



On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, I had my first invitation to a function as the Master of Cripplegate Ward Club. It was a virtual black tie dinner with the Worshipful Company of Basketmakers and I was a guest of Past Master Judy Tayler-Smith who is also Under Warden Elect of the Company. Her husband Simon, also a Basketmaker and Cripplegate Ward Club member was also in attendance.

I was told that the dress code, for the 'upper part of your body', was black tie, or Basketmakers bow tie with dinner jacket. However, how the lower body was clothed would remain secret, unless you inadvertently stood up whilst on screen! I wore a simple and classic black dress with my Cripplegate Master's badge.



We were also asked to dine with wonderful and/or amusing table displays which could be seen in your Zoom picture and each person/couple would cook a three course meal and provide all their own drinks. For my three courses I prepared a mini goats cheese and pear tart for the starter; mushroom tortellini with basil pesto and green salad for the main and raspberry fool on granola for the dessert. What was good was that we could choose the food we wanted and cater for our own dietary requirements (I'm vegetarian); we could drink as much, or as little, as we liked; (my wines were a Vincent Bachelet Chardonnay 2013 from Burgundy and a Mazzei 2016 Chianti Classico Riserva, Ser Lapo from Italy). We could dress up and make as flamboyant display of oneself and our table and food; and we didn't have to drive home afterwards!

It was an opportunity to have fun and consume real food and real drink, have real chats and real laughs, with real people, in real time.

I received a link via the Basketmakers Clerk, Sarah Sinclair and everyone joined the Zoom Livery Dinner between 7.20pm and 7.30pm.

The 'Reception' started promptly and then the Prime Warden, Anne Holden gave a welcome speech which included giving me a lovely mention as the Master of Cripplegate Ward Club! She then introduced Sheriff Christopher Hayward CC who spoke to us for five minutes.

There were 54 diners in total and seven "rooms". Each room had a member of Court acting as 'host' of that room. The role of that host was to ensure that the conversations ran smoothly and that everybody was involved in them.

As this was the July Trade Dinner, 'hosts' also wanted you to have an item of basketry, either visible in your picture or readily on hand to show to your camera, to demonstrate support of the Basketmaking trade. I showed a bread basket, which acted as a tray from my wine bottles (see back of my photograph), but many attendees had baskets that they had made themselves.

In our group, Judy showed the rush bowl she made when she and the Prime Warden made baskets in private with HRH the Duchess of Gloucester earlier this year and Simon showed off his rather long-nosed rush reindeer from the 2019 Basketmaking Christmas decoration class, which Judy said, looked more like a Christmas aardvark! (see photo below).



Each room comprised up to nine diners; some only six. The numbers in each room changed with each course. The people you met for each course also changed. The idea was to keep the event constantly fresh with a constant procession of new faces to talk to.

There was a seating plan and we were all given different room numbers for our three courses. I remained with Judy and Simon in every room.

After the reception at 7.45pm, the Clerk put each person, couple, or group of three people (some people brought guests...even logging in from abroad!) into their first allocated room. This was for the starters to be eaten. I shared this room with the President of the United Wards' Club, Anne Scrutton.

At around 8.15pm, for the mains, we were put in our second allocated room and it was lovely to be 'seated' with Past Sheriff and former Alderman, Neil Redcliffe and his wife Emma, who I know from the City Livery Club.

For the desserts, we were allocated to our third room at around 8.45pm.

At 9.15pm everyone was brought back into the 'main room'. The Prime Warden then said a few words of thanks and farewells, while we consumed either cheese, port, Cognac (or all three). Proceedings then wrapped up at about 9.45pm.

We then chose our imaginary 'carriages or supercars' to whisk ourselves all the way from our kitchens or dining rooms to the comfort of our very own lounges. I went off in my 'virtual pink Rolls Royce' and Judy and Simon 'Zoom'-ed off in their 'virtual Batmobile.' Gentlemen then removed ties, and some may have even offered to do the washing up (hopefully not virtually)!

It was a lovely evening seeing old and new friends. More importantly it was my first opportunity to promote the Cripplegate Ward Club and talk about our Club to the wider City, whilst enjoying the human interaction that has been so difficult to maintain during lockdown.

**Ms Jyotika Shah, Master, Cripplegate Ward Club.**