

The Flame



FORTHCOMING FIREBIRDS EVENTS

Thursday
18th January 2024
Zoom Tea

Monday
4th March 2024 – 12 noon
Firebirds AGM
At Cutlers' Hall

Please put this date in your diary. Apart from enjoying a lovely lunch (if this year's AGM is anything to go by) you can have your say and catch up with friends.



AGM AT CUTLERS' HALL 2023

May/June 2024
Leighton House Museum

This is an art museum and historic house in Holland Park, West London. It was awarded the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage in 2012.
Details tba

September 2024
Firebirds Biennial Lunch
Details tba



Bond Street on the day of our Fenwicks Christmas Tea 2023

Photo – Angela Chambers (Pewterers)

The views and opinions expressed by the authors and those providing comments are theirs alone and do not reflect the views and opinions of the Editor or the Firebirds Committee.



(A SECRET FAMILY RECIPE)

Zimtsterne (Cinnamon Stars)

Preheat oven to 180° or 160° for fan oven.

Ingredients:

PASTRY

400g Ground Almonds

250 g Icing Sugar

Pinch of Cinnamon

2 Egg whites

2 tbs Amaretto

½ tsp Vanilla Essence

MERINGUE COVER

125 g Icing Sugar

1 Egg white

Step 1

Mix together the ground almonds, icing sugar and cinnamon. Add the egg whites, Amaretto and vanilla essence. Mix into a pastry, cover in clingfilm and put in the fridge for 30 minutes.

Step 2

Use a little flour to work the dough and roll to about 5 mm thickness. Cut into stars and put on baking paper on a tray.

Step 3

Beat the egg white and icing sugar until stiff and glaze the stars carefully right to the edges. Bake the stars in the preheated oven for approx. 10 minutes. Let completely cool and store in a tin. They might be a bit crunchy to start with, but will soon soften in the tin.

DEAR FIREBIRDS,

I would like to give a big Thank You to all our contributors.

On Page 3, Diana Reese starts with her report of our visit to the Royal Chelsea Hospital, followed by my note on our Christmas Tea at Fenwicks earlier this month.

James Winterbotham has become a Trustee of the Historic Town Trust and is writing about a new Historic Towns Trust Atlas which they aim to publish in 2026. He also mentions the wonderful scale model of modern London at the Guildhall, which is worth visiting. Having seen the model this summer with our eight year old grandson, I heartily agree with him.

Bill Gloyn writes about the unveiling of the Wren Memory Stone on Portland. Portland is a fascinating place - full of history and impressive coastline. Again, well worth a visit, not least of all to see the Memory Stones.

Georgina Hall visited Greenham common this year and she has written a remindful article about the women's protest. The protest started in 1981 and the Women's Camp remained until 2000.

Sheila Higgs is giving us a glimpse of the good life and Peter Green shares his research into baffling laws with us.

If you enjoy reading the Flame, please think about how you could contribute. I would love to hear from you.

Have a happy and peaceful Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

With warm best wishes

Erika Gloyn (Masons)

Editor

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LUNCH AT THE PHOENIX



DAVID OUR GUIDE AND CHARLES II STATUE

ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

by Diana Reese (Bakers)

Having enjoyed a wonderfully warm Indian summer, there was a certain inevitability to the damp, murky start to the day. However, after a delicious and sustaining pub lunch in The Phoenix, conditions improved and our visit to the Royal Hospital Chelsea was able to go ahead without the need of umbrellas. We were greeted at the gate by our guide for the afternoon, an In-Pensioner called David, resplendent in his scarlet uniform, cap, white gloves and swagger stick. The shine on his shoes alone would have marked him out as a former serviceman. David shepherded us into a small lecture room where we watched a short video which gave us a potted history of the Hospital, commissioned by Charles II, who is believed to have been inspired by Louis XIV's Les Invalides. The objective was to provide 'hospitality' for retired servicemen at the end of their careers. A role which the Hospital has now fulfilled for over 300 years. Originally the Hospital housed some 500 men, mostly in individual 6'x6' cubicles (slightly larger for sergeants) in long corridors. Nowadays, the cubicles are somewhat larger with en-suite facilities and the number of residents has consequently reduced to just under 300, which since 2009 has included women. The criteria for admission includes the requirement that an applicant 'should be unencumbered by a spouse,' There are no married quarters!

David then marched off to the Great Hall with the Firebirds shuffling along behind. This splendid building is now once again a dining hall, having served in the past variously as a venue for Courts Marshall as well as hosting the lying in state of the Duke of Wellington in 1852. Every In-Pensioner is able to enjoy breakfast, lunch and dinner in these magnificent surroundings, no wonder a Chelsea Chest (increased waistline) is a problem for some!



GREAT HALL

SOVEREIGN'S MACE IN THE MUSEUM



Our next stop via the elegant colonnade was to the Museum, where the prime exhibit is the Sovereign's Mace. This is beautifully displayed on a woosack produced by the Worshipful Company of Broderers, in a cabinet crafted by the Worshipful Company of Turners. There were many fascinating exhibits which really deserved a longer visit. We admired the gilded statue of Charles II which stands in the middle of Figure Court. This open space is transformed on Oak Apple day when the In-Pensioners parade in front of invited royals, dignitaries, family and friends to honour the founder of the Hospital. Everyone wears a sprig of oak leaves, a nod to the oak tree which sheltered the sovereign as he sought safety after his defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651.



FIGURE COURT



CHAPEL

The chapel was next on our tour. Regular worship takes place, including baptisms, weddings and funerals. Services are open to the general public and one regular attendee was the former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Mrs Thatcher was the main donor to the hospital's modern infirmary, which is named in her honour. The Infirmary faces onto the cemetery, which now houses the remains of Mrs Thatcher.

We could not have asked for a cheerier guide and we all left better informed regarding the Royal Hospital Chelsea and the lives of the In-Pensioners.



OUTSIDE AND INSIDE AN IN-PENSIONER'S CUBICLE

MARGARET THATCHER'S BUST IN THE GREAT HALL AND HER FINAL RESTING PLACE OUTSIDE THE INFIRMARY

Photos by Sheila Higgs (Launderers) and Erika Gloyn (Masons)
Image of the Great Hall from the Internet

FENWICKS CHRISTMAS TEA

by Erika Gloyn (Masons)



Despite the Unions trying to sabotage our Christmas Tea with railway strikes, there were a goodly number of us, including our President Lady Juliet Mountevans, enjoying prosecco, sandwiches, cakes and scones and, of course, excellent company.

We missed the Firebirds who couldn't make it because of the railway strikes. Let's hope that next year there will be no strikes or snow and ice to stop any of us from attending.

Fenwicks is closing its doors in January 2024. Indeed, there was a hint of closing down atmosphere and we had to wait a bit longer for our drink and food. Being Firebirds, we didn't let it spoil our fun. However, it does mean that we have to find a new venue for next year. Although the Committee have one or two ideas, they would be very pleased to hear from anyone with suggestions. We have to ensure that the Christmas Tea, which has become a Firebirds tradition, will continue.



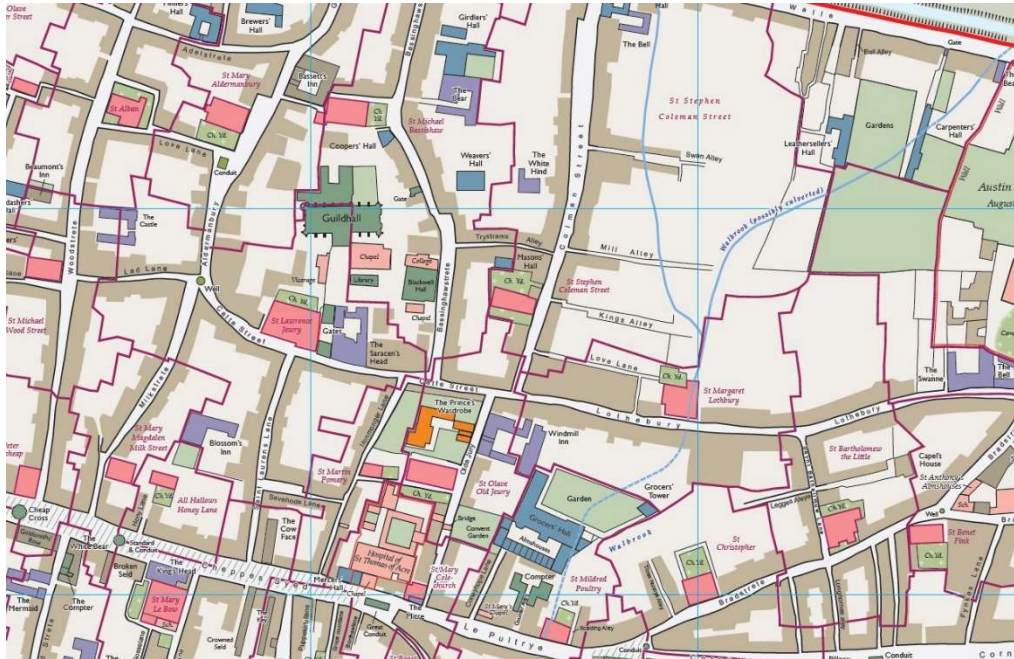
CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND SHOPPING IN BOND STREET – PHOTOS BY ANGELA CHAMBERS (PEWTERERS)

LONDON BEFORE THE GREAT FIRE

by James Winterbotham (Skinners)

A new Historic Towns Trust Atlas

Firebirds who went to the Becket Pageant in June of last year may remember the large map of London in 1520 by the entrance. This was created by the Historic Towns Trust, an educational charity working to map the urban histories of Great Britain in partnership with local historians and communities. It is the second map of London produced by HTT, the first being London in 1290. Both were incredibly helpful to Emmeline when writing "London's Turbulent Son", set as it was between Becket's lifetime (1120-1170) and the date of the Skinners' Becket Pageant in 1519-20.

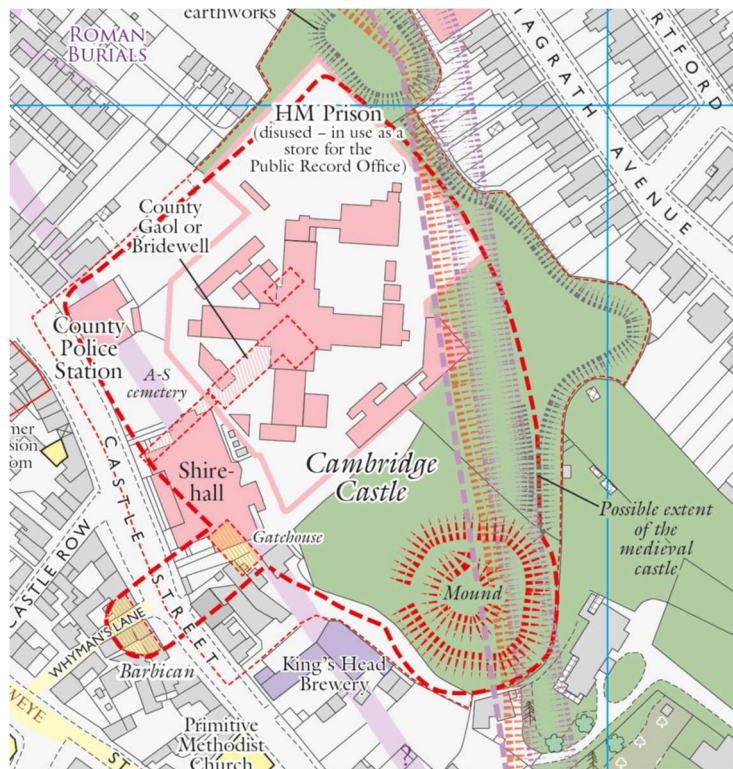


Cheapside and the Guildhall in 1520, scenes of much of Becket's London life and route of the Skinners' pageant



Earlier this year I was invited to become a Trustee of HTT by ex-Chair and Skinner Professor Caroline Barron. It is a hugely rewarding experience, surrounded by some of the most eminent academics in the UK – and, just like the Firebirds, contains some pretty organised and influential women! We have an exciting and challenging plan to grow our output and increase our impact, with community and educational programmes in each new town that we cover over the next few years – Bath, Ripon, Perth and further ahead Newcastle and Ipswich. We are going digital, but it remains a great pleasure to unfold a paper map, and we hope to introduce these to a generation raised on smartphones and Googlemaps.

Our Cambridge map was published last month, and an excerpt of the Town rather than Gown, is illustrated below.



As well as maps we produce atlases showing the development of towns – these include York, Winchester, Windsor and Oxford. Our next big project is an atlas of London on the eve of the Great Fire, something that should be of great interest to Firebirds. While the 1520 map covers London before the Dissolution – showing the extent of the great religious houses before their breakup and sale – the atlas will show how these City properties had been carved up, redeveloped and occupied, many of course by Livery Companies by 1666, 350 years before our partners were Masters. It will also show how London had grown between 1520 and 1666 – from a compact city with some 60,000 inhabitants to a sprawling metropolis with over 400,000.

The London atlas is being created by HTT's Chair, Professor Vanessa Harding, who is bringing together a team of experts, including Dorian Gerhold, whose books on 'London Plotted' and 'London Bridge and its houses' may be familiar, and Ian Doolittle, author of 'Who owned the City of London in 1666?' based on Livery Company, City Corporation and other archives. Ian is also editing the decrees of the Fire Court, established after the Great Fire at Guildhall to arbitrate disputes about property and rebuilding. This may be familiar territory to readers of the "Ashes of London" series of historical novels by Andrew Taylor that I can thoroughly recommend.

We aim to publish the Atlas in 2026. The London Topographical Society has offered a very generous grant towards the publication, if the rest of the necessary funds can be raised. We may well be approaching Phoenix Masters to lobby their Companies for support (especially those 60-plus around in 1666 – they have been warned...). But there will also be events to update everyone on the progress of the project, and I hope that we might be able to stage an event for Firebirds in the coming year. Suggestions welcome – a lecture? A guided walk?

As a final suggestion, we held a talk in October to launch the project, which was held in the Guildhall Library. I had not visited the library for many years and was astonished to find the wonderful scale model of modern London created by the London Centre in the foyer.



<https://thelondoncentre.org/>

It never ceases to amaze me how badly the City markets itself - this exhibition isn't even on the Guildhall Library website! It is very well worth visiting. But the website does have some interesting online exhibitions, including one about the Great Fire, for anyone with a few hours to spare on a dark and cold winter evening sitting by an open fire...

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/guildhall-library/guildhall-library-events-and-exhibitions/great-fire-online-exhibition>

You can find out more about the HTT on www.historictownstrust.uk

THE WREN MEMORY STONE UNVEILED ON PORTLAND

by Bill Gloyn (Past Master Mason)



This year has seen a wide variety of celebrations of the 300th Anniversary of the death of Sir Christopher Wren. Not surprisingly, many of them have taken place in the City, which was basically rebuilt to Wren's masterplan after the Great Fire of 1666 – marked by Firebirds and Phoenix Masters alike. Our years in office coincided with the 350th anniversary of that disaster.

One event that took place way outside the City was the unveiling of a monolithic stone at the entrance to the Isle of Portland. It is one of twelve massive "Memory" stones that were erected in 2017 to form a mini-Stonehenge on the cliff-top that overlooks the Bay of Portland and Chesil Beach. Over time, it is the intention that each of the stones will be carved to commemorate an important aspect of Portland's history.

They are on the edge of a disused quarry that was a source of the Portland stone which was such an important element of Wren's new buildings. To improve the efficiency of the supply chain, he actually constructed "Wren's Way", a ten-foot-wide pathway down the cliff side to the sea from where the material could be transported by boat to London far more effectively than by the almost non-existent roads.

The quarry is now controlled by the Portland Quarry and Sculpture Trust, a charity formed in 1983 to preserve the heritage of the area. In addition to managing and maintaining the site, it incorporates

a sculpture park with works by dozens of artists, including Anthony Gormley. The Trust also provides a range of training courses in stone related crafts – including carving and letter-cutting.



**CAPT ALISTER CLACK RN, VERY REVD ANDREW TREMLETT,
BILL GLOYN AND CLLR CARRALYN PARKES**

The Wren Stone was carved by Trustees and students; the inscription marks Wren's extensive role in the restoration of the dome. It incorporates a sundial with the gnomon being a scale replica of the dome of St Paul's. On mid-summer's day – when Wren placed the first stone to mark the centre of the dome – the shadow moves across the names of twelve remaining Wren churches in the City. It was therefore appropriate that the stone was unveiled by the Dean of St Paul's, the Very Revd. Andrew Tremlett, a Liveryman of the Masons' Company. He gave a blessing on the work of the Trust and all those who have worked in Portland to produce and craft the stone that built so many iconic landmarks in London and elsewhere.

The ceremony, which was attended by over 150 people from far and wide – including the Deputy Lieutenant of Dorset, also saw the signing of a formal Covenant between the Portland Trust and the Armed Forces to recognise the training for stone carving and masonry skills that the Trust provides for military veterans.

The importance of the work of the Trust was acknowledged by the Mayor of Portland, Cllr Carralyn Parkes, who also thanked the Masons' Company Charitable Trust for supporting the cost of carving the Wren Stone and the original installation of the Memory Stones. Erika and I were there in 2017 and it was a great pleasure to return for this momentous event in 2023.



PORTLAND LOOKING TOWARDS CHESIL BEACH AND 'MAINLAND' DORSET

THE VALUE OF PROTEST

by Georgina Hall (Water Conservators)

Opened during WW II as a USAF base, RAF Greenham Common was selected as one of the two British bases for the deployment of USAF's mobile nuclear armed cruise missiles in June 1980.

In September 1981, 32 women with children and four men marched from Cardiff to Berkshire to protest over nuclear weapons being sited at RAF Greenham Common. Realising that the march, and camping by the fence itself would not generate the attention needed to get the missiles removed, the founders of the March declared the camp 'women only' in March 1982 and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was born. The women's refusal to go home challenged the notion that a woman's place was in the home, men should take care of serious issues!

Despite the peace camp, cruise missiles came to RAF Greenham in 1983.

The Peace Women held many protest actions: chaining themselves to the perimeter fence; 30,000 women held hands around the perimeter fence of the camp in December 1982; on New Year's Eve in 1982 the women broke into the base for the first time and 44 women climbed the fence and danced for hours on top of a silo, leading to all being arrested with being 36 were jailed; 70,000 women created a 14 mile human chain from Aldermaston and the ordnance factory at Burghfield to Greenham on 1st April 1983.

The first cruise missiles arrived at the base in November 1983, three weeks later 50,000 women again encircled the base and pulled down fences, hundreds of protesters were arrested. Questions were asked in Parliament and Michael Heseltine the Defense Secretary assured the House that the Greenham Women could not reach the secure parts of the base. The Peace women confronted Heseltine's assertion that Greenham was the most secure base in Europe, by hanging a banner saying 'Make Peace On Earth' high on the Control Tower.



GREENHAM COMMON CONTROL TOWER

This is an account of the incursion as told by one of the protesters, Rebecca Johnston:-

5pm In the dark we cut and crawled through three fences.

5.15pm We climbed some scaffolding, terrified that armed men nearby would shoot.

5.20pm We scrambled up to the observation deck and attached our banner to the railings. I was happy we had succeeded.

6.15pm We realised that Heseltine would deny we had been there if we weren't arrested.

6.20pm After discussing the implications of occupying the control tower we decided to go ahead - responsibly and with peaceful intentions.

6.30pm After breaking glass in the front door we got in. We found the manuals and documents dealing with emergency procedures involving nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. We wrote messages on every page to show the USAF we had read them.

11.30pm After 5 hours we attracted attention by flicking the lights on and off. Finally, 2 soldiers burst in, rifles at the ready, screaming and shouting.

11.31pm We tried to calm them down, but one jabbed us with his rifle until we got to the bottom of the stairs. British police arrested us for burglary.

The next day we made it into the news and proved that Heseltine had misled parliament.

15 months later I served 30 days in Holloway and Cookham Wood

Between 1989 and 1991 the last missiles left the base as a result of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, an arms control treaty between the US and Russia in 1987, with the Americans leaving the base in 1992, but the camp remained until 2000 as a protest against the UK Trident programme.

In the years between 1981 and 2000, when the land was handed back to the Council, more than 70,000 women demonstrated and took action. Hundreds of women were arrested, fined and jailed. Were they successful?

The cruise missiles did go, international law and local by-laws did change, the land was handed back to the people and the movement became one of the longest examples of feminist protest since the suffragettes, fuelling the rise in feminism. The Women's Peace Movement was in the name of the safety of their children and future generations. A similar objective to the protests today by Just Stop Oil. Is it any different? Tactical US nuclear weapons will shortly be returning to English shores. Will a new generation of activists protest around RAF Lakenheath? We will see!

Greenham Common is now recognised as a Commemorative and Historic site and the Control Tower is a listed building. Today it is a vast windswept expanse used by walkers and families enjoying the paths and spaces a few miles south of Newbury.



GREENHAM COMMON SILO



ANGOULÊME CIRCUIT DES REMPARTS SEPTEMBER 2023

by Sheila Higgs (Launderers)

Our adventure starts on Brittany Ferries boat to St Malo.

After we dock in St Malo, we travel to the Hotel de France in La Chartre-sur-le-Loir. This hotel, historically, is where drivers congregate to view the beautiful cars in the car park, on their way to racing events in France, Le Mans, Angoulême etc.

After breakfast in the Hotel, we drive to Angoulême, staying in the town centre.

The race weekend...

Starts with a night-time concours of beautiful classic cars.

Saturday morning we take part in a rally, driving through stunning French countryside, the weather is hot and sunny.

The lunch time stop is at the French Airforce base in Châteaubernard. We join 1000s of classic cars, parked on the runway.

Sunday is race day. A great event. The day again is hot and sunny and we watch racing, look at the cars in the Pits, eat and drink...it certainly was a fantastic event for lovers of car racing.

Monday sees us driving back to the UK for the afternoon ferry from Ouistreham Port.

NEVER LET IT BE SAID THE LAW IS AN ASS*

By Peter Green (Framework Knitters)



Other animals maybe, but not an ass - or at least there are some perplexing laws round the world that relate to animals. But why this topic? Earlier this year, the Millennium Bridge was in the news when workers were required, under a Port of London bylaw, to dangle a bale of straw beneath the structure to warn shipping of work on the underside of the bridge.

This piqued my interest in researching other weird laws around the world. Unlike voting for the Strictly Final, none of these facts have been independently verified. Which in itself probably breaks a law somewhere.

Returning to the common theme of animals, be careful not to take your dog to a garden party at Buckingham Palace, or if you do, stay away from the corgis. It is against the law for a pet to mate with another from the royal household. Indeed, until 1965, this could have resulted in the death penalty.

As you might imagine, the US provides many examples:

Arizona - Donkeys may not sleep in bathtubs.

Florida - Elephants left at parking meters must pay the same fee as a car.

Kentucky - No selling dyed blue baby chicks in groups fewer than six – who even knew blue dyed chicks was a thing?

Maryland - No taking a pet lion to the movies.

Massachusetts - Gorillas may not ride in the back seat of a car.

Michigan - No killing dogs in decompression chambers.

Minnesota - No entering Wisconsin while balancing a chicken on your head.

New York - No taking selfies with tigers.

Ohio - You can only kill a housefly within 160 ft of a church if you have a licence.

Oklahoma - Dogs need a permit to gather in groups of three or more on private property.

Tennessee - You can't take a skunk across state borders.

Utah - Motorists must concede the right of way to all birds on highways.

Vermont - You may not keep doves in your freezer.

Other laws around the world are to promote harmony, well-being and, of course, health and safety. Until 1998, it was illegal to change a light bulb unless you were a licensed electrician in Victoria, Australia. At least now DIYers can legally change a light bulb and remove a plug from a socket.

If in Scotland and 'nature calls', you can knock on someone's door and ask to use their bathroom and, by law, they cannot deny you. This derives from an extension of old Scottish common law regarding hospitality and is technically still enforceable today (even though it was never officially authorised by Parliament). Next time you are north of the border ...

Returning to the City of London, it is illegal to carry planks of wood along a pavement unless there is the intention of it being unloaded from a vehicle. The Metropolitan Police Act says: "A plank of wood must not be carried along a pavement. It can only be moved if it is being unloaded from a vehicle or taken into a building."



Under the Public Health Act 1936, taxi drivers have an obligation to ask passengers if they have smallpox or the plague. And one sensible one - jumping the queue at a tube station ticket hall is an offence under London Underground byelaws imposed by Transport for London to avoid frustration for other people who are waiting in line and minimise the danger of people pushing past each other to get on the train.

Finally, a warning to fellow male Firebirds if visiting Samoa. It is illegal to forget your wife's birthday. Apparently the first offence only carries a warning, but personally, I am way beyond that stage.

However, it says nothing about anniversaries and Christmas, so I wish you all Season's Greetings (and not a card in sight).

* This expression is often attributed to Charles Dickens, who put it into print in *Oliver Twist*, 1838.

When Mr. Bumble, the unhappy spouse of a domineering wife, is told in court that "...the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction", replies: "If the law supposes that," said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, "the law is an ass - an idiot".

In fact, 'the law is an ass' is from a play published by the English dramatist George Chapman in 1654, *Revenge for Honour*.

"Ere he shall lose an eye for such a trifle... For doing deeds of nature! I'm ashamed. The law is such an ass."