

SACAVIN



COURIER

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

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SUMMER 2001

First an apology for a gap in the Courier's rather loose publication schedule! For many reasons our readers have missed a Spring edition, but we hope that the content in this piece should make amends. We look back for the AGM and Supper in March and the Summer event. Unusually we have news from Angers thanks to Michel Leterme in France and Chevalier Ernest Lee's translation. We can look forward too for the Loire trip to Sancerre via Angers in September. Do look for the last page for "Dates for your diaries". Some are new.



In March the Commanderie assembled at The Queen's Club in Kensington to open the Sacavin year with Chevaliers with their guests and spouses. This was a new and interesting venue. We hear of the club when the Stella Artois tournament takes place just before Wimbledon each year. Geoffrey Wheal, our new Chef de Cuisine had taken worked hard to provide an interesting and comfortable home for our Supper and AGM.

The AGM was conducted by the Grand Commandeur in his usual thoughtful and courteous manner. He called the meeting to order to hear nineteen apologies. The AGM 2000 minutes were approved. Derek pointed out that the Management Committee report had been circulated and asked for comments.

A broad discussion ensued. Some ideas were aired and passed to the Management Committee for their perusal. Membership number is still a worry. Chevaliers need to be aware that they should bring suitable people for induction.

In June the Wivenhoe weekend was a resounding success, due to the work of Chef de Protocol Owen Collins. It was suggested that a similar event should be arranged for the years when there is no trip to France - the "even" years. A summer event for 2002 is in the embryo stage.

In November Le Chapitre du Millénaire was also a success. We had budgeted on a minimum of sixty and finished with ninety-six. We believe this was due to a mixture of Vintners and the Millenium. The evening went well, the caterers were excellent. We have our problems with cost in the Liveries in the City and our small numbers. Around sixty is too small and one hundred is more viable. We were able to see a surplus to balance the previous last events' deficits.

We look forward to 2001. Ernest Lee has offered to be our "Chef des Expéditions" for 2001. His knowledge of the area and his fluent French will be a great help. Ernest, supported by Krystyna talked about what he has done and what will be done to deliver a rather different trip. We expect to attend the Angers Chapitre during a short stop in that City before we go on to the Sancerre/Pouilly area. More detail will be available later.

The meeting closed and the vin d'honneur was offered. An extended time was enjoyed with the opportunity to circulate and talk with more friends. The meal was well presented by very

competent staff in pleasant surroundings. It was a generally relaxed and happy evening. PFB



Summer Events always go well as Chevaliers with their spouses work hard and the result is always good food, good friendship, good wines and fine ambience. The weather does not always join in; that never spoils an event, but it does help if the weather is fine. This time it could not be better. Frank Coe reminds us of a wonderful day.

Before the end of this short article, I shall run out of superlatives because the function was just perfect. Blessed with a lovely June day, we met at our Tresorier's house in Dorking. Perched high on a hill in Deepdene, we sat on a terrace overlooking the lovely garden and beyond, views of Box Hill, Ranmore and Denbies' vineyards. Typical English countryside with a French flavour!

A glass or so of sparkling Saumur produced that relaxed atmosphere when friends have time to chat and make new friends, which is one of the many advantages of being a Chevalier.

Sadly, three of our most important officers were unable to come because of illness. Commandeur Robert Wills, Chancelier Peter Bouch and Chef de Protocol Owen Collins. We missed them all and sent best wishes for speedy recoveries.

After a suitable welcome by our Grand Commandeur we were introduced to the tutored tasting given by Chevalier and Master of Wine, Maggie McNie. Trained as an opera singer, Maggie had no trouble to make herself heard in the open air, with some aircraft noise, to about forty people. There followed the tasting of six wines - three whites and three reds. Two of the whites were dry: a Savennières and a Pouilly Fumé and one very sweet, a Bonnezeaux. The

reds were Menetou-Salon, Saumur Champigny and Chinon. Maggie has the ability to explain all details about a wine - the soil in which it grows, the characteristic of the grape and something about the history of the grower. This sort of explanation, laced with a delightful sense of humour, made this for me a tasting to remember.

John Whitcutt gave a vote of thanks on behalf of us all, and I admire his knowledge and memory of the wines we had just tasted.

Now it was time for lunch and what a lunch! The food was ideally matched by the two wines, selected by Audrey and Julian Thompson, who have a place in France and brought them back, for which thanks. They were very good.

The whole aspect of this great occasion was brought to mind soon after lunch when a hen partridge wandered across the lawn, followed by her brood.

I started by saying this was a perfect day and most certainly it was, but those things don't just happen. Careful and detailed planning and much hard work was done by a number of people. Our thanks are due to them all and particularly Michael and Madeleine Forster who hosted the occasion, and their near neighbours John and Diana Whitcutt. FGC



Our relationships with Angers and all that stands for, is sometimes a little misty. Recently we found that we were cherished when we decided to go to Sancerre rather than to the Anjou/Saumur areas. They are enjoying their vendange Chapitre with us at a Sunday lunch. So we can share their annual induction, still in the Greniers Saint Jean. The new Grand Maître Pierre Aguilas who succeeded Maurice Escher believes in communication. Ernest Lee has provided the translation.

Pierre Aguilas, the new Grand Maître of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Sacavin d'Anjou has inaugurated an information bulletin for the French branch. In Bulletin No 1 (December 1999) he explained his reasons for doing so: "We represent the wines of Anjou and of Saumur - and indeed wine in general - and we should publicise the work we do and our plans for future action."

The Grand Maitre points out that Chevaliers will be drawn from three main social groups: wine producers, wine merchants, and the general public - wine drinkers who are customers of wine producers and wine merchants.

In Bulletin No 1, the Grand Maitre discusses the prospects for the 1999 wines. He suggests that sparkling wine ("les vins à bulles") will be excellent - which bodes well for our future vins d'honneur! - as will both red and rosé wines. He forecasts that unseasonal rain might harm the production of some white wines.

In Bulletin No 2 (June 2000) tribute is paid to the former Grand Maitre, Maurice Escher. The "Grand Conseil" is also listed:

- President: Pierre Aguilas
- 1er Vice-President: Pierre-Yves Tijou
- 2eme Vice-President: Marc Morgat
- Chef du Protocole, Grand Connetable: Michel Fleur is "High Constable"
- Secrétaire General, Grand Tabellion Jean-Louis Robin this translates into the delightful (unfortunately obsolescent) English term "scrivener"
- Tresorier, Grand Argentier: Bernard Brault

- Adjoint Connetable: Jean-Pierre Bernheim. The Adjoint is Deputy.
- Adjoint Tabellion, Gazetier: Roger Papillon
- Eschanson: Claude Daheullier. "Echanson" is sometimes translated as "cup bearer", but the actual duties of an eschanson also included pouring wine (for an important person)
- Autre Echanson: Jean-Louis Douet.
- Relations Exterieures: Rene Bouin, Pierre Keller, (Canada), Clause Verdier, (Angleterre) Michel Leterme
- Co-opted: Christian Asselin

The French evidently think of us as representing "England", whereas our official title uses the term "Grande Bretagne". Maybe a little diplomatic tidying-up is required here.

From this list, it is interesting to note the inclusion of Claude Daheullier - a vigneron that we visited during the Loire trip of 1997 (and a mean dancer of "The Madison" at chapitres!).

In Bulletin No 3 (April 2001, Jean-Louis Robin considers the vendanges of 2000. He anticipates that there will be a number of very fine white wines, particularly dry whites. The "liquoreux" appellations, however, suffered from adverse climatic conditions.

Our trip to the Loire, proposed for 2001, was featured in this bulletin. It is hoped that relations - including communications - between our branch of the Sacavin family and the "mother house" in France will continue to be strengthened. **EVL**



The Courier would not be complete without Sénéchal Robert Wills' dissertation of his voyage up the Loire river, history and of course the wines and cuisines. It is sad that Robert is not well and has been for some time. We hope that we will soon hear his deep cheerful voice again. We miss his sense of humour and his wisdom. I was wondering how I could have a complete Courier without his help when a packet arrived by post. It was another script - enough for two. Typical Robert. He writes

Mention Chinon, and of course we Sacavins think of our Maitre Francois Rabelais. Would that we knew more of his life, for it is not known for certain when he was born, nor when he died and there are periods when he drops out of the records completely. Most authorities agree that he was born in 1494, possibly during the night of February 3 or the morning of February 4, probably at the little family farm at La Devinière, some 52 km southwest of Tours. His father, Antoine, was a member of the legal profession. the family was well-to-do middle class. There were four children, a daughter Françoise and three sons, Jamet, Antoine and François. For all his subsequent abilities, the Rabelais we value is the lover of convivial company, lively conversation and the more pleasant things of life; particularly food, wine and graceful living. His books make constant reference to the local dishes and wines of the Touraine and, as its adopted son, it is his statue that stands on the quayside at Chinon, gazing away from the river towards the main square, musing perhaps on the motto he bequeathed to the little town, "Beuvez toujours, vous ne mourrez jamais". ("Drink constantly and live forever").

But enough, it is time to resume our journey through the vineyards of the Touraine, where a succession of river valleys run east-west through the region and it seems that every valley has its own AOC with the character of the local wine, strongly influenced by individual soils and micro-climates.

On our way, we should take a look at the chateau at Ussé, eight miles north-east of Chinon, just a short distance from the south bank of the Loire. A magical skyline of towers, spires and fortifications, it is said to have inspired the 17th century writer of fairy tales, Charles Perrault, to write the 'Tales of Mother Goose' which included 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Red Riding Hood'!

The region is noted for its wonderful white wines, but most areas make rosé and red and the cellars, carved out of the tufa, provide perfect conditions, with their constant temperature of around 12°C. for the ageing and production of sparkling wines.

Broadly speaking, it is the Chenin Blanc that is used for the dry white wines of the western Touraine, but approaching the hills of Sancerre, the climate changes from temperate to more continental and it is the earlier ripening Sauvignon Blanc grape that holds sway in the eastern

Touraine. The Touraine appellation, (AOC 1939), covers the whole of the region and within it, are four areas that have gained their own special identification:

- Touraine-Azay-le-Rideau AOC 1953 (white) and 1977 (rosé)
- Touraine-Amboise AOC 1955
- Touraine-Mesland AOC 1955
- Touraine-Noble Joué AOC 1998

Each of these appellations have their own characteristics and although not geographically adjacent, we'll look at each of them in turn.

The vineyards around Azay-le-Rideau, lie north-east of Chinon only a few kilometres south-east of Tours. Azay is a little jewel of a town, crowned by its wonderful early 16th century moated chateau, partly built over the river Indre. Like the vigneron of Bourgeuil most of the growers here have only small holdings of vines and they have to earn a large part of their income from other fruit crops, largely from the acres of espaliered trees of apple and pear. Touraine-Azay-le-Rideau is noted for its dry to off dry, Chenin white wines, but in vintage years such as 1990, some producers let noble rot shrivel the grapes to achieve richly honeyed flavoured moelleux.

The wines have a strong undercut of dryness even when sweet and those from good producers will always improve with age, indeed the best can be kept for ten years or more.

The acknowledged top producer is Robert Denis at La Chapelle-Saint-Blaise who consistently makes well balanced, richly perfumed deliciously rounded wines.

Rosé Azay-le-Rideau is made by a direct press of the grapes of the Grolleau, (minimum 60%) with varying blends of Malbec, or the Cot as it is known here and Cabernet Franc. The wines are aromatic dry and fruity and can age surprisingly well.

The vineyards of Touraine-Amboise, lie on both banks of the Loire some 25km to the east of Tours. Once known for its well balanced off-dry to medium dry white wines, today it is the red grapes of Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon, Cot and Gamay that are to be seen on two thirds of the acreage. The Gamay is usually the dominant variety with blends of the Cot and the Cabernet Franc, to provide colour and bolster the resultant wine. The local name given to wines of such a

blend is 'Francois ler' and many vintners market a wine under that name. These are full, supple, lively, not overly tannic wines that mature well and my favourite comes from the Moreau domaine at Cangey.

Amboise is an attractive, bustling little town, dominated by the remains of its once magnificent chateau complex, now about one-fifth of what it was in the 16th century. Built on an ancient fortified site, the chateau was a favourite residence of the French royalty during the hundred year war. Kings Louis XI and Charles VIII were born in the chateau and the twenty-eight year old Charles died here in 1498, after hitting his head on a low lintel on his way to see a game of fives being played in the moat. François I was especially fond of this place, having been brought up here from the age of six and where he lived from 1500 to 1518. François was a great patron of the arts and the French Renaissance movement was marked by his encouragement of Italian artists to work in France. In the spring of 1516, he invited the 64 year old Leonardo de Vinci to Amboise and arranged for him to live at the manor house of Clos-Lucé, where he lived for the last three years of his life and where he is buried. Interestingly, the Chateau complex is now owned by the Foundation St-Louis, set-up by the Compté de Paris, the pretender to the French throne.

Once famed for its Chenin white wines, today the red grapes of Cot, Gamay and Cabernet Sauvignon are producing its more interesting rosé and red 'François ler' wines.

Mesland is one of the Touraine's oldest wine producing areas and although still producing pleasant Chenin white and rosé wines, it now specialises in warm easy drinking reds, blends of Gamay, Cot and the Cabernet Franc. The best are thought to be the wines of Vincent Girault.

Just outside Tours, a vineyard that was well known from the 18th century to early 20th century, has been replanted with Pinot Gris, Meunier and Pinot Noir to produce a red 60:30:10

blended wine, Touraine-Joué. It seems an interesting wine, but with only a small production, it is hard to find and I suspect it is only obtainable at Tours.

I try to avoid spending too much time in large town and cities when on holiday, but the Quartier Plumereau, the old quarter of Tours is well worth a visit. This, the most lively and picturesque part of the city, lies north of the Basilica of St. Martin and contains many examples of houses dating from the 14th-16th centuries, albeit largely restored following the devastation suffered in the last war. The Basilique Saint-Martin is a 19th century building, but the crypt contains a fragment of the skull of Saint Martin, all that was claimed to have survived of his body, after the Huguenot destruction of the original building in 1552.

Saint Martin was one of the most popular saints of the middle ages. Born in Pannonis now Hungary, around 316, he followed his father as a soldier in the Roman army. Tradition has it that whilst quartered in Amiens, he tore his cloak in two to clothe a nearly naked beggar and shortly afterwards, a vision of Christ appeared before him, wearing the cloak he had given away! He was baptised shortly after, imprisoned and discharged from the army. He became a monk at Ligugé and his piety as a committed Christian eventually led him to becoming Bishop of Tours in 372, although he continued to live as a monk, first in a cell near the cathedral and later in the monastery of Marmoutier. His twenty-five years episcopate was marked by the founding of other monasteries, which he saw as a potent means of converting the more 'conservative' rural pagan population to Christianity. He quickly attained a growing reputation for the healing of lepers, the raising of a dead man to life and the destruction of heathen temples and sacred trees. One story has him ordering the felling of a pine tree dedicated to a heathen god. Angered, the pagans tied him to the tree, on the side which the tree was supposed to fall. But a mighty hurricane blew up, the tree fell on to its opposite side and the sight of this miracle caused a prompt conversion of the locals!





Dates for your diary

Management Committee Meeting - **Thursday 30 August 2001**. "Media,Media" at 11am

Loire trip begins at Angers - **Saturday 22 September 2001**
(If details are not to hand before you depart, information will be available in the Hotel Ibis)

The Chapitre, a luncheon at the Greniers Saint Jean, Angers - **Sunday 23 September 2001**

End of Loire trip at Sancerre - **Friday 28 September 2001**

Chapitre at The Café Royal - Saturday 24 November 2001

It has recently been refurbished. Many Commandeurs, Officers and Chevaliers
will remember The Café Royal with affection.

No title yet, but further details will come. This is not one to miss.

Management Committee Meeting - **Thursday 31 January 2002**. "Media, Media" at 11am

Supper and AGM - **Saturday 18 March 2002** at The Queen's Club

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