

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

No. 25

Summer 1992

Suddenly it seems imperative to send out this Summer's issue of the 'Courier' before the seemingly incessant rain and gales of August obliterate the memory of what Summer could and should be like. Looking up at the endless grey skies, it seems such a long time since the glorious heat and blue skies of Saturday, 13th June, when we visited Denbies in Surrey. Just to remind those of us who were present and to interest those who were not, we are indebted to our Treasurer, Robert Wills, for the following account of this year's:-

SUMMER WINE TASTING AND LUNCHEON

Under a cloudless blue sky and bathed in brilliant sunshine, twenty-three Chevaliers and guests gazed in some astonishment at the panorama of 250 acres of neat, orderly rows of vines climbing the hillsides before us. A sight, perhaps, common enough in France or Germany, but this was Surrey, England! We were at Denbies Vineyard near Dorking, the largest vineyard yet planted in England.

Warmly welcomed by Michael Trull, Denbies Marketing Manager, we gathered in the wine-y, currently housing the visitors reception area and sales facilities, and listened to a brief history of the estate and the plans for its future development. In selecting this site for the vineyard, Denbies were aware that Dorking has a long history of viticulture. Indeed, there is evidence that there existed in Roman times a vineyard situated some 250 yards from Denbies current boundary and Defoe, in his Tour Through England and Wales, mentions a vineyard at Dorking, planted in 1676 by the younger brother of the Duke of Norfolk which produced "most excellent wines and a very great quantity of them".

Situated in the heart of the beautiful Mole valley, nestling against the North Downs in a valley of south facing slopes and protected to the south by Leith Hill, the site enjoys the optimum position for sun and warmth. Soil tests confirmed an ideal configuration of rich loam interspersed with flint, overlaying deep chalk, similar to the soil conditions found around Rheims in Champagne, and following a somewhat protracted planning period, permission was finally given for Denbies to commence planting in 1986. Still very much in its development stage, the estate has extensive plantings of a number of classic and hybrid grape varieties including Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, Reisling Auxerrois, Bacchus, Dornfelder, Elbling, Muller Thurgau, Optima and Reichensteiner, and is continuing to experiment with other varieties and blends.

We were assured that the basic philosophy of the estate is to produce quality wines and to that end the estate uses selective pruning to keep the yield down to some 6 metric tonnes per hectare. The maiden vintage was taken in 1989, but the first main vintage to be marketed was 1990 and we were invited to taste seven of its wines.

The first was a Dry 1990, a blend of 50:50 Muller Thurgau and Elbling, a pleasantly

fresh, dry white wine. The Elbling grape gives the added acid level to the blend and the proportion has been amended in favour of the Muller Thurgau for the following 1991 vintage.

The next wine was a Surrey Gold 1990 with Reichensteiner as the main grape in the blend with the variety Bacchus. An off-dry white wine with a very fragrant, almost Muscat nose and a depth of fruit in the taste. This was a well produced rounded wine.

Then followed a 1990 Reisling/Muller Thurgau Special Reserve. Each year the estate endeavours to market wines regarded as pinnacles of Denbies quality. These are blended and bottled as Limited Edition Special Reserve releases with each bottle separately numbered. A blend of 75% Reisling and 25% Muller Thurgau, this wine had the classic Reisling bouquet with a pleasing balance of fruit and acidity and with a surprisingly long finish. Denbies predict that this wine will continue to mature and develop over the next 5-6 years.

Wine number four was a 1990 Optima/Pinot Blanc Special Reserve. The Optima is a variety that is becoming popular in the Mosel because of its high must rate and low acidity level. Early ripening and frost hardy, the Optima at Denbies in 1990 achieved a natural 14.2% alcohol level, hence the high 12.5% given for this particular wine. A lovely pale golden colour, fruit on the nose, dry with a surprisingly long, smooth finish - some might find this wine a trifle weighty in the mouth for a dry white.

Next we were given a 1990 Auxerrois Special Reserve. The Auxerrois Blanc is widely planted in Alsace and is found blended into Edelzwicker (of happy memory). Denbies claim to have the only major planting of this grape variety in England where it is planted on the steepest chalk slopes. A well balanced blend of fruit and acidity, the finish has benefitted from the wine having been matured in 225 litre barrels.

Wine six was a real surprise - a dry Rose, a 1990 Pinot Noir Special Reserve. With an attractive salmon pink colour, it tasted bone dry, but with a pleasantly weighty (11.4%), yeasty and lengthy finish. A very drinkable Rose.

Finally, we tasted a red wine, the 1990 Dornfelder Dry Red Special Reserve. I first met the Dornfelder grape on a visit to Rhein-hessen and was surprised at its depth of colour, fruity nose and the hint of tannin in the mouth. The Denbies wine confirmed that initial impression. Matured in 225 litre barrels, I thought this a very pleasant wine.

The whole tasting went some way towards confirming Denbies commitment to the production of quality wines, particularly as it is still experimenting with differing grape varieties and the proportions to be used in the blends. As is usual to be found with English wines, prices per bottle are on the high side with no reduction apparent for buying the case!! It would be very interesting to revisit this Estate in one or two years time to see how it has progressed.

Following the visit to Denbies, a happy band of Chevaliers and guests repaired to the Running Horses hostelry at nearby Mickelham for a very pleasant lunch, accompanied by bottles of Muscadet Sevre et Maine, Domaine Rocue Renard. The chance was taken to renew old acquaintances and it was particularly pleasing to swop memories once again with Norman and Barbara Billington and Michael Hatton to name but three.

By unanimous accord, the day was well organised and enjoyed by all and thanks were duly given to our Senechal, Derek Sheen, for arranging such a splendid event.

With Autumn seeming to have made an early entry, reminding us that Winter is not far off, we can console ourselves with thoughts of the Commanderie's programme for the darker months. The highlight of our Social Programme for the year, as always, is the annual Induction Ceremony and Dinner which, this year, is entitled Le Chapitre du MarcheCommun. At this stage, Chevaliers should please note that, since the announcement made at the AGM in March, the date for this event has had to be changed and it is

now taking place on MONDAY 16TH NOVEMBER 1992 at the Naval & Military Club, (otherwise known as the 'In and Out' Club), 94 Piccadilly, London W1. The Evening will be presided over by our Grand Commandeur, Chris Wilkinson, ably assisted - dare one say abetted (!) - by the Officers, especially Chef de Protocole George Wilks. As is our custom, the programme will commence with the Vin d'Honneur at which one of our wonderful Saumur sparkling wines, for which our region is famous, will be served. This will be followed, at 6.30 p.m., by the Induction of several new Chevaliers to be followed around 7.30 p.m. with Dinner.

The title of this year's Chapitre was chosen to mark the significance of September 1992 for the EEC. With the rumblings over the Maastricht Treat, there may not be so much to celebrate there but we can be sure of an outstanding celebration of our own. Our Chef de Cuisine, Malcolm Harris, has arranged a superb five-course menu which will be complemented by the wonderful wines of our region, specially chosen by our Chancellor, Frank Coe.

The Booking Form for this Chapitre is enclosed with this newsletter. Do not hesitate - it will be an evening to remember!

PREVIEW OF 1993 PROGRAMME

As the poet observed - "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" - and following on takes us almost to Spring with the:-

1993 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

which will take place on either Saturday 20th March or Saturday 27th March at the Bleeding Hearts Restaurant, Hatton Garden,, London EC1. Again, an excellent menu has been arranged by Malcolm Harris who is joined by Ecuyer Raymond Harris, in thoroughly recommending this venue. The AGM will commence at 6 p.m., followed by the AGM Vin d'Honneur and then Dinner at around 7.30 p.m.

As an odd year, next year will also see the latest:-

BIENNIAL VISIT TO FRANCE

Because hotel accommodation in wine-growing areas is difficult to arrange for September, next year's Visit will be in May, to be centred around Tours and Vouvray. Chef de Protocole George Wilks and Treasurer Robert Wills are already establishing contact with vigneron in this farther end of our region and an exciting itinerary is promised. Full details of this event will be circulated when final plans can be confirmed.

Having given up on this Summer, hopes are now that next year's:-

SUMMER WINE TASTING

will also be blessed with fine weather on Saturday 19th June. Senechal Derek Sheen, as Organiser, is arranging a wine tasting at either Lamberhurst or Penshurst, to be followed by tea in the beautiful garden of a fine old manor house at Cowden, near Edenbridge, itself situated in the heart of the Garden of England.

We have hardly begun this Autumn yet plans are already confirmed for next year's Chapitre so, in taking note that the:-

1993 INDUCTION CEREMONY AND DINNER

is on MONDAY 8TH NOVEMBER, please be sure to check you have the right date for the right year in your diaries - i.e. 1993. Although it is too early to arrange menus, etc., it is not too early to confirm that this event is at the Savile Club, Brook Street, London W1.. Chevaliers who remember our past two highly successful AGMs at the Savile Club will know we can look forward to a marvellous Chapitre at this so

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attractive venue.

OBITUARY

Reading of the arrangements made for the events just mentioned, it is obvious how much the Commanderie owes to our Chef de Cuisine, Malcolm Harris, for the hard work and commitment he puts into his sterling efforts on our behalf. He, himself, would be the first to acknowledge the support that has helped him in what he does for Sacavin. Not least was that of his partner, Eric Kafton, who graciously agreed that Malcolm should host the Management Committee Meetings at their Bolton Street office. With members living north, south, east and west of London, this was a tremendous contribution to our work.

It was with great sadness, therefore, the Management Committee learned, at the last meeting, that Eric Kafton has died. We extend our sincerest condolences to Malcolm and his colleagues at Harris, Kafton, and to the family upon their loss, and record our deepest gratitude to Eric Kafton for his kindness and friendliness towards us.

SECRETARIAT

Chevaliers who would like to give notification of new addresses, request membership application forms for those of their friends who may like to join, or with any query should contact the Chef d'Historiographie:-

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