

## The Last Banquet with Thorgrim Sigmundsson as Konungr!

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2011 – a very special day in Oundle

Where do I begin?

Seventeen years have flown by and here we are with our last official banquet done and dusted!

And what an amazing event it was!

The day began in a fairly normal fashion, because the Jarls' Meeting had to happen, minutes had to be written and awards had to be prepared for the evening. Gradually, though, the warm April day and beautiful surroundings worked their magic. All around, groups of friends were chatting and teasing each other. The air of anticipation grew. The aroma from the kitchen made our mouths water. Tony and I stood aside until everyone was seated, and Bob announced our arrival for the last time as the Konungr and his Lady. After we had reached our seats, the Guard of Honour crashed their swords against their shields so loudly you could feel the room vibrate! And then suddenly we were being presented with gifts – for Tony and me, two beautiful disc brooches made by Jim Glazzard, each in its own box and pouch; and for Roger Barry, the incoming Konungr, an amazing leather bound shield. Thank you so much.

Elder Terry Warren gave a Christian blessing and Elder Jim Gillbanks broke the bread and drank the wine and a huge cry went up – Odin! The atmosphere of a banquet depends on the old rites and rituals that make it special and the Society depends on the wisdom of our Elders.

Now we could get on with the serious business of eating and drinking! Well, I have never been to a banquet where Vikings were outfaced by food, but they were on this occasion! What a feast was laid before us! Hot savoury starters; vegetable soup; whole roast pig that was paraded into the hall; baked salmon and creamy dill sauce with fresh lemons (my favourite); roast chickens; vegetables; really tasty gravy; apple pie that was to die for with perfect pastry and scrumptious custard; and then, as Tony and I started laying the medals out on the table, the cheese board arrived! A huge thank you must go to Chris Taylor and Haukur for choosing such an amazing venue, finding such competent caterers and organising everything so smoothly. Thank you so much.

Over the years, in Jarls' Meetings and Althings, you may have become aware that I like to have Bob sitting on my left. I have always been able to rely on him to know people's names and, for someone who is known for the power of his voice, to be quiet when others are talking, so that I can take the minutes. Similarly, year after year, we have relied on him to produce The Runestaff and he has been our Master of Ceremonies at countless banquets, moving things along with humour and panache. Bob always has time to listen to people, nothing is too much trouble, and the Vikings love and respect him for that, and so do we. Thank you so much Bob.

At each banquet, key people swear allegiance to the Konungr, but on this night it carried a special poignancy, memories of which we will carry with us always.

And then the awards! Recipients never know beforehand, so there is a delightful moment of surprise when their name is called. During and after each one, the tables are thundered by countless knife handles and tankards. The rhythmic beating is interspersed with the chink of blades on glasses and bottles. There are too many names to include here, but I must mention three :- Warren Cummings from Calgary, who received a few awards including a Viking Airfix Kit and a Birthday Cake! I think he

enjoyed himself! Sandra, who has managed finances and membership for years and kept us in the black! Her face was a picture of delight when she received her well deserved golden award! And Frania! I think everyone in the room joined the queue to give her a hug! Not only is she loved and respected by all of us, but also by half of Europe! Dear Frania, thank you for being you!

We thought that was the end of the awards. Roger left the hall and Tony started his final speech. Chris Taylor had other ideas though, and surprised Tony in his turn by presenting him with a leather bound book full of photographs and messages from so many of you. How amazing! Thank you so much to all of you for your love and friendship and so many wonderful memories!

At this point, I must draw your attention to someone else who works quietly and professionally behind the scenes on behalf of the Vikings - Tabs! He has unobtrusively caught the whole evening's proceedings on camera, creating a record of an incredible occasion. Thank you so much Tabs.

The time came for Tony to hand over the reins. I have the deepest respect and admiration for him. He has led the Vikings from strength to strength with stability and calm leadership and with the unwavering support of his High Council. Roger re-entered the hall with his guard of honour and took his place in front of the high table. Tony bowed down to him and offered his allegiance, and through him the allegiance that had been sworn to Tony by all of you. All hail the new Konungr!

But there was yet another surprise! Roger presented Tony and me with one of Geng's paintings, a portrait of us with the High Council and friends around us and West Stow in the background. What an honour! Amazing! Thank you so much Geng, the High Council and all of you.

It will take a while to absorb the changes. It's odd to know that meetings will now take place without us and Richie can no longer call us Kingy and Queenie! Tony and I both send our gratitude and good wishes to you all - we remember the good times and look forward to many more Viking events in the future.

Charlotte