

SACAVIN



COURIER

COMMANDERIE DE GRANDE BRETAGNE
DE LA CONFRERIE DES CHEVALIERS DU SACAVIN D'ANJOU
Summer 1995

No. 29

The 'Courier' has become the Chronicle of our events as the concluding activities of our Silver Jubilee year and those that pilot us into our next twenty-five years clearly demonstrate.

The Commemorative Anniversary Year came to its triumphant climax with:-

LA CHAPITRE DES DEUX ANNIVERSAIRES

held on Saturday 29th October last. Almost one hundred Chevaliers and guests gathered behind the magnificent glass frieze on the ground floor of the Butchers Hall to savour the Vin d'Honneur and chat informally to friends, old and new, some of whom had travelled many miles to be present. Not least was this so for our two eminent French colleagues - Michel Fleur and Camille Besmiers - both of whom had come, not only through the friendships formed during our Biennial Visits to Anjou, but also representing the Confrerie in Angers for this auspicious event.

The Vin d'Honneur was followed by the Induction Ceremony and upwards we climbed, assisted by a wonderfully carved bannister rail, to the next Floor where Grand Commandeur Chris Wilkinson, ably assisted by Chef de Protocole George Wilks and the celebrated Sacavin Fanfares, presided at the Induction, into our Order, of:-

- Gaynor HATTON who, finally, became a Chevalier in her own right after many years as an active supporter and prominent helper at Commanderie events since becoming our hostess for the 1984 Fete Champetre at Park Farm, St Osyth.
- Vivienne SHILLING who has transferred to our Order from the former Hauts Norman des Goustevin and brings with her, as she describes, "a great love of French Wines and France".
- Anthony BAKER whose career, after service in the RAF, lay in the Motor Business, due to family influence, but whose heart is in the Wines of France and especially those of our region.
- John BINTCLIFFE whose retirement from Medical Practice, after many years as a G.P., has left him with all the time he wants to devote to the practice of Wine, especially that from Anjou.

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Michael LAWSON and another distinguished member of the legal profession joins our ranks, emphasising, once again, how the practice of law stimulates an interest in and appreciation of wine, especially that of Anjou.

We warmly welcome these new colleagues into our midst and look forward to seeing them at future events.

With the Ceremony concluded and almost as if in recognition of how elevated was this Chapitre - celebrating an Anniversary so important it was graced by the presence of our French comrades - we climbed the stairs, once again, to reach the impressive Banqueting Room of the Butchers Hall for the Dinner for which a truly sumptuous menu had been arranged by Chef de Cuisine Newton Grant, accompanied by memorable wines chosen by Chancelier Frank Coe and very generously donated by our Honoured Guest Michel Fleur.

Throughout time, great Dinners, such as those we arrange, have been a cause for music as well as imbibing, and, in acknowledgement of the relationship between the two, Chef des Beaux Arts Leonard Salzedo set to music a poem by Pierre de Ronsard which expresses many of the sentiments found in the vows all Chevaliers make upon their entry into our Order. This was most beautifully sung by Mezzo-Soprano Alison Young, accompanied by the Chef des Beaux Arts, the words being:-

The earth drinks up the waters,
The tree drinks them through its roots,
The wide ocean drinks the wind
And the sun drinks the sea;
The sun is drunk by the moon,
Everything drinks, whether up above or down below,
Following this common rule,
Why then don't we drink too?

Such an important occasion as a Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, coinciding as it did with the 500th Anniversary of the birth of Francois Rabelais, the Founder of Sacavin, could not go unmarked, especially as our Honoured Guests from France brought with them the Official Greetings of Le Grand Maitre, Pierre Gaté. To ensure that this expression of goodwill between our two bodies was recorded for all time, Grand Commandeur Chris Wilkinson presented to Michel Fleur an Illuminated Scroll, beautifully produced and framed, thanks to the good offices of 2nd Halberdier Peter Bouch, on which was inscribed:-

" The Commanderie de Grande Bretagne de la Confrerie des Chevaliers du Sacavin d'Anjou celebrates this year 1994, the twenty fifth anniversary of its foundation.

This great occasion coincides with the five hundredth anniversary of the year of the birth of the honoured founder and patron of our esteemed order, Francois Rabelais.

On such an occasion it is fitting that we should cement even more the bond of friendship and fellowship that already exists between the British Confrerie and all the Chevaliers in Anjou.

This address marks these two anniversaries and expresses that friendship and the British Chevaliers' delight in being able to entertain the Grand Maitre, M Pierre Gaté and other French friends in the City of London, to enjoy good wine, good food and good fellowship in the tradition of our Confrerie and in the spirit of our revered founder.

Signed by the Grand Commandeur of
Commanderie de Grand Bretagne
de la Confrerie des Chevaliers du Sacavin d'Anjou

29 October 1994

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As evidence of these fraternal feelings, the National Anthem succeeding the Loyal Toast and the Marseillaise that to Le President de la Republique Francaise were both sung with great gusto and feeling by Chevaliers and guests alike.

After twenty-five years, it is not possible for all illustrious and much-loved members to enjoy the event and, in acknowledging those who have played their part and now left the scene, Founding Father John Braun recollected our beginnings and paid this tribute:-

"On 20th September 1969, John Addey and I were inducted as Officers at the Baptême du Petit Sacavin Chapitre held in the cellars of L'Hopital in Angers. At the same time the Comtesse Michel d'Ornano and Academician Maurice Druon were inducted in the rank of Commandeur.

The next day, as John and I sat on the station at Angers, waiting for the Paris train, we discussed plans for establishing the British Commanderie, to be put into effect two months later when, under Robert Cointreau as Grand Commandeur, John was appointed as the first Chef de Protocol, Charles Whitfield as Trésorier and I as Chancelier.

The three of us worked well together and with John as spearhead for promotion of the Confrerie, Charles handling the moneybags and I writing and setting up the protocol, these were fun days. John's panache, enthusiasm and drive soon had the machine in top gear, as more Officers joined the team and the Commanderie grew apace.

I was looking forward to greeting John today and was much saddened by his death only six weeks ago. Remembering him and his great contribution to our Commanderie, remembering also Hector Mackenzie, Glyn Hardwicke and all those others of our number who have passed on, may I ask you to join me now in a toast to

ABSENT FRIENDS "

And it was on this rather solemn but still happy note that the festivities of the evening drew to their conclusion, bringing to an end a celebration which those present will surely always remember with pride and affection.

The Chapitre was also a commemoration of the life of our great Founder, François Rabelais, whose writings - especially about those amiable giants Gargantua and his son Pantagruel - are very much concerned with the body and its aspects and fonctionnings that have, perhaps, inspired Chef de Protocole George Wilks to write for us about:-

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THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

Human attributes are often used to describe wines; pretentious, unassuming, robust, flabby, gentle, even humourous; words used sometimes to complete unintelligible absurdity; words communicating nothing except, one must assume, making some sense to the person using them. One of the commonest descriptions is "a full-bodied" wine, a description that has some meaning to most wine drinkers. What is the scientific basis of this "full-bodiedness"? What do we mean when we say a wine is full-bodied?*

If we consider the complexity of the substances involved, the intricate chemical reactions which occur during fermentation, the wine, the final product, must inevitably be a very complex mixture. It should be no surprise to know that a normal table wine contains between two and three hundred different compounds capable of quantitative analysis; with traces of many more compounds, all contributing to the characteristic colours, bouquet and taste of the wine.

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As grapes mature and ripen under the influence of sun and rain, starch which is present is converted to sugar, a group of substances with varying degrees of sweetness and different chemical constitutions. Small quantities of mineral substances are absorbed from the soil and are dissolved in the juice and contribute to a special taste, "le gout de terroir", tastes such as the "flinty" taste associated with wine of the Dão in the Nahe. One must remember, too, the presence of the ubiquitous "life" substance, protoplasm, a very complex compound. Organic phosphorus compounds derived from phosphates in the soil are present in the juice, the must, with small quantities of some vitamins. The skins of the grapes contain anthocyanins which are soluble in alcohol but not in water and give the range of colour of wines from the palest whites to the black wine of Cahor.

Fermentation is a series of complicated biochemical processes, most of which are controlled by enzymes present in the live yeasts, each enzyme responsible for and controlling one stage in the chain of reactions, a "chinese puzzle" box, each successive stage revealing something new until the treasure is obtained. The most important constituent of the final product is ethyl alcohol, ethanol. A simple solution of ethyl alcohol in water is most uninteresting, completely "disembodied"! Fortunately, many other alcohols are formed during fermentation, each with its own characteristic taste and smell. These may be isolated from the fused ore, the distillate of the heavier, less volatile constituents. Glycerol, the sweet tasting alcohol is an important constituent of such sweet wines as Sauternes, while an intermediate compound in the formation of ethanol, a sweet tasting, fruity smelling constituent of many wines, especially white, sweet wines, is acetaldehyde. Incidentally, it is a powerful hangover product.

A variety of acids is present in the must, the natural grape juice, and others are produced during fermentation. The commonest are lactic, tartaric, malic and tannic acids. The last, tannic acid has a strong, bitter, astringent taste and is largely concentrated in stalks and pips. A small concentration of tannic acid is necessary for the maturing and keeping properties of wine; but high concentrations are unpleasant because of the acid's bitter "stewed-tea" taste.

During fermentation, as the concentration of alcohol increases and more colouring matter is dissolved from the skins, these substances, anthocyanins, change in composition and in combination many produce a precipitate.

Acids and alcohols present in new wine continue slowly to produce sweet smelling, fruity substances, called esters, substances which are largely responsible for the characteristic bouquet of a wine. Substances, too, which are the reason why white wines are served cool and red wines chambréd; because the volatility of the esters is different. Wine production is a very complicated process, involving many complex biochemical reactions and producing an extremely complex final result. With such variety, small wonder that the number of different wines produced is huge.

The body, then, is the combined effect of alcohols, esters, acids, aldehydes, with minute quantities of dissolved mineral substances, colouring matter and vitamins. A full bodied wine, therefore, is one with a good balance of alcohol and acidity, neither being predominant, with a good flavour and aroma immediately on the mouth. A wine with "un bon corsage" persisting in the mouth with an excellent, pleasant after-taste. That's a full bodied wine!

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Contemplation of full-bodied wines was also a feature of our full-bodied

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

which, taking place on 26th March 1995, both concluded our Anniversary Year and began the next period of our history. Almost as if it is not a coincidence references to the body continue - with the venue The Bleeding Heart Restaurant, Bleeding Heart Yard, London EC1. The Minutes of this AGM were circulated to our full membership towards the end of April.

Our next twenty-five years began with change, with Grand Commandeur Chris Wilkinson stepping down after six years, nominating his successor at the same time, as he explained to those present:-

"Fellow Sacavins I'm sure that you are probably all aware of my retirement from office at this meeting, and in making this valedictory speech, it is incumbent on me to explain my decision. Traditionally Grand Commandeurs seem to have been selected by our parent body in Angers, using one of the criteria for election as "The Farther He Lives from London, The Better". Thus, Robert Cointreau from Anjou and Hector Mackenzie of Dalmore were followed by myself from the Isle of Man.

It was my hope that I would be able to emulate the fine attendance record of Hector, but the Irish Sea is often not the friendliest of places, and the combination of having to allow extra time for travel with the escalating cost of fares, has proved inhibitive. History shows us that successful armies are those whose generals regularly lead from the front; something I have not been able to do, particularly as I am involved with "Island Life" through duties with Peel Lifeboat, The Manx Nature Conservation Trust and Manx National Heritage.

As we leave our excellent Silver Jubilee behind us, I think it is most important that our Commanderie has, as its Grand Commandeur, someone with the skills to lead us forward to another successful twenty-five years; and that is why I was so delighted that M. Pierre Gaté and his colleagues on the Grand Conseil agreed with my suggestion that Derek Sheen should take my place. Derek has been a fine and loyal servant of Sacavin for many years. He was an excellent Chancellor, using his experienced wine trade skills to regale us with a wonderful selection of wines. As Senechal, he frequently chaired committee meetings with quiet efficiency, a talent he has used to great effect when organising trips and functions for the Commanderie. I can think of no one better fitted to become our Grand Commandeur and he has my very fullest support. He also lives in easy commuting distance of central London.

I wish to thank all the Officers who have worked so hard during my time in office and particularly Pat Salzedo, who has done so much to keep us running smoothly.

Finally, I would like to say a heart-felt 'thank you' to everyone who has come to our functions during my time in office. Without your support our Commanderie would not be the success which it undoubtedly is. I look forward to many more enjoyable times in the future.

Slaynt as shee as eash de veih as maynrys son de bragh. "

If one might be allowed one final reference to the epithet - which we are sure Chris will enjoy - we have lost a very 'full-bodied' Grand Commandeur which the framed photograph of him, enrobed and in full Rabelaisian splendour, and presented to him on behalf of the Manage-

ment Committee, amply demonstrated. An inscribed silver salver - also from the Management Committee - further ensured he would never forget the Commanderie whilst savouring his "full-bodied" wines!

The excellent menu, arranged by Chef de Cuisine Newton Grant, and accompanied by fine wines chosen by Chancelier Frank Coe, was enjoyed by almost fifty Chevaliers and their guests. It is always a little sad to say "good-bye" but, on this occasion, it was very definitely not "adieu" but "au revoir".

What is sad to recall is that a little of the almost too-hot weather we are experiencing this summer could not have been spared, as Treasurer Robert Wills remarks, in his write-up of this year's:-

SUMMER TASTING AND LUNCHEON AT MERE

"The weather gods failed to smile kindly on this year's Summer Event and Saturday the 10th June was cold and grey, typical of so many days in early June. Undauntedly, 25 Chevaliers and guests responded to the invitation to make the long journey to Mere in Wiltshire, to taste wines at Yapp Bros. The usual plague of road cones caused traffic delays on the A303 and, unfortunately, the tasting was well under way before the last of the group had arrived..

In the absence of Robin Yapp, away fishing in Scotland, we were welcomed by Lucinda Stokes who explained that, mindful of our love and knowledge of the noble grape, she had chosen nine interesting and unusual wines for the tasting.

We began with a white from the Cote du Rhone, a Chateau Valcombe 1994. The bulk of white wines from this area are produced by Cooperatives, so this wine was unusual in that it was from an individual producer, Claude Fouquerle. Using the same blend of varieties as Chateauneuf du Pape but with a predominance of Grenache Blanc, this was a straightforward zippy fresh wine, well chosen to prepare us for what followed.

The second wine was anything but straightforward. There are only twelve producers of Cassis and Francois Sack's eleven hectare vineyard borders the Mediterranean and extends in terraces half way up the Cap Canaille, the highest sea cliff in France. His Cassis Clos Sainte Magdeleine 1993 is a blend of 40% Marsanne, 30% Clairette, 28% Ugni Blanc and a little Sauvignon. Straw yellow in colour, with a herby aromatic nose and a crisp, dry taste, it was generally agreed this was a wine to be served with bouillabaisse and fruits de mer.

The third wine was extraordinary, a Condrieu 1992 by Jean-Yves Multier. The whole of the Condrieu appellation area totals less than twenty-five hectares and with its low yield and unreliable ripening, only a tiny production of wine is obtainable from the Viognier grape. Planted in vineyards near Vienne on the Rhone, this variety was deemed so unprofitable that, up to a few years ago, vineyards were being abandoned or grubbed up. But enthusiasts for this dry, full-bodied (13.5%) golden yellow wine, with its elusive and tantalizing bouquet (mangoes?) and taste have created a small but persistent market for its continued production. Coupled with a requirement for its inclusion in the cepage for the red Cote Rotie, there has been a resurgence in the planting of the variety. We struggled to find words to describe this wine. Something of the spiciness of Gewerztraminer, but more subtle in taste perhaps; a price of £17.25 a bottle gave pause for thought when considering a more in depth study!

The room temperature was still cool by the time we came to taste the reds and these undoubtedly benefited from warming in the hand. Even so, the first wine seemed rather harsh and tannic. A Vin du Pays from the west bank of the Rhone across from Chateauneuf, the Coteaux de la

Ceze 1991 by Armand and Roger Maby was a blend of Syrah and the Grenache. The second was altogether different. A Saumur red Chateau Fouquet 1992 was a tremendous example of this appellation. Made, by Paul Filliatreau at Breze, a few kilometres south east from Saumur this was a beautifully presented wine from the Cabernet Franc. A soft fruity bouquet with a richness of taste that confounds the view that Loire reds are thin of body, this was a wine that fully deserved more bottle sampling and, at £7 a time, could grace many a meal.

Still pondering the delights of the Saumur, we came next to a wine from the Coteaux des Baux area, 50 Km south of Avignon and to the east of the Rhone. Formerly a Parisian architect, Eloi Durrbach became a vigneron some twenty years ago and planted a spectacularly beautiful vineyard on the rocky slopes of Les Baux. The varieties chosen, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah were outlawed by the AOC for the area and Trevallon was forced to have its own classification as a simple Vin de Pays, Coteaux d'Aix. The wine tasted, a Domaine de Trevallon 1991 was anything but simple with 40% Syrah and 60% Cabernet, it was dark and full bodied. Robin Yapp says that wines from this estate are beginning to feature on the wine lists of nearly every Michelin 3 star restaurants in France, the reds being particularly sought after. Somewhat pricey at £12.95 a bottle, further sampling would probably confirm that this wine would repay keeping.

The next red was from another appellation on the Rhone, a Gigondas; Domaine Saint Gayan 1990 by Rog r and Jean-Pierre Meffrey. The Meffrey family have been making wines hereabouts for some four hundred years and are the leading vignerons of the district. The blend for this wine uses a high proportion of Grenache, with Syrah, Mourvedre, Cinsault and Clairette to give a dark, full-bodied (14%), rich, spicy and harmonious wine. I liked this wine a lot and even at £9.25 a must for buying a bottle (or two) for keeping under the stairs. 1990 was an excellent vintage and the wine maker is reputed to have said that this is the best wine he has ever made.

The fifth and final red was a Cote Rotie 1990 made from Syrah grapes grown on the 50° 'Roasted Slopes' near the village of Ampuis. The vigneron is one of the younger generation who believe in maturing Cote Rotie in new oak barrels for some eighteen months from vintage. Traditionalists in the area say that the Syrah has enough natural tannin for the wine to mature in barrels old enough to be kept as family heirlooms. This wine had plenty of tannin but it was well balanced with fruit. A hefty wine in every respect (£18.75 a bottle), this was another of those wines to be put aside for a special occasion.

After such a wealth of reds, it was a real pleasure to taste and enjoy our final wine, a Chateau la Tomaze 1990 from the Coteaux du Layon. Vincent Lecointre has forty hectares of vines near the attractive village of Champ sur Layon and his sweet Chenin Blanc wines continue to be made in the tradition of eight generations of Lecointres. straw yellow in colour and a honeyed sweetness with an underlying acidity, this was a wine to savour. The vintage of 1990 made for superb wines from the Loire and this wine can only get better with more bottle age.

Lucinda Stokes has to be congratulated for giving us the opportunity to taste these interesting and rewarding wines and it was with some reluctance that we left Yapp Bros. for a leisurely lunch at the Old Ship Hotel, an old coaching inn in Mere.

All in all I thought it was a most stimulating visit. My only criticism would be of the tasting room itself. After a lengthy car journey

and on a cold, grey day, it was disappointing to find that the tasting was to be held in a store room with few seats. A layout of a long table, bottles and glasses would be fine for the tasting of wines by the casual visitor but failed to provide the right ambience for a group of people keen to sip, discuss and perhaps mull over the complexities of the wines so carefully chosen. Perhaps this accounted for the somewhat subdued air of the party during the tasting. Lucinda Stokes said that a bottle of wine would be given to whosoever offered the most original or amusing comment. As far as I know, it was never claimed.

The foregoing has described events that have passed. We are now looking forward to the Programme for the remainder of the year, the most immediate being the:-

BIENNIAL VISIT TO THE LOIRE

which is taking place from Thursday 28th September to Tuesday 3rd October and during which a party of around 21 Chevaliers and their guests will enjoy vineyards and places of historic and artistic interest in the Anjou-Saumur region of France with a visit to Chinon - the ducal residence of Henry II - and Fontevraud, where lies his tomb - this being our great link with our Angevin colleagues. The Grand Conseil of the Confrerie formed a sub-committee specially to arrange the Programme for our party which also includes a Welcoming Reception at the Maison du Vin in Angers and the opportunity to attend the Chapitre des Vendanges at Grenier St Jean, also in Angers, on Saturday 30th September. Our party are all staying in the hotel 'Clos des Bénédictins' just outside Saumur with all Visits starting from there. A full report on this Visit will be included in the next issue of the 'Courier'.

The climax of the year is always the Annual Induction Ceremony and Dinner. After the impressive experience of last year's event, the Butchers Hall is again the venue, SATURDAY 4TH NOVEMBER the date. Another wonderful evening is promised by Chancellor Frank Coe, responsible for the wines, and Chef de Cuisin Newton Grant, who is planning the menu. The Booking Form for:-

LE CHAPITRE DE LA QUATRE VINGT QUINZE

is enclosed with this newsletter and the Management Committee hope that, in response, as many Chevaliers and their guests as possible will attend.

OBITUARIES

Perhaps because, as an organisation, we are already twenty-five years old, we have to accept that some who have played a prominent part in supporting our activities and events, have passed on. During the past year we have lost three stalwart members, each of whom made an important contribution to our events and the expansion of our activities.

Firstly, in September last, almost exactly twenty-five years since planning the organisation of the British Commanderie, one of our three Founding Members - JOHN ADDEY - died, quite suddenly, to be mourned by many friends - those within Sacavin and those who knew him through many of his other interests. John was so gifted in so many different ways - author, musician, raconteur, bon viveur - it is difficult to single out one from another. Suffice it to say that, without his

enthusiasm and energy, especially in the early days, the Commanderie may not have achieved so speedily the position enjoyed today.

Later, in the Autumn, news came of the death of JOHN FENTON, who was Inducted at that most memorable Chapitre held at Castle Howard in the early summer of 1982. He was one of our intrepid colleagues from the North who tried so hard to stimulate interest in events held locally for those of our members situated, dare one say, North of Watford! John finally lost his fight for health - but only after a battle demonstrating his great courage and determination. We pay tribute - especially for that wonderful event at Castle Howard, which will never be forgotten by those who attended. To his wife, Audrey, we offer our sincerest condolences upon her sad bereavement.

Then, in early December, one of our longest serving Chevaliers and staunch supporter of so many events - BILL LEYLAND - retired Managing Director of the Aylesbury Brewery Company - suffered a heart attack whilst riding to the hounds - leaving life in full tilt, as Grand Commandeur Chris Wilkinson, a life-long friend and colleague, described this loss at the AGM. The last occasion in which many of us last saw Bill was at the Butchers Hall on 29th October when he was in fine form, full of life and beaming with happiness.

A Celebration of Bill's life was held at St Mary's Church, Wyndham Place, London W1, on 27th January last with the Commanderie represented by Chris Wilkinson, then Grand Commandeur, Treasurer Robert Wills and 1st Halberdier Owen Collins with his wife Brenda, daughter of Chef de Protocole George Wilks.

We offer our sincerest condolences to Bill's family on their very sad loss, especially Audrey, his wife, and his daughter Felicity Sidders, who is also a Chevalier.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

As so often happens, we have to finish on a pragmatic note and this is about the Annual Subscription. Although it is rather late in the day, we remind our Active Members that the annual subscription of £7.50 per annum, £10 'spouse' rate (i.e. where both are members) became renewable on 1st January last. Although Treasurer Robert has been in constant communication regarding non-payment, there are still some members who have not yet paid up although we feel they want to go on receiving details of events, etc. If you are one of these, please send a remittance for the amount - £7.50 or £10 - with cheques made payable to 'SACAVIN', to the Treasurer without delay, as follows:-

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