



Sacavin Courier



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Dates for your diaries

Management Committee meeting **15 May 2003** at
The Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11 am



Loire trip 2003 – **Tuesday 23 to Saturday 27 September**. The calling letter will be sent out during
May. Full payment should be sent by the end of June



Management Committee meeting **Thursday 9 October 2003** at
The Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11 am



The 2003 Chapitre at The Bakers Hall, **Thursday 27 November 2003**



A Sacavin Wedding – Mackenzie/McIntosh. The Marriage took place on Saturday 21st December 2002 (shortest day – longest night!) between Chevalier Christopher Mackenzie and Lucilla McIntosh. Christopher is, of course, the youngest son of our dear colleague Officier Daphne and our late Grand Commandeur.

The scene was set in the delightful parish church of Aberlady on the southern shores of the Firth of Forth and the Rev. Canon John Lindsay officiated whilst the Very Rev. Michael Hickford, Dean of Inverness, gave the address. The guests were greeted at the church door by a lone piper and the service, in keeping with the pre Christmas atmosphere, included two popular carols. The bride was given away by her father, Derek McIntosh, and was accompanied by her bridesmaids and attended by a group of young page boys. The bridegroom and his best man, brother Roderick, were both kilted as were a large number of the male guests. This was, in fact, a happy coming together of Lowland and Highland families. The reception was held at the bride's family home, Linksfield. Aberlady is in the heart of famous Scottish golfing territory with Open course, Muirfield, only a mile or two to the east. Hazel and I were privileged to be guests and before Christopher and Lucilla left for their honeymoon to South Africa, Christopher expressed to us the hope that he would be able to bring his new bride, to our Chapitre next year.

DCS



The Grape Harvest in Anjou: the Gods have blessed us. After a mediocre summer, September rescued the situation, to the extent that the 2002 vintage promises to be excellent. Vincent Lecointre, the new President of the Union of Producers of Coteaux de Layon, doesn't beat about the bush: "The Gods have blessed us", says the winegrower from Champ-sur-Layon.

For him, as for others, the-year 2002 is reminiscent of 1996 - a magnificent year. "We had not dared to hope for this after the summer we have had." Clément Baraut, a technician at the Departmental Wine growing Development Centre, is even more enthusiastic, since he compares 2002 to 1997. "The Chenin grapes have never been as beautiful as this year," he assures us. "The dry whites have been extraordinary. The sweet and semi-sweet wines may well be excellent too, if the fine weather continues. We shall be drinking very fine Anjou Rouge" predicts this specialist. "Where we might come unstuck is with Anjou Villages: the rain we had last week did not help the cabernet.

"The harvest was excellent for chardonnay, sauvignon, gamay and grolleau varieties. To justify the recorded levels of sugar, some growers have even had to swear that they had not chaptalised*! To sum up the comments of the Departmental Development Centre: "A very fine vintage – fruity, natural sweetness, fairly acidic. Not a heavy yield, but a high alcohol content."

Pascal Collier, Head of the Angers Centre of INAO**, shares his colleague's opinion: "It will be a great vintage, comparable to that of 1996". The chenins are extremely beautiful. We have very sweet grapes, but with good acidity.

Like everyone else, this engineer from INAO believes that the weather has produced this outcome. "After a damp summer, the weather turned dry. The north-north-east wind dried the leaves and prevented the development of any rot. Thanks to this magic wand, the grape harvest overall will be good to very good and may even be exceptional. It is of a marvellous quality. We are talking about something that could be outstanding."

We still have to juggle with the weather. But, since the cabernet is ripe, we should be able to gather it in quickly. As for the chenin, "Almost no gray rot, only noble rot." At the present moment the weather is just right for the vines, but Pascal Cellier sees another reason for the almost unbroken series of good years: "The winegrowers are working better and better. The vineyards of Anjou-Saumur have made progress, even since 1997. In

Champigny all the leaves were thinned this year - something that was not done a few years ago. There has been general 'grassing'. ***. Also, the counter - buds have been removed."

The Gods may have blessed the growers, but they have followed the advice of the poet.

La Fontaine: "Help yourself and God will help you."

** "Chaptalisation" is the addition of sugar to the natural wine juice, to increase the strength of the fermentation process.

** "INAO" is the Institute for Appellations d'Origine.

*** "The French term "enherbement" is obscure: we should enquire during our next visit!.

Translation of an article published in the Courier de l'Ouest (Angers) on 17.10.02. EVL



January is often a bleak month, full of anticlimax after the excesses of Christmas and with little to lift the spirits. But not for 48 chevaliers, their spouses and friends who found themselves, one dark evening, in London's RSJ Restaurant, a stone's throw from Waterloo station. Yes, it really does stand for Rolled Steel Joist; 1980's renovations incorporated so many of them that the name was adopted.

And what a great evening! Our Grand Commandeur introduced us to the owners, Nigel Wilkinson and Tom King. The former was to take us, by way of a wine tasting, along 500 km of the Loire, from Ancenis in the west to Pouilly in the east, and back again. For anyone unable to join our September excursions, this was a memorable substitute.

The RSJ specialises in Loire wines and we tried eight in all. There were four whites, 2001 and all dry: a Muscadet, a Touraine Sauvignon, a Pouilly Fumé and a Vouvray. The Muscadet was "sur lie", from Pierre Luneau and the Touraine from the Clos

Roche Blanche domaine where Didier Barouillet and Catherine Roussel practice both organic and biodynamic culture. With Nigel's commentary on just these two, it became clear that here was someone with a really deep knowledge and love of his subject. This was more than just an appreciation of good wine. The vineyards were brought to life for us, and the families tending them too, and we came to realise that they were Nigel's personal friends. We shared the pleasure he felt that Muscadet had shaken off its bad press and that Pierre was now one of a dozen or so good producers. We sympathised with Didier and Catherine when he told us they'd had to sell 9 hectares to reduce their workload.

And we quickly latched onto his doctrine that the way to make a good wine is to cut yield.

Pouilly Fumé producers in their greed, he said, had forgotten this and the appellation was getting left behind. One exception was "La Rambarde" from Landret-Guyollet. It was easy to concur, as those who had made the 2001 trip remembered meeting Sophie Guyollet and had been impressed by her modern, well-equipped, establishment. Some of us were reminded of her domaine maxim: "Let us uncork a little passion for you!" By now, Nigel's own passion for good wine was obvious. The Vouvrey Sec came from Didier and Catherine Champalou, a charming young couple producing some of the best examples of this appellation. Their wines have been gaining in popularity as the quality has increased, but prices remain reasonable.

The reds were St. Nicholas de Bourgueil, Saumur Champigny, Anjou Villages and Chinon. The first was Les Rouilleres, the basic 2001 offering from Frederic Mabileau, soft, succulent and very easy to drink. The Saumur Champigny was Chateau de Villeneuve 2001 from Jean-Pierre Chevallier.

This was reckoned to have the potential of '95 and '96. The secret was an immaculate vineyard with low yields, proving that the Loire can, indeed, produce a good red. But supplies are limited! For the Anjou Villages, Jean-Yves Le Breton's Domaine de Rochelles 2000 was an example of how a red Anjou doesn't have to be tannic, harsh and acidic. And Philippe Alliet, with his 2000 Chinon Tradition, provided the finale. It was perhaps the only disappointment. A very individual Chinon, needing several more years and so not yet at it's best.

Eight wines in 90 minutes! And a commentary delivered with an enthusiasm that was much appreciated, as was apparent from the applause following Felicity Sidders' vote of thanks on our behalf. An excellent dinner, with yet two more Loire wines, rounded off the evening perfectly. For that, and for organising the whole event, we must thank Fay Landau, who worked so hard to ensure that we all enjoyed ourselves. We left wondering why we hadn't discovered the RSJ before. For the Sacavin, it's an obvious venue and one well worth repeating. **JJ**

