



## **Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards**

**April 1st 2009**

I was honoured to be invited as a guest to the annual dinner of the Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards by the Master, John R C White TD FSI LLB. It happened to be on the same day as the G20 protests and it was mooted that all City functions would have to be cancelled that day/evening. However, in the pure tradition of the City it was business as usual. In fact the Clerk and I had a meeting during the day with the Master and Clerk of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists and I had the evening function to attend. I had thought that like most large functions there would be some cancellations...not on this night. Every person that had been invited turned up despite the prospect of trouble...guests were determined not to let a protest (about anything) disrupt proceedings.

On arrival I was made to feel extremely welcome and I have to say it was a most enjoyable evening – fine wine – good food and excellent company. Like all Livery Companies it is interesting to find out whence they came...in fact the Company was incorporated to regulate the trade of making playing cards in London, which had suffered from the importation of foreign cards and cheap and inferior cards manufactured in the country.

Customs officers were ordered to seize foreign or poor quality cards. In exchange for these benefits the Company agreed that each pack manufactured was to be sealed and a duty paid to the King. Every maker had to register a mark of his own.

The King's Receiver of this duty had an office in the City and was made a freeman of the Company. In 1712 an Act stipulated that the Ace of Spades must be marked on the printed side with the maker's name, and the duty was abolished in 1960.

In common with many other Livery Companies the roles for the Company declined over the years...by 1880 there were only twenty Liverymen, apart from the Master and Wardens.

However, a resurgence of the Company in the 1880s was largely the result of the activity of two collectors of playing cards on the Court, one of whom was also a manufacturer. The presentation of the Company's pack of playing cards at the Installation Banquet for the Master and Wardens commenced in 1882 and has become an annual custom. A portrait of the Master appears on the Ace of Spades with the names of the Wardens and the Clerk. The backs of the cards commemorate some important event of the year. I was very privileged to receive a gift of this year's pack depicting the current Master - John R C White.