NEWSLETTER NO 27 WINTER 2025

The Flame





HAVING A MAGIC TIME



DEAR FIREBIRDS,

Thank you everyone who has contributed to this edition. The result, again, makes for varied and riveting reading.

Our recent Christmas Tea was at The Swan, a bar/restaurant on the OTHER side of the River, next to the Globe. This, as always, was a convivial and joyful occasion. You find the report and photos starting on page 3.

The visit to the Magic Circle was a very successful and popular event. So popular, that we don't just have one report about it, but two (starting on page 5). Thank you Diana Reese and Sarah Mosse. It's fascinating to look at the same thing through different eyes.

In the summer the Phoenix Masters organized a trip to Rochester and the Firebirds were invited to join them. Rose Mahony has written the article about this marvellous trip, starting on page 8.

Then we have articles by Vicky Nugée (The Feast of the Century), Jane de Halpert (Vienna Bells) and Georgina Hall (Do Trees Talk?) – all thoroughly interesting.

Many Firebirds and Phoenix Masters were at the Celebration of Life Service for Sandy at St Joseph and the English Martyrs Church in Bishop's Stortford. She meant a lot to her family and friends. She was a very good friend to the Firebirds and we will miss her. There is a short obituary on page 15.

Nicola Barclay forwarded photos of a beautiful red rose (last page) and a snow covered tree (this page). The photos

were taken in Auld Cummerton, Scotland, on 19th November.

I hope you find some time over the Christmas holiday to read The Flame. Enjoy!

I wish you a Peaceful and Happy Christmas.

Erika Gloyn (Masons) Editor

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FORTHCOMING FIREBIRDS EVENTS

3rd March 2026 12 noon Firebirds AGM

The City Livery Club Full Details to follow

Summer/Autumn 2026 Behind the Scenes at the Royal Albert Hall

Details to be advised

Monday 8th June 2026 12 noon for 1 pm At the RAF Club

The Phoenix Masters have kindly invited all Firebirds to their Annual Summer Lunch
Save the date.

September 2026 Lunch

Phoenix Masters are invited

Details to be advised

FORTHCOMING PHOENIX EVENTS

3rd February 2026

Visit to the City of London Gin Distillery

4th - 8th May 2026

Visit to Jerez, Spain Waiting list only

15th October 2026

Convivial Lunch at Le Beaujolais

10th November 2024

Mercers' Hall AGM and Annual Dinner



2025 CHRISTMAS TEA AT THE SWAN

by Erika Gloyn (Masons)

This year's Christmas Tea was at The Swan, a restaurant and bar next to The Globe Theatre. Many of the Firebirds seemed to be familiar with it, but for some it was a bit out of the comfort zone to go across the River Thames.



PASSING TROUGH ST PAUL'S GARDENS



We often go to the Globe or the Tate Modern and to get there, we usually take the Central Line to St Paul's. From there we walk through the gardens of St Paul's towards and across the Millennium Bridge (I still think of it as the Wibbly Wobbly Bridge). The views from the Bridge along the Thames and London are magnificent, especially on a lovely sunny day and also at night with all the lights twinkling like Christmas decorations.



THIS SIDE ENJOYED THE VIEW OVER THE THAMES

The Swan is indeed a lovely location. It has a big restaurant/bar downstairs and a charming restaurant overlooking the Thames upstairs.

The staff were very nice, but it took a little while to get our sparkling wine, and we had to wait for our Afternoon Tea. Once it arrived, the Tea was excellent and the Firebirds are a forgiving lot. The delay did nothing to spoil the joy of spending time together.

We were thinking of the Firebirds who were not able to come and hope to see them next year.

A big thank you to El Moss, for keeping up our traditions and organizing everything. We really appreciate it.







VIEWS FROM THE MILLENIUM BRIDGE AT NIGHT





HISTORY AND MYSTERY AT THE MAGIC CIRCLE 22/09/2025

by Diana Reese (Bakers)

Once the impressive black doors of the HQ had swung open at 11.00am, we were ushered inside for a very welcome cup of coffee. The Firebirds were all present and correct by the time the fun began, and what fun we had!



VICKY BRAVELY VOLUNTEERING

We were first treated to some brilliant close up Magic by the amazing Chris Wood. He seemed to be able to turn a piece of plain paper into a £50 note, merely by folding. Can't help but feel that was too good to be true! Vicky bravely volunteered her signet ring which was subjected to a variety of tricks before being retrieved from Chris' pocket, carefully wrapped in a cloth within not 1, not 2, but 3 little wallets. How did he do that? Absolutely no idea! Jane Orr followed in her grandmother's footsteps by becoming a magician's assistant. She was completely befuddled as to how many little red balls she was holding and none of us was able to spot how it was done. Many of us are bridge players and would dearly love to know how to track the aces in a pack, but Chris wasn't telling.

Charlie then took us down to the museum where he explained that magic was

originally seen as witchcraft, an opinion which is fortunately not commonly held these days. There were many artefacts and props to be discovered. Our attention was drawn, amongst other things, to the only non-human member of the Magic Circle – Sooty! Then back upstairs for a short stage performance, featuring playing cards and a rather terrifying gin trap. Definitely not one to try at home! Fortunately, no animals or humans were harmed during the course of the proceedings.

Then on to lunch in the nearby Steak & Lobster, where we were efficiently served with our meals. Conviviality was the order of the day and everyone seemed to have had a good time.



JANE'S GRANDMOTHER WAS A MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT

King Charles's entry into the magic Circle. Although his cup

and ball trick did not go very well, he got in anyway.

It all started well, lovely weather, Google maps switched on and a tube to Warren Street. Then we met Flavian, Yasmine and Pauline plus a few more in the middle of Euston Road definitely going in the wrong direction!



TURNING BLANK PAPER INTO A £50 NOTE

All sorted and re-directed, we arrived safely and on time. We settled down to half an hour of close-up magic by Chris who was quite amazing and had us all mesmerised. He did card tricks, had Jane playing with red squashy balls and, best of all, turned a blank piece of paper into a £50 note and back to a blank bit again.

Then down to the Museum where we met Sooty, Houdini, Lafayette, Harry Potter and learnt about Chung Ling Soo aka William Ellesworth Robinson whose catching the bullet trick went seriously wrong and he died on stage. Not a good look for a magician! We also learnt about



DO YOU REMEMBER SOOTY'S MAGIC?

The third part was stage magic with Paul who had a real gift of the gab and did several very clever tricks involving members of the audience. The whole visit was fascinating and visually brilliant.

Then on to lunch at The Radisson Blu. Diana certainly chose well - very good food, all hot and delicious. Her prompting labels for us all meant the staff were very efficient and everyone got what they had ordered. There was lots of wine to finish off the meal. The whole day was a great success. What a wonderful way to spend a Monday!





LUNCH AT THE RADISSON BLU





Magic Circle overlooks tricky past to admit Penn & Teller

Lara Wildenberg

Penn & Teller, dubbed the "bad boys of magic", have been inducted into the Magic Circle after 50 years.

The Americans were officially welcomed into the 120-year-old society on the steps of the Palladium in London's West End yesterday.

Penn Jillette, 70, and Teller, 77, were previously barred for explaining their tricks to the audience.

The circle's president Marvin Berglas, said the pair had balanced secrecy and explanation to "a degree of mastery" and their induction represented

the Magic Circle "moving forward". The Magic Circle, founded in 1905 at Pinoli's Restaurant in Soho, has about 1,750 members

worldwide, who all passed an exam.

Penn & Teller, who started performing together in 1975,

The duo officially joined the circle at the London Palladium

have enjoyed success on stage and TV, including a 24-year residency in Las Vegas. They claim to be on first-name terms with the King, an amateur magician and circle honorary member.

Penn & Teller said in a statement: "We're honoured that the Magic Circle has invited us to be members, after we've violated its cardinal rule — don't give away secrets — for five decades. This is going to be fun."

Teller, who mimes rather than speaks during their acts, said to Berglas: "We know this wasn't easy. We spent years making fun of the Magic Circle.

"But your members took the high road, forgave us and welcomed us in." He said that they got in the most

trouble for using clear plastic cups in the cups-and-balls trick to show the audience when sleight of hand occurs.

The induction coincided with the duo's 50th anniversary, which they are marking with a series of shows at the London Palladium.

This article was published in The Times on 20th September 2025



PHOENIX AND FIREBIRDS TRIP TO ROCHESTER 4/5th JULY 2025

by Rose Mahony (Plaisterers)

To be honest, when my Phoenix Past Master husband suggested that we should sign up for the two-day trip to Rochester, I was less than enthusiastic having lived for several years in nearby Gravesend back in the 70s.

We were treated to an excellent programme devised by John Nugée, with help from Isobel Pollock Hulf. Everywhere was within a short walking distance of the railway station and the Travelodge hotel where most of us stayed. The whole tour was accessible to everyone.

Rochester is at the lowest bridging point of the river Medway, about 30 miles east-southeast of London. It has been an important hub of trade and culture since early Roman times. The Cathedral is the second oldest in England and the Castle Keep dates back to the 12th century.



JOHN AND VICKY NUGÉE AND DAVID PEARSON

On our first day we visited The Huguenot Museum, The Bridge Trust and Restoration House and the day ended with a dinner in the 14th century George Vaults beneath a local pub.

At the Huguenot Museum we were given an introductory talk and a guided tour by Tessa Murdoch who is the chairman of the Trustees and a former curator of the Museum of London. The Huguenots were French protestants who faced persecution in Catholic France, particularly after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Many of them fled from France and established communities in various parts of Europe, including England, where they were able to settle and flourish. Some lived in the Square Mile and 55 livery companies have Huguenot connections. Two members of our group, Messrs Nugée and Pearson, are able to trace their family history back to Huguenot roots.

The escape route from France was extremely dangerous as capture could result in being burned at the stake, but the refugees became clever at avoiding discovery. The museum relates the story of the Condomine family who travelled at night with their two children hiding in the panniers of a mule. An interesting item on display is a large family bible which was baked into a loaf of bread so that it would not be found by soldiers searching the house – it must have been a VERY big loaf!

The Huguenots were creative and talented people and particularly excelled in crafts such as those of the goldsmith and the weaver. Displays of silver tableware in the museum show the high standard of workmanship achieved and one notable exhibit is a silver double lipped sauceboat which was made, unusually for that time, by a woman called Anne Tanqueray in 1727-1728.



BEDROOM IN MISS SARAH LETHIEULLIE'S DOLLS HOUSE

Another major exhibit is a large exquisite 18th century Dolls House which is fully furnished and was given to a lady called Sarah Lethieullier when she was two years old. (Her father was a director of the Bank of England and it is interesting to note that seven of the twenty-four founders of that Bank were Huguenots.) The house was not a toy but was used to teach Sarah how to manage a household. She learnt to respect and cherish the dolls who inhabited her house, understanding the duties of the footmen, the housekeeper, the cook and the nursery maid. In this way she

came to know about cooking and cleaning and the need to care for the fabric of the house including the valuable textiles and furnishings. She also learned the concept of everyone dressing appropriately according to their status. As a result, when she finally married, she was ready to carry out the tasks required of a lady.

Our next stop was at the Bridge Trust, an ancient charity that was founded in 1399.

My father was a civil engineer specialising in designing elevated motorways and bridges, but I was never remotely interested in his work. However, engineer Sue Threader, who is the Bridge Master and the elected Chief Executive of the Bridge Trust, brought to life the history of the bridges across the Medway from Roman times to the twenty first century.

Since medieval times the Wardens and Assistants of Rochester Bridge Trust have maintained this strategic river crossing. Sue's storytelling and explanations were so good that everyone present acclaimed her as a highlight of the whole trip. She described to us the bridges that currently cross the river, all of which are owned by the Bridge Trust who are in complete control, with no Local Authority involvement. Their primary aim is to keep the bridges open so that they can always be used. With an unofficial motto of 'see it, fix it', work is constantly on-going to maintain both the structure and the appearance of the bridges. With a commitment to a net Zero Carbon status for its routine bridge maintenance, the Trust has reduced its carbon footprint by 88%. This has been achieved through practices such as avoiding the use of machines for tasks that can be carried out





LUNCH IN THE BRIDGE CHAPEL

The charity is committed to supporting engineering education and encouraging young people, especially girls, to learn more about civil engineering and bridge building. They visit local primary schools where pupils take on all the roles of the work force, including that of the site manager, and then are helped to build their own bridge which they are able to walk over. A previous project in Rochester Cathedral led to the building of the world's longest interlocking bridge made out of Lego.

Scholarships are funded for particularly able pupils, whatever their background and awards are presented to civil engineers who make a special effort to share their knowledge, and support newcomers to an engineering career.

As part of this visit, we were offered a light lunch in the medieval Bridge Chapel which was built by Sir John de Cobham in 1393 and this proved to be a rare experience.

Since a refurbishment in 2021, this historic building has managed to combine the features of its ancient history with modern lighting and accessibility for all. It is a wonderful building and the fact that the ploughman's lunch and strawberries and cream were fresh local produce made it a meal to remember.



RESTORATION HOUSE GARDENS

Our final visit of the day was to Restoration House and Gardens, so named because King Charles II stayed there in 1660 on his way from Dover to London where he was to be restored as King after fifteen years in exile. It is thought that the house dates to at least 1600, but materials uncovered during renovation work go back to the 15th century.

Samual Pepys makes mention of the house in his diary - he described it as 'a pretty seat' and made note of the fact that whilst there he "met with a young, plain, silly shopkeeper



GARDEN RENOVATIONS

and his wife, a pretty young woman, and I did kiss her." Charles Dickens based Satis House, the home of Miss Haversham in 'Great Expectations' on Restoration House.

We were very lucky that we visited on a sunny summer's day because the gardens could be seen at their best. What we were

able to see is based on detective work by historians and archaeologists who uncovered Tudor brick walls and evidence of terraces. Work is still on-going, creating a series of gardens with a renaissance flavour. There are beautifully designed flower beds, water cannons shooting into turreted rills, statues and potted citrus plants and lots of little staircases, nooks and crannies which make exploring a joy.



DINNER AT THE GEORGE VAULTS

Every good Phoenix and Firebirds trip needs a dinner and this one was no exception. It was, of course, held in a very historical place – The George Vaults on Rochester High Street. This was once a church, then became an inn and is now part of a contemporary Brasserie wine bar. To get to our dining area we had to walk through crowds of young people who were heading to the Castle for a music festival. They were noisy and dressed to kill - a bit like ourselves!

My name placement bore the words 'goat, cod, pavlova', which is exactly what I got and proved to be very tasty. There was plenty of wine and lots of animated conversation which echoed round the enormous vaults.

An excellent way to end an excellent day – to quote Samuel Pepys again "and so to bed".

Walking tours round the city centre had been arranged for the next day. There were two options, the first a relatively gentle stroll and the second an even more leisurely amble. I joined the amblers group which was led by a knowledgeable and extremely patient guide.

It was a slightly cooler but sunny morning, just perfect for sightseeing. We were unable to enter the cathedral because it was being used for an end of term service by the local grammar school (the cathedral is on my list for the next visit). As we ambled along, we were passed by line after line of pupils, all dressed the same in their school uniform, and walking silently in single file towards the cathedral. We must have passed hundreds of boys and girls and not heard a sound apart from their footsteps – impressive!

Unfortunately the Castle was closed to us because of the music festival being held there. In 1215 King John laid siege to remove rebel barons from the castle and although the defences proved to

be very effective, he eventually sent out an order to the local area asking for 40 pigs. These were then burnt and their fat was used to fire a mine under the keep which brought its southern corner crashing down. The defenders held on as long as they could but they were starving and the smell of roast pork along with the collapse of part of the castle eventually led to their defeat.

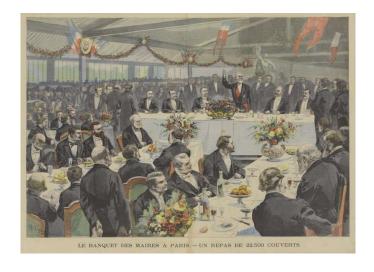
Living in the neighbouring town of Chatham as a child, Charles Dickens would have known Rochester very well. It features more in his work than any other city apart from London and is identifiable as Cloisterham which is featured in 'The History of Edwin Drood'.



THE SWISS CHALET

At the end of our tour we passed Eastgate House, a Grade I listed Elizabethan town house which featured as Westgate in the Pickwick Papers and in the grounds was, what was to me, the most exciting place of all. Known as The Swiss Chalet, it is a two-storey building which was sent to Dickens by a French actor called Charles Fechter, arriving on Christmas Eve 1864, in ninety-four pieces. Dickens attempted to construct the chalet with the help of some friends but failed disastrously – we've all been there! Eventually, he enlisted the help of the carpenter from the Lyceum theatre in London to help him. It was erected across the road from his house in Gads Hill and it was in this retreat that he wrote many of his best-known novels. He was working in it on Edwin Drood the day he died. The chalet

was moved to Eastgate gardens in 1960. Unfortunately, it is not safe to visit but just looking at it and thinking of the works of genius that were written in there, was a wonderful way to end our walk and our visit to Rochester.



THE FEAST OF THE CENTURY

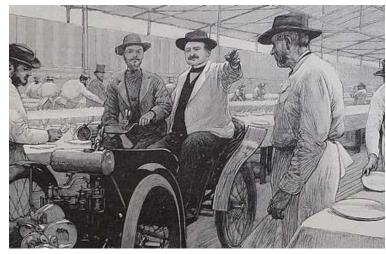
by Vicky Nugée (Weavers)

We're used to the idea of fine dining in large numbers – it's what Livery companies are really good at, but here's a feast to cast anything we've been to completely in the shade.

In Paris, on September 22, 1900, to mark the City's hosting of the Universal Exhibition, every mayor in France was invited to the Banquet des Tuileries by Emile Loubet, President of the Republic. There were 20,777 mayors in attendance, and 22,278 guests in total. It was a banquet of eye-popping grandeur and extravagance. Held in the Tuileries Gardens, it celebrated 108 years since the Republic was born as well as showcasing France as a powerhouse of fine cuisine.

As far as impressive venues go, the enormous marquees set up in the alleyways of the glorious Jardin des Tuileries took the biscuit. Setting up the tables alone was a mammoth undertaking; put end to

end, the tables were 7 kilometres long; even those in the kitchen were 4 km long. M Legrand, of Paris caterers Potel et Chabot, the go-to large scale caterers, organised a team of 1,215 maîtres d'hôtel and 3,645 waiters and cooks, as well as six bike-riding supervisors who whizzed up and down the dining areas to tend to the guests' needs. The boss himself used a De Dion-Bouton 4CV car to get around! One of the most impressive things about the organisation was that all guests were served within one hour and a quarter – after all, according to the President's wishes, the meal should last no more than 90 minutes.





The 9-course menu reads like a dream for gastronomes, although historians insist that the dishes were fairly standard banquet fare at the time. Wine carafes were well stocked with offerings from the finest wine regions: Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne, while the guests enjoyed dancing displays and singing – including everybody joining in a stirring rendition of La Marseillaise. Proceedings concluded with 1,500 bottles of fine Champagne Cognac, with a post-prandial cigar offered to each diner.

The reporter from the *Ouest-Éclair* relayed the conviviality of departure nicely: "Emotional and tender handshakes were exchanged between friends for an hour [...] Many mayors indulged

in the small act of harmless vandalism that consists in taking away tangible memories of the banquet. [...] The mayors, increasingly animated, spread out along the Rue Royale, the Rue de Rivoli and the Champs-Elysées. They greeted the carriage drivers and omnibus conductors, and looked like jokers on the loose. On the Champs-Elysées the spectacle was truly epic. The brave mayors, in gangs, arm in arm, left in human bunches, sweating, blowing, singing, joyful."

Spare a thought for the dishwashers who had 95,000 glasses to deal with, as well as 250,000 plates. The Mayors' Banquet of 1900 went down as the largest sit-down meal in history, and an astonishing feat of slick organisation.



The Banquet in Numbers

20,777 Mayors

7 kilometres of tablecloth

3, 000 litres of coffee

2 tonnes of salmon

33,000 bottles of wine

7,000 bottles of champagne

50 cloakroom attendants

VIENNA BELLS

by Jane de Halpert (Shipwrights)

A popular question seems to be 'can you remember where you were when President Kennedy was shot?' I answer in the affirmative as it seems do most people. I don't think I can be quite so specific with other past, important newsworthy events. However, I can now say I know exactly where I was when Pope Leo XIV was elected.

Having never managed to visit Vienna, we booked a five day visit last May and the City did not disappoint. We stayed in a central cosy hotel and were able to get around easily and mostly on foot. May 8th marked Victory in Europe Day – celebrated as the city's liberation day in Vienna - and we found ourselves passing a stadium where a concert marking this occasion was to take place. The orchestra was practising for the evening performance which we noted would be televised.

Later in the day I was taking a shower and Jeremy had found the channel for the televised concert on our bedroom's TV. I heard him shout 'White Smoke' as the preliminary coverage of the concert had switched to the Vatican's Sistine Chapel chimney. As I came out of the bathroom the first single church bell started to ring swiftly followed, as it seemed, by every bell from the myriad churches in Vienna. This Peal continued for quite some time, and it was both moving and heartening.



The next day we had an afternoon flight home but had a last morning to stroll about the city. I knew that the new Pontiff was a member of the Augustinian Order, so we stopped at the Augustinian Church on route for a final coffee and Sacher Torte. It was fairly quiet inside the church but a priest clad in black was positively beaming with pride as he welcomed the people entering and the news had been firmly posted inside and outside the building.



It was a relief to return home to reasonable weather and to enjoy the view of our little village church with its single bell proudly in place and rung regularly before each service.



DO TREES TALK?

By Georgina Hall (Water Conservators)

On a recent holiday I was watching an elephant attack a thorny acacia for food. Not content with just nibbling the leaves he was yanking branches off the tree to get to the leaves. With a predator as destructive as this I began to wonder how trees survived in the African Savannah. The answer surprised me.





Scientists noticed that giraffes feeding on thorny acacias would quickly stop moving and move on, ignoring nearby trees. They found that when the tree senses an animal attack, the roots send toxic substances into the leaves which give the leaves a very bitter taste. They observed that the giraffes would stop feeding and move off, up to 100 yards away before eating again. They found that not only did the tree send the toxic taste to its leaves it also released a scent which alerted trees of the same species down wind of the attack. In response, nearby trees downwind also sent toxic substances to their leaves. The researchers concluded that the giraffes knew this would happen and moved on or went upwind.

Similar things happen in our own forests when their leaves are attacked. Beech, oak and spruce all

register if an insect is nibbling their leaves. Oaks store toxic tannins in their bark and leaves, willows produce salicylic acid. Leaf tissue sends out electric signals of attack. The tree can match the saliva of the attacking insect precisely and use scent compounds to attract beneficial predators to the tree to devour the pests.

Dr Suzanne Simard in Vancouver discovered that fir trees warn each other of danger via chemical signals sent through fungal networks around the root tips. Once the neighbouring trees have 'received' the message they too pump defensive compounds through their veins.

Underground, fungi help a tree to increase its root system so it can suck up more water and nutrients by sending root threads which cover the tree's roots like a web roaming the forest floor, connecting with other trees roots and fungi webs. A network is created, a fungal communication highway, a "wood wide web".



Trees may not talk to each other as we do but they certainly communicate!

Source: The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben



HAPPY TIMES - SANDY ON THE LEFT WITH JANICE AND PAULINE

Sandra Carole Rowsell

7th April 1946 – 7th August 2025 by Erika Gloyn (Masons)

Most of us met Sandy as Mistress to the Master of the Worshipful Company of Lightmongers during our year as Consorts. I was honoured to be invited to the Lunch she hosted in May 2016 at the Vintners' Hall. Everything was beautifully organised and she had Canon Ann Easter, then Chaplain to the late Queen Elizabeth, as Speaker. A memorable Lunch indeed.

As a Sports Teacher, Sandy was vital and sporty. She had a nurturing spirit and loved working with children. Her daughter called her a leader, incredibly loyal, fearless, courageous and vivacious.

Her granddaughter, in her eulogy, said she will miss Sandy's guidance and the way she knew how to make her smile.

Sandy was devoted to her family and especially to her husband John.

She had been fighting cancer for a long time and her daughter thanked her mother for fighting as long as she did and being with them for as long as she was.

Sandy inspired us with her courage and we loved her good company. We will all miss her.



ROSE IN AULD CUMMERTON ON 19/11/2025



ALSTROEMERIA IN CHINGFORD ON 09/12/2025