

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

No. 27

Winter 1993/94

Somehow the long dark Winter evenings - sitting snugly indoors, for preference in front of a comforting log fire - induce reminiscences of past pleasures and contemplation of those to come. Such enjoyment is enhanced by sips of a favourite wine, reminding us of the Noble Order to which we belong and on links with Plantagenet France. These are brought even more to vivid life by Chef de Protocole George Wilks' report upon last Autumn's:

BIENNIAL VISIT TO ANJOU, SEPTEMBER 1993

This Biennial Visit proved to be an unqualified success, success ensured in large measure by the very active cooperation of our French fellow Chevaliers who assisted in the preparation of our programme and received us with lavish hospitality. It is almost invidious to mention individuals, but our Grand Maitre Pierre Gatè and Michel Fleur, Interprofessionnel secretary of CIVAS (for the uninitiated Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins d'Anjou et Saumur), Head of Chamber of Commerce of Angers, and Commandeur Camille Bersiers, a senior lawyer in Angers, who accompanied us throughout the whole week.

On our first day (Thursday) we arrived at the Hotel d'Anjou in the evening, to be greeted by representatives of CIVAS, led by Pierre Gatè, with welcoming speeches accompanied by excellent wines (promise of things to come) and canapès. We were able to greet old friends and to lay foundations for making new ones.

The Visit proper began on the following morning with a visit to the old family firm of Giffard Distillerie. M. Bruno Giffard apologised for his absence, but we were taken through the details of liqueur production by his charming secretary. After a typical "degustation" of Giffard's oldest and newest liqueurs we were soon on our way to Coulée de Serrant, to be received by other old friends, MME. Joly and her son Nicholas. The vineyard, founded in the 12th century by monks, has built up a reputation over the years for producing some of the finest white wines in the whole of France. The vineyard, high above the Loire, is so steep that working with machinery is not possible. It's position and topography make it a most beautiful place. M. Nicholas has recently become "organic" and he expounded at some length, in excellent English, some of his theories which proved, to some of our party, to be untenable, theories going back to the Ancient Greek 'four elements' theory and to the alchemists. However, the

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refreshments and tasting provided by Madame was (contrary to organic theory) very acceptable.

After a light lunch we were taken to Thouarcé, to the vineyard of M. Gaston Lenôtre around the newly restored Chateau de Feste. The vineyard is in the Bonnezeau appellation and the production of these excellent sweet wines is very restricted. Everyone of our party appreciated the tasting. One feature of this visit was an exhibition of the arts of spun sugar and chocolate sculpture - M. Lenôtre is a well known pastry cook.

The evening gave us a splendid denouement, an excellent dinner arranged by CIVAS in one of Angers well known ancient buildings - the Hotel de Penitents, built by monks in the late 15th Century as a refuge in troubled times. Then, in 1640, as a religious community for Penitents (particularly "sinful" women) and more recently as a prison, finally being restored to its present magnificent splendour, bearing no trace of its former uses. The dinner was excellent, the company interesting and the atmosphere at times hilarious and almost Rabelaisian.

The following day, Saturday, departed from the arranged programme. We should have visited the Chateau de Serrant. However, this proved to be impossible - they were entertaining a very large number of guests at a memorial service for the death of a daughter. M. Camille Bersiers was very apologetic at the mistaken arrangements. We were taken on an interesting trip through some of the pleasant areas of Coteaux des Layon to the vineyard of M. Aguilas. We had an informative and very pleasant tour of the vineyard by M. Aguilas himself, a description of beautiful scenery, his own methods in the vineyard, his difficulties and the coming vintage, the whole spiced with humour from a man who was the personification of jollity. He took us to his "show room" where his wife had prepared a splendid lunch of local specialities, served with some of the vineyards excellent wine, Mme and M. Aguilas being assisted in the serving by their small son and daughter, aged about six and eight. Despite the initial disappointment, a splendid start to the day of the Grand Chapitre des Vendanges.

The evening of the Chapitre proved to be the most spectacular of the whole of our visit. It was held, this year, not in the Hospice of St. Jean as on previous occasions, but in the great early 13th Century Chateau d'Angers. The officers and guests assembled in the great courtyard after crossing the drawbridge and, despite the cool wind, enjoyed meeting the guests and keeping out the cold with welcome glasses of Quart de Chaums. Then, in the huge vaulted room, the site of the old Chapel built by King René in which the great stone altar dominates the whole width of the great room, the robed Officers entered in procession and assumed their places for the Induction Ceremony. There were thirty-one Inductees, with the principal guests, the Japanese and Belgian Ambassadors to France. The Induction having taken place, the Grand Maître and his Officers left the imposing room and moved to two adjacent rooms for the banquet. Our group, members of the Commanderie de Grande Bretagne, were treated as guests of honour and our own Chef de Protocole was escorted by the Grand Maître to sit at the top table between the Japanese Ambassador's wife and the wife of the Belgian Ambassador. The banquet was a feast of Anjou delicacies with two chosen wines accompanying each course and finishing with coffee and Cointreau. Despite the very large numbers, the service was excellent, efficient and prompt. We were glad that, after such a spectacular event, our coach was waiting to

take us back to the hotel.

Sunday, being a free day, gave us an opportunity to breakfast a little late and then take advantage of the occasion to discover for ourselves some of the interesting features of Angers. A few of us were invited by our coach driver to visit his home in Montreuil Bellay. Here we renewed our acquaintance with Lorrière, Jean-Marie's wife and his young son and daughter. In the afternoon, we visited the vineyard of a friend of Jean-Marie, Jean Mabileau at the Domaine du Bourg in Nicolas-de-Bourgeuil.

The Hotel de la Godeline, an ancient building now beautifully restored, is the headquarters of CIVAS and, in the evening, we were again entertained, first by a show of slides of wine-growing in Anjou and Saumur. The slides were accompanied by a lucid and interesting explanation by our friend Michel Fleur, a former president of CIVAS

Monday, our last day, arrived too soon, a day as busy and as full of interest as our first day. The Loire, east of Angers, flows through a limestone area riddled with natural caves and on its north bank an area famous for its troglodyte features, dwellings, cellars, restaurants and mushrooms. We spent the day in this area, first to the Domaine Filliatreau for a tasting of the splendid A.O.C. Saumur Champigny, sampling four vintages of different ages with an interesting anecdotal talk by the younger M. Filliatreau who now manages the vineyard.

We lunched in one of the well known restaurant in the troglodyte area and then journeyed through some pleasant countryside to Bouvet Ladubay, the sparkling Saumur wine known to all Chevaliers who attend our functions. Here we were met by Patrice Monmousseau, an old friend of our Commanderie who has been our host on many past occasions. The company has developed and enlarged considerably. They still have miles of caves which store millions of bottles, but mechanical remuage is fast replacing the fascinating manual manipulation of bottles. Of course, we had a tasting - of a number of vintages, the peak quality was 'Le Tresor' which received the acclamation of the whole group. The extensive building houses a collection of modern art and there is, too, a theatre built in the last century which has just been restored and redecorated to its original condition. The first performance in the newly decorated theatre was being held on the evening of our visit. We wished we could have stayed.

Our visit ended with promises of further meetings in London and in Angers, with grateful thanks to all who contributed to making the visit a memorable one - to all the vineyard owners to our chauffeur, whose knowledge of the area is amazing; to the representatives of the Syndicat Viticole des Coteaux du Layon, to the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins d'Anjou et Saumur and, especially, to Camille Bersiers, Michel Fleur and Pierre Gaté, our Grand Maitre - a grand "thank you". •

It is not only s a Commandeur of the British Commanderie that George Wilks has recently been honoured. Having moved to the Essex coast to be nearer to his family, George was recently inducted as a:

FREEMAN OF BRIGHTLINGSEA

in a ceremony reminiscent of our own Induction Ceremony to the Confrerie des Sacavin d'Anjou.

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Brightlingsea has been associated with the Cinque Ports for about seven hundred years, while the Cinque Ports' story is even older. At this time, five ports of Kent and Sussex provided England's sea defence against attack. The fishermen of Sandwich, Dover, Romsey, Hythe and Hastings, converted their fishing vessels, none above fifty tons, into warships. The five ports, the original providers, sought assistance from other ports to provide ships and men. Brightlingsea was one of these fishing ports. It became a "limb" of Sandwich. The responsibility for mobilising ships and men was vested in the mayors of the principal ports, and in the smaller ones, deputies were appointed. In return for their services, the freemen of the Cinque Ports negotiated privileges from successive sovereigns - the rights to all wrecks off the coast; freedom from taxes; freedom from jury and military service; and the control of certain fisheries. With the formation of the Royal Navy in Henry VIII's reign, the need for the Cinque Ports ceased.

The Ceremony of Deputy Making and the recognition of new freemen is held at an annual ceremony in the ancient church of Brightlingsea. In the presence of the Mayor of Sandwich and the deputy and past deputies, new Freemen are recognised, swear an oath of service to Brightlingsea and pay a fealty of eleven old pence.

An ancient tradition which, although its original purpose has gone, is still remembered in a colourful and interesting ceremony. The Freemen have lost many of their privileges, but still serve the citizens of the ancient and interesting port of Brightlingsea.

As a Freeman, George is bound by an oath of fealty to Brightlingsea. By the oaths sworn at their Induction, all Chevaliers acknowledge fealty to the drinking of wine, a duty that is taken so seriously, it was entirely suitable last Autumn's Induction Ceremony and Dinner should be described as:

LE CHAPITRE DE BACCHUS

for the wine really did flow in the beautiful silver and blue dining room of the Savile Club, London, on 8th November. A most enjoyable dinner was preceded by the Induction Ceremony, presided over by the Grand Commandeur, Chris Wilkinson, supported by the Officers and with Chef de Protocole George Wilks setting the scene so that the following candidates for election could demonstrate their fealty to Sacavin:-

Jane Fowell - who acknowledges her life-long romance with France, its lovely old towns and superb wines, especially those of our region and who, as a former scholar at the University of Montpellier, a distinction shared with our Founder, Francois Rabelais, is excellently qualified to join us.

Julian Luttrell - who, as well as a distinguished career in the Army, Industry and Farming, is also partner in a very distinguished wine business, enabling him to sample, almost to the limits, the wines of our region.

David Wolfe - who joins us through his membership of the former Hauts Normands du Gouste Vin. He came to wine initially through the Cigar trade but who now concentrates, as he puts it, on "doing a bit of wine consulting" when we are sure he loses no opportunity to praise the wines of our region.

On behalf of us all, the Grand Commandeur welcomed these new Chevaliers

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into our ranks, the response, on their behalf, being made by the newly elected Julian Luttrell.

The Chapitre was not only a time for elections but also for promotions when, during the course of the Dinner, the Grand Commandeur invested Chef de Voyage Pat Calmels and 2nd Halberdier Peter Bouch - he of the axe - as Officers.

The Chapitre de Bacchus was one of the best attended of what is our most prestigious annual event for many years. Getting on for eighty members and their guests enjoyed the evening - no matter what the after-effects - and we extend the Commanderie's grateful thanks to Chef de Cuisine Newton Grant and Chancelier Frank Coe - with input from Senechal Malcolm Harris - for their organisation of a truly outstanding event.

Thoughts of wine that the name Bacchus invariably conjure up are even more applicable to a Wine Order so it is not just understandable but very appropriate that the first event for 1994:

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

should commence with a Wine Tasting - offered by our hosts, the Management of the Bleeding Heart Restaurant (Bleeding Heart Yard, Greville Street, London EC1) - when there will be a conducted tasting of four to six wines beginning at 6 p.m., followed by the AGM itself at 7 p.m. with Dinner scheduled to commence at around 7.30-7.45 p.m. This notable occasion is on Saturday 16th April and all Chevaliers are recommended to mark the date in their diaries now as it is obviously an event not to be missed. The Booking Form with the Agenda and Reports relating to the AGM are enclosed with this 'Courier'. Please also note guests are, as always, very welcome.

Mention of the AGM is a reminder that another year has passed, making it renewal time for the:

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION AS ACTIVE MEMBER

Payment of this subscription entitles members to receive all the mailings - newsletters, notices of meetings, booking forms, etc. - with this year's renewal becoming due on 1st January. Approximately two-thirds of our Active Members have already paid through their Bankers' Orders. The remaining one-third are reminded that, to continue receiving such information, they will need to pay this year's subscription - £7.50 per member, £10 spouse rate (i.e. when both are members) - and requested to send payment to the Treasurer:

Robert Wills
14 West Meads
Onslow Village
Guildford
Surrey GU2 5ST
(Tel: 0483 62314)

with cheques made payable to 'SACAVIN'.

The spirit of Bacchus continues an influence with plans for this year's:

SUMMER WINE TASTING AND LUNCHEON

when we are returning to the impressive terraces rising across

Ranmore Common, just above Dorking, Surrey, to compare the magnificent Winery that is now part of the estate at Denbie's to the skeletal shell we viewed at our last Tasting there, two years ago. Our former Senechal - Derek Sheen - is responsible for organising this event, as he was for that in 1992. It will be fascinating for those of us who went then to make the comparisons. For all who go, it will be a marvellous opportunity to experience something very like the Wineries that are so much a part of the scene in California. The date is Saturday 25th June and members are advised to mark it in their diaries now. The Tasting will conclude with Lunch in the Atreum at Denbie's, followed by a Visit to a local place of interest, yet to be arranged. Booking Forms and details will be sent out around the time of the AGM.

All years are important but 1994 is especially auspicious for Sacavin because of the two notable anniversaries that are occurring. This year is the Quincentenary of the birth of the illustrious Founder of the Confrerie - the great humanist Francois Rabelais. It is also the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the creation of the British Commanderie to which we belong. To commemorate two anniversaries of such significance to us, the Induction Ceremony and Dinner taking place on Saturday 29th October is being entitled:

LE CHAPITRE DES DEUX ANNIVERSAIRES

To ensure a setting worthy of such a celebration, the venue is the Butchers' Hall in the City of London. A small sub-committee has been formed whose task is to devise a programme fitting for such an occasion. Important members of the Confrerie in France are being invited, including the Grand Maitre whilst the attendance of our own founding members is also hoped for. Plans are yet at an early stage but the Management Committee hope that all members will make a note of the date and its importance to the Commanderie. In turn, they can be sure of attending a truly superb event.

This will be the second Chapitre to be held at the Butchers' Hall. Our first was through the good offices of our much lamented good friend, Frank Moody - a very notable Halberdier. The then Grand Maitre - M. Breheret - was a very welcome guest and he once more comes to mind through his contribution to the latest issue of the Confrerie's newsletter - 'Le Sacavin'. It seems appropriate, therefore, to conclude with his:

PART OF A SERMON BY THE BISHOP OF MAINZ, AS REPORTED BY GOETHE

May whosoever feels so bemused, after the third or fourth Jug of Wine, that he can no longer recognise his wife, his children or his friends to the point of ill-using them, let him confine himself to two Jugs, lest he wish to give offence to God and scorn the Hereafter.

But may he who, having drunk four or five or six, is still in such a state that he can do his work and hold to the Commandments of his Ecclesiastical and Secular Superiors, fulfil in all humility and with avowal the Part which God has ordained him to take.

Let him take care not to pass beyond the limit of six measures, for it is rare that the Lord, in his infinite Goodness, grants to one of

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his children the favour that he has bestowed upon me, his unworthy servant.

I drink eight Jugs of wine a day and nobody can say that he has ever seen me delivered over to an unrighteous choler, to harm my parents or my acquaintances.

May each of you, my brethren, fortify the body and gladden the spirit with such quantity of wine that the Divine Goodness has willed that you may be permitted to absorb.

Translated from the French of E.L. Breheret
by Commandeur John Braun

whilst we note yet another coincidental link for the translator - John Braun - is one of the three Founding Members of the British Commanderie.

SECRETARIAT

Chevaliers who wish to notify address changes or seek information - except regarding subscriptions which should go to the Treasurer (see page 5.) - should contact:

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