

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

No. 23

Summer 1991

It is a well-worn cliché that the sun will follow the rain and this does seem to have been the weather pattern for this summer – cold, rainy days followed by lovely hot, sunny ones. Unfortunately, for this year's summer event, the day chosen was one when the heavens well and truly opened as the following account by Chef de Protocole George Wilks admirably describes:-

SUMMER WINE TASTING & BUFFET LUNCHEON

About sixty intrepid Chevaliers and their guests challenged the rigours of the summer to attend our 'summer event' on 15th June, held again this year at our Chancellor's home near Dunmow in Essex. The summer lived up to its reputation of being a truly English one – it poured in torrents from the time we arrived until the last guest departed. Nevertheless, everyone had a splendid day!

A commodious marquee sheltered us from the rain and provided a colourful setting for a talk on "Tasting", and for the superb buffet meal which followed. The talk, given by Maggie McNie M.W., was an informative, interesting instruction on how to appreciate a wine. The talk was full of basic facts and elementary principles with lively anecdotes and humour. We learned afterwards that Maggie was an actress, an opera singer with training in both disciplines and is now a lecturer in wine, having become a Master of Wine in a record short time of study.

The buffet lunch was a delectable meal, the principal course being fresh salmon. A variety of cooked meats and salads was followed by strawberries and cream and stilton. Needless to say, the wines provided by the Chancellor were ideal accompaniments to such a meal.

Our Senechal, Derek Sheen, thanked Maggie McNie and the providers of the banquet in his own inimitable way. A few hardy visitors made very good use of the swimming pool including your raconteur. It was pouring with rain but, when swimming, one can hardly get any wetter!

The Commanderie is grateful to Frank and Pat Coe for allowing us to invade their home and ruin their lawn. Thanks, too, to the other helpers in the combined culinary operation – Gaynor Hatton, Brenda Collins and Tricia Calmel with Terry Hatton doing sterling work as principal wine waiter!

Just to let those Chevaliers who did not attend know what they missed, the food and drink served was:-

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| <u>Aperitifs</u> | - | Saumur Brut Prestige |
| <u>Lunch</u> | - | Muscadet sur lie 1989 |
| | | Domaine des Croix D.B. Pichon – Patron |
| | | Chinon 1989 Couly-Duthell |
| | | Les Gravieres d'Amador |
| | | Abbe de Tirpenay |

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accompanying

Smoked Salmon Rolls

Fresh Salmon
Roast Scotch Beef
Prime Cooked Gammon
Roast Turkey
Scotch Eggs
New Potatoes
Selection of Salads

Fresh Strawberries and Cream
Gateaux

Stilton Cheese

Coffee

George's mouth-watering report seems the opportune moment to follow with his comments upon:-

MEMORABLE MEALS

What makes a meal memorable? The menu, the wine, the company, the conversation, the atmosphere and general ambience? All of these can contribute but I think that in all probability the company and the ambience are the most important. This is why Sacavin banquets are so enjoyable and even memorable. I rarely remember complete menus, perhaps one special course, but I remember occasions, some of them really memorable.

Many years ago, when I first started to teach in East London, my first headmaster was an elderly man from the Forest of Dean. As I grew older in the profession, I realised how much I owed to "Jimmy". He was my mentor, my teacher and adviser and a real friend. Occasionally, he would interrupt a lesson and, after a few interesting, preliminary remarks would ask the class (about sixty small boys) "What's the strangest meal you've ever had?", then he would go on to tell how he had eaten hedgehog wrapped in clay and roasted on a bonfire. I doubt whether many of those East End eleven year old boys had ever seen a hedgehog, certainly not a roasted one! I have had snails and frogs' legs and octopus but never roasted hedgehog. However, I can remember a few truly memorable meals.

A few years ago, I had the good fortune to be invited to represent the Wine Development Board accompanying a small press group visiting the wine producing areas of Northern Portugal. Needless to say, the Portuguese Trade Department had arranged an enjoyable, instructive and varied visit. One evening towards the end of our stay, one of the press men insisted that the group should visit a local restaurant to have a 'typical' meal, the main course of which should be bacalhau, locally caught cod, salted and dried. It looked horrible, it tasted horrible and nobody ate more than the first mouthful. On my return, I was invited to dinner with a Portuguese friend and his wife. Talking over aperitifs, he asked about my recent visit to Portugal. I told him of the group's reaction to bacalhau. He laughed, his wife had prepared bacalhau for dinner! It was delicious! I learned later that there are many recipes for the preparation of dried salt cod - Portuguese bacalhau.

Durnstein is a village not far from Vienna; a place with an interesting history, full of stories of Richard the Lionheart and his minstrel, Blondel. On holiday

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there, my wife and I often walked in the woods high above the Danube, blue only in the reflection of the clear, summer sky. On one occasion, we came upon a small restaurant in a pleasant glade; a timber building, grey with age and weathering, with a broad balcony from which, through the trees in full summer leaf, could be seen glimpses of the wide, fast-flowing Danube. Herr Ober brought in Heurige, the new wine, in a large flagon, then crusty new bread with plates of Austrian cheese, cold meats and fresh fruit. He wished us 'Guten appetit' ! A simple meal, a delectable meal eaten 'al fresco' in beautiful surroundings - atmosphere making a meal to remember.

The occasion which, perhaps, is most vivid in my mind was again unprepared and unaffected. We were on holiday in Corfu when we had a surprise visit from our friend, our travel agent (well known to many of you!). He invited us to dinner with one or two of his Corfu friends. About nine o'clock (dinner is late in Greece) the party, six of us, assembled and set off for an unknown, to us certainly, destination. The fine summer night was warm but not oppressively hot; the cars journeyed leisurely along country lanes through the oleander-scented dark, through unknown and nameless small villages. We finally stopped in the main street of a village which I subsequently learned was name 'Keant Piastis' - 'The Dog Catcher'. We had halted outside what seemed to be a Victorian double-fronted shopfront, a brightly-lit doorway dividing the two gloomy glass display windows. However, in the forecourt was a large spit on which a whole sheep was slowly turning. At the door we were noisily and affectionately greeted by the restaurant owner who led us through the dim and shadowy shop into the contrasting well-lit garden restaurant. Most of the dining area was covered by trellised arbours supporting vines and lemon trees. A few musicians played "Greek" music, the performer on the zither being particularly skillful. Diners spontaneously left their tables and danced their native dances, especially the handkerchief dance. The proprietor insisted on changing our ordered retzina for an ample supply from his own special reserve. He joined us in several prolonged toasts most of which were quite incomprehensible to us, our Greek being very limited. We had 'mezithes' ('starters') - dolmades (stuffed vine leaves), olives, feta cheese, gherkins with fresh, crusty bread. Then spit-roasted mutton - not elegant, wafer-thin slices with synthetic gravy but large chunks of meat, cooked to perfection, and succulent in its own juices. Retzina flowed freely and, despite language difficulties, conversation was general. At an adjoining table, a young man, a Greek, was obviously interested in our table.

We learned he was a member of an operatic company performing in Athens. He was a baritone and we were soon exchanging snatches of favourite arias from our respective repertoires, from Handel to Verdi via Mozart; from 'Vulcan's Song' to 'Eri tu' and 'The Toreador's Song', to our mutual pleasure and, apparently, also to our friends at both tables.

Dessert was one of my special delights - wild strawberries - and although I spared a thought for the back-ache and sore knees of the gatherers, I ate my soup-plateful with great relish. The meal ended with cognac, ouzo and coffee. We reached our hotel early next morning. At late breakfast, we learned that our friend had caught the first flight to Athens.

An evening of marvellous memory, combining all the attributes of a memorable occasion, good, joyous company, a noteworthy meal with accompanying good wine and, above all, unique atmosphere and circumstance. A truly memorable occasion

I have others; dinner on the night express from Salzburg; our Sacavin visit to Fontevraud when Robert Cointreau was Grand Maitre; our own Chapitre at our first function at the Dorchester; mussel soup and the baron of beef at the Cafe Royal; a splendid dinner at Gundel's, the famous restaurant in Budapest.

Can you recall a memorable occasion? Have you had a memorable meal? Perhaps one of outstanding excellence of food and wine or even one of outstanding "unexcellence"

like our first experience with bacalhau.

One thing of which there is absolutely no doubt is the excellence of the food and wine that Chevaliers and their escorts will enjoy during the Commanderie's:-

VISIT TO ALSACE

which is taking place between September 26th and October 1st. Over twenty will be in the party leaving Heathrow for Strasbourg on the Thursday and, with Colmar as their base, visiting various vineyards and, also, places of architectural and historic interest in Alsace and even beyond its borders into Freiburg before returning on the following Tuesday. Chef de Protocole George Wilks and Chef de Voyage Nick Kyriakides are the Organisers of this event with great assistance in the planning of the visits from Senechal Derek Sheen.

Our final event for the year is also its climax, especially so as it marks an important anniversary for the Commanderie - the Twenty-First Induction Ceremony and Dinner since our founding as the British Chapter of Sacavin. In celebration of our 'coming-of-age', it is being fittingly described as the

CHAPITRE VINGT-et-UN

and is taking place on MONDAY 4TH NOVEMBER at the InterContinental Hotel, Park Lane, London W1. Chef de Cuisine Malcolm Harris always arranges a marvellous event for us and he promises something even more special for this year. The evening will commence with the Vin d'Honneur at 6 p.m., the Induction Ceremony at 6.30 p.m., with the Dinner at 7.30 p.m. The Booking Form is enclosed with this 'Courier'.

At this moment in time, however, November and the oncoming of winter seems far off as we enjoy this lovely, summery August. The Autumn session will begin and lead us on to Christmas and beyond, so it is not too soon to give a

PREVIEW OF 1992

At this year's AGM, Chef de Cuisine Malcolm Harris emphasised the Management Committee's interest in using clubs rather than hotels as venues for our various events. It is true this year's Chapitre is at the Park Lane InterContinental but this was arranged some time ago and in recognition of the very fine way they served the Commanderie in connection with the 1990 AGM.

Next year, however, our venues will include very prestigious clubs, the Management Committee sharing Malcolm's view that clubs provide an atmosphere more conducive to the spirit of Sacavin as well as giving our members and their escorts the opportunity to visit places of great interest which may not, otherwise, be possible for them.

All who attended agreed that the Savile Club in Brook Street, London W1, was completely right as the venue for this year's AGM so we are returning there for the 1992 AGM which can be confirmed for Monday 23rd March.

For next year's November Induction Ceremony and Dinner we move a little along Piccadilly to the Naval and Military Club - perhaps more familiarly known as the 'In and Out' Club, the second Monday in November being the date agreed.

In between these events, Senechal Derek Sheen is planning next year's Summer Wine Tasting and Luncheon at the recently developed and extensive vineyard on the south-facing slopes of Ranmore Common, near Dorking, followed by lunch at nearby Burford Bridge. It is expected this will take place in June.

All that is left is to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and we are not saying for which one!
