



Sacavin Courier



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*The Grand Commandeur pays tribute to
our retiring Trésorier, Michael Forster*

HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE CONFRERIE

To allay any fears recent new members or guests may have concerning the nature of Sacavin or possible dark practices to be indulged therein, our liaison officer, Délégué-Angevin Michel Leterme has kindly offered the following clarification:

1 Sacavin

It behoves us to clear up any ambiguity over the meaning of sacavin in the title of our confrérie, La Confrérie des Chevaliers du Sacavin d'Anjou. It is true that "sacavin" can mean "a drunkard", but it can also mean "a container in which wine can be carried": it was the name for a container in which vineyard workers carried wine for their sustenance at work. The barrel suspended from our collarettes is modelled on these containers.

2 The intronisation ceremony in Angers

This ceremony, presided by the Grand Maître, is conducted by a Master of Ceremonies (Le Chef du Protocole), with the Grand Conseil in attendance. The officers wear a chestnut and yellow velvet robe and a 4-cornered hat, in the style of Rabelais. They wear a white shirt, white bow tie and white gloves. The ribbon of our collarettes is blue/red in colour – the colours of Anjou.

The first intronisation was held, thanks to the good offices of the Mayor of Angers, in the Caves de l'Hôpital de St-Jean. This hospital, with its caves, was constructed in the 12th century by Henry II, the Plantagenet King of England and Comte d'Anjou. Nowadays the caves house a wine museum, dedicated to the confrérie as follows: "Cy sont sacrés les illustres Chevaliers de Noble Ordre du Sacavin".

The Grand Maître's robe is decorated with ermine and he wields a ceremonial vine root, with which new Chevaliers are "dubbed". The Chef du Protocole carries a sycamore

staff sculpted with grapes and vine leaves. The procession of the "platform party" is accompanied by a march from Aïda, played on medieval trumpets. Halberdiers guard the officers with their halberds.

Postulant Chevaliers strike a barrel 3 times to request admission and their CV is read out. With a hannah of wine – Anjou wine, of course – in his/her right hand, a postulant Chevalier must read the oath (with a portrait of Rabelais looking on): Je jure devant notre Maître Rabelais, que quand mon verre sera plein je le viderai, et quand il sera vide je le plaindrai. He/she then tastes his/her wine, after which he/she is dubbed by the Grand Maître, who recites the following welcome to the confrérie: Au nom de Noë, père de la Vigne de Bacchus, dieu du vin de St-Vincent, patron des Vignerons, et devant notre Maître Vénéré Rabelais, je vous fais Chevalier de notre Ordre bien aimé du Sacavin et je vous donne l'accolade*. The members of the Grand Conseil and the body of Chevaliers applaud and greet the new Chevalier(s) with the chant "Optimé, optimé il(s)/elle(s) a/ont bien parlé, il(s)/elle(s) est/sont de nôtres".

The Grand Maître delivers a speech at the conclusion of the intronisation(s) and enjoins the new Chevaliers to promote the wines of Anjou and Saumur. After this speech, a vin d'honneur is served, followed by the "chapitre".

* "accolade" means "embrace" and the French text comments at this point "cette dernière étant plus agréable quand il s'agit d'une gente dame". So does the Grand Maître welcome new Chevaliers with a kiss? Does our Grand Commandeur?

AGM 2009



Our AGM at Queens Club was the usual mix of procedure and conviviality. This year the formalities took place downstairs as the first floor Committee Room, where we normally meet, was unavailable. However, the room suited us well, so well in fact that we may request it again for 2010. Richard Ridler and Jane Berger were elected to the Management Committee and Ray Lindley succeeded Michael Forster in the rôle of Trésorier. Michael was stepping down after 9 years in the position and, coincidentally, Raymond Harris who has audited our accounts since 1996 was also retiring, with Philip Wood taking over as Honorary Auditor. Expressions of thanks were voiced to both Michael and Raymond.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Grand Commandeur presented Michael with a set of 12 Riedel wine glasses, 6 white and 6 red, (with something to put in them) in appreciation of "his wise counsel and secure control over our finances." As Derek went on to say, "He has even managed to follow Robert Wills' precedent of refunds following some Loire visits!" He reminded us that Michael had been superbly supported by Madeleine, also a Chevalier and recalled the delightful summer event, held in their lovely garden in Dorking in 2001. Happily Michael has agreed to remain on the Committee as Délégué-Général.

THE WAR OF THE ROSÉ

“*Quelle horreur!* French winemakers are apoplectic,” ran a headline in this year’s March 21st issue of Time Magazine. “If meddling bureaucrats get their way, it could destroy winemaking traditions that have been nurtured over centuries.”

The vintners' indignation was directed at European Commission plans to simplify the process of making rosé wine. Traditionally, rosé winemaking is a complex operation: black grapes are crushed and the skins, pips and pulp left to macerate with the juice for a few hours before being removed. This tints the wine pink, and leaves a light, low-tannin flavour. But under the proposed reforms, winemakers would have had the option of simply blending white and red wines to make the pink drink, a practice used in other wine-producing regions such as Australia and California. (And indeed in France itself it is an accepted practice in the making of pink champagne, but that’s another matter.)

Anjou is not the only region affected. “We’re shocked, angry and worried,” said Jean-Jacques Breban, president of the Provence winegrowers’ association. The region is the biggest rosé-producer in France. “If the rules change, we won’t be able to compete with our traditional methods, our industry will die and the Provence economy will be devastated. If tens of thousands of wine-growers are forced out of business, swaths of landscape could see vines pulled up and destroyed. It will change our region forever.”

Where mixing red and white may well deliver something approximating to the pink colour of traditional rosé, it will never achieve the same character and quality. Often unfairly dismissed as a lightweight plonk for a summer picnic, rosé wine is versatile enough to be drunk at meals, as an aperitif or during soirées. It is also currently enjoying a revival, rosé has now overtaken white-wine sales in France and accounts for almost 10% of the world market. So it is unfortunate that the Commission chose this moment to propose changing the rules governing its production. When French

wine-producers generally are suffering from global competition, the fear was that such moves could lead to the lowering of quality and thousands of job losses in this more time-consuming method of production. The disquiet was not limited to France alone, Italian and Spanish winemakers were equally incensed.

No surprise then that the Commission’s proposals were followed by intense lobbying and threats of demonstrations. It seems to have worked. Three months later, a headline in the *Courier de l’Ouest* proclaimed “We’ve won!”

The journal was quoting a cry made to his wife by Olivier Lecomte, President of the Association of Rosé producers, when he learned of the news from a noonday TV bulletin. M. Lecomte, a wine-producer from Faye-d’Anjou, represents 500 growers. “The lobbying has paid off,” he said. “In spite of our limited means we decided to struggle against the monstrous practice of blending. This could have led to disastrous consequences. They said that we, the producers of real rosé, could have put on our bottles ‘traditional rosé’. That was too much! It was up to the others to alert wine drinkers: ‘Warning! Blended rosé’ ”.

The strength of feeling was also evident from the article: *Red + white = rosé? No, non et nein to this mixture. Is it a co-incidence or a matter of conscience? The European Commission announced the day after the elections, that it was giving up on the idea of this blending. Is it possible that the Dane Mariann Fischer-Boel, European Agricultural Commissioner, felt that the tide was turning and wanted to leave a way out? A decision was expected on June 19th after a meeting of experts from the Member States, but the Commission reported earlier*

than expected. "I am always ready to listen to a sound case" said Madame Fischer-Boel. Milk producers should take note of this confession.

There is considerable relief. Real rosé will therefore still continue to be produced by steeping black grapes: cabernet, black grolleau and gamay as far as Anjou is concerned, which produces almost 400,000 hectolitres each year. Patrice Laurendeau, president of the wine producers association of Anjou, shares his colleague's satisfaction as well as that of thousands of producers that he represents: "It seems to me that for once the European Commission have

shown good sense under pressure from the whole of the wine producing industry. It is a very wise decision and brings us some comfort in our choices and our beliefs. In this way we can acquire new markets, one example being the Chinese. The Chinese want real rosé and not a blend. This is not the moment to get it wrong when things are not so easy."

Our thanks to Michel Leterme & Ernest Lee for spotting the reports quoted in this article.



GRADUATES IN WINE-MAKING

Our confrérie admitted an interesting group of chevaliers in Angers last year, following the vendanges. This was a group of students – 28 of them – completing their course of education in the Ecole Supérieure d'Agriculture. They had followed a course in wine-making and the products of their coursework have been put on sale in the region, with great success.

In order to gain their hands-on experience the "Master International Vintage" students had access to the 1-hectare vineyard of the Couvent du Bon Pasteur, planted with Chenin Blanc vines in 1999. In 2008 the vineyard produced 3,000 bottles of strong wine – 13.5-14° – which is marketed under the name "Coeur d'Angers" and which is available in prestigious local restaurants as well as local Caves. This is a dry but powerful white wine AOC. The 2005 vintage of this wine features in the Guide Hachette.

The students are responsible for all the stages of production and promotion, from pruning to sales, but the actual vinification is supervised by a Savennières vigneron. The skills thus



Instructing the World in the Art of Wine-making

acquired will be practised worldwide, because there were 20 different nationalities in the 28 new chevaliers*.

Optimé: ils sont des nôtres!

* In order to obtain their vitivinicole qualification, the students are required to demonstrate their ability to practise their trade in 2 foreign languages.

JANUARY WINE-TASTING



Brenda Wheal, Ingrid Gray & Krystyna Lee



Michael Gray & Robert Timperley



Diana Whitcutt & Madeleine Forster



John Ingram with Martin & Gaynor Reynolds



Derek Sheen with Sarah Hawkes



Des Holland



Francesco & Pippa Cusimano



Lucy Gallon & Matt Niven



Graham Macfarlane pours for Jane Berger & Fouad Ghali



Margot Boss & Keith Lockyer



Sherlie & Peter Vidler



Could this happy bunch be next year's inductees?

We are grateful to Fouad Ghali for the photographs appearing in this edition of the Courier.

SACAVIN DINNER AND WINE TASTING
28TH JANUARY
NATIONAL LIBERAL CLUB.

Firstly, a very BIG thank you to Des Holland for organising and presenting the dinner and wine challenge. To enlighten those unable to attend, we were testing our tasting abilities (try saying that at the end of the evening) in a similar fashion to last year. The wines were served in pairs for each course, with one from the Loire and the other from another French region. Des had produced an excellent colour booklet, with detailed instructions, descriptions of the wines and tasting notes. He had clearly gone to a great deal of trouble.

55 of us enjoyed a delicious dinner in the David Lloyd George room, after Vin d'honneur in the former smoking room – how times have changed during the life of the club. The service was efficient and swift, so much so that Des was “under the guns” somewhat and had little time to guide and instruct us for each pair of wines. That said, the food was delicious and graciously served, if a little too speedily.

There were 7 tables, each with the name of a Loire grape, a nice original touch. We had to decide which wine was which, and give each a score. It is with a little smugness that I tell you that our table achieved 100% in this, but

I am sure others did too. With one exception, we preferred the Loire wines above the others – however one should expect nothing less of a Sacavin group! We were also asked to rate the wines from 1-10 we tended to give the Loire wines around the 8 mark, with the 2 dessert wines having an equal score. How politic was that – they were both from the Loire.

Thanks also to Alastair, the Chef du Protocole, for arranging the excellent facilities at the club, and to our Grand Commadeur for a warm speech of thanks at the end of a most enjoyable evening.

Robert Aitken-Sykes February 09.

The Wines Tasted

Domaine St-Just “Coulee de St-Cyr” 2006 Yves Lambert A.C. Saumur
 Domaine Ballot-Millot 2003 Meursault Charles Ballot A.C. Meursault

Domaine de la Chevalerie Cuvée Peu Maleau 1996 Pierre Caslot A.C. Bourgueil
 Château Loudenne 2002 Cru Bourgeois Supérieur A.C. Médoc

Domaine du Monteillet “Cuvée du Papy” 2005 A.C. St-Joseph
 Domaine des Roches Neuves 2005 Cuvée Terres Chaudes A.C. Saumur Champigny

Domaine des Sablonnettes “Le Champs du Cygne” 2002 A.C. Coteaux du Layon Rablay
 Domaine de Haute Perche 2001 Christian Papin A.C. Coteaux de L'Aubance

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Management Committee meeting **Wednesday 23 September 2009** at
The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place at 11.30 am



Chapitre 2009 at Vintners' Hall **Tuesday 24 November 2009**
Calling letters to be posted in October



Wine-tasting/dinner at the National Liberal Club (provisional) **Wednesday 10 February 2010**



Visit to the Loire (provisional) **Tuesday 12 – Sunday 17 October 2010**