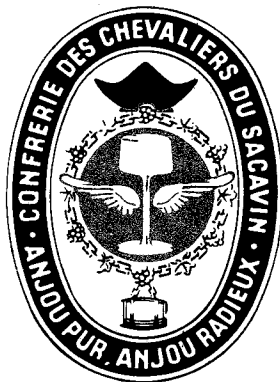


SACAVIN



COURIER

COMMANDERIE DE GRANDE BRETAGNE DE LA CONFRERIE DES CHEVALIERS DU SACAVIN D'ANJOU

No. 10.

Winter 1984/85

For the Sacavin Courier Winter has, surprisingly, stretched over into Spring which has also been, unfortunately, somewhat true of the weather. Apologies for this both from the secretary and the weathermen! Before turning our backs, completely, on the long dark nights, there were two events which shone as a bright light through the cold and the rain:-

Chapitre des Jolies Dames - Last year's Induction and Dinner, held on Thursday 29th November at the Cafe Royal, London, W1, was yet another 'first happening' for the Commanderie with the Ceremony devoted to the Induction only of the fair sex. With the Grand Commandeur, Col. Hector Mackenzie, officiating - ably assisted by Chef de Protocole George Wilks, the other Officers and the Sacavin Chorus - six charming ladies joined their husbands, fathers or friends to become Chevalier of our Order:-

Marie-Terese Baird - wife of Nigel, and who has already distinguished herself to the Commanderie with her lively vignettes of Plantagenet personalities, history and customs that appear in the Courier.

Barbara Billington - wife of our new Chef de Cuisine, Norman, an enthusiastic supporter of Sacavin events and rumoured to be the 'power behind the throne'. So eager is she to learn all about our region, her studies have taken her on two 'educational visits' to the Loire.

Stephanie Colasanti - a very distinguished professional photographer whose specialty of providing art work for travel brochures leads her to many places but who has yet to fulfil her ambition of an excursion to Anjou, and the caves of our region.

Laraine Del Buono - who, as well as working as an Adjudicating Officer for H.M. Government, is also studying for a BA in Law with the objective of becoming a solicitor and then, no doubt, adjudicating on the virtues of the wines of our region.

Janine Harris - wife of Raymond, an Angevin by birth and a graduate of the University of Angers. With this background, her belief in the beneficial effect of the wines of our region is such that she even adds a little Saumur to the Pedigree Chum of her dog, Napoleon Bonoparte.

Caroline Salzedo - daughter of Leonard and Pat and thus a second generation supporter of the wines of our region - well versed in music, the Spanish language and, by profession, computers.

A sumptuous Dinner - planned by our recently retired Chef de Cuisine, Cyril Saper, and executed by our newly inducted Chevalier - Roger Banfield - followed the

/ cont

Ceremony. It was absolutely superb, as was the wine which accompanied it - chosen by our Chancellor, Derek Sheen, who commented on both food and drink at the intervals during the repast. In his Speech of Welcome to the guests and the new Inductees, the Grand Commandeur was especially impressed that the Confrerie's new Grand Maitre Mr. J-P. Sorgniard and the Confrerie Secretary, Mr. Y. Cariou, had given of their time in order to travel to England and be present at the Ceremony and Dinner. In his reply, Mr. Sorgniard brought messages of friendly greeting from our fellow-Chevaliers in France. The response from the new Inductees was another innovation devised by the ladies themselves. Marie-Terese Baird recited a poem in old French commenting on wine and women in particular and the habits of men in general! Laraine Del Buono and Caroline Salzedo, accompanied by the trumpeters, sang arrangements of three Angevin folk-songs, with wine as the theme and the fate of ladies if they were not careful!!

It is unusual for a wine order to have an Induction for Ladies Only - and it proved to be an occasion enjoyed by everyone.

Christmas came and went and so did the snow (nevertheless to return a little later). This brought us unwelcome news that our Grand Commandeur, Hector Mackenzie, had suffered a setback with his health from which he has now thankfully recovered. This circumstance, however, meant that he was unable to be present at the first event of the New Year which was the:-

Annual General Meeting and Seminar - held on Friday 1st February, also at the Cafe Royal. The Seminar was first in the programme. "Internal and External Aspects of Fragrance" had been chosen as the theme and our former Chancellor, Chris Wilkinson, a Master of Wine, with especial interest of those from the Loire which he had chosen to illustrate the influence the fragrance of a wine has in assessing its quality. The delegates present followed his instructions with great enthusiasm as they judged the relative bouquets of two contrasted Gamay de Touraine - 1984 and 1982 - a 1983 Anjou Rouge de Cabernet, a Saumur Champigny 1982, a 1983 Muscadet, a Reuilly 1983 (grape Sauvignon), and two from the Chenin de Blanc grape - a 1981 Clos de la Coulee de Serrant and a 1959 Anjou Blanc.

This internal appreciation of fragrance was followed by a most fascinating lecture on the history, genealogy and classification of perfumes by David Butterfield, Technical Director of the British section of the multinational company International Flavors & Fragrances (IFF), the world's largest perfumery suppliers. An appreciation of the external aspects of fragrance was generously illustrated with both examples and samples, finishing with all the ladies receiving a bottle of perfume.

Derek Sheen was an admirable Chairman of the Seminar, ensuring that all delegates became well-versed in making judgements through their sense of smell. It is true this educational process did not allow a great deal of time for the following Annual General Meeting. However, retiring Senechal David Rutherford, as Chairman, made sure that all necessary business, election of Officers and Committee Members and tribute for all concerned with the various events was covered. The Minutes of the AGM were circulated to all Active Members at the beginning of March.

So now we can concentrate on activities planned for the remainder of the year:-

Visit to Angers and the Loire - Whilst it proved not possible to arrange a Sacavin Tour of the Loire in mid-May, as first hoped, because there was insufficient support, a fresh attempt is being made to arrange another Tour at the end of September/beginning of October. This will coincide with the Autumn Chapter of the Confrerie in Angers which is on 28th September with the Induction Ceremony in Caves des Plantagenet followed by Dinner in Greniers St. Jean.

Our Chef de Travel - Nick Kyriakides - has planned a very pleasant itinerary for the September/October Tour. Before arrangements can be progressed further, the support of our Chevaliers and their spouses for this visit must be ascertained. A form - returnable to Nick - is enclosed with this Courier and perhaps those who would like to join the Tour would very kindly complete this as soon as possible and certainly by the end of June.

/ cont

June Event in Angers - between now and the hoped for visit to Angers/Tours in the Autumn, the Confrerie are holding their Summer Chapter on 22nd June with an Induction Ceremony also in the Caves Plantaget in Angers and Dinner afterwards in Greniers St. Jean. On this occasion the internationally famous cellist Mitislav Rostropovich is being received into the Order.

Mention of Caves Plantagenet and the events of the Confrerie in Angers brings to mind the historic relationship between ourselves and our French friends. Chevalier Marie-Terese Baird has very thoughtfully supplied us with more information about:-

The Plantagenets - their Clothes, Food and Wine -

1. Clothes. Historians have reflected on the curious fact that, in spite of her renowned beauty, no 'image' of Eleanor of Aquitaine is to be found anywhere. I have one single picture of her and it is remarkably unlike anything painted in her time. Her face is indeed beautiful, her hair, light brown, is long and very loosely plaited. Her eyes are large and very light in colour, quite unlike the traditional black-button eyes of other contemporary portraits. In fact, this picture is so pre-Raphaelite in style that I have wondered if it was not, indeed, a retrospective imaginary work by someone like Burne-Jones. I have, however, found no evidence of this.

Her simple beauty is enhanced by the fact that she wore, like all the other ladies in Norman times, a plain white tunic and no jewelry at all. Hair was worn loose sometimes in two very long plaits interwoven with strips of material. One may almost assume that the hair was sometimes washed, which is much more doubtful half a century later when it was hidden under the most extraordinary contraptions and was to remain so for several centuries.

The only adornment of a Norman lady's woollen dress was a girdle, which was also a status symbol. The higher the rank of the wearer the more ornamental the girdle. A really big one indicated that the lady had no need for work. A big girdle nowadays merely indicates that the lady has no need for chocolates.

Eleanor's simple tastes didn't last very long. When she married the King of France, she became a leader of fashion and by the time she was Queen of England, we are told that she had forty-two gowns of velvet or silk from Italy or linen or wool from Flanders, many of them richly embroidered. She had fourteen pairs of shoes with gold thread, five mantles bordered with ermine, countless veils and ten 'undershirts'. No pants. It is interesting to note that women wore gloves as early as the thirteenth century but had to wait for their knickers until the 19th Century!

Her husband, Henry the Second, when he arrived in England, cut an equally dashing figure in his very mini coat which earned him the nickname of 'Curtmantle'. This fashion caught in England. The coats became shorter and shorter and eventually quite indecent, obviously far more so than the 'mini skirt' ever looked on a woman.

Certain fabrics were strictly reserved for the nobility to wear: lame which was a fine silk interwoven with gold or silver, samite, a Chinese material also known as San Twan, and the grey and white fur of the squirrel, called vair. Perrault wrote a French fairy-tale called 'Cendrillon' which we know as 'Cinderella' which suffered a great injury in its translation. Perrault tells us that Cendrillon went to the ball in slippers of vair, this exclusive fur, which was translated into 'glass' (verre) and that's why English children think Cinderella wore glass slippers and Continental children know they were fur slippers.

The daughters of noblemen were taken to live at Court at the age of seven. They were referred to as the 'young matrons'. They were taught sewing, very elaborate embroidery with gold and silver thread, spinning, bleaching of cloth to pure whiteness, reading, playing the harp, singing, playing chess, riding a horse and holding a falcon, making their own dresses in the then favourite light blue,

rose or scarlet. They also sewed for the menfolk, handsomely decorated 'over-robcs', helmet lacings, capes and banners. In their spare time (!) they created intricately designed altar-cloths. All this between the ages of seven and thirteen by which time, their courtly education was deemed satisfactory and they were put out on the marriage market.

King Henry, always resplendent in his attire, often wore his two favourite colours, 'ruby scarlet' and 'Lincoln green', with jewelled brooches at the throat and shoulder, and richly ornamented buckles on his belts. He and his nobles also often wore bi-coloured 'hosen' one leg red, one blue or green.

Matilda, eldest daughter of this smart couple, seems to have inherited her parents' dress sense. When she travelled to Germany to marry the Duke of Saxony, she took with her twenty pairs of chests holding clothes to the value of £63.13.7p. Those pairs of chests were slung across the backs of thirty-four packhorses. She also took seven scarlet and gilded saddles, seven pairs of gilded reins, and, of course, all her household goods, including two large silken cloths, two tapestries, one cloth of samite and twelve 'tableskins'. This item puzzles me a little as one never sees, in pictures of that period, any cloth on any table.

Today, for £63.13.7p. one might buy a reasonably good coat and wear it on one's own back, doing away with the necessity for 34 packhorses.

It is not generally known that nuns, and particularly abbesses of noble birth, dressed quite sumptuously. There is a story of a bishop, suffering either from ascetism or dyspepsia, visiting a Convent to berate the nuns upon their extravagant clothes, their hunting-hounds and monkeys and a certain laxity of conduct, to say the least. This spoilsport left a Bull with recommendations for the inmates to peruse at their leisure, but the whole flock of nuns, screeching like infuriated magpies, chased him out and threw his Bull at him. Bravo.

In the 14th Century, some very peculiar things happened in the world of fashion. First to the men's footwear. Their shoes, made of cloth, velvet or very fine leather, developed extremely long points, reaching a good six inches beyond the foot and eventually reaching such a length that the points had to be fastened to the waist with chains to enable the wearer to walk. These shoes, called 'poulaines', were, understandably, restricted to the nobility. After all, 'other ranks' had to work which meant being able to walk without falling flat on their faces every five minutes.

The women, not to be outdone, started doing extravagant things to their headgear. They invented 'gorgets', which were white linen whimples, covering their throats, up to the chin, their necks and heads. Later they took to wearing a 'caul', like an upside-down colander, then later a 'eage' extending many inches on either side of the face, and later still a high steeple called a 'hennin'. When I went to boarding school at the 13th Century English Convent in Bruges, the nuns, of the Order of Saint Augustine, still wore the wimple and the high 'hennin' with black veils hanging from the point at the back. Very picturesque on the hockey and cricket fields.

Buttons, hitherto merely decorative, became practical fastenings in the 13th Century. When Eleanor attended her sister's wedding, in 1290, she wore a dress fastened with 636 silver buttons down the front.

It is often believed that Queen Elizabeth I started the fashion of shaving her front hair to produce a fashionably high forehead and plucked her eyebrows to a thin line. In fact, both these customs started in 1370, when women also dyed their hair with saffron, producing a very horrid yellow colour, but a waste of time, to my thinking, since the hair was hidden at all times. Fashionable women walked oddly at that time, pushing their tummies out and hollowing their backs, which must have made them all look like that queue on Tuesday afternoons at the ante-natal clinic. Medieval children wore exact replicas of the adults' clothes: kirtle, overgarment

mantle, linen shift, shoes, peacock feathers in their caps, squirrel-trimmed gloves, tabards and coifs. Poor little blighters, We've a long way to go to the modern babygrow stretch-suit.

In the 14th Century, women suddenly took to baring their throats and shoulders, which caused a contemporary chronicler to remark 'A gown open thus at the neck seems like the hole in a privy'. I've wondered and wondered what he could possibly have meant ...

2. Food and Wine. The two stories I am going to tell you now I had to translate from the Medieval French, and if any of you think Chaucer's English is no picnic, they should try Medieval French!

The first story shows us that the pruning of vines was invented by a donkey. A 13th Century chronicler tells the story of Saint Martin paying a visit to an Abbey in A.D. 440. Saint Martin, you may remember, is the chap who had his own peculiar ideas about charity, like chopping his coat in half to share it with a beggar. It's difficult to imagine half a coat keeping either of them warm and it seems to me that a true Christian would have given the beggar the whole coat. However, that's by the way.

On this occasion, Martin left his donkey waiting outside so long that the poor beast became bored and thirsty and wandered into the monks' vineyard, and promptly demolished several kilos of grapes in that lackadaisical way donkeys eat, i.e. a bit here and a bit there. Well, the monks threw a temper about that, naturally, but later in the year, lo and behold, the grapes that had been left were not only four times bigger but yielded a larger quantity of the most magnificent wine they had ever produced. Martin, as we know, became a saint, on the grounds that he had performed a miracle, but the poor donkey got no reward at all, not as much as a third class beatification.

The second story in Medieval French tells how, in the Autumn of 1372, the Anjou wines helped Messire Du Guesclin defeat the English. On learning from his spies that the English were on their way to conquer Chizay, this worthy Connetable hit on the ingenuous idea of ordering two large carts, loaded with wine, to be placed on the invaders' way. When the English, hot, bothered and chronically thirsty, came across this unexpected refreshment bar, they didn't waste a minute making good use of it. They drank the wine out of cups, out of pots and even out of their helmets, telling one another craftily that if they drank their fill, they'd be all the better for a good spot of fighting or, in the event of a defeat, they would at least die very happy. When the French arrived, the English soldiers peered at them curiously, laughed at them uproariously but absolutely refused to pick a quarrel with them. The French, who as everybody knows, don't have quite the same sense of humour as the English, got diligently down to work. All the invaders were left on the battlefield, some dead-drunk, but most just dead, but, presumably, cheerful to the end.

Wine in England became scarce. Although flourishing at one time, vineyards had become gradually sacrificed, partly because of the overwhelming competition from the superior Bordeaux wines, then a part of the Angevin Empire, but mostly because the land was given over to grazing for the sheep that produced 'the flower and strength of England', that is, the best wool in the world. Such was the quality of English wool that it was in great demand, particularly in Flanders where the Flemish weavers were famous for their skill. The alliance with Van Artevelde and the Flemish Burghers was more commercial than political. Eventually Flemish weavers came to England to teach us the craft. Women spent most of their time spinning, which, it was said, was the principal occupation of mother Eve, in between trips to the orchard to see how the apples were coming along.

The poor ate badly in England. The land left over from the sheep occupation produced wheat, rye, oats, peas and beans. Not much else. Even the rabbits,

considered a plague, were reserved for the manor. Privileged birds were the doves living in Manor House dovecots where they grew exceedingly fat for the lord's table, on the corn that should have fed the peasants.

Hérons were also much appreciated. They were caught by trained hawks. In the early days of Henry's reign, there was, in London, on the banks of the river Thames, a public cookshop where one could find an infinity of dishes, coarse meat for the poor, dainty meat for the rich, roasted, baked fried or boiled, game, birds, even sparrows (a miserable mouthful) and all the fish, big and small from the very productive river Thames.

The only 'bane of London' records the same chronicler 'is the immoderate drinking of fools'. In the Hulton Picture Gallery, there is a drawing of a monastic cellarer leaning towards a huge vat. In his left hand he holds a jug which is being filled from the vat. In his right hand, two enormous keys dangle from his fingers while the palm of the hand holds a very large bowl from which he is drinking with every evidence of non-monastic ecstasy.

In Billingsgate, there existed a faithfully kept agreement that one Corporation would sell 'wine but no flesh' and the other 'meat but no wine'. It is reported that the Court of Henry II was regularly supplied with 'a dozen different wines', alas, not specified. I am looking at a series of illustrations from a 12th Century German manuscript, depicting various activities of daily life. One I find most intriguing. In a kitchen there is a boy cutting the throat of a sheep, and a woman, stirring a vast mass of potage in a huge iron pot over a brazier. Towering over her, we see what appears to be a glowing-eyed supervisor brandishing a kind of cat-o-nine-tails above her head. Is one to assume that cooks worked under duress? The funny thing is that the cook's face, half-turned towards the tyrant, bears an unmistakable expression, not of fear, but of pure happy masochism.!

In England, at that time, they prepared a most peculiar dish, which consisted of a roast swan, stuffed with a whole capon, stuffed with a partridge, with a lark inside it and finally a wren in the lark. I assume all those birds were boned first, otherwise it must have been a very tricky job for the carver.

At home, I sometimes cook one of the two Medieval recipes I have. One is called Egurdouce, and is rabbit cooked in rich red wine, raisins and a lot of those spices originally brought back from the Crusades. The other dish is called Peions Ystewed and is more picturesque. Each guest is given a thick trencher of stale bread, originally on the bare table, but I am a coward and provide plates. On this trencher is placed a pigeon, cooked with many herbs and spices. This should be eaten with the fingers, but I go on being a coward and provide the tools. The juices from the pigeon soak into the bread which is eaten afterwards. Delicious.

But back to Anjou! Soon after Henry's and Eleanor's marriage, the Schenechal of Garlande gave a banquet in their honour. We owe the detailed menu to yet another chronicler (God bless all writers). First came different kinds of soups, rich, sweetened and 'coloured to please the eye'. To follow, whole roast shoulders of mutton and veal, haunches of beef, meat pies made with calves, sheep and other ingredients. The guests, incidentally, used their own knife and spoon, presumably carried in their pocket, to make great dashes at those dishes and hack away whatever portion they didn't want anyone else to grab.

Now came fat geese, chickens and capons, all in a row, presented on long spits. Huge dishes of leeks from Picardy, peas, onions, beans and beets adorned the tables. Those little appetizers were followed by the daintier turtle-doves, blackbirds, plovers and larks. Throughout the feast, dishes of spiced eels, pike and herring were presented, presumably to keep the thirst going. Naturally, the glasses were constantly kept filled. The 'piece de resistance' was a boar's head and a decorated pea-fowl. Peacocks were not plucked but skinned and the skin and feathers put back on them afterwards. Ugh.

/ cont

Bear with me. We cannot leave the table yet. There is still the cheese from Brie, pears from Saint Riule, so highly praised by Rabelais, peaches from Cailleaux, cherries and apples from Auvergne and Provence.

At this point it's useful to remember that excessive girth was then a sign of wealth. Thin chaps were despised. In fact, there are still parts of Germany, in our enlightened 20th Century, where husbands don't like to see their wives too thin as it reflects on their competence, throwing aspersions on the health of their bank balance. A Frankish chronicler remarked sourly that, although the cellars of Anjou yielded the best vintages of France, the English were quite incapable of appreciating them, as their palates had been ruined by the consumption of beer. This doesn't seem to have been the general opinion, however. It is said that the English were the first to introduce beer into France and that the French took to it enthusiastically, declaring that it was a 'wondrous drink', in colour like wine, but with a much finer taste' When Thomas a Becket went to France in the happier days as Henry's Chancellor, he took with him two carriages full of iron-bound casks containing beer for the French 'who greatly admire this liquor'.

The Plantagenet monarchs, however, were notoriously fond of Anjou wines. The Vendors of this wine in the streets of Paris called it 'Le vin du Roy'. Charles VII of France and his beautiful mistress, Agnes Sorel, used to sit and drink large amounts of Saumur together. To be fair, it didn't seem to have stopped her dying at twenty-eight.

There was a mighty Abbot in Angers who drank wine, not from a cup but from a pot, and it was said that his flesh was deemed incorruptible so pickled was it in good wine. Louis VII chose Anjou wines as special present for his special friends and both he and Henri I made quite sure, when embarking on a Crusade, of a very considerable ambulating cellar.

Much of the Anjou wine was exported to England during the 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries. In 1212, John Lackland purchased eight casks of it, and the accounts of Henry III show the expenditure of 404 barrels of Anjou wines for the sum of 404 'livres d'or'.

I'll finish on a note that will, I hope, prompt you to go and uncork a bottle forthwith! Anjou wines were once recommended as a cure for obesity on account of their 'lightness and slight acidity'. Do yourself a good turn!

Confirmation of the beneficial as well as the enjoyable attributes of Anjou wine thus illustrates the importance of our summer event:-

July at Chough Cottage - Senechal Chris Wilkinson and his wife Hilary have very kindly organised another wine tasting at their delightful home in Towersey, Oxfordshire for Sunday, 7th July. This will be the fourth time they have played host to the Commanderie and offered Chevalier and their spouses the opportunity to taste a great variety of wines of our region followed by a very enjoyable buffet lunch prepared by Hilary. Sunday at Chough Cottage is a wonderful experience with food and drink of superb quality served in a most beautiful setting. If the weather is fine, there is even the chance of a swim! Those who have enjoyed the previous tasting's will know this is an event not to be missed. The Booking Form is enclosed with this Courier and, with numbers restricted to 50, members are advised to make early application to avoid disappointment.

In acknowledgement of the influence of Anjou upon all our activities, the final event of the year - our annual Induction Ceremony and Dinner is:-

Chapitre des Angevins - on 19th November at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London W1. Please note this date in your diaries now - the application form will be included in the next edition of the Courier which is scheduled for the beginning of September.

* * * * *