

Past Tastings and Dinners (2015 – 2017)

14 December 2017 - Pre-Christmas tasting

Last year Stephen Plaistow because of ill health had to withdraw from the planned presentation of a selection of his own Bordeaux wines; and sadly he suffered the same misfortune this year. All Winetasters will wish Stephen a steady and lasting recovery.

Stephen's time in hospital occurred a few weeks before the tasting, and there was time for the Committee to devise and implement a worthy Plan B based on a determination to ensure that those who had signed up to taste good claret got nothing less. Richard Andrews and David Morgan were able to provide a total of seven fine wines, and I too made a modest contribution.

In the event Plan B became somewhat fraught. I discovered that my stock did not match my records in the case of one wine of which I had offered two bottles. A precise replacement advertised on the internet turned out to be from a different, albeit neighbouring, château. Next, Plan B threatened to become Plan C when in the small hours of the day before the tasting I had to spend time in the A & E department of St George's Hospital; but fortunately this resulted in an explanation of troublesome symptoms (now resolved) as well as a free health check of all vital working parts.

On the day, in spite of two of the bottles of the 2000 vintage (including the rogue substitute) being corked, the occasion turned out to be a worthy and lively substitute for what we were missing; and the sumptuous buffet, for which grateful thanks are due to Liz and Sue, ensured that the evening was a joyful contribution to the festive season.

13 October 2017 - AGM and Washington State tasting

We were fortunate indeed to have persuaded Norman Gooding, our senior former President, to apply his expertise to the tasting of wines from Washington State, which were part of our stock of tasting cases bought from the Wine Society. I brought, together with the Society's glasses, one of the cases of six wines but not the other; but this turned out to be a *damnum sine injuria*, as Norman had brought two bottles of each of two white wines, and of a red to accompanying the buffet. The resulting twelve bottles for sixteen people were more than enough; eighteen might have been challenging. Norman gave an erudite presentation of the wines, illustrated with a map of the various American Viticultural Areas of Washington State, including Rattlesnake Hills, Snipes Mountain, Horse Heaven Hills, Walla Walla Valley and Red Mountain; and Jean added a learned footnote before we proceeded to the buffet.

19 July 2017 - Dinner at Shepherd's

In 2012 we planned to have dinner at Shepherd's in Marsham Street, with the added attraction of pre-prandials in Roger Westbrook's flat, which like the restaurant is in Marsham Court. We were foiled by refurbishment work, which was due for completion in the week before our date, overrunning, as such work tends to do. Instead we dined at Langan's Brasserie, which belongs to the same group; and although redecoration of the room provided was not quite complete we did well. So this year we decided to revert to our original choice. Jeffrey Preston kindly undertook the task of liaising with the restaurant, in concert with Roger, whose patronage clearly carries great weight, for the restaurant's confirmation of the details named our host as Lord Roger Westbrook. Correctly interpreted (it rarely is these days, regrettably) this means that he is a younger son of a duke or a marquess.

It was slightly disconcerting when the foreseeable event of a change of menu was notified to us only after it happened; but the modest total of fifteen members and one guest who were able and willing to come had the not exceptional onus of amending their choices. The guest was Stephen Plaistow's grandson Paris, who brought charm to the occasion as well as reducing the average age.

The evening was agreed by all to be a great success. The task of keeping the cost within reasonable bounds, never an easy one these days, was lightened by our ability to drink *Nicolas Feuillatte NV* at cost in the elegant sitting room of Roger's flat; and he kindly provided smoked salmon canapés as well as impressive views. We are most grateful to him for enabling us to get the evening off to a cracking start.

The private dining room at Shepherd's was a fine place in which to enjoy a meal together, and the presentation and service were beyond reproach. All seemed well satisfied with their choices from the menu:

Potted Cromer Crab *or* Home Cured Old Spot Ham

Poached Wild Sea Trout *or* Roast Saddle of Swaledale Lamb

Lemon and Mint Granita

Strawberry Tart *or* Iced Chocolate & Coffee Parfait *or* Neal's Yard Cheese

Between them Jeffrey and Roger did extremely well in selecting wines of good quality and interest, without punitive cost; a particular success was persuading the manager to allocate to us, at a keen price, all their remaining bottles of the claret, which showed up particularly well in its ninth year.

24 May 2017- Portugal tasting

Ruth Campbell had assembled all but one of the wines for this tasting. Roger Westbrook contributed the other, and by his elegant commentary he demonstrated that his two postings to the Embassy in Lisbon, the second as HM Ambassador, had not been limited to achieving mastery over the minutiae of Portuguese politics, economics, industry and agriculture, but had led him also to an impressive knowledge of the wines of the country. It is a matter of regret that the timing of our excellent tour in 1997 was such that he could not take part, and that the itinerary did not enable us to take advantage of his offer to entertain us at the Residency.

The wines on the whole were not altogether easy going, and they were proof of the challenges which the terrain and climate present to the aspiring winemaker. It is to the credit of Sir Cliff Richard that he established the Vida Nova estate in the Algarve, a region which presents as great challenges as any. He had the good sense to engage as his winemaker David Baverstock, who entertained us in 1997 at Esporão in the Alentejo. Another who has taken up the challenge is Richard Mayson, who led the 1997 tour in style and who gave us a fine tasting in 2003. The *pedras* in his two wines are the stones which are a prominent part of the challenge, and the *basta* in the second wine suggests that at times he has more than enough of them.

17 March 2017 - South-west France tasting

David Morgan has volunteered to assemble and present a selection of wines from this interesting area, and the tasting is likely to be of particular interest to those who took part in the tour of Gascony in 2011, which included the Basque country, Jurançon and Madiran. An especially enjoyable visit was to Producteurs Plaimont at St-Mont, and this was followed by an equally enjoyable tasting presented by Fanny Sucré of the co-operative in February 2012. It is certainly time to revisit the area and its wines.

27 January 2017 - Mediterranean Island Hopping tasting

An enjoyable visit to an excellent Sardinian restaurant in Bath on a hot day last July gave me the idea that a tasting of the wines of that island, together with those of its immediate neighbour to the north, Corsica, and Sicily to the south-east, might be of interest. I presented the following wines to a gathering of 23 members and two guests, and the consumption of every drop from nearly all of the bottles suggested that the wines were found to be well worth the visit. The tasting took us from south to north in Sardinia, from east to west and back again in Sicily, and then from south to north in Corsica, with the opportunity during the buffet to stop off in the Rhône and at Bordeaux on the way home. Many thanks to Liz Jamieson and Sue Gibson for the main part of the fine buffet, and to Ruth Campbell who provided two delicious *pannetoni* to accompany the Muscat.

28 November 2016 - Chinon tasting

This was organised in some haste, in consequence of Stephen Plaistow's ill health which sadly precluded him from preparing and presenting a selection of his own wines of Bordeaux. Fortunately, on Norman Gooding's recommendation, a case of Chinon wines had been bought from the Wine Society; and these were supplemented by a champagne from the society's stock and a Barsac provided by Richard Andrews.

9 November 2016 - AGM

The Committee had decided that it would be appropriate to depart from the practice of making the AGM an entirely free event, and to invite members to bring a bottle of their choice for tasting after the meeting. The response was magnificent, and there was a small surplus of bottles for use as buffet wines on the next occasion.

16 September 2016 - Austrian tasting

Linn Rothstein of Merry Widows Wine returned, following the successful tasting which she presented in February 2015. She gave an amusing account of how she and two others dealt with widowhood by sharing their love of the wine of their country while running a congenial business. The twenty members who attended enjoyed a full range of nine wines and a superb buffet.

27 July 2016 - Summer Dinner RAF Club Piccadilly

This was a return visit to this highly regarded club which was also the location of last year's Dinner. It was again held in the prestigious President's Room and was in celebration of the Winetasters 50th Anniversary. Wines, food, service and atmosphere all helped do the event justice.

20 May 2016 - Château Fourcas Dupré Tasting



This was held in St Peter's Church hall. It was presented by past Chairman Stephen Plaistow who described recent progress of this domaine using vintages selected from 2001 - 2010. Vieux Château Gaubert was also presented as a comparison.

18 March 2016 - Alsace Horizontal Tasting

This was held in St Peter's Church Hall and consisted of a horizontal tasting of 2007 Rieslings, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from our own stock purchased from The Wine Society. Presentation was by past President Charles Gibson.

27 January 2016 - Australian Tasting

This was held at St Peter's to mark Australia Day on the 26th and was presented by Daniel Todd of Majestic Wines. Chardonnays, Cabernet, Malbec and Shiraz were selected from their current list. The wineries included 10 Minutes by Tractor, Two Hands Sexy Beast, Smooth Operator and Two Hands Bella's Garden as well as the more conventionally named Shaw & Smith, Barry McRae Wood and D'Arenberg.



7 December 2015 - Christmas Tasting

This was held at St Peter's and was presented by past President Charles Gibson and current Chairman Richard Andrews. It was based on a Wine Society Tasting case of Best of Both Worlds Reds featuring wines from Bordeaux and California. Rieslings from the last German Tour were included to round the tasting off.

7 October 2015 - AGM

Held at St Peter's and attended by 19 members. A subsequent walk round tasting made good use of members' choices which included a Viognier Pays d'Oc, a Crémant Limoux and a Nicolas Potel from France, a Barolo Manzone Perno and a Le Buche from Italy, Running with Bulls from Australia, a Quinta da Rosa from Portugal and a Karthausberg from the Mosel.

24 July 2015 - Summer Dinner RAF Club Piccadilly



A very pleasant dinner in an appropriate location just after the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

17 June 2015 - Champagne Tasting

A return visit by Christos Ioannou of Criterion Wine to present further examples of the excellent quality to be found amongst the region's smaller growers. Wines from Simonsig Kaapse Vonkel, Louis Picamelot, Hubert Paulette, Dauby, Bernard Hatte, Pannier, Voirin Jumel and Andre Roger were all enjoyed.

6 May 2015 - Majestic Tasting of South African Wines Mayfair

A tasting given by Daniel Todd manager of the Mayfair branch to show off their re-furbished premises in South Audley Street. Wines from the following growers were presented: Ataraxia, De Morgenzon, Griffen, Rustenberg, Meerlust, Boekenhoutsloof and Kanonkop.

11 February 2015 - Austrian Tasting St Peter's

Linn Rothstein of Merry Widows Wines and a specialist on Austria presented a tasting based on the wines of Heinrich Hartl from Thermenregion, who was also in attendance. The following were tasted: Rotgipler, Zweigelt, Pinot Noir, St Laurent, Gruner Veltliner, Sauvignon Blanc, Muskat Ottonel and Blaufrankisch.