



Sacavin Courier



NO. 53 SUMMER 2008

The Sacavin Challenge, (page 3)

AGM matters, (page 7)

Bottling Woes, (page 8)

Bonjour Confrère, (pages 9)

Old Friends, (page 10)

John Bintcliffe, (page 11)

Dates for your diaries, (page 12)



Commandeur Owen Collins retires from our Committee



The Sacavin Challenge

....

The Loire takes on the World at the National Liberal Club

The National Liberal Club in London's Whitehall Place is fast becoming a favourite Sacavin venue. The club's impressive neo-gothic building overlooking the Embankment of the river Thames is one of the largest clubhouses ever built. It was constructed to provide club facilities for Liberal Party campaigners among the newly-enlarged electorate that resulted from the Representation of the People Act of 1884, and was established by William Gladstone himself. It was opened in 1887. 121 years later, in January, the cavernous David Lloyd George function room bore witness to another great event, a Sacavin wine-tasting, the second in 12 months. There seems to be a certain irony in this, given that the National Temperance Federation, formed in 1884, became closely associated with the Liberal Party.

Would Mr. Gladstone have approved? Indeed, might the Grand Old Man have been persuaded to join the Sacavin? The noted 19th century writer, W.T. Stead, tells us that while at Eton "Mr. Gladstone was familiarly known by the name of Mr. Tipple". A good start. However, he continues, "At nineteen he went up to Oxford and became a model undergraduate of Christ Church. Ten years after he left college it was said that undergraduates drank less wine in the forties because Gladstone had been so abstemious in the thirties." *W. Gladstone...*



Nevertheless, he had so *...Sacavin material?* many interests it is difficult to imagine something as noble and righteous as the study of wine would have been omitted. In another comment, Stead had this to say about Gladstone, "Even when apparently consumed by his preoccupation about Ireland or Bulgaria, he snatches time to review "Ecce Homo," to discourse on the Olympian gods, or to write essays about Marie Bashkirtseff. He is a wonderfully all-round man."

While an Olympian god himself in the opinion of many, he also had his human side. Lady Violet Bonham Carter used to tell that story of how, one day when she was just six years old, she was permitted to join the adults for a lunch at 10 Downing Street because the great Mr Gladstone would be there. Like many Victorian children, she had been taught not to gulp her food down but to chew each mouthful 32 times, just like Mr. Gladstone. Naturally, she was spellbound, watching intently all through the meal as each forkful entered his mouth. But the conversation flew back and forth with great intensity and later she was to protest to her parents, "We've been deceived! He bolted his food like a wolf!"

So maybe it's as well that he didn't join our Confrérie. In his Lancashire accent and the long-winded, but perfectly punctuated, sentences for which he was famous, he'd have been far too busy talking to appreciate the food and wine. And no one, from the Grand Commandeur down, would have got a word in edgeways!

But to get back to our wine-tasting. Des Holland, our Chef de Cuisine, had structured

this to accompany rather than precede supper, and had chosen a menu to match the wines to be tasted. This wasn't to be Loire wines alone but a chance to compare and contrast worthy representatives of the Loire with outstanding wines from elsewhere in the world. To accompany the four courses of our supper, Des had selected 8 wines, served in pairs with each course, a Loire wine along with a non-Loire challenger. An attractive formula, judging by the enthusiastic turnout, amongst whom were a number of old faces not seen for some time.

To accompany the fish, we were offered two examples of Sauvignon Blanc. A contest between two hemispheres: in the North corner, from the Loire, Pouilly Fumé 'Les Sables' Jean-Paul Mollet 2005 and in the South corner, from New Zealand, Villa Maria 'Clifford Bay' Reserve Sauvignon Blanc 2006.

With the chicken, Pinot Noir was the setting. This was a much more local affair, Sancerre Rouge Fernand Grandjean 2005 holding the flag for the Loire, while, from hardly more than a hundred miles away, the challenger was Gevrey-Chambertin 'Clos Prieur' Jean-Philippe Marchand 2005.

Cabernet Franc accompanied the cheese. Pitting Anjou Rouge Vieilles Vignes Château de Fesles 2005 against Dona Paula Cabernet Franc 2005, old world of France against the new world of Argentina. (We visit the Château de Fesles on our trip this October.)



Chef de Cuisine Des Holland with Graham MacFarlane

And finally, with the dessert, two delicious sweet wines. The first, an example of one of the truly great sweet wines of the world, Bonnezeaux Château de Fesles 2003/1999, Chenin Blanc from close to the river Layon. (Those fortunate enough to try the '99 would certainly have known!) The second, from a tiny, very special appellation overlooking the Pyrenees and Montagne Noire, totally dedicated to producing a unique style of sweet wine, Domaine de Montahuc Muscat de St-Jean de Minervois 2003.

MENU

Avocado, Crayfish and Prawn Salad

*Chargrilled Corn Fed Chicken Supreme
with Plum Tomato and Shallot and Thyme Jus
Parisienne Potatoes*

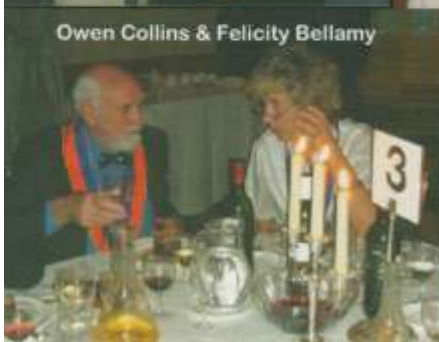
Plate of Cheese for each Table

Chocolate Truffle Mousse with Almond Florentine

Coffee and Mints

Mostly the wines retail in the £11 to £14 range, but both the Burgundy and the Bonnezeaux were about £10 dearer. The St-Jean de Minervois was good value at around £9, but the Anjou Rouge must rate as one of the best buys at £7.50. If there was a surprise it was the New Zealand 'Clifford Bay', which received almost universal acclaim. Should anyone wish to do the tasting for themselves, copies of Des Holland's notes can be had from the Chancellor and it may still be possible to procure the wines from Oddbins where, of course, a discount can sometimes be obtained for volume.

Needless to say, this was all preceded by our regular Vin d'Honneur, taken in the smoking room surrounded by past Liberal luminaries, all impeccably if sombrely dressed (apart from Paddy Ashdown in shirtsleeves), as they gazed down from their portraits between the pillars and the wood panelling. A great room to gather in, full of welcome on a cold January



evening, the glow of a fire in the grate, the reassurance of solid furniture and leather armchairs, the sense of history. Another pleasing feature of the club, not just in the smoking room but everywhere, from the grand staircase to the various function rooms, is the heavily glazed and richly coloured Victorian tiling which adorns the walls, pillars, arches, everything, in a way that is quite exceptional in 21st century Britain.

Mind you, the tiling was not always so appreciated. There is a well-known story told of the NLC, that the Conservative politician F E Smith would stop off there every day on his way to parliament, to use the club's lavatories. One day the hall porter apprehended Smith and asked him if he was actually a member of the club, to which Smith replied, "Good god! You mean it's a club as well?"

As always, we are very grateful to Des for masterminding this event. But our thanks are two-fold on this occasion because, in response to popular demand, he is already making plans for another function at the same venue on Wednesday 28 January. So make a note in next year's diary. In selecting the wines, Des had also become, effectively, our Echanson. Our recent AGM gave official acknowledgement to this, confirming him in that rôle along with his existing function of Chef de Cuisine. As such he is keen to listen to suggestions and has asked that, should anyone come across an exceptional wine that they consider worthy of our attention, to let him know.

POSTSCRIPT

Members may recall notification of yet another event at the National Liberal Club. This was in June and was intended for members' family and friends, those who, in the main, were coming up to retirement and might now be thinking of what to do with all that spare time once work commitments had become a thing of the past.

Well, we all know the truth about that! However, getting on for 20 such folk were interested enough in the Sacavin to come along to Whitehall Place, together with their Sacavin sponsors, to try some wines, partake of a modest supper and meet a few established members who could tell them something about our organisation.

For those wishing to take it further, a 'degustation' of Sacavin membership had been organised, a weekend in Angers this October, to coincide with the end of our own biennial visit and attendance at the Chapitre des Vendanges. It was a friendly and stimulating evening, sowing the seed for future membership and convincing a number that the October excursion would be worth the effort. Eleven individuals will be making the trip, with our friends in the French Commanderie providing a welcome, and ensuring a full and entertaining programme.



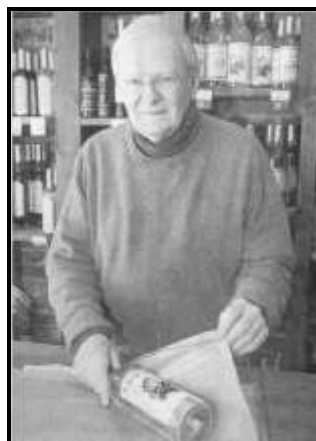
Once again, we are grateful to Fouad Ghali for the photographs appearing in this edition of the Courier.

Bottling woes...

Rarely does one of our members make it into the national press. "VINTNER FACES £30,000 BILL FOR EUROBOTTLES" screamed the headline in the Telegraph of Tuesday 25th March. The Times had a similar story. Even the Mirror got in on the act with "VETERAN WINEMAKER JERRY SCHOOLER IN EU BOTTLE SIZE ROW". We were concerned.

Jerry Schooler, who joined the British Commanderie in 1979, has been making mead, fruit wines and liqueurs at his Lurgashall Winery, near Petworth, West Sussex for the past 24 years, currently producing some 400,000 bottles per annum. He has won many awards. An honourable occupation so what was all the fuss about? Well, he certainly deserves our sympathy, because an EU directive made on 5th September 2007 makes it illegal for him to continue selling his produce in the traditional 75cl and 37.5cl bottles we all associate with the wine industry. No matter that he has been using them since he started the business. According to the BBC, who also reported the story, the company has been given six months to convert to using bottles of 70cl, 50cl, 35cl or 20cl, but this also involves changing all its corks, "star wheel" machinery, labelling and boxing. Any Sacavin member who has been on one of our Loire trips will remember the complexity of a bottling plant, and will readily appreciate the £30,000 cost involved.

Lurgashall Winery, as the Times explained, sells ten fruit wines, nine liqueurs, including redcurrant, walnut, ginger and sloe, and seven sorts of mead. The television chef Rick Stein featured the winery in his book and television series



Jerry Schooler plus 'illegal' bottle

"Food Heroes" and The New York Times Magazine described the mead as the "Dom Pérignon of the genre". So, an enterprise of some significance. However, it has fallen foul of trading standards that deems an alcohol volume above 15% be classed as a spirit. Lurgashall's fortified wines fall into this category and that is the basis for the EU directive prohibiting traditional wine bottles.

So, what has happened since March? There was some talk in the press of a grant to finance the changes, but none proved available. Nothing daunted, the company have embraced the problem, concentrating most production on 50cl bottles, with smaller sizes also for liqueurs. They are taking the opportunity to re-brand with new labels throughout the range and, in a pre-emptive move, to include the alcohol unit strength that will eventually become a legal requirement. At the same time new lines are being developed, a cranberry liqueur and one made of apricots will shortly be available. And, for the US and Japanese markets using 330ml dark beer-style bottles, (for export, so not covered by the directive), there are plans for a sparkling mead! They are busy expanding their distribution nationwide and a new website is scheduled for October 1st.

In the eternal battle between bureaucracy and enterprise a refreshing example of indefatigable endeavour. And, indeed, there are even thoughts of a stock exchange placement. Exciting times would seem to lie ahead for the Lurgashall Winery!

AGM MATTERS

Our AGM, held for the 8th consecutive year at Queens Club, would not normally warrant a report in the Courier. Our deliberations are well enough covered by the minutes and the dining arrangements are by now familiar to most. However, two highlights of this year's meeting are worth recording here.

The first was our pleasure at being able to welcome Michel Leterme from Angers, the first time he had attended an AGM of the British Commanderie. Monique Christiaens, who accompanied Michel, was able to witness his election to our Management Committee in the office of Délégué Angevin, thus giving formal recognition to the function he has been fulfilling for some considerable time.



Michel Leterme & Monique Christiaens

The second was the retirement of our long-serving Chef de Protocole, Owen Collins. There cannot be many who remember the British Commanderie without Owen's guiding presence somewhere in the background. Inducted in 1985, he joined the Management Committee in 1989 and has served us well these 19 years. In recent times he was the mastermind behind the Wivenhoe weekend and we remember him too, as one of the "Motley Crew" who serenaded us over lunch at Brightlingsea. At that latter event, bearded and imperious of stature, it is perhaps not surprising that some mistook him for Noah as he called out in welcome to us from the gallery of Brightlingsea's All Saints' Church! But it is for his decade as Chef de Protocole that we are

most indebted to him. The Grand Commandeur's words of 10 years ago, following his first Chapitre in this role, are as apt now as they were then. "To have to follow in the footsteps of his father-in-law, the incomparable George Wilks, was a tremendous challenge and one which you have met, Owen, very successfully, with your own style and panache".



Owen & Brenda Collins

One great interest Owen has is sailing and, in recognition of his tremendous contribution to Sacavin, Derek, on our behalf, presented him with a detailed model of Sir Francis Chichester's yacht, Gypsy Moth IV, with the stand suitably inscribed, along with a beautifully illustrated book of the British coastline.

It should come as no surprise to learn that, despite his "retirement", Owen has since been busy organising the special "taster" weekend in Angers for prospective members!



BONJOUR CONFRERE !

The magazine of the Sacavin Confrérie, circulated to members of our “mother house” is called “Bonjour Confrère!” and their officer responsible for liaison with us, the British Commanderie, has sent us a copy of their December 2007 issue. Ernest Lee has kindly offered this review.

The “editorial” is a witty and learned article, composed by Pierre Aguilar, the Grand Maître, on the subject of wine and wine festivals. His closing words make the point that wine unites what is noble with what is popular (in the sense of “of the people”).

Several chapters are reviewed in this edition of Bonjour Confrère and it is recorded that tombolas at two of them had raised getting on for £2,500 for a local charity – L'Association “Marie, Rêves et Espoirs” – a sort of Jim'll Fixit for children with terminal cancers.

Michel Leterme, who attended our 2006 Chapitre in Armourers' Hall, contributes a full, appreciative account. He expresses his pleasure at seeing the formalities of the Confrérie observed in the British setting. The account is accompanied by a memorial for Audrey Thompson, whose presentations of wines, in her role of Echanson, had impressed the French visitors.

Another article in this magazine is a well-researched history of wine production and commercialisation in Anjou. They were even introduced into England, to satisfy the tastes of Plantagenêt royalty. The writer of this article, Dr Lecacheur, states that wine has three basic constituents – alcohol, acidity and sugar, all of which must be in perfect balance – while Loire wines have a fourth characteristic, fruitiness. Another article points out that these qualities are so respected in Loire wines that a special term is applied to them: the flavours of Loire wine are compared to a peacock's tail, with its richness of colours, all in perfect harmony.

Finally, there is a highly technical description of the climatic ups and downs of 2006, with an estimation of the resultant quality (and quantity) of the various wines. Happily, it appears, the skill of the vignerons enabled them to triumph over the difficulties they encountered and the 2006 vintage promises well.



The theme of nobility comes up again in the account of the Confrérie's 2006 Chapitre des Vendanges, at which Charles-Philippe d'Orléans (Duc d'Anjou and nephew of the Comte de Paris) was intronisé. The Duc d'Anjou made a short speech, in which he promised to play an ambassadorial role on behalf of the wines of the Loire. 300 diners attended this chapitre and 22 officers were created.

OLD FRIENDS

It used to be said that with advancing years comes wisdom and respect but, in today's world, it's more likely to be ill-health that gets noticed. In an organisation like ours, despite the benefits of a daily glass or two of red wine and the fact that very few of us smoke, it is inevitable that infirmity in one form or another prevents a few members from attending our functions. This often goes unremarked, or maybe it's just accepted, as we are not in the habit of giving health reports in the Courier. However, for two of our colleagues we will make an exception if only because they have been amongst our most dedicated members and have many old friends within the Sacavin.

Regrettably both Fay Landau and Frank Coe are now unable to participate in our activities. Some will know that Fay was taken ill last year and for some months was looked after in a residential home in Hove, Sussex. A family friend has kept us informed of her situation, the following is an extract from a letter he wrote in June.

Fay is back in her own house, but it's so sad to see that she doesn't know it, or realise where she is. She has deteriorated a lot since I saw her in Hove, although she knows me well enough, she cannot recall other visitors who have come to see her.

She has 24 hour daily care and I was impressed by the young woman carer I met, who is called Faith, aged about 30 or so I should think and perhaps a West Indian, obviously intelligent and educated a calm unobtrusive well-spoken presence. I spent about an hour and a half with Fay sitting in her sitting room with all her pictures and things including that portrait of herself over the fireplace, talking of the past trying to find a memory to hang onto. But Fay talked of her mother (wondering why she had not been to see her) and had quite forgotten her marriage and that her other name is Landau.

Frank is similarly stricken and his decline has been rapid. Terry Hatton visited him recently, along with Owen Collins, and writes to say, "Frank is in a care home in Thaxted, Essex. Tragically, he is no longer able to recognise even members of his own family. He has lost the power of speech but I know he would like to acknowledge the pleasure his membership of Sacavin has given him. He would wish me to say a 'thank you' for the friendship extended to him by the members through these many years."

We can but pray that our two friends continue to be well cared for and are spared the anxieties that sometimes accompany this upsetting condition.

Dr. John Bintcliffe - 1916 - 2008

We were much saddened to learn of the passing, on 31st January this year, of John Bintcliffe, following a stroke. At 91 he was the most senior of our active Chevaliers, if not, indeed, the entire membership, until very recently regularly attending London functions with Joan, his wife of 56 years.

Affectionately known as Johnnie, he came from a medical background, with both his father and brother also general practitioners. A tradition maintained into the third and fourth generation by one of two sons and one of six grandchildren.

After qualifying at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in 1939, he was commissioned into the Royal Navy, serving at sea and developing services in the Far East. On demobilisation, he joined the North Street Practice in Romford, where he remained for 38 years, helping to develop it as a training practice. He was also general

practitioner for naval staff in the area. It was in 1994 that we first got to know him, following his induction into the Sacavin at the Chapitre des Deux Anniversaires at Butchers' Hall. Six years later Joan also became a member.

John was a devoted family man who spent a life caring for others, yet enjoyed life to the full. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him and our sincere condolences go out to Joan.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Management Committee meeting **Tuesday 2 September 2008** at
The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place at 11.30 am



Excursion to the Loire **Tuesday 7 to Sunday 12 October 2008**
(Includes Chapitre des Vendanges in Angers Saturday 11 October)



Potential members visit to Angers **Friday 10 to Sunday 12 October 2008**
(Includes Chapitre des Vendanges in Angers Saturday 11 October)



Chapitre at Apothecaries' Hall **Tuesday 18 November 2008**
Calling letters to be posted in early October



Tasting with supper at the National Liberal Club **Wednesday 28 January 2009**
Calling letters to be posted before Christmas