

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

No. 38

Winter 2000

The year 2000 will be remembered for good sociable events, some positive introspection and better than usual numbers at our events. Those of us who make plans, often wonder why one venue is favoured rather than another. Should we look for links with other similar organisations? How should we attract new members? Where in the Loire area? How can we improve our links with Angers? And many other subjects. However, 2000 has been successful - and fun. We can be sure of that. You still come, you write and call us saying so. We like to know of your preferences, so please tell us what you want to do.

In this Courier, we have an account of le Chapitre du Millénaire and induction ceremony at Vintner's Hall, a further piece from Sénéchal Robert Wills as he roams along the Loire. Key dates are listed, (some still tentative). Do read the notes from the Trésorier, and those from the Chancelier.

Last Courier we left Rob with St Martin having covered Anjou and Saumur. Read on about Chinon - just the name recalls many tastes, history and noble architecture.

From Saumur, the road to Chinon takes you through Candes-St-Martin where the river Vienne joins the Loire. It is well worth making a brief stop here to visit the large 12th century monastic church dedicated to St. Martin and to take the short, rather steep climb, that takes you behind the church to a field high above the village and the superb, panoramic view over the two rivers.

St. Martin, the first bishop of Tours, died in Candes in November 1397 and the monks of Poitou and Touraine bitterly disputed where his remains should be buried. Legend has it that the Tourangeaux stole the body and as they rowed back upstream to Tours, the bare trees lining the river banks miraculously burst into bloom, even though it was November. Country folk still call a freak spell of unseasonable fine weather a 'St. Martin's summer'.

South of Candes lies Fontevraud l'Abbé. The huge Abbey here was founded in the 12th century to house five separate communities of priests, monks, nuns, lepers and invalids, organised as a dual order under

the absolute authority of a woman. The abbess held all spiritual and temporal power within the abbey and the nuns and monks owed her absolute obedience. Thirty-six abbesses ruled this abbey from its foundation to its closure at the Revolution, with at least half of them of royal blood. To the English visitor, Fontevraud is famous for its links with the early Plantagenet kings and as their royal burial place. Within the recently restored creamy white nave of the abbey church, lie the four recumbent funerary effigies of Henry II, his sword on his left, his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, holding a bible in both hands and wearing the Fontevraud habit, their son Richard the Lionheart and their daughter-in-law, Isabelle of Angoulême, wife of John Lackland, John I. Hers is the only wooden figure, the others are of painted, sculptured stone. The hearts of John and Henry III of England are also buried in the abbey.

There is a delightful 14th century story. It tells how Richard I, anxious to obtain salvation for his

father's soul, sought, through prayer, to be shown whether or not he was in torment. And it happened one night that an angel appeared and led Richard to a room with neither door nor window, yet light enough. Sitting him on a throne, the angel said he would shortly see his father and he looked and saw two devils leading a man, beating and torturing him continuously. The devils left and gradually the man recovered enough to say to that he was indeed Richard's father, Henry II, and he endured this suffering day and night as punishment for bad governance of his kingdom, for unjust decisions, for appointing to church livings, unworthy clerics and above all, for his guilt over the murder of Thomas à Becket. However, because he had founded the XIIIth Order of Nuns at Fontevraud, when the nuns were at prayer the devils could not torment him. But as soon as their devotions were finished, the devils would return and continue to beat and torture him. As you can imagine, this vision gave Richard pause for thought and he promptly founded three convents at Fontevraud, so that night and day there would always be nuns at prayer, to alleviate both his father's suffering and his own after his death!

Sheila and I, stayed for a few days in 1999 in the Prieure St-Lazare, a small hotel within this wonderful abbey's walls. The restaurant is situated in the cloisters of the old priory, providing the perfect setting for reflection and the enjoyment of good food and splendid Loire wines.

But back to wine. Our journey up the Loire valley now takes us on into the wine growing district of Touraine, famous for some of the most splendid red and white wines of the region. We start in the picturesque countryside of Bourgueil, just a few miles across the river from Candes, bordered to the north by forests and to the south by the Loire. The vineyards here are at the very western edge of the Touraine and sheltered from northerly winds, the micro-climate is particularly mild with banana plants and palm trees growing quite freely. Besides grapes, the district produces fruit, including strawberries, cherries, blackcurrants, pears and apples, [including the P  pin de Bourgueil] and vegetables. As the average vineyard is no more than 5 acres, most wine growers cannot earn a living by their wine alone and therefore need to cultivate these other crops. Soils are either sandy-gravel or chalky-clay and lovers of Bourgueil wines claim they can identify by taste, which wines are grown on particular soils. It is generally recognised that the richest, more complex wines, needing bottle age to show their best, are produced from vines grown on the chalky-clay soils. The grape is the Cabernet-

Franc, or Breton as its known locally, but the wine can have an allowed 10% maximum of Cabernet Sauvignon. Vignerons found that the Franc is well suited to the cooler climate of the Loire, it buds and ripens early and is more productive than Cabernet Sauvignon.

First granted AOC status in 1937, the vineyards are split roughly 60:40 between Bourgueil and St-Nicholas-de-Bourgueil, which now has its own appellation. Until comparatively recently, Bourgueil, as with other reds from the Loire, was not greatly regarded, but the need to compete in the market place has seen a big improvement in its production over the last decade. Reducing quantity in the vineyards to raise quality, picking at optimum ripeness and the gradual adoption of more modern vinification techniques has resulted in the wines gaining a wider appeal. Even so there is still considerable polarity in people's reaction to these wines. There are those who enthuse over their vibrant fruit and others who object to the earthy taste of the wines when young - the French refer to it as 'gout de terroir'. For sure these are full, sturdy wines. A famous cross-country runner, once claimed that a glass of Bourgueil before a race gave him back the strength in his legs that he had at the age of 20!

Shippers like Chevalier Robin Yapp of Mere, have long since listed Bourgueil wines, but they now appear widely on UK supermarket shelves. Much credit is also due to the work done by the Commanderie de la Dive Bouteille de Bourgueil & St Nicholas in raising standards. Faithful to the traditions of the corporations of the middle ages, the Commanderie was re-created in 1977 to, 'd  fendre en toutes circonstances la noble cause de nos vins, de les promouvoir ainsi que de faire mieux conna  tre et appr  cier la gastronomie tourangelles et la douceur de vivre en terroir bourgueillois'. Noble sentiments indeed.

Last year, we Sacavins were given a fascinating talk by Monsieur Audebert, the Grand Maitre of this Commanderie, at La Maison des Vins in the centre of the village of Bourgueil. Illustrated by tastings, he showed how the 'terroir' influenced the wines of the area. Interestingly, he said that as a Bourgueil producer, he found it easier to identify a Bourgueil from a chalky-soil to that from a sandy soil, than tell a Bourgueil from a Chinon.

Wines from his Domaine du Grand Clos and La Marquise are considered to be two of Bourgueil's finest cr  s.

Wines made by Pierre-Jacques Druet are something else again. Not native to the area, he bought several parcels of old vineyards in time for the 1980 vintage and with obsessive fervour, set about creating a first class estate. A long cuvaision, or vatting with the skins, pips, stalks and grape juice all fermenting together, ensures he extracts maximum tannin, the deepest colour and full, rich flavours, for his red wines. In his crypt-like cave at Benais, he makes four different Bourgueils, with Les Cent Boisselées his simplest wine, next is Beauvais, then Grand Mont and finally Vaumoreau. Prices range from £10 to £25; expensive wines perhaps, but if you don't like these, you don't like Bourgueil. But beware, these are uncompromising wines - no easy youthfulness here - they need to be laid down for a few years before they reveal their charms. All good quality Bourgueil needs bottle ageing to reveal its complexities. Even a year or two will reward ones patience and it will keep and keep. Wines from the best vintages, eg 1990 can be kept for several decades.

To the west of Bourgueil lies St. Nicholas de Bourgueil. The wines from here are considered to be lighter and more forward than Bourgueil. Some say they are also earthier and less fruity. For a more personal view - and in the interest of pure research you understand, at lunch I opened a bottle of Cuvée Prestige, Domaine du Bourg 1997, by Jean-Paul Mabileau. Sipping a further glass as I write, confirms my first impressions - dense garnet colour, bags of fruit, soft tannin, a taste of damsons and cherries with a hint of earthiness. Delicious, but alas, no detectable strengthening of the legs! Turning south and crossing the Loire again, we soon see the vineyards on the south facing slopes around the medieval town of Chinon, with some 4200 acres located within a triangle formed by the confluence of the Loire and its tributary the Vienne. The town is best left for Rabelais to describe in verse;

Chinon, Chinon, Chinon,
Little town of great renown,
Built on ancient stone;
Above the wood,
Below the Vienne`

One should really approach Chinon from the south to appreciate the spread of the great château fortress high above the town and the lovely thirteen arched, medieval bridge, spanning the Vienne. Out of season, Chinon is a delight. Crammed between the river and the cliff, the town is a network of narrow streets, lined with timber framed buildings, often

leaning at grotesque angles. History permeates this little town. At one street corner, standing against a slate-covered house, is the coping of a well. Legend has it that Joan of Arc used this to dismount from her horse when she entered Chinon. A house built of tufa in the Rue Voltaire is reputed to be where Richard the Lionheart died on 6th April 1199, from an arrow wound received when besieging the castle at Chalus. He was then forty-two and had been engaged in almost constant war since he was sixteen. In the cliff, directly beneath the Château, is the Cave-Peint [Painted cellar]. The name comes from Rabelais' description of the paintings of dancing satyrs on its walls. In his book Pantagruel, Rabelais recalls his visits to this cave where he drank 'many glasses of chilled wine', while singing 'Bonum vinum laetificat cor hominum', [Good wine gladdens the heart]. The wine growers' brotherhood of this area, 'Le Bons Etonneurs Rabelaisiens' meet regularly in this cave to celebrate the virtues of Chinon wines. No.15 Rue de la Lamproie is reputed to be built on the site of the house of Rabelais' parents and where it is said, Rabelais fished for lampreys when the Vienne flooded.

And then there is the short but steep, staired climb to the château. It really is a fort and two châteaux, linked by a bridge. The fort, built by Plantagenet Henry 11, who died here in 1189, is now little more than a ruin. In 1205, after a year long siege, his son John 1, was forced to abandon the territory to Philippe Auguste, who built the châteaux. The fortress is for ever famous for the meeting here on the 9th. March 1429, between the seventeen year old Joan of Arc and the Dauphin of France, later to be crowned Charles V11. The court abandoned the chateau in the 16thC and it passed into the hands of Cardinal Richelieu who obtained permission from Louis X111 to demolish it and use the stone for his own building purposes. But it proved too costly to continue and the chateau was left to gradually fall into disrepair.

Chinon was once a busy port and the home of artisans, merchants and bargemen, but a gradual silting of the river and the advent of railways in the 19thC saw a decline in its prosperity. Historically though, its wine has always been the most important red wine of the Loire and generations of small-time growers have vinified the Cabernet Franc and shipped it up and down the river. Improved as it has been, by the use of modern cellar equipment, better attention to hygiene and greater control over fermentation, casking and bottling you either like Chinon or you are completely apathetic

to its charms. The producer of red wine in this part of the Loire is always at the mercy of the weather and in some years when the Breton will just not fully ripen, the resultant wines are hard and tannic. The 1998 vintage was a case in point. Although the grapes were looking good in early September, the onset of long spells of rain during the harvest, meant that they were not fully ripened and wines for this year are best drunk young. Preferably with those wonderful local Loire dishes such as rillons of pork, rabbit grillettes, eel with black pepper or rich liver paté. But with a modicum of luck, most years will produce wines that are impressively fruity, that can be enjoyed at the earliest opportunity, yet will keep. Anyway, I agree with the theory that its the circumstances under which it is first sampled, that affects ones liking for a wine. Chinon first sipped in a small restaurant by the Loire in warm sunshine, is one thing. Chinon tried on a cold winters day in Guildford is another!

Back in 1987, on one of Sacavin's biennial tours to the Loire, we visited the Clos de l'Echo, in the historic heart of this appellation. Hard by the chateau of Chinon, this vineyard is said to have once belonged to Rabelais' parents. The chalky soil here ensures the wines have a long maturity in the bottle, yet they still manage to be bright, smooth, balanced and richly fragrant when young. In 1989, the cellars were completely modernised, with

a pneumatic press, temperature regulated stainless steel fermentation tanks and a heavy investment in barrels of local oak. But tastings continue to be held in an ancient limestone cave, lit only by a brilliant stained glass portrait of Rabelais!

Another notable producer of Chinon is Charles Joquet of Les Varennes du Grand Clos at Sazilly. He is credited, with being the co-inventor of the "cuve à pigeage" a stainless steel tank used in red wine production. The top of the tank is equipped with a mechanism that when operated, breaks up the cap of grape solids and stirs up the fermenting mass to extract maximum flavour, colour and aroma. Opinions are divided on the gains claimed to be made by the use of this device, but 'punching down' as it is known, is now becoming quite widespread among the producers of Bourgueil and Chinon. Certainly, the wines made by Charles Joquet are considered to be outstanding.

At the Vintners Hall, Chapitre du Millénaire, in November this year we enjoyed a Chinon, Les Picasses 1995, by Olga Raffault, that was a fine example of a good vintage year. Modestly priced, yet full flavoured and rich, it showed how a well produced wine from a good year, can develop with age. And to keep the memory alive, I am sipping another glass as I write! **RRW**



How hard is the burden of the scribe? We feel for his pain. He is committed to his task. Now to the Chapitre and Induction ceremony. - LE CHAPITRE DU MILLENAIRE.

A year ago, a decision was made to visit Vintners' to celebrate the millenium and our thirtieth birthday. In Vintners' Hall, the Commanderie was initiated by Robert Cointreau on twentieth February 1970. As several Liveries, they do not open on the evenings of Friday, Saturday or Sunday. With some trepidation the reservation was made.

As the bookings came, it was clear that there was going to be a very good attendance. Finally ninety eight Chevaliers and their guests arrived on a wet night, but in a warm and beautiful Hall. The induction ceremony conducted by Chef de

Protocol Owen Collins presided by Grand Commandeur in the Court Room. Six new

Chevaliers took the oath, struck the Barrel head, (rather firm inductees this time), dubbed by the vinestock and entered in the Golden Book. Optimé for all!

Bernard Gilhespy is already known by Chevaliers, husband of Chevalier Mavis. Frank Coe spoke about Bernard's long and distinguished career. Service in the Royal Artillery, and recall for Suez. He became a Special Constable, then joined the Metropolitan Police, serving for thirty-five years deserving decorations from the TA and police. He then joined the DVLA as an

investigator on Road Tax Enforcement. He is now retired.

Des Holland has spent most of his working life in and around the wine business. Though his rôle was managing the people in the business, he had the opportunity to broaden his knowledge of the wine trade and a passion for wines of the world as he progressed in the business, working thirty-seven years. His work in Human Resource developed, in training and producing audio-visual programmes. During that time he served four years as a non-executive director of the Wine and Spirit Education Trust and spent three years on the fund raising committee of the Wine and Spirit Benevolent.

Felicity Holmes is known by many. Her husband Stanley was a distinguished Chevalier. She had the great advantage of her father's vineyards in Austria. Both good food and wines became her lifetime hobbies. She is a life member of the International Wine and Food Society, a British Epicurean, a Commandeur of the Chaîne des Rotisseurs and a Dame d'Honneur des Coteaux de Champagne. Chevalier Howard Davis summarised saying "Felicity is thrice blessed, first for the depth of her wine knowledge, secondly for her Vouvray-like sparkling character, (methode traditionnelle), and lastly because she is absolutely, positively, knock down gorgeous!"

Arthur Prince is known by most Chevaliers. With Dora his wife, he has travelled twice to the Loire as a guest and has attended our events during the year. He has forged many links with France and French wines.

He served in the Navy during the 39\45 war. He was posted to HMS Braid a River class frigate converted to a French ship L'Aventure crewed in the main by French expatriates seeking to escape the German invasion in Europe.

In following civil life he founded the Salvage Association for the London Marine Insurance Market serving in all executive departments retiring in 1986. He travelled extensively throughout the world on Company and principals' business.

His maternal family believed that they were descendants of Huguenots, Protestants who had fled France to Britain in the late seventeenth century. His son and his wife live in France with

their two children. They have done so for eleven years. They are being brought up in France.

As an amateur winemaker for many years he has acquired detailed knowledge of the process of fermentation and essential ingredients. Over the years he has appreciated and enjoyed the wines of the Loire. His visits to Saumur in the company of Chevaliers of Sacavin d'Anjou has enabled him to further improve his knowledge and appreciate the products of the area.

He has an arcane skill which is peculiarly valuable to the Commanderie. He turns the oak barrels for our collarettes.

Hazel Sheen, the wife of our Grand Commandeur, was born in Kenya, where her father founded his firm of Chartered Accountants in Nairobi. He served with the King's African Rifles in the then German East Africa. Hazel, with the family returned to Britain in 1937 as the unrest in East Africa increased. She was educated in England then secretarial training. She worked for six years at ICI in London, working sometimes for the Chairman, Lord McGowan.

She left to start a family, now grown up, two sons and a daughter. To have an independent income Hazel worked with the Yehudi Menuhin School, joining in early days. She stayed there for twenty two very happy years, part of the community. Yehudi founded and nurtured that community to give musical children a happy and well rounded life. Hazel left the school to retire in 1990.

Her love and knowledge of French wines and regions has widened since meeting Derek and they have been on many trips, particularly those in the Loire area.

Diana Whitcutt was educated at Westonbirt. A secretarial course in London followed. She moved to Surrey and enjoyed a variety of jobs. She has been working for Surrey Fire and Rescue Services for the last seven years. She has three married daughters, spread around the country keeping her busy touring the country to keep up with her daughters and her three grandchildren.

Diana was first introduced to red wine when her father took the family out for Sunday lunch. Her mother always a Hans Christof or Liebfraumilch whereas Diana had a very small glass of her father's Chateauneuf du Pape or Nuits St George. And to this day Chateauneuf du Pape is one of her favourite wines, (after Chinon, Bourgueil and

Saumur Champigny of course). Diana has made many visits to France to taste and enjoy wine. She has built up a large interest in wine over many years.

The company stood in the Hall as the trumpets sounded for the entry of the new inductees as they were conducted to the top table. Commandeur George Wilks said the grace and the meal commenced. Sénéchal Robert Wills described the wines between courses. We had hoped that the Chef would describe similarly, but the need for last minute culinary activity forbade. But notes were supplied so that we could know a little more about the food.

Party Ingredients, our caterers were excellent. Their presentation was impeccable, the food was unusual and full of flavour, with a touch of Anjou. The wines chosen complemented the meal.

Vintners' was an old friend for those who were members in the seventies. Those who were new to the Hall were impressed, in particular the display of the silver and gold plate. In those surroundings, the wine and the food combined to give us a memorable evening.

Our Délégué Générale, Fay Landau MBE, introduced John Avery, (of Avery's Bristol) a freeman of the Vintners Company. He welcomed the Commanderie to Vintners and told us of the work of the freemen, and the history of the Company.

The Grand Commandeur addressed the company thus:

"Rabelaisian greeting to you all and welcome to this special Millenium Chapitre, celebrating at the same time our thirtieth anniversary".

He spoke of the link with Vintners' Hall. Our first Chapitre was held here in 1970, with Robert Cointreau the first Grand Commandeur followed

by Col. Hector Mackenzie. He commented on the presence of Officier Daphne Mackenzie with her son, Chevalier Christopher. Derek spoke of the early Officers, some who are no longer with us and some still very active. Many of our distinguished members were inducted at Vintners'. He talked about the other activities in the Hall: the Wine Trade Club and the Education Committee. Our Grand Commandeur reviewed our good relationships in France, and the events in the home country through the year, particularly our Summer activity. The Wivenhoe weekend was a new and very successfully event thanks to the efforts of Chef de Protocol Owen Collins.

At this point Derek proposed a toast to the Confrerie.

He then spoke of apologies from Chevaliers who were not able to be with us. In particular, the Clements and the Hattons, stout attenders, who were unable to come because of ill health. All assembled sent their best wishes for complete recovery and regards.

Derek thanked those who had worked to provide a delightful evening: Peter Bouch, Owen Collins, Robert Wills and Geoffrey Wheal.

The Grand Commandeur asked all to join with him for the toast to the Inductees.

Arthur Prince replied for the inductees. He said that the inductees could only be overawed to be the centrepiece of the Chapitre Millénaire in "this illustrious venue". He referred to his friendships forged on Loire trips and events. He commended his fellow inductees to avail themselves of these opportunities to wallow in the historical association between the two countries.

In a light and humorous vein he spoke about his trips with Chevaliers, and the pleasure enjoyed with them. PFB.



The Management Committee send all Chevaliers, their spouses and families. Rabelaisian Greetings,, Happy Christmas and a healthy New Year. We look forward to enjoying your company and fellowship in 2001

Please turn over and read the notes.

The Trésorier's Note

As your new Trésorier, I send my warmest New Year greeting to all Chevaliers but I have to couple this with a reminder that subscriptions become due on January 1st.

There is no change in the amount since last year.
They are £15 for one. £22.50 if your spouse is a Chevalier.

If you already pay by bankers order, there is nothing more for you to do, so please accept my thanks and relax with another glass of Loire wine.

If you would like to pay by bankers order from now on - and this saves both you and me a lot of time.

The Bank is HSBC, 168 High Street, Guildford, Surrey GU1 3YU.

The sort code is 40-22-26. The account number 21802208.

If you would like a bankers order, ring me on 01306 884032 and I will send you one.

If you prefer to pay by cheque please send this to me payable to 'Sacavin', the rates are as above:

To: Michael Forster, "The Clearing" Deepdene Wood, Dorking Surrey, RH5

Notes for your diaries

Management Committee meeting - Thursday 1 February 2001

AGM and Supper Queens Club - Saturday 24 March 2001

Summer Tasting and luncheon at the Forsters - Saturday 23 2001 June (provisional)

Loire trip - Wednesday 29 September to Sunday 2 October (provisional)

Management Committee meetings dates to be agreed



Provisional plans from the Management Committee - The biennial trip to the Loire

At our 14th December meeting we made plans. Ernest and Krystina Lee will visit the Sancerre area, to find a suitable hotel and a general reconnaissance. The most likely dates would be from Wednesday 29th September to Sunday 2nd October. The basic package will be five days, four nights. Those who wish to attend the Angers Chapitre, will drive there on the Saturday and leave on the Sunday. The arrangements will be made and booked for those who take that option. Those who stay in Sancerre will be at leisure, also leaving on the Sunday. As usual,, members can arrange more days if they wish. More information will be available at the AGM in March 2001. *These plans will be provisional until then.*