



Sacavin Courier

NO. 44 DECEMBER 2003

Dates for your diaries, (below)

The Trésorier's Note, (page 2)

Salon des Vins de Loire, (page 2)

Colour Supplement, (page 3)

Chevaliers with wings, (page 4)

Loire wines under threat, (page 5)

Obituaries, (page 6)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Management Committee meeting Wednesday 14 January 2004 at
The Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11 am



A tasting and supper, RSJ Restaurant, Coin Street, London
Thursday 22 January 2004

Calling letters were dispatched 1 December 2003



AGM and supper at The Queens Club Saturday 13 March 2004
Calling letters will be posted late January 2004



SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Trésorier's Note

- Subscriptions are due on January 1st. The rate stays the same at £15, or £22.50 if your spouse is also a Chevalier.
- Most of you pay by bankers order so there is nothing more for you to do but accept my thanks for making my life simpler.
- If you prefer to pay by cheque, please send this to me, Michael Forster, payable to Sacavin, rates as above at:- The Clearing, Deepdene Wood, Dorking, Surrey. RH5 4BQ



SALON DES VINS DE LOIRE



Our September expedition to the western Loire was, of course, the high point of this year's activities, but certain of our number found good reason to make an earlier visit to the area. We are indebted to our Chef de Protocol for this report.

A contact made through Ernest, our "Chef de Expeditions", led to the Grand Commandeur receiving an invitation to attend the "Salon des Vins de Loire" held in Angers this February. Derek kindly asked me and two Chevaliers (our wives) to accompany him.

We decided to travel by train and anyone considering a visit to the Loire may be interested to know what a straightforward journey this was. We caught a morning Eurostar from Ashford having stayed overnight at a Travelodge (rather than risk the M25 morning traffic), changed to the TGV at Lille and reached our destination - Angers early afternoon. The train continued along the Loire Valley to, among other places, Ancenis, and I note that several on the September trip, travelling *sans voiture*, also found this a most convenient and relaxing way to make the journey.

As hoped Michel Leterme (Relations Exterieures - Angleterre) greeted us on the platform of Angers Station. He had learned

that morning that our Ibis Hotel reservation had been cancelled for that night and he had spent the day finding alternative rooms - not easy during the Salon des Vins. Fortunately the hotel he found - close to the station was fine and we would use it again in preference to Ibis.

After an excellent dinner, a comfortable night and petit déjeuner we were collected by no less a person than Pierre Aguilas, the Grand Maître, who whisked us through the outskirts of Angers to the site of the fair. We were then left to explore - Pierre had his own stand to look after.

The fair consists almost entirely of vigneron showing their produce. Perhaps we expected some equipment, machinery, wine accoutrements, and such but that did not lead to disappointment as we were persuaded to taste a variety wonderful Loire wines. We soon realised that if we were to survive the day we would have to call upon the services of the crachoir

We tasted many delightful old friends and made some splendid new acquaintances. Not least among the latter were some rosé wines. These have certainly improved in recent years and any of you who are still a bit sniffy about them – be warned we may well try one as a vin d'honneur at a future summer function.

We really were spoilt for choice and if we or others were to return another year it would be wise to prepare, perhaps by seeking out vigneronns we might call on during our biennial visit.

The Grand Maître found us at lunchtime and led us to the Salon's "Restaurant du Pecheur". As you might expect, Pierre is very well known and some mere mortals were moved from the best table to make room for him and his guests. We were treated to a mouth-watering selection of fish, washed down of course by even more wine, for which we did not use the crachoir.

After lunch it was no hardship to sample some of Pierre's own Coteaux de Layon and enjoy

travelling back in time to some of his "vintage" years. Another hour exploring the stands and we decided to catch the shuttle bus which conveniently for us ran to and from Angers Station and hence our hotel.

I could list some of the many wines we tried but I feel that this short report should concentrate more on the logistics of the visit. We only stayed two nights and another time would consider a third to visit other parts of the valley by rail. The fair does not offer an opportunity to purchase wine (unless you want to import a few hundred cases) but it is a most interesting experience for anyone who, like me has not previously visited. Of course you could always arrange an invitation to the Wine Trade Fair in London but somehow Salon des Vins de Loire seems the right place to be for a member of our Confrerie.

Brenda and I thank Ernest for acquiring the invitation and Derek for asking us to accompany Hazel and him. OC



COLOUR SUPPLEMENT: LOIRE 2003

Our trip to Ancenis this September was, in our Grand Commandeur's words, a stunning success. An excellent choice of visits and arrangements that went like clockwork, for which great credit should be given to Ernest Lee, our Chef des Expeditions. Our thanks also to Chevalier Des Holland, who has provided us with a most comprehensive write-up of our activities there, together with numerous photographs. To do it justice it was decided that, as a one-off, this issue of the Courier should be accompanied by a Colour Supplement, devoted entirely to his report. It is hoped that those who were unable to join us will get pleasure from living the experience through his eyes, while those who actually went can enjoy this "action replay".





The Commanderie de Grande Bretagne de la Confrérie des Chevaliers du Sacavin d'Anjou was formed in 1969 and the first Chapitre was held in the Vintners Hall on 27th Feb. 1970.

However, there are some of our number who were inducted into the French Confrérie rather than the British, where the requirements might be considered a little more onerous. Leslie and Laura Garner were two such intrepid Chevaliers. Leslie, as most readers will be aware, is one of our great story-tellers, so we asked him to describe what was required of them. This is what he had to say:

WE were inducted on 12th June 1971 in the cave Aux Greniers Saint Jean. In order to qualify we had to arrive by light aircraft at Angers [Avrille] aerodrome for three of the Rallye Aérien International des Vins, Fleurs et Châteaux d'Anjou. We managed to get there in 1969, 1970 and 1971.

I thought you might be interested in the following instructions on our invitation to the rally (exactly as written!):

"The competitors welcome on their landing at Angers will be taken to the hangar where the federation of viticultural syndicates shall test them on the tasting of wines of Anjou."

"The organisers wish each one to go on being satisfied with the welcome of Anjou will be able to refuse the belated engagements."

We enjoyed our flights to the rallies and always returned with pots of Hydrangeas in full bloom on the back seats of the aircraft looking as though we had two people in the back!!"

Leslie and Laura were not the only ones. Several other flying Chevaliers used to pilot themselves across the Channel to the little airfield at Angers to meet up with their French confrères. Those with their feet more firmly anchored to the ground might marvel at this way of visiting a wine-tasting! As veterans of the Sacavin will recall, the spirit of those early days of our Confrérie is symbolised by the flying hanap, in other words the winged chalice, which forms the centre-piece of the Sacavin emblem.





Competition from Australian and United States wine producers, not to mention South American and South African, is intensifying. Modern techniques, greater efficiencies and mass marketing mean that traditionally made French wines are under threat. How should French producers, particularly those on the Loire, respond? The following extract from a recent article in the Independent highlights a plan attributed to some leading wine producers, amongst whom is the Grand Maître, Pierre Aguilas.

According to The Independent, the plan would entail producing white, red and rosé wines under the label of 'Val de Loire'. The products would be targeted at new consumers - the youth of Northern Europe. The bottles would have simple - but attractive - labels, emphasising the name of the Loire.

The region would continue to produce its fine wines, but an undefined proportion of the region's production would be targeted at a new, lucrative and ever-expanding market - standardised wines, produced to meet predefined criteria of taste and quality.

France has produced wines of this type for years, generally in the less 'noble' regions such as Languedoc and l'Ardèche. What is being proposed - and the Val de Loire will be a test case in this respect - is that generic wines should be included in the French wine-production industry. Half a dozen new French labels would be created to compete with the Australian Jacob's Creek and Rosemount wines.

The Independent also reports the inevitable disagreement of certain sections of the profession - critics, oenologists who wish to preserve traditional practices and the Confédération Paysanne.

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For an analysis of the thinking behind the plan, we can turn to an interview with Pierre himself, recorded in the Courier de l'Ouest of 28/8/03.

**Q1** You say that the production of wine is endangered. What makes you say that?

**A1** The drop in consumption is obvious. Worse, the perception of our wine is becoming negative. It is no longer a fashionable drink. Less and less is bought in restaurants. There is over-production of Muscadet, dry Anjou is no longer in demand, Coteau-du-Layon sells for 16F a litre while the cost of production is 30F. Red wine is going through a bad period.

**Q2** What are the counter-attractions of New World wines?

**A2** We have AOC wines with reference to the ground, the climate, customs and practices, while our competitors sell their wines like industrial products, referring only to the grape. The Americans and Australians sell at relatively high prices but they do it more efficiently. In Great Britain our share of the market is in progressive decline.

**Q3** What defensive measures do you propose?

A3 If we have to compete in a given market, we must use the same weapons as our competitors. In France we also have wines which can be produced to a given standard, e.g. in the South of France. If we have to add oak chips, then why not do it?

Q4 And in the Val de Loire?

A4 Our strength is the geographical limitations of the various vignobles – and that is also our weakness. The consumer has the problem of reading and interpreting the descriptions of our wines. My customers sometimes ask me for 'vins de pays' and I have to tell them that I only produce AOC wines. There are other wine producing regions of France which sell wines under a generic regional name – Burgandy, Côtes-du-Rhône, Alsace, Champagne. Our region is basically the Loire, so why not seek an agreement for all our wines – vins de pays and AOC – to be marketed under the generic appellation 'Loire wine'? The vineyards around Angers are among those that have made great efforts in recent years to improve the quality of their wines, but these efforts have not been rewarded.

Q5 Will the local AOC designations be abolished then?

A5 Oh no, they are sacrosanct. There has been some drift and we must strengthen the controls, even. But this is not contradictory: you need the masses and you need the elite. Would Bordeaux enjoy its status without the existence of Mouton-Rothschild? And Champagne without Mumm and Mercier?

It is interesting that he still talks in terms of francs! But this debate that will run and run, and is one we will follow with interest. In the meantime, our objective remains to seek out fine wines from amongst the Loire producers and as long as we are successful in this we will continue to enjoy them.



Sadly, we have to report the death of two of our number. Writer and Restaurateur David Wolfe, a Chevalier since his induction at the Chapitre de Bacchus in 1993, has died of heart problems aged 70. And Bernard Partridge, a Chevalier of two year's standing, has died after a brave fight against cancer. In their obituaries we have included an extract from the Decanter magazine and material from the National Pig Association respectively.

#### David Wolfe, 1932-2003

What fun he was! He liked to describe himself as 'the short, fat man with the long, thin restaurant'. He was so short and fat that some of his friends were surprised he lived to see 70, as he had been suffering with heart trouble for some years. But he was merry and fat with an infectious sparkle in his eyes.

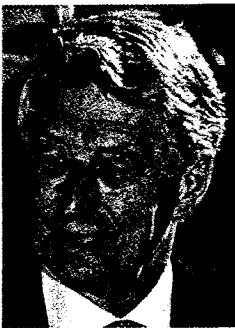
He was born in London, the son of a furrier, and tried his father's business but it did not suit him. He was a born gourmet with a vocation to be a restaurateur. The long, thin restaurant was in Abingdon Road and David moved with difficulty between the tables. It had a memorable wine list and was an enormous success: the food was delicious and original. The customers included royals, fashionable, would-be fashionable, rich and a sprinkling of intellectuals. It was a delightful place to dine and he used to enjoy telling stories about the vagaries of his customers.

He was also a wine merchant, but was so generous a disposition there can be no wonder he went bust. Hugo Dunn-Meynell tells how one day, when he was a complete stranger, he bought a magnum of first growth; when he opened it found it corked and telephoned that he would have to return it. 'No, pour it down the drain,' said David. 'I'll send your money back'. The next day a messenger arrived with a cheque, a letter of apology, and a replacement magnum.

After the restaurant had to close he became a consultant to the restaurant trade and many of the best wine lists owed much to his inspiration. He had a passion for matching wine with food, and his interests extended to the cuisine of the East, as did his great knowledge of the visual arts. He was a keen traveller and a most popular member of press trips to vineyards, enlightening the party with wisdom and humour.

Decanter readers will best remember him as a regular contributor from early days to the end. His flow of words and wisdom passed as fluently through his pen as through his lips, and everything he wrote was worth reading. He was a delightful, irreplaceable man.

### Bernard Partridge, 1936-2003



A Chevalier since his induction at the Chapitre de l'Empereur at the Café Royal in 2001, Bernard was already well known to many of our Essex fraternity. Born in London, he was the second son of a Harley Street dentist. He was educated at the City of London Boys' School, but spent many of his holidays at a house his family owned on the River Colne, where sailing became a passion. In due course he settled in the area and in 1953 Bernard embarked on a career in pig farming.

Despite having very little experience in that business, he made a great success of it and ultimately became one of the foremost pig breeders in England. He set up Elite Hybrids, a breeding company that went on to supply breeding stock throughout the U.K. and Central Europe. The launch of the "Hylete" hybrid gilt caused a sensation when it was unveiled in 1968. At the forefront of developments in pig breeding, Bernard served on numerous industry committees and the NFU Pigs Committee, and ultimately became a powerful force in matters of pig politics. He was also a former Chairman of Colchester Round Table and a keen golfer.

Our deepest sympathy goes out to Pat, his beloved wife of forty-four years, two sons who continue in the business and three adoring grand daughters.



With this Courier come warm wishes from the Management Committee to all Commandeurs, Officers, Chevaliers and their families for this Christmas and the coming New Year.  
Rabelaisian greetings to you all!