

The International Wine and Food Society, Berkshire Branch

Annual General Meeting - Secretary's Report for the year ending 29th February 2016

Committee:	Chairman	Colin Mair
	Vice Chairman	Doug Miles
	Secretary	Julie Graham
	Treasurer	Andrew Johnson
	Membership	Anthea Johnson
	Catering	Charlotte Turner
	Members	Chris Graham, Johanna Raffan, Ian Roe and Carol Roffey

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Pat Curtis. Colin Mair began the January meeting with a tribute to Pat who died in December 2015. Pat was one of the founder members of the Berkshire Branch, as well as serving twice as Secretary with her husband Tony and finally as Chairman for 15 years before retiring in 2013. Our thoughts have been with Tony and we look forward to seeing him back at meetings in due course.

We have been pleased to welcome four new members over the last twelve months – Bob and Kate Harrison and David and Maureen Bukht.

Kate Dowdeswell left Awin Barratt Siegel in order to pursue a change of career. However, the wine trade drew her back in and we were extremely pleased to welcome Kate once again to IWFS Berkshire. In addition she is studying for her Master of Wine, a very gruelling experience judging from her comments. For the March meeting, Kate brought a selection of wines from the Loire Valley. The Loire extends much further south than perhaps one realizes, as it rises in the Auvergne, within 160 kms of the Mediterranean Sea.

A Vouvray Mousseaux Réserve Brut NV from Yapp Brothers was served as the apéritif wine – a Chenin Blanc that is kept in very cold limestone cellars. Kate changed the traditional order for tasting wines and we began with a Pinot Noir Rosé from Caves Saint VERNY in the Auvergne. Appropriately St VERNY is the patron saint of wine although his name varies across the regions. This is a Co-operative of 86 members near Clermont Ferrand, on a similar latitude to Bordeaux but higher, the Massif Centrale of very old volcanic rock providing a productive and fertile environment along with a continental climate for the cool Pinot Noir grape. The two red wines from the same Co-operative were a Gamay and a Pinot Noir. The wine had a blueish hue and was high in PH. In contrast the Pinot Noir was redder with a lower PH level. Both scored an average of 6.5 – 7. The first white was a Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur Lie from husband and wife team, Louis Métaireau. This had none of the sharpness which one often associates with a bottle of Muscadet resulting in several surprised but pleasurable comments from members. It achieved a justified 7.5. There then followed four Sauvignon Blancs - a Quincy from Jacques Rouzé (7), a Pouilly Fumé by Régis Minet (7.5) and two Sancerres produced by Pierre Martin – a Monts Damnées 2013 (7.5) and an oaked 'Cul de Beaujeu' 2013 (8).

Charlotte carried out her usual research for the evening, discovering that there are 48 cheeses in France that carry the AOC status. Six of these are in the Loire Valley, all of which are goats' cheeses which Kate had already referred to as a going well with some of the local wines. Apparently the Arabs left their goats behind after they were defeated at the Battle of Tours in 732. The six cheeses were: Valençay, Crottin de Chevignol known as Chavignol, Chabichou du Poitou, Poulligny St Pierre, Selles-sur-Cher and Sainte-Maure de Touraine. These were preceded by a game casserole served with mashed celeriac and pointy cabbage. (33)

We decided to celebrate St George's Day with a tasting of English Wines. We were joined by Julia Trustram Eve, Marketing Director for English Wine Producers. Julia proved to be extremely knowledgeable and was a fund of information. She remains working in the English wine industry as the changes that are occurring make it an exciting place to be - acreage has doubled in the last 10 years; there are currently 470 vineyards in England, 20 in Wales and 1 in Scotland; twenty four vineyards produce 80% of the output; two thirds of overall production is sparkling wines with aromatic still white wines also proving popular. Much advice has been

sought from Germany over the years, enthusiasm meaning that patchy quality has gradually been replaced with a professional, business approach, an improvement in planting and a greater degree of consistency.

The apéritif wine was a Brut 2012 from Camel Valley in Cornwall with 50% Seyval Blanc, 25% Chardonnay and 25% Reichensteiner. This was an Award winner and Camel Valley is proving to be a great ambassador for the world of English wines. We tasted two more sparkling wines, a Classic Cuvée Brut NV from Hambledon and a Rosé, Ridgeview Fitzrovia from Ridgeview scoring 6.5 and 7 respectively. Two whites followed – a Bacchus 2013 from Chapel Down (6.5) and a Pinot Blanc 2013 from Stopham (7.5). A Rosé from Denbies NV made of 85% Dornfelder and 15% Pinot Noir scored 6 and our one red wine of the evening, a Pinot Noir from Bolney Wine Estate, achieved a wide spread of scores, averaging at 7. The final wine was a Late Harvest 2013 from Astley, 100% Siegerrebe, scoring 6.5.

Charlotte frequently impresses us with the quality of her meals and Friday was no exception as she excelled herself once again, on this occasion assisted by an aspirational trainee chef, Di. Continuing the English theme Charlotte created our favourite foods, first in miniature in the form of canapés and then as a main course. We tasted rare roast beef Yorkies, a traditional English breakfast (including a baked bean!) and mini fish and chips. Our main course was Toad in the Hole with Bubble and Squeak (try explaining that to German friends!) followed by a three part dessert – lemon posset, individual Bakewell tarts and sticky toffee pudding. All absolutely delicious. (26 + 4 guests)

May has been a tricky month with regard to numbers since it is a period when many members take their holidays. On this occasion however, the opportunity to try a unique tasting of 6 vintages of Château la Lagune proved a big draw. Alex Corrin very kindly delved into her cellar (albeit upstairs rather than down!) and brought along bottles from 2011, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2005 and 2001. As one member summarised, this meant the variables were all fixed except for the vintage and therefore the age, although the blends varied very slightly. Despite the fact that 2005 and 2009 score 7s on the IWFS Vintage Chart, the 2007 produced the greatest surprise. The range of scores also showed that members responded to the vintages in different ways. Not surprisingly the 2011 vintage still had some maturing to do whilst the 2001 scored the highest. 2011 = range of 4-9; 2009 = ave 8; 2008 = ave 7; 2007 = range of 6-9; 2005 = ave 8; 2001 = ave 8 with a couple of 10s. The tasting notes made frequent reference to “coffee beans” which proved a mystery as did a discussion on feminine versus masculine wines. Thank you Alex for allowing us to experience these wines.

Chris Graham sourced a Crémant de Bordeaux Rosé as the apéritif, which went down very agreeably. Alex also brought two whites from Bordeaux & Beyond – an Entre deux Mers and a Château de Respide Graves which proved to be a “marmite” wine as it was very heavily oaked. Charlotte prepared a delicious duck canapé, with chicken and ham pancakes on a bed of spinach, with gruyère topping served with new potatoes and English asparagus as the main course followed by raspberry crème brûlée with a shortbread biscuit. (34)

Ian Roe organised our June lunch for us this year at the George and Dragon in Swallowfield. Whilst the lack of a “flaming June” meant we were dodging raindrops and unable to sit outside for our apéritif, we still enjoyed a glass of cava which Ian had purchased beforehand. The choice of Thai fish cakes, chicken liver parfait or melon with feta cheese and Parma ham all proved popular. Ian had selected four wines from the list to accompany our food and allow people a choice – Fathoms Sauvignon Blanc, Picpoul de Pinet, Ripasso Valpol Remo Farina and Navajas Rioja. There was a wide range on offer for the main course with the calves liver proving a favourite. The portions were well-sized and, although the roast beef was rather too well done for some tastes, everyone tucked in with relish. The brioche summer berry pudding was well received with vanilla panna cotta or lemon posset for those preferring a lighter option. As always, these Sunday lunches provide the opportunity for members to socialize over a longer meal. Thank you, Ian. (19)

Our August meeting proved to be exceptional with Yoko and Chris Gutch and Charlotte organising an evening of Japanese food, drink and culture for our edification. The tables were delightfully laid with origami birds and chopstick stands (prepared beforehand by Yoko), small wooden implements and Japanese style flowers with pebbles. Chris concentrated on introducing us to seven different Sakes, explaining how they are made and the differences between them. To be honest, far more enjoyable than I anticipated although the small shot glasses gave sufficient quantity as Sake is quite strong. Yoko and Charlotte provided a wide range of dishes

to taste alongside the Sakes starting with a comparison of Highland beef and Wagyu – literally “Japanese cow” – the latter being extremely expensive at £96 per kilo. Fortunately, at this price it was extremely delicious! The beef was accompanied by edamame beans which one ate directly from the pod. We then tasted Ohitashi (par-boiled vegetables), pork belly, tofu, Negima (chicken thigh & spring onion with Tare sauce), Gyoza (small rice dough dumplings filled with ground meat and vegetables) and finally Sushi which we prepared ourselves with a choice of seafood and vegetables. Bottles of Japanese beer provided a welcome accompaniment to this course or green tea if one preferred.

All three presenters helped to explain what we were eating, as well as the etiquette linked to such dishes. I have only touched on the array of flavours that we experienced so if you wish to find out more you can read the paper that Charlotte prepared which is on the IWFS, Berkshire web-site along with photographs and Chris Graham’s article which was also printed in the Food & Wine magazine. A great deal of time and thought went into preparing for the event. Yoko must have emptied her kitchen as she provided sufficient bowls and cups for everyone. It was an amazing evening, thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed by members and several guests. (28 + 9)

In September, sixteen members of the Branch met together in Pamplona in order to explore vineyards within the Navarra region. Johanna Raffan, in liaison with Xavier Tournon (a local resident) and with guidance from our President Julian Jeffs, oversaw an excellent stay at the Castillo de Gorraiz Hotel and visits to six Bodegas. These included Ochoa, Senorio Sarria, Monjardin, Senorio de Arinzano, Monasterio de Irache and Inurieta. Our thanks go to Johanna for organising such an interesting and enjoyable tour.

A new speaker joined us for the October meeting – Torquil Jack from Carte-du-Vin whom we met at the Wokingham Wine Fair. He provided a tasting of South African wines from some of the lesser known producers around Stellenbosch and Franschhoek. All the wines were single grape varieties starting with an oaked Chardonnay from Clos Malverne. Subsequent wines included a Semillon from La Chataigne which proved popular, a Viognier from Noble Hill and a Chenin Blanc from the Star Hill Estate in the Tradouw Highlands. The red wines included a Merlot from Noble Hill, a Cabernet Sauvignon Springfield Estate in the Robertson Valley, a Cabernet Franc from Lynx Wines and a Grenache from Arendsig – the latter was considered a “marmite” wine and indeed the wide range of scores reflected this fact. Charlotte selected less traditional South African recipes inspired by the restaurant “La Motte” in Franschhoek. For the main course she served a venison pie with buttermilk pastry, followed by a passion fruit cheesecake. Torquil brought along a Syrah which was the recommended wine to accompany the food. (23+3)

Our Vice-Chairman, Doug Miles led the November meeting with a selection of wines acquired during his visits to Alsace. After a simple lesson in Geology and History, whilst members finished supping their glass of Crémant d’Alsace Cuvée Prestige, Doug went on to explain the three classifications – compared to 57 in Bordeaux. The entry level Riesling was much dryer than the German equivalent and paved the way for a Riesling Grand Cru Schoenenbourg 2010 from Dopff & Irion in Riquewihr which scored an 8. As Doug commented, Alsatian wines “cry out for food” which perhaps explained the wide spread of scores for another Grand Cru, Riesling Cuvée Frédéric Emile 2007, from Trimbach in Ribeauvillé. Whilst Pinot Grigio often has a poor reputation as a pub wine, the two bottles of Pinot Gris which Doug brought along both scored 8+ - one a Pinot Gris GC Brand 2008 from Cave de Turkheim and the second, a Pinot Gris GC Hengst 2007 from Josmeyer in Wintzenheim. The tasting concluded with a Gewurztraminer Cuvée des Comtes d’Eguisheim 2005 and Pinot Noir 2011 from Cave de Turkheim.

Charlotte prepared an “experimental supper”, as suggested by Doug, a rustic dish called “Baeckeoffe” meaning “baker’s oven”. This hearty one pot casserole of lamb, pork, beef and vegetables was prepared on Sunday evening, taken to the village baker so that on Monday, which was washing day at the river, the hot casserole could be collected on the way home with a loaf of bread. An Alsatian apple tart with its thin layer of custard topping was served as dessert. Doug chose a Pinot Noir to accompany the casserole and Gewurztraminer Vendange Tardive to go with the tart. Members thoroughly enjoy meetings organised by other members so a big thank you to Doug for sharing some of his favourite wines. (34 + 2)

Our Sunday lunch in December was held at Shaun Dickens at The Boathouse in Henley. The menu was unusual yet proved to be very popular. The group was made most welcome and the glass of Prosecco on

arrival gave members time to share news whilst enjoying a few delicious canapés. Pig Cheek with white bean, brassica and sorrel competed with Salmon, cauliflower, golden sultana and caper or Pumpkin with walnuts as a starter. Lamb with salsify, turnip and sea lettuce was the favourite main course with a few choosing cod accompanied by polenta, red wine and watercress. Apple with financier (a small French cake), sage and camomile or fig with yogurt and honey were equally popular. The service was excellent and the overall opinion was that it had been a very good venue. My thanks go to Hugh Edwards who recommended the restaurant and who made the initial arrangements. (27)

For Tony Hill and John Green of Bordeaux & Beyond, January provided them with the third opportunity to share some of their wines which they have acquired from Independent Vignerons of France. As Tony explained, they are now in their 8th year of trading, they enjoy drinking wine and having a good time and they only buy wine in which they themselves indulge. It is a recipe for an extremely good evening with a range of wines that suited all tastes. The fact that Tony and John know the vineyards so well means they have a fund of stories from the owners including finding an unknown grape in a field in Plaimont which, when tested, proved to be pre-phylloxera and bottles of Le Faite Blanc that are stored in soil underground and celebratory glasses of wine given to those who manage the cycle ride up the slopes of Mont Ventoux to where Domaine Vintur is situated. It transpired that one of our members, Bob Simson, has succeeded in carrying out just this feat and he was duly rewarded with his own bottle of Le Gentleman.

Tony and John took us on a tour of France to include Burgundy with a two bottle in one Chablis (the addition of CO2 meant the first mouthful was fresh and zingy although if left for an hour after opening, the wine reverted to a traditional Chablis), SE France, Provence, the Gironde and Bordeaux. Six of the nine wines tasted scored 7.5 plus showing that the overall scores were above average, including the apéritif wine, a Champagne Domi Moreau. The highest scoring wine was the 2010 Médoc, Goulée from Château d'Estournel, although inevitably this was also the most expensive. Having wetted our taste buds with king prawns with saffron and garlic aioli, Charlotte prepared a winter warmer meal of rolled breast of lamb, Daube style, served with champ and peas. Orange scented ricotta cake with new season rhubarb provided a delicious dessert. (33 + 4)

Our February meeting enabled us to focus on a small region of Hungary whose past reputation for sweet wines and cheap party Bull's Blood has changed considerably. Suzy, the Sommelier at The Boathouse, kindly introduced us to Ferenc Zelenak of Zefino Wine & Spirits thus allowing us to appreciate all the changes that have taken place in the Historical Wine Region of Tokaj since the end of Communism in 1989. Everything in modern Tokaj stems from that date with the wine growers able to return to their natural roots. It is a small area of 9,500 hectares, with 8,000 hectares used for wine growing. The wines we tasted came from two main grape varieties – Furmint and Harslevelu. The first dry Furmint was produced in 1993, two years after the last Russian soldier left the country. We tasted a range of single varietal and blended Premier Cru and Grand Cru wines before moving on to a Late Harvest intense flavoured sweeter wine from Patricius. In Ferenc's words: "on the palate, is love". This also achieved the highest score of the evening at 8.5. Ferenc's family has been involved in wine-making for generations, not only in Hungary, but also France and Italy. His deep understanding and knowledge of the subject and area made it an extremely interesting and informative evening. Charlotte's second winter warmer was a casserole using shin of beef with swede and peas, followed by chocolate espresso cake with red berries. The supper wine was Titi, Egri Bull's Blood produced by Gal Tibbor – quite different from days of yore. Both courses went down extremely well! (33+3)

I always like to take this opportunity of thanking all of you who contribute in many different ways, either with setting up or packing away, carrying boxes in and out, writing articles, managing the web-site, recommending speakers and leading sessions as well as the Committee members who cook, advise, manage the finances and help to organise events. This contribution is greatly appreciated as it helps maintain a thriving Branch. Thank you again.

Julie Graham
February 2016