



Sacavin Courier



No. 41 May 2002

Dates for your diary – page 1

The Sacavin visit to Vinopolis – page 1

A trip to Anjou 1981! - page 3

A report from the AGM 2002 – page 4

The results of the questionnaire – page 5

Dates for your diaries

The Summer Event at Rickmansworth Saturday June 22 2002

The calling letters are included in this copy of Sacavin Courier

Management Committee meeting in early October 2002

Date will be circularised to committee members

The Chapitre at the Bakers' Hall on Thursday 21 November 2002

Calling letters will be posted in early October

The Supper and AGM 2003 on 15 March 2003, (tentative)

Calling letters will be posted at the end of January



The new-look Courier starts with a recount of our First Halberdier's report in the London January winter - a new venture. Whilst there were problems on the night, Chevaliers enjoyed the trip to Vinopolis. John writes

I discovered Vinopolis in November 2000 when I was invited to a corporate blind tasting event. To my utter surprise I came a close second to the eventual winner, (and I have a signed copy of the author Oz Clarke's Vinopolis World Wine Guide to prove it). A combination of sheer luck 90% and intuition! I came away thinking that a visit to Vinopolis could be a good venue for Sacavins. Your Committee supported this. After the event, a brief aside from the Chancellor invited me to write this piece - "as you know all about the place", for the Courier.

Background information both on Vinopolis and the many other local places of interest were sent out to Chevaliers. There was an opportunity for the intrepid to have a day out on Bankside, apparently the Soho of medieval London. Unfortunately, a severe weather depression coincided with our visit which curtailed many of our plans. Our party of brave souls, however, had an interesting afternoon

in Borough Market - which has an amazing range of foodstuffs on display not only from the UK but internationally. This was followed by a brief visit to Southwark Cathedral, expertly renovated and now surrounded by gardens which were opened last year by Nelson Mandela. Then we took a brisk walk past the 'Golden Hind' replica in Queenhythe Dock and the 'Clink' museum brought us to Vinopolis where our party gradually assembled. We then moved off in three groups each led by a Vinopolis tour guide, all of us being armed with seven tasting vouchers.

Vinopolis consists of a three acre site west of London Bridge, under the high early Victorian railway arches built in yellow London Stock brickwork which has been expertly cleaned and renovated. Each brick vault is themed to a particular wine producing area.

The tour starts with the origins of wine with appropriate ancient artefacts on display and then into the Wine Odyssey - a journey into the world's wine growing countries starting naturally, with La belle France and its diverse regions - Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Rhone, Loire and others.

I noted a splendid life sized bronze of our Patron Rabelais in the French area and had a vague suspicion that our Chancellor might have unwittingly modelled for this after a heavy going Chapitre! I liked the idea of identifying the various grapes used throughout the world by individual faces. The Cabernet Sauvignon for instance depicted as a choleric male with drooping moustache and a napoleonic hat.

By this time our group was becoming rather parched but on a rather busy Saturday evening we received VIP treatment from our guide who happened to be MR BIG . He is an American from California with the title of House Manager. An added bonus was that we had rather full tastings without having to give up our precious tasting vouchers. One piece of advice Brian Sullivan imparted was that the 2001 vendange in Germany was producing the best vintage for quality wines for fifty years.

It was amazing to learn that the height of vineyards in Argentina are highest by far in the world. The North American area was impressive, especially the production of eiswein in Canada. The Australian display is innovative. One you had to sit in a simulated airplane and watch an informative film at the cockpit end about the wine industry in 'Oz'

The Italian section proved amusing with its row of modern motor scooters - complete with small screens above the handlebars simulating travel down ancient alleyways in Verona. La dolce vita lived again - particularly after tasting splendid Chianti.

After passing an area dispensing 'Gins of the World' we arrived finally in a large hall contiguous with our starting point where ports were dispensed to those canny enough to retain a tasting voucher or two. A brief look was taken to the well equipped gift shop and beyond to the Neal's Yard cheese counter and a foray into the majestic Wine Warehouse. All the wines were available to purchase and tasting in Vinopolis. Thereby we completed our tour.

We all then retired to the Wine Wharf - a bistro within the Vinopolis complex for an exclusive gathering on the mezzanine floor for a pre-ordered cold buffet, plus wine individually purchased from the bar below. This provided an opportunity to wind down and circulate. Unfortunately, the cold buffet did not live up to our expectations, particularly in quantity, which resulted in the party breaking up rather prematurely. Finally we wended our way home having experienced an attraction which is surprisingly unique in the world.

JBW

~~~~~  
**A**nother visit to Anjou? But this was a vintage visit in May 1981. A small group of Sacavins and their wives paid a visit to Anjou. They were fortunate to avoid the frustrating delays occasioned by a Civil Service strike. They were fortunate to exchange the cold, wet weather of England for the sunshine of Anjou. And fortunate too to enjoy the generous and varied hospitality of their French hosts in the genial company of Rabelasian companions. Courier is indebted for the anonymous author, we suspect Officier Pat Salzedo who launched the first Sacavin Courier and produced it until she retired from the Management Committee in 1995. She is still an active member. Many will remember her. We still call her when we need help. We will continue the use of Couriers from the archives. So here is the report of May 1981. . . . . PFB



**I**mmediately on arrival at Nantes, a coach was waiting to take us to the Chateau du Cleray in Vallet, where, under the expert guidance of M. Jean Sauvion we were introduced to the delights of the products of his cellars. After this tasting, we were entertained, in the impressive surrounding of the Chateau, to a splendid buffet lunch with accompanying wines. Muscadet at its best. Then on to Saumur, an interesting drive through the Anjou countryside, following the course of the Loire, which, because of the previous heavy rains, was in high flood carrying down great trees in its torrent. A very pleasant interlude in our journey was a visit to Robert Cointreau's delightful home and garden. Mme. Cointreau entertained us to a sumptuous and very acceptable afternoon tea.

The next morning we visited the famous vineyard, the Clos de la Coulée de Serrant. The Chateau de la Roche-aux-Moines has a long history dating back to the 12th century when it was a strong fortress overlooking the Loire from its position on the rocky heights. Our tour was conducted by Mme. A. Joly herself, pointing out to us with the enthusiasm and expert knowledge of a proud owner, the interesting and beautiful aspects of her splendidly maintained estate. At the foot of the vineyard is a charming house and an old monastery with its ancient cellars. The vineyard is worked almost entirely by horses and by hand, the terrain being too steep for machines to turn on the narrow terraces. The Chenin Blanc is the cépage used and the vines growing ranged from five to eighty years old. After the tour Mme. Joly entertained us for tasting in the beautiful salon in her home. The afternoon was spent at the Cointreau distillery. Our Grand Maitre Robert Cointreau had, during the morning, entertained Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, in his home and afterwards touring the Distillery. Our party was shown an explanatory film of the distillery and then taken on a tour with explanations of the various processes carried out in this fine modern factory complex.

The following day was one of the highlights of our whole visit. In the morning we drove to the cellars of Bouvet-Ladubay where we spent some hours with M. Patrice Monmousseau following the various stages in the production of the sparkling Bouvet-Ladubay prepared by the champagne method. Still in the cellars, the tour was followed by a tasting and a delicious buffet lunch

accompanied by the appropriate wines. The evening was the occasion of the grand combined chapter - The Chapitre de Plantagenets - with the French Confrérie. The chapter was preceded by a very comprehensive tour of the Abbaye Fontevraud, a tour during which our own Chevalier David Burroughs performed prodigiously, translating the text given by the French speaking guide. The chapter was held in the imposing, magnificent hall of the medieval abbey. The officers of the British

Commanderie robed and marched with their French colleagues. The induction, carried out in French, was completed for about two dozen Chevaliers, from Great Britain, France, Belgium and Switzerland. Then followed the magnificent banquet. The intervals between courses were enlivened

by an entertainment, the performers in which were in Plantagenet dress; the leader could have been Rabelais himself. The acts included an escapologist, a levitation act, fire eating acts and performing dogs. During the meal, various experts expounded on the wines being served. Our Grand Commandeur replied suitably to the Grand Maitre's welcome to the British party. The celebration continued until the early hours and members of the party were glad that the following day was a 'free' day with no official visits planned.

The final day dawned with the beautiful sunshine, ideal weather for a pleasant journey to St. Cyr-en-Bourg to the Cooperative of the Vignerons of Saumur. The Cooperative uses ancient caves cut into the soft calcareous rock, down four storeys, to cellars twenty five metres deep. Here we spent half the morning in the company of M.M. Neau who at the banquet had described a number of wines. We explored the cellars and tasted the excellent wines of the Cooperative. The coach took us to Montreuil Bellay where the party had lunch 'en plein air' almost in the shade of the Chateau overlooking the very pleasant village. Then on to the plane, to return to the dismal cold and wet of London.

The visit was an unqualified success, a success due to the work of our Chancelier Chris Wilkinson in arranging the visits to vineyards and to Chevalier Nick Kyriakides who arranged with meticulous care all our travel by plane and coach. The Hotel Budan in Saumur, overlooking the Loire, was our centre for the stay.



The Annual General Meeting was on March 16<sup>th</sup> at The Queen's Club at Kensington. Fifty four Chevaliers and their guests were called to order by the Grand Commandeur, Derek Sheen.

The Grand Commandeur spoke to the report. The year had been enjoyable and the events were well attended. One hundred Chevaliers had paid their subscription. We needed a steady flow of new members on the Management Committee and in the Commanderie. As ever, we have only one source - the present members. He said we are happy to be here, in The Queen's Club for a second visit through our Chef de Cuisine, Geoffrey Wheal. Our Chapitre at The Café Royal bought happy remembrances in a newly refurbished Café Royal.

Our Summer event was a superb day in Michael and Madelaine's garden. Chevalier Maggie Mcnie's tasting was a tour de force; a mixture of professional knowledge, humour and experience.

Our visit to France was new: we met our confrères in Angers and enjoyed their hospitality over two days. Their Chapitre was cancelled due to a lack of numbers. Nevertheless, our friendship was strengthened. There may be a reciprocal visit to London. There are no firm plans. Our trip in Sancerre was fun, interesting and educational. The vignerons gave us time, and opportunities to taste the products and discuss their merits. Due to Chevalier Ernest Lee, the whole trip was very well planned and brilliantly executed. A substantial refund was much appreciated.

The Management Committee have decided to seek the membership's views by using a simple questionnaire. We wish to understand the members' preferences. The returns that were sent out to those who attended the AGM and those who sent their answers in the post are very help and interesting.

The Grand Commandeur thanked the work done by the Committee - a team. All the committee members work. But he spoke particularly of The Chef de Protocole, Owen Collins; Trésorier, Michael Forster; Chef de Cuisine, Geoffrey Wheal; Chancelier, Peter Bouch. He believes that we always need new blood. He will be delighted if you talk to him or any one of a Committee member.



The questionnaire results are very clear. We had 38 returns, 25 from the AGM and 13 in the post. Some boxes are not filled. It was a good return, around 40% of the subscription members. We counted by using the "score" boxes on the sheet, the numbers of people and reading the 21 notes written on the bottom half.

First we asked you for your views on the venues for the City and the higher costs.

Is it worth to pay more for a City venue?

| People preferred | "Scores" | People differed | "Scores" |
|------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| 20               | 77%      | 12              | 23%      |

The second question was about the idea of a "night away" Chapitre

| People preferred | "Scores" | People differed | "Scores" |
|------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| 28               | 89%      | 11              | 11%      |

Of course these numbers are hedged with ifs and buts, and we will remember the notes which were written on the sheet. Inevitably, needs will not be the same. Those who do not want to pay for more in the City, may well come along if the ticket price is reasonable. We think we may be able to do that this year. Watch this space!