



Master: Richard J Wells Esq, AGH 2016 - 2017

*The Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards - The Great Fire of London 1666 - 350th Commemoration.*

**The Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards of the City of London** was founded by Charter granted by King Charles I in 1628 to protect the English manufacturers of playing cards from overseas suppliers and to regulate the trade in London.

Since 1882, the Company has issued an annual limited edition double pack of playing cards to celebrate the installation of the Master and Wardens of the Court of Assistants, the theme being chosen by the new Master usually to commemorate the anniversary of an important historical event.

The theme for these playing cards is the Commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the Great Fire of London in 1666.

#### **The Master**

Richard Wells was admitted to the Livery of the Makers of Playing Cards in 2007 and joined the Court of Assistants in 2012. He became a Freeman of the City of London and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Gardeners in 1985. Richard has spent some 56 years working in the City

of London, mainly in the Lloyd's and London Insurance markets, holding numerous directorships and executive appointments. He continues to do so, in a slightly more relaxed manner, and has no intention of retiring.

#### **The Cards**

The Kings represent the principal dramatis personae connected with the Great Fire of London: King Charles II, his younger brother James, Duke of York, later King James II, who basically took charge of the efforts to put the fire out, Samuel Pepys, Secretary of the Navy and diarist famous for giving a first-hand account of the disaster and Sir Christopher Wren, responsible for the re-building of much of the City.

The Queens depict four of Wren's masterpieces: the rebuilt St. Paul's Cathedral, the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry next Guildhall, the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich and, of course, The Monument.

The Knaves show images or scenes connected with the Great Fire and its aftermath: a medieval baker's oven, a fire insurance sign, rudimentary fire services and a Pudding Lane road sign.

The Jokers show Nell Gwyn, mistress of King Charles II and The Golden Boy of Pye Corner, a statue erected in Giltspur Street, Smithfield, where the fire was eventually stopped. Beneath the statue is an inscription with the words: "This Boy is in Memory Put up for the late FIRE OF LONDON Occasion'd by the Sin of Gluttony"

The card backs are unusual in that they show the left-hand and right-hand halves of the 1666 Shlohavot woodcut print, the only surviving contemporary record of the fire.

#### **The Great Fire of London 1666**

Much has been written about the Great Fire and recent television programmes have awakened considerable interest. This year a huge effort has been made by the Corporation of London, The Museum of London, City Institutions and a number of Livery Companies (including The Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards) to help commemorate its 350th anniversary, culminating in the burning of a wooden replica of the 1666 City on the River Thames.

The fire was said to have started in a baker's oven in Pudding Lane, the premises of Thomas Farynor, baker to the King. It quickly spread and, in the course of four days, had destroyed 436 acres or some 80% of the City of London and 25% of the capital as a whole: some 13,200 houses, 87 churches and many famous buildings including The Royal Exchange and St. Paul's Cathedral.



The Golden Boy of Pye Corner.

James, Duke of York took, control of the efforts to extinguish the fire after the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Bludworth failed to take the necessary speedy action to quench the flames. He was reported to have said that "a woman could p\*ss it out".

Remarkably, only 6 deaths were officially recorded as a result of the fire. There was no official fire brigade and fire-fighting techniques were rudimentary. Citizens were forced to seek equipment and help from their churches or Livery Companies. After the fire had been extinguished, scapegoats were sought and suspects, particularly foreigners, were attacked in the streets. A French watchmaker, Robert Hubert confessed to starting the fire and was duly hanged at Tyburn on October 27th 1666, despite the judges doubting his guilt. They were later proved correct when it was discovered that he was still in France on the day the fire started.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The Shlohavot print on the card backs is reproduced by permission of the Museum of London and the paintings displayed on the four kings reproduced by permission of The National Portrait Gallery.

A version of the Wenceslaus Hollar print depicting the extent of the Great Fire has been reproduced on the sleeve by permission of The British Museum.

This year, the design has again been undertaken by Brad Zachary Baker of Amesbury.