

The Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner 28th March 2009 : Fife

This year's Crossword Setters' Dinner — once again organised by **Jago** (with the invaluable help of his partner Jan) — was held on Saturday 28th March, at a superb venue: the Queensferry Hotel, north of Edinburgh, which overlooks both of the Forth bridges. Its dining room has a magnificent view of the historic rail bridge, which happily was still visible in the early evening light, whilst the diners were gathering for their pre-prandial drinks. The Dinner was held slightly later in the year than originally intended, owing to the travel plans of one of the crossword setters (we must make sure they can come!).

A total of 77 persons were present this time, including 36 Listener Setters; these were (in alphabetical order): **A8RGG, Arcturus, Arepo, BeRo, Brimstone, Calmac, Charybdis, Derek, Dimitry, Enigmatist, Fresco, Hamamelis, Henry, Homer, Jago, Kea, Lato, Leo, Macbu/2, Machiavelli, Mespot, Mr Lemon, Nibor, Oyler, Pabulum, Ploy, Radix, Raich, Rebel, Ruslan, Samuel, Tea Leaves, Theod, Tiburon, Verbascum** and **Viking**. The remaining attendees were either guests of the Setters, or were Solvers who had attended in the past and/or who had been one of the “all corrects” from the 2008 Listener Puzzles. Apologies were received from **Colleague, Essira, Gos, Hera, Loda, Morix/2, Phi, Pilcrow, Schadenfreude, Third Man, Trev, Xanthippe** and **Zero**.

The number of Solvers achieving “all correct” status has been getting very high: much higher than in the 1970's, when the suggestion of the Listener Setters giving a free dinner to any all-correct Solver was first adopted. [Regular readers of these Dinner Reports will recall that the system was changed a few years back: so that a free place at the Annual Times Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner is now only given to the outright Winner of the *Solver Silver Salver* — plus any former recipient above him or her who still qualifies, but who has honourably passed it down the ranks.] For the 2008 Listener puzzle series, there were 32 (!) all-correct entrants, including many from previous years, although one or two long-standing members of those illustrious ranks did manage finally to trip over, during 2008. The leader of the pack was Simon Long, who was the 2008 SSS winner, and the runner-up (but still a very honourable position, and someone who has been climbing the rankings for a number of years now) was Justin Daddow. Justin, by dint of Simon “doing the honourable thing” was thus declared to be the Times Listener Crossword 2008 *Solver Silver Salver* Winner. Unfortunately, neither Simon nor Justin was able to be present, so the Salver was collected on Justin's behalf by Neil Aspland. Justin, as the unofficial Chairman of Selectors, oversaw the voting amongst his fellow all-corrects to choose the winner of the *Ascot Gold Cup*. His speech was kindly read out (with asides) by Neil, who of course won the SSS with his father Denis in 2007. **Dimitry** has kindly undertaken to deliver the SSS to Justin (and, we hope, to take a photo of the winner, with the trophy).

Space limitations here mean that the full AGC deliberations and comments cannot be reported, but the top five puzzles of the year were: *Big Holes*, by **Elap**; *City Tour*, by **Mango**; *Carte Blanche*, by **Homer**; at number two, *10 by 8*, (*Digonal*, by **Pieman**, who also got an honourable mention for *Collusion*, which he co-set with **Mr Magoo**, as **The Magpie**). But the out-and-out winner was (by a large margin) declared to be *Conflict Resolution*, by **Kea**: “Magical”, “Illusionist”, “Awestruck” and “Ingenious”. **Kea** was applauded hugely as he was presented with the *Ascot Gold Cup* by Neil.

The third element of the prize-giving was the Table Quiz — now an official part of the Listener Dinner — set by **Tea Leaves**: and this year the winners of the *Bronze Casket* were Table 6. As is by now the tradition, the Casket must be returned next year full of sweets, in time for the 2010 Dinner presentations.

One notable guest was Anne Robertson of Chambers Harrap, who brought along some of their latest crosswording books for guests to view and (it was hoped) purchase. We were also told that Chambers Harrap are taking over the Brewer's imprint, so we should expect some “new look” *Phrase & Fable* stuff soon. Also on the “crossword book” theme, Derek Harrison brought along copies of his own private reprint of **Afrit**'s very rare *Armchair Crosswords*, which has been his labour of love for some time.

Finally (and thankfully!), the evening degenerated into the usual talking and alcohol consumption that it is known and loved for: but since the clocks went forward overnight into the Sunday, the diehards were deprived of an hour's extra boozing time!

Jim Coulson (Jago)

March 2009