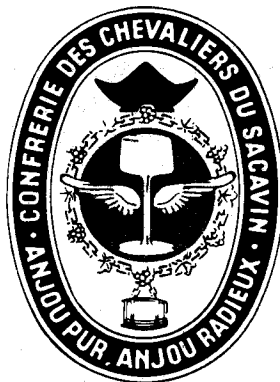


SACAVIN



COURIER

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

No. 11.

Summer 1985

Summer - although only getting under way late and intermittently - came in, warm and sunny, just in time for our Summer Event, the:-

Wine Tasting at Chough Cottage - on Sunday 7th July and was our fifth summer event at the home of our Seneschal, Chris Wilkinson, and his wife Hilary. Chris had arranged a tasting of 24 wines covering a wide range of those produced in Anjou and the Loire. Some were well-known labels although, with these Chris had chosen those displaying unexpected qualities. Others were quite rare - coming from small vineyards with a consequently restricted output. All offered had very distinctive qualities including some unusual reds which should dispel for ever the widely held but incorrect view that Anjou produces no good reds! The price range was as varied as the wines - stretching from just under £3 a bottle to almost £30. In fact, the Vin de Table, Robert Bossard, Blanc de Blanc at £2.75 per bottle and an Anjou Rouge de Cabernet 1983 Domaine de Rochettes DB G. Chauvin at £3 per bottle are absolutely fantastic value and it is a wonder shelves are not already stripped! At the other end of the scale a Quarts de Chaume 1959 Chateau de Suronde DB P. Laffourcade at £27 per bottle was quite superb - each golden droplet being of pure delight! At the conclusion of the Tasting, Chevalier David Burroughs summarised the qualities of the wines sampled in very expert manner.

To match such lovely wine, Hilary Wilkinson served a summer luncheon of incomparable quality which included a fish dish, to her own special recipe which was outstanding. One would continue to savour it, in one's mind, long afterwards. The sweets, too, were a tour de force.

Numbers were a little down on last time - due, no doubt, to the proliferation of Wine Society events on that Sunday, not to mention the Men's Finals at Wimbledon and the first day of the Henley Regatta. This was a little disappointing in some ways but, at least, it identified the truly dedicated, 'hard-core' Sacavin supporters. It also allowed the slightly smaller numbers the opportunity to mix very freely and enjoy the pleasant company and the beautiful garden. Our Grand Commandeur was still not quite well enough for such a long journey but it was very nice that Daphne was able to come. The Chef de Protocole took his customary dip - a solo swim this time - although, later, we are told, Daphne took to the water!

With Summer, hardly begun and now coming to an end, we can gain some comfort from thought of the Autumn and Winter activities ahead. The first of these is the now almost traditional biennial Visit to Angers and district - the third such excursion (one could almost say pilgrimage!) undertaken by the British Chevalier in homage to the birthplace of our Order. Approximately 20 members and spouses are going

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along, leaving Heathrow on 27th September to return on 1st October, no doubt fully replenished with stocks of wine - bother internally and externally! Chef de Travel Nick Kyriakides has made all the hotel and travel arrangements and Chancellor Derek Sheen has organised the visit to the various caves of our region. The well-known hospitality of our French colleagues is being demonstrated once again with 'degustation' to and from Nantes Airport as well as at frequent intervals in the days between. The highlight of the Visit will be the Chapitre d'Hippocrate on Saturday 28th September at Greniers St. Jean in Angers.

We will give a full account of this year's Visit to Angers in our next Newsletter. As a background to the unique occasion it will undoubtedly prove to be, Commandeur John Braun reminds us of:-

A Touch of History - although the vine has been cultivated in Anjou since ancient times, perhaps the oldest written reference to its wines, albeit obliquely, appears in the works of Sidoine Apollinaire in the 5th Century. He wrote: "Not far from the sea of Brittany is a town built on a rock, rich in the gifts of Ceres and Baccus. It is the city of Angers". The historian Gregoire de Tours, writing some years later, amplified the vinous quality of Anjou thus: "... throughout the Anjou Country, the vineyards are very extensive. They constitute one of the riches of the country".

Thenceforward a wealth of records made during the 11th and 12th Centuries testifies to the steadily increasing production of both white and red grapes. Many of these records, signed by the Plantagenet Kings, are concerned with ownership of land and feudal rights. The noblemen of the day laid down standards for the provision and maintenance of cellars and required their vassals to put aside a given part of their land for the cultivation of vines. Quality standards were set and the noblemen alone decided the commencement date for the grape harvest in their own domains. The droit de ban was the most widely spread feudal right in the whole of Anjou.

One of the best public relations men of old Anjou was King Rene, whose Chaze estate on the outskirts of Angers was extensively planted with vines. He harvested the grapes with his own hands and would allow no other wines on his table, even when he stayed in Provence.

By the 16th Century, Anjou wines were known throughout the Kingdom of France and exports, which had been built up steadily under the Plantagenets, spread to Flanders, then Holland and its overseas empire. A strong Dutch connection developed after two dealers from the Netherlands set up business at Souzay, near Saumur.

Business was interrupted during the wars of Louis XIV and subsequently the French Revolution, but trade was resumed early in the 19th Century. Nowadays, of course, trade is world-wide and Anjou wines are to be found in all European, American and Far Eastern markets, to the joy of those who drink them.

Our next Autumn activity is also our major event of the year, the:-

Chapitre des Angevins - which will be in the Ballroom of the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London W1 on Tuesday 19th November. This will be our first time at the Dorchester, and Chef de Cuisine Norman Billington has worked very hard at arranging a really superb occasion for us. An outstanding menu will be prepared by Chef Mosimann whilst we can be sure that Chancellor Derek Sheen will choose excellent wines from our region to accompany it. The booking form for the Chapitre des Angevins is enclosed with this Courier and, with tickets at £39.50 per person, the Management Committee feel this is exceptional value for a Vin d'Honneur, a five course Dinner, with wines to accompany the various courses, not to mention the added bonus of a really splendid venue - the Ballroom at the Dorchester is both elegant and glamorous - and good Sacavin company. In turn, they hope that members will support this very prestigious event by coming along themselves and, if possible, making up parties with their

friends. We are hoping that distinguished visitors from Angers will be joining us for the occasion - invitations have already been extended to our Grand Maitre, Mr. J-P. Sorgniard and to Mr. Yves Cariou, the Confrerie Secretary.

The name for this auspicious Chapitre at the Dorchester again reminds us of our Plantagenet links - there is no doubt that Queen Eleanor would have thoroughly approved of an event held there. Even her favourite son might have been persuaded to linger in England a little longer in order to be present although Richard I did not greatly favour the country of which he was monarch, as we are told by Chevalier Marie-Terese Baird:-

Richard the First or Lion-Heart.- Richard the First, inventor of A.W.O.L., was born in 1157, the fourth son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. He reigned over England for ten years and, except for six months in all, was constantly absent from it. He cared nothing for England and often said so, but History requests us, if not to care for him, at least to try and understand his peculiar character, with all its vagaries, perversions and virtues. Let's start with his nickname: The Lion Heart. One legend has it that Richard once fought a lion with his bare hands. Thrusting his fist into the beast's mouth, he pulled out its heart. Well, we don't need an O level in basic Anatomy to know this would be rather like going from London to Dover via the Birmingham spaghetti-junction. You try and pull a heart out through a mouth and you will see what I mean. More significantly, it is now historically accepted that the name 'Coeur de Lion' made its first appearance more than a century after Richard's death and was coined by a French troubadour. This is one of the lesser-known facts of History. In his lifetime, he was known as 'Richard Oc-e-No' which is Provençal French for 'Yea-and-Nay'. More later about how he got himself that nickname.

Of all the sons of that marriage, Richard was the most handsome. Over six feet tall, which was remarkable in itself at the time, he was well-built, had flaming red hair and a face to match it; his complexion being of that rich brick colour that comes from a harmonious mixture of fresh air, exercise and the consumption of plenty of splendid Anjou wines.

To go back to very basic facts, Richard was known later to have been very fond of his wet-nurse, a goodly woman called Hodierne, who had given the prince her left breast, reserving the right one for her own plebeian infant. Let the politicians toy with that idea if it amuses them.

Thirty years later, Richard granted Hodierne a very generous pension and she became the first and almost certainly the only wet-nurse ever to have a place named after her, to wit, Knoyle Hodierne, in Wiltshire.

Historians always have, between them, produced a medley of sketches of all monarchs, so let's get that down next. Richard was, we are told, a poet, a lover of music, a fanatic soldier, a lecher, a glutton, a hypochondriac enjoying absolutely perfect health; he was greedy, extravagant, cruel, perverse, brutal, insolent, not madly intelligent, but exceedingly brave, which is a quality that is sometimes engendered by a certain lack of imagination. He was fond of jewelry and of all the trappings of regal life. Richard was his mother's favourite son and he lived with her at her Court in Poitiers from a very early age. This education in the peculiar atmosphere of Eleanor's Court has been blamed for Richard's eventual homosexuality. Not only did his mother turn him into a precious 'little lover', a Mummy's boy, but he, like the women at Court, inspired some of the 'Gai Saber' or 'Joyous Art' of troubadours, always awake to passion inspired by beauty and grace.

It is generally accepted that Richard was homosexual, though some say possibly bi-sexual. This theory having been based on Richard acknowledging the existence of one bastard son, Philip, who seems, however, to have had a much bigger place in the mind of Shakespeare than in true life. One has never been quite sure of his existence. At the age of fourteen, Richard was installed Duke of Aquitaine and, by the time he was a grown man, he was ruling, very efficiently, over all his mother's domains, thus causing the jealousy of his brothers.

The picture we have of the young Richard was that of a very accomplished youth, fluent enough in Latin to make jokes at the expense of the Clergy, a writer of better than average poetry and music, a man of high spirits and a witty tongue. He was also very proficient in all the knightly arts of combat, games and tournaments. As an after-thought, it is also noted that the very slightest contradiction sent him into paroxysms of typical Plantagenet maniacal fury. Another trait he seemed to have inherited from the Plantagenets was a determination never to overburden himself with sincerity or loyalty. Hence the 'Yea-and-Nay' reputation in matters of faithfulness. In the case of his father, Henry II, this was known as 'diplomacy', in that of his brother John Lackland as downright treachery and dishonesty. Richard was somewhere between the two.

At about this time, Philippe-Auguste, King of France, started making annoying noises about the little Alys who had been betrothed to Richard since she was one year old, and who had, while still a child, been seduced by Henry. Richard made it quite plain to the King of France that he was not willing to pick up his father's left-overs. Bear this unfortunate Alys in mind, please. She keeps coming back, through three reigns!

Richard's coronation, at Westminster, in 1189 is interesting for two of its features. First because it was of unprecedented sumptuousity, which, incidentally, set the pattern for coronations as we still know them today. The second interesting fact was that Eleanor, always bright and alert, must have said something like this "My boy, you can't dodge around this one any more. You must have an heir and I shall find you a bride to my liking" to which Richard, using his favourite oath, probably answered "By God's legs, Mother! You know how I am ..." and Eleanor no doubt retorted "I know, dear boy, but you will just have to shut your eyes and think of England". He didn't. He died without an heir, although Eleanor had provided him with a suitable bride, the rather ineffectual Berengaria, daughter of Sancho de Navarre. Richard, who had embarked on a Crusade soon after his coronation, argued that the Church didn't permit marriages during Lent. Nobody pointed out to him that the Church also forbade fighting during Lent, but that's by the way.

On leaving Sicily after having delivered the bride, Eleanor stopped long enough in Rome to see her friend, the delightfully named 'Hyacinth Bobo' (Giancinto Bobo) crowned Pope under the rather more serious name of Celestine III.

The marriage of Richard and Berengaria took place in Limasol, in Cyprus, on May 12th 1191. It is amusing to see that no report is to be found anywhere of the bride's attire, whilst we are told in great detail that Richard wore a 'tunic of rose samite and a cape embroidered with gold crescents and silver sunbursts'. One doesn't know if the marriage was ever consummated but the festivities lasted three days and then Richard packed off his bride and turned his attention to the real love of his life, fighting. There is little more to say about the luckless Berengaria. From now on she tiptoes in the background of History. She spent a secluded life in Maine where she died. Today, there is, in Cyprus, in the town of Limasol, a hotel called 'Richard the Conqueror' and nearby, irony of ironies, a small village to be avoided at all costs as it serves as a sewer for Limasol. Its name is Berengaria. Sit transit gloria mundi

Richard's 'raison d'etre', his Crusades, are too well-known to have a place in this frivolous essay. I've only picked out one or two lesser-known tit-bits. For instance, all women camp-followers were banned by Richard, except those big and brawny enough to carry the baggage. Also that, when the King of France, feeling ill, deserted Richard in the middle of the Crusade and went back to Paris, he became the inventor of the 'pave' as we (alas for our heels) still know it today. The story is that the King, obviously blessed with a very sensitive nose, became increasingly incommodated, during his illness, by the stench rising from the streets of Paris and hit on the idea of covering up the stinking mud with nice little square bits of stone. It was in the same Crusade that Frederick Barbarossa of Germany drowned while taking a relaxing bath in a river. Too relaxing! This left Richard alone to pursue the good works of killing all those poor chaps who happened not to share his own and always very shaky religious beliefs. In fact, Richard was quite pleased to be ride of the other two Kings. He's said to have remarked that they 'bickered constantly like a couple of old women'.

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Nobody is ever going to deny Richard's legendary courage; and his 'good' deeds for Christianity certainly gained him his very romantic reputation. In Acre, Richard had one of his funnier ideas. He started parlaying with Saladin, suggesting that Saladin's brother, Saphadin, might like to marry Richard's sister, Joanna of Sicily, now a widow. Joanna, backed strongly by the matriarch Eleanor, invoked religious grounds for refusing absolutely to marry the sunburnt gentleman.

It is curious to note here that Richard, whose life was dedicated to the art of killing, was, at the same time, unusually interested in the skills of curing, and that on one of his crusades, he took the time to call on the medical school of Pelerno, 'the most advanced in Christendom'.

A final work on Richard's Crusades. There is an interesting legend that lingered for more than a century after his death. Arab mothers, it is said, still invoked the name of Richard of England to pacify, or terrify, their recalcitrant children and horses.

Richard never trusted his young brother John, when he was away from base, and quite rightly too. Philippe-Auguste never missed a chance of 'ganging-up' with John against the absent ruler and they were forever plotting and scheming to relieve Richard of his throne, meanwhile indulging in little pacts about the re-appropriation of his lands in France.

As for England, she survived the reign of her King 'in absentia' because his parents had been the popular Henry II and the ever-watchful Eleanor, but above all, Richard owes his throne to the never-failing ability and faithfulness of Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury and Justiciar, who can fairly be said to have run the country for Richard.

Philippe-Auguste now offered John, the Lackland, a bride, and guess ... Yes, that slightly shopsoiled little Alys again. John said he'd have to take a raincheck on that one. After that, there was a beneficent cooling off between him and the French king. I have told elsewhere the story of Richard's capture and imprisonment in Germany on his return from the Holy Land. A lot of soppy stuff has been written about Richard's favourite troubadour, Blondel, who is alleged to have traipsed from castle to castle, looking everywhere for Richard in bleakest Germany, singing under the windows the first bars of a song he and his friend and master had composed together and, eventually, being rewarded by Richard bursting into song of the second verse. I'm afraid that this is absolute rubbish, first because there was never any mystery or secrecy about the King's place of imprisonment, but mostly because the story of Blondel was first told by a minstrel in Rheims in the second half of the 13th Century - a whole century later!

After Richard's mother Eleanor, had taken the King's fabulous ransom to Germany, she and the beloved son made a triumphant journey back to England, via Antwerp where they were received magnificently by the Duc de Louvain and given the time of their lives by the good burghers of Antwerp. This still happens to tourists in Antwerp nowadays. From there they embarked on the 'Trenchemer' commanded by the royal Admiral Stephen Turnham. Richard had been away from home for four years. In general, the population went mad about the return of their exotic King and his picturesque mother, but there were exceptions. It is reported, for instance, that the Castellan of St. Michael's Mount, a pal of John's, 'died of fright' on hearing of the King's return. Wouldn't it be interesting to know what he had been up to! Also, Bishop Hubb pointed out sharply to the King that if it hadn't been for the faithful skills of Eleanor and of Hubert Walter, the Kingdom would, by now, have fallen prey to anarchism.

Then there was that very Hubert Walter, so reliable, so staunch, yet perhaps not without human frailties. He seems to have wanted to feather his nest a bit, that one. When Richard, in 1166, sent the Abbot of Caen on a mission to investigate the accounts of the Exchequer, Hubert treated him to so grandiose a banquet that the unfortunate cleric didn't survive it. Call it coincidence ... or just call it plain English cooking. The visit home was sharp and short. The following May, in the teeth of a dreadful storm, Eleanor and Richard left England again. Neither was ever to return.

In France, Richard quickly and efficiently restored order in his lands in Anjou and Aquitaine. John sought out his brother, crawled on his knees begging forgiveness. Richard is reported to have said "Get up, lad, you're only a child (John was 27) and you have

been under some very bad influences. Now what would you like for your din-din?" and offered him a superb salmon he had just been presented with. John, now dead-keen on showing his brother his goodwill, promptly had 300 prisoners decapitated in Evreux and their heads stuck on pikes for all to see. Richard was not impressed and told the 'child' to apply the soft pedal.

Richard very methodically recovered all the bits and pieces Philippe-Auguste and John had been nibbling at, and then, in 1196, built himself the pride and joy of his life, 'Chateau Gaillard', inspired partly by the castles he had seen in the Holy Land and partly by the German ones. It certainly was not like any other castle. It was extremely strong and curiously devoid of decoration or ornamentation. Philippe-Auguste, marked, asked him if he knew that his famous Chateau was blocking off the Seine and its approaches to Rouen. Richard said yes, he knew. He was immensely proud of Chateau-Gaillard which cost him £11,500 to build, which is not peanuts when you consider that all his castles in England together had cost him a paltry £7,000.

Of his private life from now on, very little is known except that when a holy man said to him "Be Thou mindful of the destruction of Sodom or God's vengeance shall overtake Thee", Richard burst into a noisy demonstration of penance, in true Plantagenet tradition, confessed in public his 'sins against Nature', stripped himself naked and begged his (probably rather embarrassed) peers to bash him up.

Richard died stupidly, bent on a Quixotic and quite unnecessary fight. In Chalus, a Limousin peasant had found a rich Gallo-Roman treasure on his land and had taken it to his Lord, Achard de Chalus. Richard, itching to go on another Crusade and badly in need of funds, decided to march on Chalus and gain for himself the allegedly fabulous treasure. He set off valiantly, in spite of the bishop having forbidden him to fight during Lent. When he arrived in Chalus, surprise! The castle was garrisoned by a mere fifty men, who immediately offered to surrender, on condition that their lives and their arms be saved. It is very difficult to understand why such an experienced warrior as Richard turned down this plum dropped in his lap. He said no, he would capture the castle and have all its garrison put to death and then walk away with the treasure.

On the eve of the battle, Richard, unarmed, took a 'recce' walk under the battlements of the castle in the quiet of the evening. From a battlement, a lone soldier shot an arrow at him. It hit him in the shoulder and the wound was considered not dangerous, but he died of gangrene, two days later, in his tent, and, needless to say, in the arms of his mother. Knowing himself to be dying, Richard had sent for his assailant and magnanimously forgave him and ordered that he should be set free. In total disobedience of those generous last words, the unfortunate young man was sent to Richard's sister Joanna, now married to the Count of Toulouse. She demonstrated her devotion to her brother and her grief his loss had caused her, by having the prisoner blinded, then flayed alive, then torn apart by horses. Very soon afterwards, she was seized by a fit of true Plantagenet conscience, left her husband and took the veil at the Abbey of Fontevault where she suffered agonies of repentance before dying.

To end this short sketch of Richard the First, I can think of nothing better than the words which poet Bertrand de Born put in his royal master's mouth:

' I love the gay Eastertide, which brings forth leaves and flowers and the joys of the birds, but I also love to see, in the meadows, tents and pavilions spread out, for it gives me great joy to see, drawn on the fields, knights and horses ready for battle. '

That, I think, sums him up.

This, too, completes our activities for 1985 and the next event to look forward to is:- The Annual General Meeting - so far it has not proved possible to confirm a venue or date for next year's AGM but members will be advised as soon as possible. End of January/beginning of February is the most likely time.

We end on a congratulatory note to one of the three Founders of our Commanderie and our first Treasurer:-

Mr. Charles Whitfield - upon being appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire, an Honour recently bestowed upon him by the Queen.

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