

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

No. 33

Spring 1998

This edition of Courier is devoted largely to two remarkable and hard working Chevaliers. Pat Salzedo and George Wilks have decided to do a little less whilst they continue to be part of the Commanderie, Pat as Chevalier and in George's case a Management Committee member without portfolio. But first an account of the AGM in March.



This year, and unusually, The Grand Commandeur was unable to attend. Sénéchal Roy Clements conducted proceedings, succinctly and briskly. Reviewing the Management Committee report he commented on Committee changes for the ensuing year. George Wilks had agreed to continue as a committee member without portfolio; so we retain his wisdom and advice. George declared his pleasure at the new arrangement.

Pat Salzedo's decision not to seek re-election was understood by fellow committee members who regretted the loss of a long standing member who had contributed in full measure. Her ebullient contributions and encyclopaedic memories of members and events will be missed. The Management Committee would consider how best our good wishes could be shown. So the Committee remains as last year, with the notable absence of Pat. We believe that her title was unique, held by a unique lady. Her position will not be filled. (Her successor as editor of this publication, Chancellor Peter Bouch will take over the task of editing the Courier with some trepidation – a hard act to follow).

Formal business was followed by a review of the year. The Sénéchal thanked management committee members. He thanked too, Chevalier Malcolm Harris, who allows his West End office to be used for Management committee meetings. His generosity helps us to enjoy quiet discussion and decision making in a Central London venue at no cost. Roy commented on a successful 1997/98 programme. The Loire trip had

been a highlight, one of the best. This and the Grand Maitre's presence at our Chapitre indicated a closer friendship and cooperation with our fellow Chevaliers in Angers.

Our membership numbers continue to be a subject for some concern. He urged active members to introduce suitable new members who would be active and support events.

In a discussion led by Chef de Cuisine Tony Morris spoke of the events prepared for 1998 and beyond. A lunch and summer tasting would take place at the home of Audrey and Julian Thompson. Audrey spoke hoping that many members and their guests would join them. Some informal comments on a group of French wines would be made by Derek Sheen. It is noteworthy that the date is close to Bastille day.

The Chapitre and Induction in November would take place at the Royal College of Pathologists thanks to the help of Chevalier Keith Lockyer who spoke about the College. Terms will be an improvement from Butchers' Hall enabling better food and wines in an elegant setting. The evening will be a little different. Canapé style starters will encourage more sociability. Ticket cost will be close to that of the last two years.

Tony suggested that the venue for the supper and AGM should continue to be The Bleeding Heart. Chapitre venues would vary more often, where good value for money and suitable ambience can be found. There was

general support for that idea. The supper which followed the meeting was superb in every way. The Bleeding Heart is still justifiably popular.

The questionnaire circulated last year indicated that there might be some support for an out of town Chapitre location including the facility to stay for the night. Some possible venues had been identified which seemed particularly suitable. Costs involved may allow us to offer a very keen price for the package. A show of hands suggested that there would be support. Further investigations would be made.



Pat Salzedo was inducted Chevalier in 1978, at the Vintners' Hall, and promoted Officier in 1985 at The Dorchester. She has served the Management Committee with humour and commitment over the years. She has been the focus for that body, as Chef d'Historiographie. Her contribution has been consistent. Her encyclopaedic knowledge of Sacavin and Chevaliers may be irreplaceable. Her personal contribution at meetings has been valuable. We will miss her and her ever cheerful approach. As you will read, Pat has enjoyed her office. She titles her contribution, "Memories of a minutes taker".

I have been asked to write something about my experiences during the period I have been the Commanderie's Chef d'Historiographie, another term for archivist. When I was elected into this post I became among other things, the minutes secretary. As that by deed if not by title I have been present at many Management Committee and Annual General Meetings over the past seventeen years, so I thought I would recall the very many fascinating venues at which these took place. My reason is partly because I do not want to duplicate what my predecessor as Chef d'Historiographie and my very good friend – George Wilks – who has also been invited to share his experiences.

As I am sure is very noticeable the minutes taker scribbles away furiously whilst others are talking and I thought it would be interesting and for me a pleasant journey as I wander down memory lane and recall some of the illustrious luxurious, glamorous and distinguished places at which I have scribbled my way through various official meetings.

The very first at which I had an official position – the 1981 AGM – was at a venue associated with the setting up of our British Commanderie and the excellent foundations laid to establish its position and prosperity, The Whitbread City Cellars in Chiswell Street. In these early days Sacavin enjoyed the hospitality of the cellars and the facilities of the Overlord Room for many an AGM and Committee meetings. This was through the good offices of one of our founding fathers, Charles Whitfield. I am very grateful that being asked to write

There was a suggestion that the Angers Commanderie might change their Chapitre date to coincide with the millennium. Whilst there had been no confirmation of that change, some members had discussed the possibility. A discussion ensued. Some members thought that if the change is made, it should be supported. Others felt that we should continue to visit France in "odd" years and perhaps a further visit in 2000. The Management Committee would pursue the subject and report when more is known. (Dates and venues appear on page 5.)

these few lines also gives me the chance to pay tribute to Charles, who died last year. He was among those instrumental in bringing the British Commanderie into being.

In the early 1980s we left the City behind and moved West for our AGMs. Between 1982 and 1985 the Café Royale was favoured, and why not! It was a thrill for me to scribble away hoping that the spirit of its literary patrons, notably Oscar Wilde, would brush against me and help me find the right words. Indeed the West End was our chosen meeting ground during the 1980s. From the Café Royale we graduated to The Dorchester with the 1986 and 1987 AGMs held in the Holford and Orchid rooms. When the Dorchester closed for renovation we went further West, to the territory of Sherlock Holmes with the 1988 and 1989 AGMs at the Portman International at the bottom of Baker Street. Hopefully though the minutes of this period did not require clues for their understanding!

It is possible that the then Management Committee felt it had come too far West. This coupled with the excellent fare that was a feature of the Inter-Continental Group and perhaps we had come to like the glamour of Park Lane. We moved back in this direction for the 1990 AGM held in the Hotel International just off Hyde Park Corner.

Even the best does not satisfy forever and though the AGM dinners enjoyed there were excellent, the architecture and décor of either hotel made so little

impression that I have no memory of the rooms where we carried out our work.

It was then we recalled the Café Royale in its heyday which had seemed like a club, and perhaps or because of this, and through the good offices of John Braun and Raymond Harris we enjoyed the facilities of the Savile Club for our 1991, 1992 and 1993 AGMs. The beautiful rooms and works of art displayed there are a lasting memory and I am sure inspired us to even greater things. By now, Newton Grant had become our Chef de Cuisine with the duty of arranging our venues and he had a very happy relationship with The Bleeding Heart. So once again we went City-wards to the ghostly legend, Dickensian flavour and wonderful food that has made this the favourite AGM venue to date.

Our AGMs were not confined to distinguished West End venues. The late Col. Hector Mackenzie OBE was appointed Grand Commandeur by the Grand Conseil in France. Hector lived in Invergordon. He took the opportunity of the Annual Chapitre to hold a short Management Committee meeting before the Induction and Chapitre. This was not always popular. Committee Members felt a little robbed of their Vin d'Honneur, and a little flurried in getting their "frocks" on! I particularly recall the fascination in glancing around the wonderful mirrored room at The Dorchester and seeing ourselves from all angles as we worked through the agenda. In fact Management Committee meetings in temples of food and wine are not always the right place to hold meetings. There are often too many temptations and distractions. On a couple of occasions we met at The Bleeding Heart, but it was not ideal. It was difficult to say who was the most put off, ourselves or the diners.

This brings us to the question of the question of where to hold business meetings. Every endeavour is made to ensure they are not a cost. Through Charles Whitfield we enjoyed the City Cellars at no cost. Just as we enjoyed everything that Tesco House in Cheshunt

could offer, including wonderful AGM dinners as a gift arranged through our then Trésorier Donald Harris. In this the Commanderie has always been very fortunate. There has often been an Officier able to host Management Committee meetings in superb venues, really top class. My first few years as minutes taker were spent as near to heaven as I am likely to achieve. Martini Terrace, courtesy of Martini Rosso, and our then Sénéchal, David Rutherford. We met sixteen or seventeen floors above Haymarket with absolutely fantastic views across London. It was really quite difficult to concentrate on the agenda, there was so much to look at. When David retired we moved to Mayfair, to Bolton Street just around the corner from Green Park to the boardroom of our then Trésorier Malcolm Harris. We held Management Committee meetings in the tranquil atmosphere of this very elegant room for several years as Malcolm moved from Chef de Cuisine and then Sénéchal. It was towards the back of the building, relatively quiet looking onto a court which was especially pleasant in the summer with the doors open and the birds singing. After all we were only a stone's throw from Berkeley Square, but no nightingale that I could hear!

When Malcolm moved office, our new Chef de Cuisine, Newton Grant perhaps feeling it part of his responsibilities to ensure the Management Committee did not become homeless. He took us back to the City, to the Boardroom of his firm in Greville Street. Several happy meetings passed until Newton partially retired; after a few short noisy meetings in The Bleeding Heart, Malcolm came once again to our rescue. Although no longer an Officier, his care and support for the Committee is undiminished. Our meetings are held now in his Harley Street Boardroom which fits the Management Committee like a glove.

So you can see how the duties of the Minutes Secretary are much enhanced by the extremely pleasant places it has been my good fortune to enjoy as part of my working environment. Also to record how much the Commanderie owes to these good friends who in the past as well as the present, made sure we are accommodated as befits our aspirations and objectives.

Hilaire Belloc on tasting

"The rule of tasting is this:-

- (1) always taste in the morning, and better later in the morning,; anyhow, long after eating food.*
- (2) Take the merest sip of each sample.*
- (3) Begin with the youngest.*
- (4) Eat (a touch) of dry biscuit when you feel your taste getting doubtful.*
- (5) Allow a minute or two between each taste.*

Now very often you can't taste. They don't give you the chance. You have to buy the stuff in its bottle or leave it. In such circumstances never buy anything you have not tasted, apart from the bottles awaiting your purchase. If you have had wine at a meal, and like it, then trust the wine man that he will sell you the same in glass. But don't buy wine by the name or the year, or anyone's recommendation. Buy it by your own liking of it.

George Wilks seems to have achieved several careers while most of us struggle with one. Perhaps the reason is his enthusiasm for life and his energy for whatever he takes of. He has many real friends and still acquires more by the day. He entitles his piece, "Recollections of a long serving Chef de Protocol"

You may wonder how the Headmaster of an old established Grammar School in London became involved in one aspect of the wine trade and found an interest in the British Confrerie of the French wine order of the Sacavin. Charles Whitfield, one of the founders of the British Confrerie, was an 'old boy' of my school and was also a well known member of the British wine trade. When I retired as Headmaster, Charles persuaded me to take an active part in the work of a newly formed organisation 'The Wine Development Board'. I became liaison officer between the representatives of the British Trade (about a dozen senior members of the wine trade) and the representatives in London of the principal wine producing countries exporting to Great Britain. I perforce had to learn a great deal quite quickly, a task which I enjoyed and in the work, made some very good friends, both British and foreign.

The British Confrerie was also newly established. Charles Whitfield was the treasurer, John Braun the secretary and the experienced Robert Cointreau temporarily held the office of Grand Commandeur until Colonel McKenzie was appointed by the Grand Counsel. After a few months, John Braun moved to Brussels and had to relinquish his office as secretary. Charles Whitfield eventually managed to persuade me to take on the job, despite my complete ignorance of the French order of Sacavin.

I well remember my amusement when John came up to my office with two large travelling cases which he said would provide me with enough information I needed to do the secretary job. I was inducted as Chevalier and with help and advice from senior members of the order, I succeeded in doing the job reasonably satisfactorily.

When I retired from the Wine Development Board, the job of secretary to the Confrerie was taken over by the much more experienced Mrs Pat Salzedo. Some of the tasks which I did as secretary I was asked to retain and I was entrusted with the job of preparing place cards and table plans for the Chapitre. It was a job I enjoyed doing and it developed with the years. Only on one occasion did Chris Wilkinson and I make a real blunder - at this banquet we found we had separated a Chevalier from his guest.

I went often to Chris's office to discuss Sacavin business and often that business was postponed when the Guards marched along St James about eleven in the morning. Chris was an ex-guardsman and always

recognised the marching troops who were visible from his office window.

My introduction to the business and pleasure of the Chapitre was made very early and I have missed very few meetings since my own induction. During this early period, M. Robert Cointreau was the supreme Grande Maitre of the Order and I had the pleasure of attending one of his induction ceremonies at Abbé Fontevraud. The Abbey was in process of restoration and refurbishment, not very convenient for ladies in evening dress or for men's thin patent leather evening shoes. The banquet after the ceremony was held in the large crypt in typical medieval ambience. I think there were between three and four hundred diners. I even remember the first course, a half lobster each served with all the necessary implements for separating shell from meat. The entertainment, pseudo-fifteenth century, was performed in the wide middle aisle, sword swallows, fire eaters, acrobats and the finale, a chariot drawn by two or three men with bits in their jaws. Although I have witnessed it many times, the pre induction procession always impresses me, especially in the special French settings, darkened arches, through moonlit cloisters with the moon casting shadows of the fine trees in the pavement and lighting up the magnificent spectacle of the Grande Maitre attended by his officers marching in their colourful robes lit by flaming, flickering torches and disciplined by equally colourful trumpeters. Unforgettable spectacles in grand surroundings.

Our London Chapitres are not usually so spectacular, few London hotels, clubs or City Livery Halls can offer the same splendour as some of the French historic buildings. An exception is Vintners Hall, a survivor of the Great Fire, a venue which we used regularly for the early British Chapitres. Nevertheless many of our Chapitres have proved to be memorable, our marches are unique, written by our own Chef des Beaux Arts, Commandeur Leonard Salzedo.

My predecessor as Chef de Protocol was Glyn Hardwick, a senior lawyer in the City of London, and on his retirement he obtained permission for our Confrerie to hold a Chapitre in the magnificent surroundings of the Guildhall. The induction ceremony was held in two adjacent crypts, one used as a robing room, the other for the inductions. The Officers thought such an arrangement necessitated a rehearsal for the March of Officers with trumpeters. Under the watchful eye of our talented Chef des Beaux Arts with a stop watch for surety, officers paraded in rehearsal.

He said "not enough music, I'll write a few more bars". He stood at the piano, wrote a few extra bars and the trumpeters had enough music for the complete crypt to crypt march. Leonard was a really accomplished, talented musician. The banquet was held in one of the splendid Elizabethan rooms (complete with a musician's gallery), now used as a library.

When Chris Wilkinson was appointed Grand Commandeur a vocal quartet accompanied by Leonard Salzedo at the piano, sang his praises to the tune of the Old Simon the Cellarer. On another occasion a quartet sang the praises of the Café Royal which, for a number of years, had served us admirably.

Over the years members of the Chapitre have enjoyed many social occasions including tastings, lectures by members and visitors, visits to members country homes with food and wine and splendid company fellowship. I remember particularly the occasions at Chris Wilkinson's home "Chough Cottage" near Oxford where we had some splendid tastings and I enjoyed swimming in the pool with Chris's children.

A few years ago I attended a French Chapitre conducted by M. Gaté at which the two principal

inductees were the Japanese and Belgian Ambassadors to France. I was the senior British officer present and was introduced to the assembled company which included the wives and entourage of the two Ambassadors. To my surprise at the ensuing banquet, I was seated at the top table between the Japanese and Belgian ladies. The Japanese lady spoke fluent French, English and German and was obviously quite at home in opera - one of the most accomplished ladies I have ever met. The Belgian lady was not as fluent but was trying to improve her English and asked for an explanation of every English phrase used. She bore a striking resemblance to the singer Eartha Kitt, and I was later accused by my son and one of two friends of spending the evening "chatting up Eartha" - I didn't learn one word of Japanese.

I think I've been to every Chapitre since my induction. I've enjoyed new friendships with both French and English Chevaliers. I've learned a lot about wine and I remember with gratitude Charles Whitfield's introductions many years ago. I have had the pleasure too of introducing some of my old friends to the pleasures which I have enjoyed for nearly thirty years.

Optime! Optime and Rabelaisian greetings to you all.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



Summer Garden Luncheon

At the home of Audrey and Julian Thompson at Rickmansworth.

Saturday 11 July 1998

A calling letter is enclosed.

Chapitre and Induction

At The Royal College of Pathologists, Carlton House Terrace

Saturday 14 November 1999

Supper and AGM

At The Bleeding Heart.

Saturday 27 March 1999