



Sacavin Courier



NO. 56 WINTER 2009

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One of the swans at Vintners' Hall

VENDANGES OF 2009

Our Chef des Expéditions, Ernest Lee, has been at work again translating interviews with various vigneronns, gleaned from the press, on the outlook for the 2009 vintage Loire wines.

As October drew to a close this was the picture:

Brissac-Quincé:

Almost entire satisfaction with this year's harvest, with a slight regret that August was too dry for vines planted in schist. N.B. The commanderie made a detour to see the Château de Brissac during their 2008 excursions – it is the tallest château in the Val de Loire and it houses the portrait of Veuve Cliquot.

Saumur-Champigny:

Again, a near perfect year – the best since 1979. This year's wine is predicted to be “très aromatique, équilibré et soyeux” (“soyeux” meaning “silky”). N.B. It will not be marketed until 2011/2012.

Savennières:

There are high hopes for this region too – the early signs are reminiscent of the 2005 vintage. There is one terroir that, like the schist of Brissac, found 2009 too dry – stony vineyards: the grapes were eventually able to mature satisfactorily, however, thanks to the length of the summer.

Effervescent Saumur:

The president of the “Maisons de Saumur-Brut” made an interesting observation in her interview. When you are considering sparkling wine, she said, the question of vintage is not crucial, because we blend a selection of wine varieties to achieve the “signature” balance of our region. (Note from the translator: The label on the last Crémant de Bourgogne that I tasted stated that the wine was constructed from a blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gamay and Aligoté!)

The Saumur president, by the way, described their wine as “un Chardonnay très expressif”. Like Saumur Champigny, this year's sparkling wines will not be marketed until 2011/2012.

Then, at the end of November, came this summary:

The vigneronns of the Val de Loire are delighted with the grape harvest of 2009. The elements that contribute to a good vintage are primarily the weather, viz: no late frost; a warm, and wet enough, spring; a dry summer; light autumnal rains, accompanied by the right amount of wind to keep the grapes dry. Having enjoyed these conditions, the grapes should be picked at the peak of their maturity: the 2009 vendanges were begun at the end of September. The colours of the first pressings of the 2009 vintage have been judged to be perfect and acidity is low.

Everything promises well for the wines of 2009.



A SACAVIN WEEKEND IN SUSSEX

The debate over Climate Change continues but, whatever one's views, what cannot be denied is that the English Summer is now much more conducive than it was to the production of wine. All the reports suggest 2009 will be a prime example. So, the timing of our July weekend in mid Sussex to observe the current state of the English wine industry could not have been better.

To Hickstead in fact, famous for equestrian events. But for the 40 who were to gather there for dinner on the Friday evening, jodhpurs, tack, horse and horsebox could be left at home. All that was required was a willingness to participate in a little communal self-indulgence. We were to stay at The Hickstead Hotel, an Edwardian country house hotel on the edge of the South Downs, extended in recent years and thus easily able to accommodate our party and with a reputation for culinary excellence.

A peaceful setting, yet just a few minutes from the A23(M) Brighton Road. The only sound to be heard on entering the driveway was that of frogs croaking in the ponds nearby. Something French on the menu then? No, our dinner that night was very English, with tender roast leg of lamb as the centre-piece.

Breakfast was traditionally English too, eggs, bacon, black pudding, the full works and as much as one could eat. Those wishing to keep a foot in both camps could, of course, add croissants if they were still hungry.

Our coach that Saturday morning took us a mere 5 miles northwards to the Bolney Wine Estate known also as Bookers Vineyard. Sunshine and blue sky overhead gave promise of a warm and settled day and we were not to be disappointed. We were greeted in the yard

by Duncan Monroe, our host and guide for the visit, whose first concern was to see to it that we were all well supplied with coffee and biscuits, which he served in the large conservatory that functioned as reception area, café, shop and lecture room. Here he outlined a little of the history of wine-making at Bolney. There was perhaps just a little concern that this could take some time, because he started in 43 A.D. when the Romans began vine cultivation in Britain with a grape similar to Pinot Noir. Vineyards flourished then and were successful on and off right up to 13th century when, records show, exports went as far as Rome. However, a mini ice-age in the mid 1300s put paid to virtually the whole industry. So we jumped quickly to World War I, when the last wine vineyard in Britain was grubbed up, somewhere near Cardiff Castle, to allow vegetables to be grown to feed people.

The renaissance began shortly after World War II, when attempts were made to re-establish vine-growing in Hampshire and Sussex using German grape varieties, such as Muller Thurgau. Over the years these endeavours proved successful, with vineyards appearing all over the country, now numbering in excess of 400.

It was in 1972 that Rodney Pratt, influenced by his spell in digs in the home of a local wine maker, bought the Bookers chicken farm of

SACAVIN IN SUSSEX



Breakfast
at the Hickstead



Amongst Bookers' vines



Barrel inspection....Hats On!



Fermentation Room.....Hats Off!



A challenger from Sussex.....Rheims beware!



Leslie & Laura Garner with
Valerie & John Ingram



Madeleine & Michael Forster with
Chris & Peter Bouch



The Grants, Craggs & Hollingsworths



Jerry Schooler welcomes
us to Lurgashall



One group tours the winery....



.....while a second tastes Gooseberry wine



Thank you, Jerry and your team, and
farewell



Earnestly in need of Pimms!

4.5 acres. Here Rodney and his wife Janet established the original Bookers Vineyard. Over the years more land has been acquired and there are now some 22 acres planted with vines, with more planned. Significantly, in the early 90s, their daughter Samantha Linter, who trained as a professional wine-maker, took charge of production.

Bookers makes wines under the Quality Wine Scheme. Duncan explained that every community has one, with Brussels naming two for "Europe UK": England and Wales. Three categories exist: Quality Wine psr (produced in a specific region), Regional Wine and UK Table Wine. Production here was generally of Sussex Regional Wines with some achieving Quality Wine status.

It was time to go outside and take a look. We followed Duncan to the bottom of a slope covered in vines stretching way into the distance. 18 acres with an aspect due south and a slope of 30°, perfect for vines, he told us, as it concentrates the sunshine and eddies prevent frost forming as, with no hollows, the cold air moves down the slope. Unlike those in the Loire, the vines were trained almost at head height, to protect them from both ground frosts and the attention of marauding deer. However, as is often the case in France, roses were planted to warn of the advent of mildew, as it appears on the rose foliage a week or so before the vines. Given UK weather, mildew can be expected every year, but spraying controls it. This has to stop a minimum of 3 weeks before harvest, the residue degrading naturally in that time.

As Duncan continued, detailing the finer points of pruning, rattling off yield statistics, describing how different grape varieties performed in an English climate, it became apparent that here was a man not only immensely knowledgeable in his subject but also for those of us only familiar with French vigneron, a real treasure in that he could explain it all in English! Taking advantage of this, questions came thick and fast and of an increasingly technical nature. But it was one at

a more basic level that produced the most surprising answer. Asked what training he had had in wine he replied: "None." Formerly responsible for computer security at American Express, Bookers hired him for his I.T. skills. Only then did he develop an interest in wine.

Picking is all done by hand. The vineyard employs 4 field workers throughout the summer plus a gang-master and around 15 pickers during the harvest, typically Latvians and Rumanians. The previous year they had recruited 12 students, all English, but they gave up after only one day! Naturally, Health and his brother Safety set the rules but 12 pickers could normally be expected to pick 2.5 metric tonnes a day, with 1 metric tonne producing around 930 bottles.

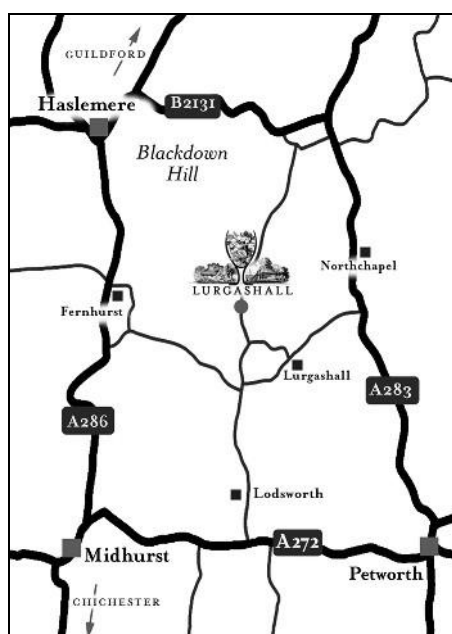
8 grape varieties were planted. Classic reds don't flower in the UK until the end of July but need around 100 days before picking, i.e. the second week in November, so late that the result is often a gooey mush. So the preference has been to plant German bred varieties, such as Dornfelder, already in flower for us to see, and the dark-skinned Rondo. Pinot Noir, an early budding and ripening variety, was also present, together with Merlot. For the whites, the German (or Swiss) theme continued with Muller Thurgau and Wurzer. Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio completed the picture.

Time to move on. In 2005 a brand new, state of the art winery was completed, with help in the form of a grant from DEFRA. Costing £650,000 it was opened by Margaret Becket, a fact confirmed by the plaque on the wall outside. Once again Duncan's commentary was both informed and detailed. What we saw was quite familiar, having seen a number of modern wineries in France. However, amongst all the technical stuff one fact emerged unknown to many. Who thought Dom Perignon invented Champagne? Not so! It was an Englishman, a certain Christopher Merrit. Some 20 years before the merry monk produced his first bubbly, Mr Merrit discovered the process whereby a second

fermentation, following the addition of sugar, produces the sparkling wine we all know and love. (It must be true, it was all documented in 1662 by the Royal Society!)

This news was, no doubt, to prepare us for the tastings. Back in the “Conservatory” Duncan started opening bottles. Recently, vineyards in southern England have been producing some exceptional sparkling wines, a few beating all-comers in worldwide competition. Not surprising perhaps, in that the chalky soils in southern England are identical to those that promote winegrowing in Champagne. Amongst Bookers’ production are a few international award winners. Tasting them was therefore something of a privilege but, along with the reds and whites we also tried, and the lunch that followed, made an enjoyable conclusion to our morning’s education.

Our afternoon excursion was further afield. Deep in an impenetrable forest north west of Petworth lies the Lurgashall Winery, owned and run by Chevalier Jerry Schooler. Where, exactly, in this forest was a mystery, complicated by the fact that our coach appeared wider than any approach road. For those who still have no idea how we got there (and that may well include our driver!), here is a map:



When we finally arrived, Jerry greeted us warmly in the yard and climbed the steps of his office to address us. This was no ordinary office. In fact the range of buildings surrounding us had more in keeping with the film set for “The Darling Buds of May” than a modern winery, but appearances can deceive as we were to find out. The two story timber building immediately to the front, so we learnt from Jerry, was a 17th century barn that originally stood near Billingshurst. In 1985 it was dismantled and rebuilt as the centrepiece of a complex of rustic buildings forming Jerry’s winery which he established that same year. The barn serves two purposes. On the ground floor it houses fermentation, maturation and bottling vats, and modern, high quality equipment in a sterile bottling room, together with a fully equipped laboratory. And on the first floor is the office. It also provides the link between what had once been a bakehouse, to the left and now used as the shop, and a carriage house and stables to the right. The sign at the entrance, “Windfall Wood” aptly describes the surroundings and one didn’t need the Union Flag on the flagpole at the entrance to know this was rural England at its best!

A previous Courier, No. 53, highlighted problems EU bureaucrats had dumped on Jerry, all to do with changes in permitted bottle size. He has now put that behind him although his feelings were apparent from one of several maxims he reeled off, “UK rules OK, EU rules cause trouble”! One can sympathise, as officialdom and all its nonsense must really grate with someone whose previous occupation was as a professor of corporate planning and business ethics.

Our party toured both the production facilities and the office. In the latter, framed and hung on the wall, were many letters of appreciation from satisfied customers, evidence, if it were needed, of the quality of his merchandise. Some, indeed, were from various members of the Royal Family, to whom Jerry had sent samples as birthday presents!

Then it was time for a tasting. But for these wines no grapes were involved. The Lurgashall Winery offers something more traditionally English: fruit liqueurs, meads and country wines made only from the finest natural ingredients, following time-honoured recipes and maintaining authentic flavours. With 26 different products, including curiosities such as Silver Birch Wine, Elderberryport liqueur and a Whiskey Mead, it might have been difficult to know where to start. However, resident winemaker Ian Morris was on hand to guide us through a small cross-section.

Gooseberry Wine: Dry, (in fact the driest of the Lurgashall wines), crisp white with a clean gooseberry taste. Similar to a French Sauvignon Blanc – in fact, it had been picked as one in a blind tasting by wine professionals. A great accompaniment to fish. Best served chilled or tried as a spritzer with tonic and a slice of lemon. 11%.

Blackberry Wine: A medium dry red with a ripe blackberry aroma. The flavour is equally fruity, with a balanced acidity. Very refreshing served chilled like a Beaujolais, or at room temperature. Great with a light cheese or as an apéritif. 11%.

Rosepetal Wine: Specially commissioned by the Royal National Rose Society, this is an intensely aromatic rosé. Medium dry and well balanced, with a superb flavour reminiscent of Turkish Delight. A very refreshing wine, lovely on its own or mixed with Cava or, more extravagantly, Champagne! Also, try mixing it with soda or spring water and ice. 10%

English Mead: Well balanced, with a very full, sweet honeyed flavour – but not too sweet! The most popular mead. Lovely over ice or mulled with spices, or orange and ginger. It goes well with Cheddar cheese and is a great accompaniment to desserts. Try adding two-thirds tonic and a squeeze of fresh lime for a superb cocktail. 12.5%

Walnut Liqueur: With its intensely nutty aroma, this is reminiscent of a sweet Madeira. Long-lasting sweet flavour with well balanced acidity. Delicious over ice or with ice cream, or with cheese such as Cheddar and mango and ginger Stilton. Or try it in coffee! Fortified with Spirits. 17%

Ian did his job too well. The queue that then built up at the shop meant that there was no time for the tea and scones thoughtfully set out for us under a gazebo on the lawn. But Lurgashall wines will no doubt make their appearance in a number of Sacavin households this Christmas.

Our thanks to Jerry Schooler and his staff for making us so welcome, and for providing the directions necessary to ensure a timely return to our hotel.

A warm, still, July evening in the English countryside after an enjoyable day out. What drink does one serve? Well, Pimm's No. 1 Cup of course. Even Sacavins appreciate the occasional departure from Crémant de Loire. Our gathering prior to dinner on the hotel lawn had, as added interest, a wedding reception in an adjoining garden to amuse us. In the distance, but unobtrusively, a dance band could be heard. But if anyone had thoughts of gate-crashing they were put aside in favour of our own informal observance of the 4th July. The dinner menu had a suitably American flavour, somewhat loosely interpreted so as to include Cajun spiced Escalope of Chicken, Guacamole, Monterey Jack Cheese Melt with Black Bean, Peppers, Sweet Potato and Chirizo. Mirassou Merlot from California's Central Coast was dead on target although we were stretching it a bit with the white, Indomita Sauvignon Blanc from Chile! Well, it's still America isn't it? The important thing is everyone had a good time.

And for that we have to thank our Chef du Protocole Alastair Bellingham. Organising a weekend away together for so many is not easy, but the appreciative comments heard at breakfast the following morning as we said our goodbyes confirmed its success.

JMI



Our thanks to Barbara Moon & John Ingram for the photographs.



Le Chapitre du Singe *at* *The Vintners' Hall*

The committee prepared a most interesting, well thought out and beautifully presented booklet, which describes in detail how members are intronised. Obviously a lot of thought and planning went into this booklet and we are very grateful to all the people who organised and arranged its publication. I hope you have all kept it as a souvenir of the truly wonderful evening we spent at the Vintner's Hall. (penalty for not keeping the booklet you will have to drink an extra glass of wine at the next function.).

The evening began with pre dinner drinks, the Vin D'honneur, Crémant de Loire Louis Beauchant-Duroc 100% chenin flowed copiously as did the conversation, with everyone having a wonderful time talking to old friends and making new ones.

Soon it was time for the fanfare of trumpets and the ceremonial part of the evening to commence. Two members were upgraded to the title Commandeur: Des Holland who combines the rôle of Chef de Cuisine with that of Echanson, and John Ingram, our Chancelier. Well deserved. Congratulations to them both.

Two new candidates were intronised in our traditional manner: Graham McKowen and Sid Price. Graham was proposed by Chevalier Ray Lindley. Graham was born in Birkenhead, initially worked in the shipping industry then in sales, before starting up his own business with two colleagues designing and manufacturing container decoration machinery. Graham was a founder member of the Round Table in Dronfield near Sheffield. He now lives in Thorrington and is retired, although he still keeps a keen interest in his former business. He is a wine lover, as is his wife, particularly of the chenin grape. Graham and his wife Anna have one daughter and

three sons, and we welcome him as a new member.

Sidney Albert Price was proposed by Commandeur Des Holland. Sid was born in Lucknow, India. (The same place as Cliff Richard), his father was a regular soldier serving with the Yorkshire Regiment. Sid is an Economist (but not responsible for the state of the economy at the present) and worked as a senior civil servant in the Treasury, Department of Energy and the Department of Trade and Industry for some 30 years, and then as advisor to Exxon Mobil, the Foreign Office and various city brokers. From his earliest University days (London and Leicester), he has been interested in wine. Having made many visits to France on business and pleasure, his love of wine grew, particularly those of the Loire, a pleasure shared with his wife Ann.

Once again we were privileged to dine at the Vintners' Hall. A place truly appropriate for the Commanderie de Grande-Bretagne de la Confrérie des Chevaliers du Sacavin d'Anjou. The menu was perfect, as were the wines, especially chosen by Des Holland. Des goes to a lot of trouble to match the food and wine, this he does brilliantly.

LE CHAPITRE DU SINGE



Raymond Harris with Roger & Geraldine Payton



Brenda Collins, Laura & Leslie Garner



A Vintners' swan is photographed with our newly inducted Chevaliers & the Committee



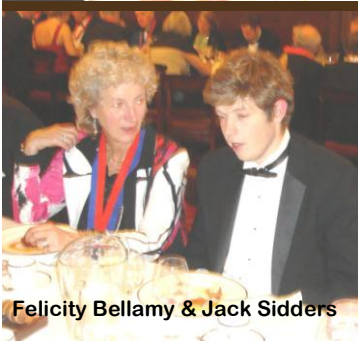
Sid & Ann Price



Graham & Anna McKowen



Des Holland & John Ingram



Felicity Bellamy & Jack Sidders



Derek & Hazel Sheen



John Whitcutt & Joan Bintcliffe



Michel Leterme



Sue Craggs



David Hollingsworth & Lawrence Kaufmann



Hmmm?...
...powerful, well-structured...

Menu

DUO OF CRAB TIAN

Menetou-Salon 2007 Domaine Teiller 100% Sauvignon
Well balanced with a nice freshness, floral, fruits and agruma aromas with a long finish

GUINEA FOWL CONFIT OF LEG & BREAST
 WITH SAVOY CABBAGE, GOLDEN BEETROOT,
 FONDANT, TENDER BROCCOLI & GAME JUS

Bourgueil 2007 Haut de la Butte, Domaine de la Butte
 Jacky Blot 100% Cabernet Franc
Powerful and well structured. Round and harmonious with red fruits and spices aromas

CAULIFLOWER CHEESE WITH COLSTON BASSET
 CHEDDAR AND PANCETTA

TARTE TATIN WITH APPLE SORBET

Coteaux du Layon, Chateau de la Roulerie 2008
Nice Expression of exotic fruits on a delicate and fruity finish

COFFEE AND CHOCOLATES

Choice of Cointreau or Dalmore Single Malt

I was particularly impressed with the golden beetroot, and if I can track some down I will certainly add it to my repertoire. The cauliflower cheese with Colston Basset Cheddar and Pancetta was unusual and very much to my taste, so much better than the usual cheese plate.

And so another successful evening came to a close. The happy, contented members and their guests made their way home, mulling over the wonderful events of the evening.

SFZ



Our thanks to Fouad Ghali for the photographs.



THE LANGUAGE OF MOLIÈRE

The British media reports all too regularly of declining educational standards in the U.K. However, disturbingly, others are now recognising this sad state of affairs. A recent article in Le Figaro caught the eye of our Délégué Angevin, Michel Leterme and he drew it to our attention.

French continues to lose ground in English schools. In one year, the number of secondary school pupils in Britain who sat a G.C.S.E. in French has dropped by 6.5%. (The French equivalent is the brevet). In 7 years the figure has almost halved – dropping from 341,000 in 2002 to 188,000 last year. This is about 1 in 4 pupils.

German, too, is showing a severe drop while Spanish remains stable – although in the past it was less often studied. The only languages showing progress – although they are still very much minority subjects – are Chinese, Polish and Arabic.

The decline in French – the language of Molière – is the result of a political decision taken 5 years ago. In 2004, Tony Blair's government said that the study of a foreign language would no longer be compulsory after the age of 14 – a populist decision that has since been criticised by most education experts.

This policy has had dramatic results not only for French, which is still the second language studied by most secondary pupils but also for modern languages over-all. “What is happening is the opposite of what should happen in a world where frontiers are gradually disappearing,” said Christine Blower, general secretary of the N.U.T. regretfully.

It is in fact the nature of the G.C.S.E. itself which has led to schools giving up French and other modern languages. For, in contrast to the French system, British pupils choose the subjects that they wish to take at G.C.S.E. To bump up their grades, more and more pupils are choosing subjects considered "easy" such as religion, I.T., music or P.E. rather than modern languages which are considered

"difficult". What is more serious is that this "dumbing down" affects the schools themselves which are graded according to their G.C.S.E. results. Only the private and "public" schools which prepare their pupils for Oxford and Cambridge continue to urge their students to learn a foreign language.



Roy Thomas Bouch 1927 - 2009



Chevalier Roy Bouch passed away following a stroke on 5th November 2009. Roy was inducted at the Chapitre des Noces d'Or Royale in 1997. He and his wife Margaret accompanied us on the visit to Sancerre in 2001. Unable to take part in more recent functions due to Margaret's ill health, Roy joined us for the Hickstead weekend this year, making new friends and with every intention of becoming a more regular attender.

In his earlier years he was a keen cyclist with the Bath Road Cycling Club, attempting a record speed tandem ride from John o'Groats to Land's End.

His other passion was Rugby, winning an England school boy cap against Wales. Under age he volunteered for the R.A.F. during the Second World War, playing for the Air Force during national service. He played for Rosslyn Park and was a prop row forward for Ilford Wanderers, and a regular supporter at

Twickenham. When his playing days were over he became a referee, notably sending one of his sons off the field! He supported both Ipswich and Suffolk Rugby Clubs in numerous rôles.

Living in Coddendam for the last thirty years, he was a keen supporter of village events. Roy has lived a full life and will be much missed by his three children, grandchildren, all his family and his friends.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Management Committee meeting **Wednesday 3 February 2010** at
The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place at 11.30 am



Tasting with supper at the National Liberal Club **Wednesday 17 February 2010**
Calling letters to be posted early New Year



AGM 2010 at Queens Club **Saturday 17 April 2010**



Summer Luncheon at the National Liberal Club **Wednesday 9 June 2010**



Excursion to Sancerre **Tuesday 12 to Sunday 17 October 2010**
(Includes Chapitre des Vendanges in Angers **Saturday 16 October**)



A MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR
From the Management Committee

