

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

Summer 1986

No. 13

The appearance of this year's second Courier confirms that summer is already well under way. For once, though, we do not need this reminder - the glorious weather is sufficient announcement that the year is already over half way through. What a sunny year this has so far proved for Sacavin too, with each joyous event following the other, starting with the:-

AGM and Seminar - which took place in the Orchid and Holford Rooms of the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London W1, on Tuesday March 4th. Activities begun with the serving of tea and very delectable sandwiches whilst registration for the Seminar was taking place. Continuing our exploration of the senses, the Seminar topic was "External and Internal Influence of Colour" and, after a Welcome to the participants from the Grand Commandeur and an Introduction by the Seminar Chairman - Chancelier Derek Sheen - the more technical side of the programme began with a very interesting lecture on "Colour - Illusion and Reality" by Derek Wheeler, Director of a company manufacturing 'own name' toiletries and cosmetics for several retail outlets, notably Marks & Spencer. An expert formulator of colour cosmetics, Mr. Wheeler very cleverly slanted his talk towards the colour and apparent colour of wine, illustrating, with various examples, the influence of background, texture and light upon what we see - or perhaps only what we think we see!

It is interesting to note, at this point, that, quite by coincidence, it was realised that Derek Wheeler and his wife, Gwyneth, who was also present, were both former pupils of our Chef de Protocole, George Wilks. As Derek readily admitted, it was George who taught him all his pre-University Chemistry. The concensus view of the audience was that Derek had received very expert tuition!

Thus, after being made to realise what seeing really involves, attention was turned to how the attractions of a wine can be judged by its colour as well as its other attributes. Chevalier Anthony Hern, a distinguished writer on wine, and former Arts Editor of the Evening Standard, conducted us through a fascinating tasting of Loire Wines - from the greenish tinge of the Muscadet to the faintly brown-rimmed appearance of the Loire reds. The wines thus savoured were:-

Muscadet sur Lie - Domaine Robert Bossard - 1984

Savennieres - Domaine de Closel - 1978

Vouvray - Domaine A. Foreau - 1973

Anjou Rose - Ackermann Laurence - N.V.

Chinon - Domaine de la Noblaie - 1984

Saumur Champigny - Vignerons de Saumur - 1983

all of them chosen, with great discrimination, by our Senechal, Chris Wilkinson. All of them were very well worth the in-depth study by the participants with the Vouvray being exceptional and the two reds especially commendable.

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After such a pleasant encounter with colour, attention was focussed upon the Annual General Meeting, held immediately after the Seminar. Grand Commander Col. Hector Mackenzie, as Chairman of this Meeting, led the discussion into consideration and adoption of the various reports, election of the Officers and Management Committee for 1986 and defining programme arrangements for this year and next. The Minutes of the 1986 AGM have already been sent to all active members.

After the AGM, the AGM Vin d'Honneur and then the AGM Dinner, all of which was served in a style befitting the very high standard of our venue. There is no doubt that the Dorchester is a most elegant setting for our events and the rooms provided for our AGM, Seminar and Dinner confirmed this yet again. The Commanderie's gratitude is, once again, extended to our Chef de Cuisine, Norman Billington and new Chevalier, John Brooks, the Dorchester's Banqueting Manager, for once more, arranging an outstanding event for us.

That was our Winter event and was followed, as a late Spring activity, by the really tremendous:-

Highland Tour - May/June 1986 - For some years, our Grand Commandeur has been suggesting that the Commanderie should organise a tour to Scotland, a visit which would culminate in a reception at his home, the House of Rosskeen by Invergordon. Such a visit took place in the late Spring. Twelve members of the Commanderie arrived, in pouring rain, at the Kingsmills Hotel in Inverness to be welcomed by Hector, resplendent as befits the Thane of the Mackenzies, in full Highland costume, kilt in the tartan of the clan with a sporran fashioned from the head and pelt of a Highland wild cat. The hilarious noisy meeting in the hotel bar was the prelude to a most enjoyable four days, meticulously organised by our Grand Commandeur with an imaginative insight into various Scottish interests likely to please the unlettered Sassenachs.

Our first day started with cold, heavy rain and, after driving along the shores of Loch Ness, we were glad of heavy pullovers on our tour of Urquhart Castle, a Medieval castle, now a ruin, built on a site occupied since the Iron Age. Even from this vantage point, no member of the group claimed to have spotted the legendary monster. The rain eased and the weather improved as we journeyed through beautiful wooded country to Moniack Castle Winery. A winery in Scotland? Yes, a winery making "country" wines by the fermentation of fruits and flowers of the hills and countryside; sap from the silver birch, berries from the rowan and flowers from the meadow sweet. Moniack Castle has always been the seat of the Clan Fraser and we are grateful to Mrs. Phillipa Fraser for an interesting visit and for a tasting of her country wines, produced by age-old, handed-down recipes. A journey through spectacular wooded country sparkling with masses of golden broom and gorse took us to the well-preserved ruin of Beaulieu Priory where, quite unexpectedly, we saw the splendour of a Highland Wedding. Then again through beautiful country beside trout and salmon streams and rivers, back to Inverness, visiting, en route, the Holm Woollen Mills at Dores where, by intricate weaving, tartans are made.

On Sunday, we were pleased to see much better weather for our journey to Elgin Cathedral. The cathedral's history, going back to the Thirteenth Century, was a tale of destruction and pillage told with fluency and with his own witty comments by Mr. Simpson, the Custodian, and a natural raconteur. A long journey brought us to the Macallan Distillery for what proved to be a most enjoyable visit. The detailed description of the manufacture of whisky from barley through malt to distillation and maturing was informative and interesting. Ten year malt proved very adequate as aperitif for a magnificent lunch which included some delectable local salmon. Our hosts, knowing our intimate association with the Loire, paid us the signal compliment of serving Vouvray 1976 with our meal. The Chef de Protocole spoke on behalf of the group, thanking, with some apposite literary allusions, all those who had given us such a good time. The visit ended in the 'display' room where we were shown an amusing film emphasising the

the instruction we had received. Our Chef des Beaux Arts showed his skill and virtuosity by an impromptue performance upon the moog synthesiser. We shall not forget Macallan Distillery.

We sped on through further lush, green countryside amid mild 'soft' weather to the home of Lord and Lady Cawdor, to Cawdor Castle, a 15th Century Castle with massive stone walls, forbidding dungeons and beautiful tapestries relieving the stark, gaunt coldness of rough stonework. No difficulty here in conjuring up pictures of Duncan's brutal murder by Macbeth and his ambitious wife. On Culloden Moor, too, we had no difficulty in imagining the terrible carnage which followed the defeat of the Scots after the great Jacobite rebellion. A journey back to Inverness and a noisy, jolly, typical Sacavin dinner in our private room, ended an outstanding day full of interest, of beauty and of good fellowship.

Our last day dawned clear and sunny, and our journey to Foulis Castle gave us some superb views of the Cromarty Firth. The Castle, the home of Captain and Mrs. Patrick Munro reminded many of us, irresistibly, of the French Chateaux we have visited in the Muscadet area, a stately home. Mrs. Munro described, in interesting detail, the restoration which had already been done and the work which was still in progress. The garden, too, was full of unusual plants, the varied coloured blooms setting off the cool grey of the ancient building; a beautiful, lived-in home.

Dalmore Distillery was the next call, Hector's own ground. Here we had another detailed account of all the stages in producing first class whisky; accounts and anecdotes given by men who obviously lived for and enjoyed their work. After liberal tastings we went on to the House of Rosskeen, the home of our Grand Commandeur and his wife Daphne. Here, in magnificent surroundings, heralded by a young piper, we enjoyed a splendid lunch provided by Daphne and Lucilla with true Highland hospitality of excellence and liberality. Needless to say, we drank Loire wine (Sancerre) with our salmon and Dalmore malt both before and after. The Chancellor, in a charming witty speech, expressed to Hector, Daphne and Lucilla, the thanks of the whole group, for everything they had done. Very reluctantly, we made our farewells and drove off to the airport.

The success of this Highland Tour we owe to our Grand Commandeur, who arranged visits, worked out our schedule and ensured that we met the right people in the right places. The hotel, the Kingsmills, chosen by Hector from his personal knowledge, was excellent, impeccable service and attention with splendid food. Throughout the visit, Daphne's influence was obvious. We met her friends, she had interesting stories, she knew the history and the culmination of her work was the final magnificent visit and lunch at the House of Rosskeen. Our sincere thanks to our dearest Mackenzies for a most enjoyable few days. GW.

After such a glorious beginning to summer in which we received instruction upon the distillation of Scotland's noble brew and the traditional methods of making Highland wine, another very instructive as well as pleasant event is planned, the

Visit to Lamberhurst - during which members and their guests can benefit from a conducted tour of the Winery and Cellars ending with a Tasting of the Wines produced by this, the largest and probably best known of the English Wineries. This is on SATURDAY, 6TH SEPTEMBER. Coach transport to and from Lincolns Inn Fields (London WC2) has been arranged and, also, an early Dinner at the New Fantail Restaurant (Locks Bottom, Farnborough, Kent) to round off a very pleasant afternoon/evening. The coach will depart from Lincolns Inn Fields at 1.15, its next stop being the New Fantail Restaurant where it is expected to arrive about 2.15 pm and depart for Lamberhurst at about 2.30. The rest of the afternoon is then taken up with the Tour and Tasting, with arrival back at the New Fantail by 6.30 pm for Dinner at 7 pm. The coach is scheduled to leave the New Fantail by about 9 pm to arrive back at Lincolns Inn Fields by 10 pm. Members and their guests can either join the coach at Lincolns Inn Fields or at the New Fantail Restaurant. There is adequate car parking space at both places. The Cost for the Lamberhurst Visit, covering entry

to the Vineyard, the Tasting, Dinner with Wine including service and VAT, is £23 per person for those making their own travel arrangements and £27 per person for those travelling in the coach as well. The Booking Form for the Visit to Lamberhurst is enclosed with this 'Courier'. There is an upper limit on numbers with places being allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis. Members intending to come along are therefore advised to complete and return the form, without delay, to the Chancellor.

With the Visit to Lamberhurst illustrating the interests which we share with our French colleagues, this seems an apposite opportunity to include the first of a Trilogy from the pen of our Commanderie Historian, Marie-Terese Barid, which she has entitled "Obnoxious French Queens of England" ! First, she turns her attention to:-

Eleanor of Provence (1216-1272) wife of Henry III - Eleanor, sister of Marguerite, Queen of France and consort of King Louis IX (Saint Louis), was the second of the five beautiful daughters of Count Berenger of Provence. She had a certain talent for poetry and, in her teens, wrote a romantic epic about the Cornish hero, Blandin, which, when it came to the notice of Richard of Cornwall, so delighted him that he decided that its author would be an eminently suitable wife for his brother, Henry III.

We are told that she was a very energetic and vigorous young woman, incisive, ambitious and unbelievably extravagant. Indeed, it's impossible to resist the temptation to liken her to a certain type of modern woman who might marry a President, then a shipping millionaire and set about seeing how soon she can get through their respective vast fortunes. Eleanor too, one feels, would have bought two hundred pairs of shoes at one sitting without batting an eyelid.

Henry III, son of the lacklustre John Lackland and Isabelle of Angouleme had started his reign as 'a pretty little knight' aged nine. He was intelligent, precocious, well-made and princely and he had inherited the traditional Plantagenet appreciation of beauty, especially in matters of jewelry and apparel. He was affectionate and trustful, but had his fair share of the legendary Plantagenet hot temper. When he came to the depleted throne, half his kingdom was ruled by Louis VIII of France. In January 1227, at the age of 19, he declared his own majority and embarked cheerfully on twenty-six years of misrule.

Several attempts had been made to find Henry a wife. First there was the daughter of Leopold of Austria, then the daughter of the King of Bohemia, then the daughter of the Count of Brittany Pierre de Dreux and, in 1231, Henry is said to have fallen violently in love with the sister of the King of Scots, a match strongly opposed by his barons. In 1235, Henry was actually married, albeit by proxy, to Joan, daughter of the Count of Ponthieu, but the Count failed to obtain the consent of his king, Louis, and consequently the Pope released Henry of his temporary 'vows' on the well-trodden grounds of consanguinity. It was then that Richard of Cornwall suggested Eleanor of Provence, whose sister had recently married Louis IX of France.

There was so much dallying about Dowry and Settlements that Henry lost his temper and his patience and told his ambassadors that he'd have her 'either with money or without'. That must have been the last time he ever made so rash a statement. Henry and Eleanor together were going to fleece the people of England quite methodically and very thoroughly.

He was 28 and she 14 when the marriage finally took place on January 4 1236. As marriages go, it was absolutely magnificent. Henry, true to his love of finery, was the first to wear, at his wedding, a new luxurious material called 'baudekins' which was a fine tissue of pure gold. To quote Matthew Paris, it made him 'glitter very gloriously'.

It's probable that the bride followed the French fashion of the times and married in red. It was much later in history that white wedding-dresses became a claim of the bride's virginity. In the 13th Century virgin brides wore their hair loose, just to inform the media of the purity of their state.

Jewelry the young king gave his bride was then estimated to be worth £30,000. To gain an idea of the magnitude of this sum, let's just remember that the average wage

of a manual worker was sixpence a week. The radiant young couple then settled down to the sweet domestic bliss of finding out how much money they could spend and how fast!

After the marriage, Henry's court became a place of unlimited welcome to his wife's relatives, which were uncommonly numerous because her grandfather had had a prodigious progeny. Nepotism ran high, and bitter native jealousy kept up with it. The Queen's uncle, Boniface, became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1245, the only foreign prelate ever to hold that position, which made him instantly and heartily detested. He was, we are told, 'the most hated man in England'.

Apart from her relatives, Eleanor brought with her an immense entourage of cooks, artists, actors, minstrels, ladies and pages. All had, of course, to be fed and housed royally, another fact that didn't escape the notice of the natives and cause, at first, discontent, then a full-fledged hatred of the Queen.

Before long, King Henry and his administration were living on borrowed money, and this at a time when England was doing quite well for herself, thank you. She was exporting 8 million fleeces a year to the weavers of Flanders. A royal mill at Elcott, near Marlborough, had been rebuilt at the cost of £4,175.4d. to meet the pressure of work. The famous 'scarlet cloth' of Lincoln was fetching very high prices in Venice. But that was just peanuts. Henry accumulated debts at an unbelievable rate, some of which were still outstanding in the reign of his grandson. He levied loans, fines and scutages. He exploited the Jews and borrowed abroad. Bankers from Sienna and Florence were invited to trade in London, but Matthew Paris said, rather quaintly, that he found it shocking that they were allowed to live there 'like respectable citizens'. One in the eye for our bank-managers.

Henry borrowed and Eleanor kept him supplied with incentives. When her mother brought her other daughter, Sanchia, to England to marry Richard of Cornwall, Eleanor demanded that they should be entertained on a scale already wildly beyond the court's resources. Henry just borrowed a bit more to meet the insatiable demands of his Queen.

In between shopping-sprees, Henry and Eleanor produced five children: Edward I, born in 1239, then Edmund and after that three daughters 'of no importance'. Daughters in serious history books are always of 'of no importance'. These trifling objects were: Margaret, who married Alexander III of Scotland at the age of 11, Beatrice and Katherine. When Edward, the Heir, was born, the King, true to form, issued an order that the presents his subjects planned to make to celebrate the event 'should be costly' so that it was said by a chronicler 'God gave us the infant, but the King sells him to us'.

There was a poet called Ribald who was actually driven insane with fury at all this reckless extravagance. He vowed to kill the King and then claim his throne for himself, no less. The King heard the tale and thought it a bit of a joke. He invited the irate poet to dinner. But Ribald was not joking. In the dead of night he found his way to the King's chamber where he repeatedly thrust his sword into the bolster on the royal bed. The King owed his life to his predilection for his wife's bed. No longer amused, Henry had the mad poet promptly executed.

In 1242, Eleanor accompanied Henry on an ill-fated expedition against her brother-in-law, the King of France. It was a total failure, ending with Henry having to beg for a 24 hours 'truce' during which, under the cover of darkness, he ran away to Bordeaux. During this ignominious retreat, Henry lost his military chest and his portable chapel with its valuable plate. Eleanor chose that moment to give birth to a daughter (of no importance). Undaunted, the royal spendthrifts held a sumptuous feast to celebrate the event. In disgust, most of Henry's nobles returned to England, leaving him to his roistering.

In October 1242, when Eleanor's sister was married to Henry's brother, the King and the Queen did certainly not allow their massive overdrafts to interfere with the jollity of the occasion. The dinner at the bridal feast, if we are going to believe a contemporary chronicler, and quite honestly, I find it difficult this time, the feast consisted of three thousand different dishes ... the mind boggles!

The unfortunate Jews were squeezed yet again. One of them, the famous Aaron of York being forced to 'contribute' 400 gold marks and 4,000 silver marks. By 1244, when royal debts amounted to one million marks, Henry and Eleanor invented a temporary economy measure. They started inviting themselves and their favourites to dine in the houses of wealthy Londoners and were given to 'manifest much discontent' if they were not allowed to take valuable gifts away as souvenirs, tokens of their hosts' delight at having had the honour of entertaining them.

The people's fury was all set to explode, and it was the Queen herself who set the match to the powder. She had her own methods of raising money. Part of the Revenue for the Queen Consorts of England came from customs dues levied at the Queen's own Wharf, known as Queenhithe. On the Queen's explicit orders, all vessels laden with wheat and expensive cargoes were forced to dock at her own Quay, to the fury of London merchants.

Easter 1262 saw a terrible riot in London, following an anti-semitic pogrom in which 500 Jews were murdered. The Queen who was at the Tower, seized by a 'mortal terror' jumped into her barge, intending to escape to Windsor. "Drown the witch! Drown the witch!" yelled her loving subjects from London Bridge and, according to Matthew Paris, started pelting the royal barge with 'every kind of disgusting missile'. Hysterical noble ladies in befouled gowns implored their mistress to return to the Tower but she, enraged, bellowed to the oarsmen to 'keep rowing' until, bleeding after being hit by stones, they refused to obey and allowed the current to take them back.

The young prince, Edward, determined to punish the Londoners for their treatment of his mother, started a very bloody fight and chased the rioters out of London, only to find, on his return, that the King, his father, had been arrested.

Eleanor escaped to France, welcoming a change of air. She investigated the conditions at the French court and found them pleasing. The food was sumptuous, the wines from the King's estates plentiful and delicious to her French palate. There was a curious rule at court. The King himself, the saintly Louis, was abstemious, but his guests were 'compelled' to enjoy his wines 'even the unwilling' we are told. The King sometimes drank a little wine but always well diluted with water, which, let it be said 'en passant' shows that saintliness and good taste do not necessarily go hand in hand. The King once asked Joinville why he didn't follow this royal example of wine-diluting. Joinville replied that his doctor had told him that he had a 'strong head and a cold stomach', apparently a combination that made drunkenness impossible. A nice theory anyway! As for the brilliant theologian and scholar, Bishop Grosseteste (Bighead), he considered that the three essentials of well-being were Food, Sleep and Laughter, but he firmly denounced Drink. Another one in need of conversion.

Eleanor and her entourage were amused to find that the French King always dressed very soberly as befits a Saint-to-be, in 'grey woollen cloths' and had his bed coverings made of deerskins or hareskins and not of the usual regal ermine or squirrel. This very frugal man, however, was not without his own brand of weakness. He paid 20,000 'livres d'argent' for what he believed to be Christ's Crown of Thorns, in spite of the fact that he must have known that France already had two of them - one given to Charles le Chauve, the other presented by Saint Germain to his Abbaye. It was said that if all the 'thorns' sold as holy relics were put together, Christ's crown would have had a circumference of three metres, fifty!

In France, our Eleanor (guess what) incurred certain debts, but Pope Clement XIV, who liked her, ordered a 'tenth' for three years to cover the Queen's debts, the first mandatory tax ever levied by a pope on the clergy of England, not for a Crusade, but for personal use of the royal couple.

In the meantime, while Mummy was shopping in Paris, young Edward had rallied the royalists and won the battle of Evesham where worthy Simon de Montfort was slain. The King was duly released and proceeded to make London pay dearly for its impertinence to the Queen. He levied a collective fine of 20,000 marks, all of which, to the last penny, was handed

over to the Queen.

And when all is said and done one must, in all fairness, remember that, in spite of his incredible financial disasters, King Henry III did manage, God knows how, to achieve his life's dream. In 1269, after fifty years, the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey was completed.

He died three years later, on November 16th 1272, in his Palace of Westminster.

Eleanor took the veil at Ambresbury, but ... first things first! She didn't go into retirement before obtaining the Pope's permission to retain possession of her dowry. A nun's pocket money; presumably enough to allow her to die in the manner she had lived - very, very comfortably.

After this account of the very lavish spending of gold to enhance the life-style of this Henry and Eleanor, the Commanderie can look forward to its own event involving gold but, this time, of a very different kind the:-

Chapitre d'Or - which is this year's Induction Ceremony and Dinner and is on MONDAY 17TH NOVEMBER in the Ballroom of the DORCHESTER HOTEL, Park Lane, London W1, commencing at approximately 6.45 pm. The Chapitre has been given this name because it takes place the day before the fiftieth birthday of our Senechal! It was felt, in acknowledgement of his very great contribution to the Commanderie, this would be a fitting way to acknowledge the Gold Anniversary of Chris Wilkinson! The Booking Form for the Chapitre d'Or will be sent out at the beginning of September.