



Sacavin Courier



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DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Summer Lunch at Creek Cottage, Thorrington, near Brightlingsea, Essex

Saturday 3 July 2004

Calling letters were dispatched 10 May 2004



Management Committee meeting **Wednesday 7 July 2004** at
The Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11 am



Management Committee meeting **Wednesday 8 September 2004** at
The Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11 am



Centenary Celebrations in Angers **Weekend 9/10 October 2004**



The 2004 Chapitre at The Bakers' Hall, **Thursday 25 November 2004**





CHAPITRE 2003 at the BAKERS' HALL

With the onset of each winter, it would be all too easy to withdraw into our centrally heated homes and spend the evenings flicking through the pages of the latest catalogue from The Wine Society or slumped in front of the TV, bemused by the antics of Jilly Goulden. But not so the members of this Confrérie, who for many years have marked the start of the season with an excuse for a great banquet, our Chapitre. In this world of newly discovered syndromes, what better way to combat S.A.D. or Seasonal Affective Disorder! Baker's Hall having proved so popular with members, we make no excuse for having chosen it once again for the 2003 Chapitre and we are indebted to Chevalier Shirley Zangwill for this report.

Our annual Chapitre was held on 27 November 2003 in the hall of the Worshipful Company of Bakers but the evening really begins on the journey to this ancient livery company. It was a fine evening and the traffic was light in what is now known as Docklands. There were fine views of the controversial dome, the new Billingsgate, the docklands light railway, and numerous luxury large waterside houses and apartments. It was a very different place from when this area was known as the Pool of London. At the turn of the century, when Britain was at the zenith of her colonial powers, this area was one of the busiest ports in the world with imports of tea, coffee, silk, ivory, animal skins, spices, and just about anything, coming into the port of London. Dockers were employed on a daily basis, at a rate of 6 pence a day, with harsh penalties for any act of pilfering. Hence the Dockers strike of 1900. (Read London 1900 by Jonathan Schneer). Then on past the beautifully illuminated Tower of London, scene of many a dramatic happening, and on to Mincing Lane, now there is a name to conjure with, and finally Harp Lane and Bakers' Hall.

A warm and amicable atmosphere always pervades at any Sacavin function, but in the

glorious surroundings of the Bakers' Hall it was even more noticeable. We are fortunate to have amongst our members a former Master of the Worshipful Company of Bakers, Chevalier John Moon and we appreciate his office, which enabled our Confrérie to hold their annual Chapitre at Bakers' Hall.

Comme d'habitude, the Chevaliers and Officiers enjoyed with the Grand Commandeur a well chosen sparkling Saumur with our guests at the Vin d'honneur, before processing to an elegant room to witness the intronisations of our new chevaliers. For this remarkable ceremony our dignitaries are dressed in splendid robes denoting their status and are preceded by a fanfare of trumpets played by skilful musicians.

The first duty of our Grand Commandeur was to ask for one minute's silence for two of our members who had sadly died, Chevalier Bernard Partridge and Chevalier David Wolfe.

On this occasion we welcomed three new members. Madeleine Forster, wife of our Trésorier Michael. Madeleine, a fluent French speaker, was an interior designer, but now does much voluntary work for which she has justly received the Surrey County Council

Award for Achievement. Chevalier Chris Bouch read Madeleine's citation. Our next inductee was Lorraine Wilkinson, a graduate of Guildford School of Art, formerly teacher at the Art School in North Oxford and at Bloxham Boys School. On moving house to Dorking Lorraine took the position of secretary to the director of music at the Yehudi Menuhin School of Music, a spot she held for 10 years. Chevalier Hazel Sheen read Lorraine's citation. Richard Ridler was our third inductee, a civil engineer, specialising in motorways and bridges in this country and power stations abroad. During the last nine years Richard has run his own successful practice from his home near Bristol. He has a great interest in the Loire wines since taking a holiday in that area some time ago and this interest has been greatly encouraged when Richard and his wife joined us on our recent trip to the Western Loire so well organised by Krystyna and Ernest Lee. Chevalier David Hollingsworth read Richard's citation.

After the inductees were invited to recite the oath "When my glass is full I will drink it and when my glass is empty I will fill it", the Officers and Chevaliers sang with gusto:

**Optimé, optimé
Ils ont fort bien parle
Ils sont des notres**

The Beadle of the Worshipful Company of Bakers, Mr Tony White, gave us a most fascinating account and brief history of Bakers' Hall. Mr White, such an eloquent speaker, kept us all enthralled.

After this most interesting talk we proceeded to dinner. The menu was well thought out by our Chef de Cuisine, Officier Geoffrey Wheal and beautifully presented with impeccable

service by "Lady Bountiful" and her staff who described the delights in store for us. We are grateful to Officier Audrey Thompson for the description of the wines, which, needless to say, she had taken much time and trouble in their selection to compliment the menu. The Grand Commandeur, Derek Sheen, thanked all those who had worked so hard to arrange this most enjoyable evening, to which all the members concurred. He then proposed a toast to the new inductees, which was enthusiastically received by the members. Officier Daphne Mackenzie most generously donated the Dalmore 12-year old single malt whisky, which was enjoyed with the coffee at the end of the dinner.

THE MENU

Chicken liver and mushroom pâté
with toasted ciabatta

Plessisière Muscadet sur lie (Mabir) 2001

Fresh crab timbale with roasted baby tomatoes

Beef Wellington with Burgundy sauce
Rosemary roasted potatoes
and traditional vegetable selection

Chateau Haut Maureaux St Emilion 1998

Cheese board selection
with celery, crackers and butter

Honey baked pear with vine fruits
*Coteaux du Layon – La Cuvée Ancienne
de Jean Baumard*

Coffee/tea, chocolate mints and petit fours
Cointreau, or Dalmore 12-year old single malt whisky

This enjoyable meal concluded our evening, except for lots and lots of amiable chat amongst the members. **SZ**





If the Chapitre postponed the onset of winter blues, our January wine tasting and dinner should have banished them altogether. Another repeat but again a popular one which, given the limit on numbers, provided an opportunity for those who were unable to be present at the previous occasion to experience a small fragment of the Loire in London. Our Chef des Expeditions was amongst the 42 Chevaliers who attended and has kindly penned this report.

Nigel Wilkinson – co-founder of the RSJ enterprise 20 years ago (“enterprise” because RSJ are vintners as well as a restaurant, their *cave* being located round the corner from the restaurant) – guided the tasting with enthusiasm, wit and what appeared to be an encyclopaedic knowledge of the wines, vineyards and vigneronns of the Loire appellations. 5 white wines and 3 reds featured in the tasting, reflecting the relative weights of the 2 colours in any wine list.

General observations

The wines of the Loire appear to have a 3-year cycle – 3 good years being followed by 3 not so good – and we have just come to the end of the last 3-year cycle (2001, 2002 and 2003). 2003 was, of course, a brilliant year for sun; in some cases too brilliant, since the vigneronns had stripped leaves from the vines to get more sun on the grapes and, consequently, the grapes were burnt.

Although early indications are that 2003 was an excellent vintage (certainly for strength, but less so for quantity) the wines may not be good keepers, because of shortages of both acidity and tannins. Meanwhile, we were tasting wines of 2000, 2001 and 2002.

No 1 – Quincy, Domaine des Ballandors 2002 (Jean Tatin & Chantal Wilk)

Quincy is a region of relatively small vineyards, along the Cher. The grape is Sauvignon – the grape of Sancerre wines. According to Nigel, Sauvignon wines are currently displacing Chardonnays in restaurants. Quincy, incidentally, was the second French wine to obtain appellation status.

The 2002 vintage is referred to locally as the “Lazarus” vintage: as a miserably wet August wore on, the vigneronns were in despair, but in September the weather changed dramatically and a good harvest was “resurrected”. This example proved to be an excellent wine with “body” (a sweet aftertaste) and a clean taste: it is fermented in stainless steel and kept right away from oak.

It could be drunk as an apéritif or with any of the foods of the Loire, especially fish. It is priced at £8.25 a bottle by RSJ.

No 2 – Sancerre, les Pierris 2001 (Roger Champault et Fils)

This was a typical Sancerre or, one should add, a typically good Sancerre; 2001 was a year when the good Sancerres were very good, while the less good ones – less good, frequently because of over-cropping and overpressing – were not very good. Again, vinified in stainless steel. (£8.95)

No 3 – Anjou Blanc, Cuvée Prestige 2000 (Vincent Ogereau)

This was a wine, made from Chenin Blanc, that had been vinified in oak and this showed – in both its colour and its taste.

It did not appeal greatly to our group. Perhaps it contrasted unfavourably with Nos 1 and 2, but Nigel offered the opinion that in a couple of years time it might have matured into a great Chenin Blanc. (£8.45)

No 4 – Vouvray demi-sec, Cuvée des Foudrax 2002 (Didier & Catherine Champalou)

This was an excellent wine, even appreciated by many who are not normally fans of Vouvray. It is also made from Chenin Blanc and vinified in stainless steel. Notionally semi-dry, it had pleasant hints of sweetness and sparkle. (£8.30)

No 5 – Saumur Chapigny, Domaine des Roches Neuves 2002 (Thierry Germain)

This was the first of our reds and – again, possibly, suffering by comparison with its predecessors – initially somewhat disappointing. Uncannily, however, by the time we were emptying our glasses the wine had improved immeasurably! Was it the effect of oxygenation or had it been warmed as a result of our glasses having been nursed in our hands? The Grand Commandeur asked Nigel what he recommended as a drinking temperature and Nigel confessed to liking his Champignys on the cool side - 14° would certainly be far too warm.

In any case, red wine is designed to be drunk with food. Made from Cabernet Franc, of course, this wine had an excellent colour, an excellent texture and it grows on you, especially at this price (£7.35).

No 6 – Touraine Cot, 2000 (Domaine Clos, Roche Neuve)

This was a new grape for many Chevaliers, at least under this name. The Cot grape is also known as Malbec (“a red grape, rich in tannin and flavour”) from South West France, where it is the major ingredient of Cahors wine. This example was excellent – characterised by the author of this account as “robust and needs food”. A curiosity, to hail from the Touraine and, again, a snip at £7.25.

No 7 – Anjou Villages, La Croix de Mission 2001 (Jean-Yves LeBreton)

Another new grape (at least, new tonight) – Cabernet Sauvignon. This example hails from the bank of l'Aubance, to the West of Angers. And spectacularly good it was: the pride of the reds, in the opinion of the author. Not a snip, but worth the outlay for a special occasion at £9.65.

No 8 – Coteaux du Layon, Cuvée Prestige 2001 (Vincent Ogereau)

This wine was held back to last – the position it would normally occupy in a gastronomic meal. It proved to be pure nectar!

Made from Chenin Blanc, of course, the grapes had been harvested in the traditional way, i.e. by hand. This labour-intensive style of grape-picking – in French “à tris successifs” – has to be adopted because the grapes of Chenin Blanc ripen differentially, so the grape-pickers have to detach individual grapes from the bunches, on successive visits! Full of sweetness, with “bite” nevertheless, this is a wine for the connoisseur (and the merchant banker/stockbroker) at £12.95.

Conclusion

This was an excellent occasion, organised expertly by Déléguée-Générale Fay Landau, which concluded with an excellent meal accompanied by 2 further wines – Anjou Blanc Sec 2002 (Vincent Ogereau) and Saumur Rouge 2002, Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers (Dominique Tessier).



Those who were fortunate enough to attend the last Chapitre will have had the opportunity to enjoy Dalmore 12-year old single malt whisky. This was thanks to the generosity of Officier Daphne Mackenzie, who kindly presented the Confrérie with enough of this noble, after dinner malt to keep us supplied for several years to come.

We thought it might be appropriate, for the benefit of our newer members, to quote from a history* of the distillery, particularly given the connection between Dalmore and Daphne's late husband, a previous Grand Commandeur, Col. Hector Mackenzie.

The Dalmore Highland Malt Whisky Distillery was founded in 1839 and acquired by the Mackenzie brothers, a local farming family, in 1878. It has a fine position overlooking the Cromarty Firth and the Black Isle, and its appearance has been compared to that of an old-fashioned country railway station, its offices partly panelled with carved oak from a shooting lodge. The harbour here was once an important embarkation point for timber that was being shipped to Newcastle and North Shields. It has exclusive rights to the water of the River Alness and one of its stills dates from 1874.

A diary dating from this time is still in the possession of the Mackenzie family. It holds

detailed entries of tastings and day-to-day transactions, showing the importance of whisky as a part of the agriculture and commerce of the area. During the First World War, when the distillery was closed, it was used for the assembling of mines.

The Mackenzie brothers were friendly with James Whyte and Charles Mackay, and Dalmore had always been a key component in their leading brand, Whyte & Mackay. In 1960, the two companies merged, although the Mackenzie connection was not lost and until recently there was still a representative of the family on the board of the larger company. Much of the distillery's output now goes to Whyte & Mackay blends, although Dalmore has an established market as a single malt.

(* Extract from the Mitchell Beazley Pocket Guide - Scotch Whisky - by Charles MacLean)



Another summer is upon us. For Anjou wine producers the next few months will be crucial. Last year's quite exceptional weather conditions resulted in vendanges that were unbelievably ahead of time, up to one month earlier than usual. The grapes for the production of dessert wines, those of L'Aubance and of Layon, had never been picked so early. A remarkable phenomenon was that whole bunches of grapes had ripened by the time of the first picking, so there were no grapes left for the second picking! Such climatic conditions can result in a memorable year for the quality of Loire wines, but they have the effect of reducing quantities.

In the last Courier we reported on the way Loire wine producers were facing up to competition from the New World. This time we look at how they are adapting to climatic change. The following comments by vine cultivation specialist and former Director of the Saumur "Maison du Vin" Jean Bellard appeared last autumn in the publication *Maine et Loire Actualité*. Thanks once again to Officier Ernest Lee for the translation.

For the past 40 years, our vines have been budding earlier and earlier. Similarly for flowering and, consequently, for the vendanges. The strength of the wines produced has been increasing progressively.

The reasons for these changes are:

- 1. The general rise in temperatures over the last 50 years.*
- 2. The stocks (i.e. grafts) give earlier crops.*
- 3. Cloning produces grapes that ripen regularly and simultaneously (i.e. all on a bunch at the same time).*
- 4. We are planting vines less densely - 3,300 to the hectare instead of the former 5,000. So the grapes see more sun and ripen accordingly.*
- 5. We've altered our treatment of the soil. Instead of ploughing and the control of plants by*

chemicals, we now practice "enherbement" (grassing) for a third of the vineyards.

We shouldn't be too hasty in coming to conclusions about this warming-up, however. There have been numerous years, or successions of years, when the vendanges were exceptionally early or exceptionally late. It is tempting to compare 2003 with 1893. Or with 1921, 1947 or 1990. But good years do not all follow the same pattern.

Nevertheless, M. Bellard ended on a note that underlined the difficulties being faced. In 1950, 40,551 winegrowers operated on 30,177 hectares of Anjou/Saumur. In 1994, the number of winegrowers had shrunk to 6,133 and the number of hectares to 19,936. And that is already 10 years ago.

CENTENARY



CELEBRATIONS

This year marks the centenary of that great occasion in 1904 when, at the Château du Montreuil-Bellay, the Sacavin was reborn in all its medieval splendour. To mark this event, the French Confrérie are organising a **celebration in Angers on the weekend of 9/10 October**. As mentioned at our AGM, they have very kindly sent an invitation to their British Confères.

Details are, as yet, a little sketchy, but the focus of events will be a **prestigious evening at the Greniers St. Jean**, that magnificent medieval building in Angers where the Chapitres are held. There is one other feature to be mentioned at this time: a **painting competition** on the theme of wine, open to all.

A long weekend, Friday to Monday is envisaged. Full details will be sent in August, with the possibility of a group booking on Eurostar/TGV, for those who wish to travel that way, along with accommodation arrangements. **So, make a note in your diary.**

If, on the basis of this necessarily limited information, you think you might fancy joining a party of us in Angers that weekend, please complete **and return the slip enclosed with this Courier**. This would help with planning and give us an idea of the likely number of British Confrères hoping to attend.

And, if you are a budding Van Gogh or Tracey Emin, get that easel set up and start painting!