

The Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner 8th March 2008 : Oxfordshire

The Dinner was held at the Oxford Belfry Hotel, in Milton Common. A total of 108 people attended, including some who had travelled from as far afield as Scotland, Ireland and the USA. There were 51 setters present: **A8RGG, Adam, Aedites, Aldhelm, Alligator, Ark, Bandmaster, BeRo, Brimstone, Bufo, Charybdis, Derek, Dimitry, Duck, Elap, Elfman, Elgin, Essira, Gioconda, Gos, Hamamelis, Henry, Homer, Jago, Kea, Leo, Macbu/2, Machiavelli, Mash, Mespot, Mordred, Mr Lemon, Mr Magoo, MynoT, Nibor, Pabulum, Pieman, Pilcrow, Ploy, Radix, Raich, Rebel, Samuel, Tea Leaves, Ten-Four, Theod, Third Man, Tiburon, Trev, Viking, Xanthippe**. Attending as a guest was Richard Whitehead, Deputy Editor of the *Books* section of *The Times*, where the puzzle appears.

Apologies were received from 24 other Setters, many of whom now live abroad: for example, **Sabre** and **Arcturus**, both in the USA, **Colleague** and **Emkay** in France, **Mass** in Spain and **Phi** in New Zealand. Although **Phi** hinted that further NZ-related puzzles were possible, he was unlikely to fit Taumatawhakatangiangaakoauauotamateapokaiwhenuakitanatahu (the place where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, who slid and swallowed mountains, known as land-eater, played his flute to his loved one) into a grid. **Jago** noted the sad passing of **Alban** (Will Scotland), **Ilex** (Charles Hopkins) and **Obiter** (Ifor Torbe) during the last twelvemonth.

The main business of the evening commenced with the awarding of the *Solver Silver Salver* for the 2007 run of all-correct solutions. As in recent years, a large number of solvers achieved this: 21, a record high. Those with the longest record of correct submissions were Simon Anthony* (now 288 not out, a new record), followed by Roddy Forman*; both had already held the *Salver* and declined to receive it again, so it was awarded to the third-placed solver, Simon Long*. Other all-correct solvers were John Minter* & Stephanie Perks*, Roger Phillips*, Justin Daddow*, Neil Talbott*, John Reardon*, Philip Sant, Henry Blanco White, Tony Sever, David Howell*, Glen Mullineux*, Denis Martin*, Robert Whale*, David Webb*, Nicholas Maxwell, Glyn Hinde, Piers* & Elizabeth Ruff, Tom Moore, and Ross Beresford & Magdalen Braden. (* denotes present at the Dinner.) All received the warm applause of those present.

Jago then explained that it fell to the *Salver* winner to announce the winner of the *Ascot Gold Cup*, in fact a silver rose bowl, but so named to recognise the generosity of **Ascot** who provided both trophies. Simon Long, after thanking the setters for providing such good puzzles throughout the year, explained that he had involved all the all-correct solvers in the task of deciding the best puzzle. He thanked the Listener Statistician for acting as Returning Officer. There was a particularly even field this year, with 27 puzzles receiving at least one vote and no single puzzle dominating the voting. The top five (in reverse order) were: *An Amusing State* by **Dimitry**, *Band on the Run* by **Tea Leaves**, *Eleven Across* by **Elap** (a mathematical puzzle), *On Air* by **Charybdis**, and the winner *King* by **Rebel** a three-dimensional puzzle where the clue answers were structured to represent a castle from the title of a novel by Franz Kafka, whose name appeared in the final grid, a projection of that structure when viewed from above.

The *Bronze Casket*, inaugurated last year by **Tea Leaves**, and now refilled with sweets by the previous holders, was presented to the table with the best solution to a quiz provided by **Tea Leaves** himself.

Jago noted that puzzle number 4000 was due to appear on September 20 and he was organising a special dinner — open to solvers and setters — on that day, in the Apollo Hotel, Birmingham. This led **Viking** to announce that an anthology of puzzles covering the years 1996 to 2000 would appear at the same time, published by Chambers. He had selected and re-edited 60 puzzles, with the help of feedback from solvers recorded when they first appeared. He implored everyone to buy as many copies as they could: if the loss made by the publishers of the previous book were repeated, this would certainly be the last one.

Finally, **Jago** confirmed that the 2009 Dinner would take place around the beginning of March; he suggested having it “north of the border”.

Jim Coulson (**Jago**)