

## My Goose Was Cooked!

Akin to an induction to the Eleusinian Mysteries or, apocryphally, Joseph Crabtree's induction to that lair within High Wycombe's hidden depths, the Hellfire Club, my invitation came unexpectedly one January from the distinguished scholar of Russian Music Education, Professor David Forrest. His email sidled widdershins, with a hint that I might be interested in a small gathering at University House on St Valentine's Day 2023. Whatever prompted me to respond favourably is lost now. I have a high regard for David as a scholar and a friend; I have similar sentiments toward Professor Martin Comte, so too for the Hon Sec (Australian Chapter), Mr Phil A'Vard AM. At least the invitation was not to Hanging Rock. I accepted.

To walk into a room I had known well from many years as a member of University House and find it full of many friends from many different pasts was an almost instant immersion what I now know to be the fellowship that followers of the Founder hold fast.

Enough of that: next thing I know, after an excellent dinner and Oration by Ms Gwenda Thomas, I found my name being announced as the 2024 Crabtree Scholar. Like the Speaker of the House of Commons, I found myself manhandled to the despatch box with all the assembled eyes upon me. How could I say 'No'? Could I say 'No'? A muffled squeak passed my nostrils, and the rooms stood in acclaim – for the outgoing Orator who handed me a shopping bag and what turned out to be three volumes of the English Crabtree Orations. My goose, as it were, was stuffed, trussed, and ready for twelve months basting. I stumbled out of University House, down Professors' Walk and emerged into the dark of Leicester Square (Carlton). My long-suffering companion's withering glance was almost lost on me.

There began a remarkable period of research and reflection. As mentioned elsewhere, my D.Phil. work on the seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Middleton, brought a connection with The Queen's College, Oxford; Crabtree's presence on *HMB Endeavour* on Cook's First Voyage brought him to Australia via the South Seas; the meticulous chronologies and bibliographies of Crabtree Scholars provided more and more grist; my own research interests, albeit concerning George Frederick Handel's relationship to the stage and British pageant in the two decades before Crabtree's birth, afforded more lines of enquiry: so too did a pewter mug and a small card signed by King Neptune himself conferred upon a child barely nine-months old as he 'crossed the line' travelling by Port Line ship *MV Port Invercargill*, en route Melbourne to Aden and on to the English Midlands, in November 1959.

Joseph Crabtree dwells among us even now. The fellowship that arose from that first chance email has been an almost unmixed, unshaken, unstirred, unalloyed delight.

Mark Williams 2024

Crabtree Oration 2024: *Crossing the Line: Crabtree's Polymorphous Personality: the Early Years.*