

The International Wine and Food Society, Berkshire Branch

Annual General Meeting - Secretary's Report for the year ending 19th March 2010

The committee for the last year has been:

Chairman	Pat Curtis
Vice Chairman	Carol Roffey
Secretary	Julie Graham
Treasurers	Johanna and Sandy Raffan
Members	Charlotte Turner Colin Mair Chris Graham

Tasting wine is a different experience for each one of us and that statement probably reflects people's attitudes towards this year's meetings. Many of the wines have been thoroughly enjoyed, others less so and yet I know you still found the presentations interesting and informative. I always explain to speakers that our members are very knowledgeable and that you gain much pleasure from learning about new wines and vineyards about which you previously knew nothing. Judging from comments everyone will have learned something "new" over the last twelve months. The numbers in brackets represent the numbers attending each meeting.

Having completed the AGM, we were pleased to welcome back **Frank de Mengel**, head of the Bakery Department at the Hospitality and Catering section of Westminster Kingsway College, accompanied by one of his students Sam Laverick. On this occasion Frank talked about **chocolate**, going through the history of chocolate and then sharing samples of 10 different chocolates ranging from white chocolate (which we now know contains no chocolate at all) to 100% cocoa solids. He demonstrated heating chocolate in a microwave and then using leaf moulds to make decorations. At the end, members were each presented with a little box containing 4 chocolates of different shapes and fillings, all personally made by his students. Since deciding on the best wines to drink with chocolate is always a subject for discussion, Ian Smith very kindly brought along some Elysium 007, California Black Muscat from Quady Winery, Madera, to enable us to experiment. The conclusion was that it went very well with the dark chocolate. Charlotte provided a meal of corn-fed chicken followed by a selection of cheeses and dried fruits to complement the tasting. (37)

Ians Roe and Smith presented us with a real challenge at the April meeting when they asked members to compare pairs of wines and state whether they were **New World or Old World**. The choice of grape varieties included Riesling, Pinot Noir, Tempranillo and Shiraz whilst the range of countries covered Germany, France, Spain, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia. Cries of "but I have just been there" or "I had a bottle of that last week" still didn't enable people to always come up with the correct answer. Definitely fun although the evening proved how much the production of wines is changing across the globe. The meal was a one pot stew of pork and beans with an upside down apple cake served with fudge sauce and clotted cream. Delicious even if not the ideal choice for weight watchers! (38)

It had been agreed during the IWFS Berkshire Branch visit to Lake Garda in October 2008 that we should acquire additional bottles of the wines tasted in order to present them at a members' evening later in the year. This would allow those who had made the journey to Italy the opportunity to reminisce on a splendid weekend and for others to share in some of the wines that we had enjoyed. **Colin Mair and Chris Graham** put together a tasting in May entitled **Italian Retrospective**. Samples of wines from the Custoza, Bardolino, Valpolicella and Soave regions were shared alongside a commentary and photographs of the vineyards, the surrounding countryside and towns. Charlotte provided an accompaniment of cold meats and Italian cheeses, followed by spinach and ricotta cheese pancakes and last, but certainly not least, some Italian gelato. (34)

Superb and excellent were two of the words used to describe both the presentation and quality of the food at **The Goose at Britwell Salome** where we went for our Sunday lunch at the beginning of July. From the mouth-watering parmesan dusted choux pastry canapés, which accompanied a very soft and creamy Prosecco, to the final dish of sweet and sour strawberries, every course produced a cry of delight and pleasure. Whether one was tasting the Paignton crab with a foaming pink grapefruit sauce, Berkshire Downs chump of lamb or the chocolate and olive oil truffle, the ensuing silence paid due respect to the food on our plates. And as for the Hay Baked Chiltern Hill's Muntjac – absolutely splendid! **Ryan Simpson**, the chef, and his team have made the headlines twice in the last month because of their achievement in gaining a Michelin Star and also because they decided to leave the Goose. Hopefully they will find new patronage and premises in the near future and within easy reach of Berkshire. (15)

Wines from the Jura proved to be a very specialised tasting although several commented that it was the first time that they had attended a purely Jura presentation. **Sophie Verstringhe**, MW, returned to talk us through these wines. Since she comes from this region, she had sourced her wines direct from the vineyards including two from the Tissot family. The famous, or infamous, depending on your point of view, Vin Jaune and Vin de Paille caused comment even if not to everyone's palate. Two lesser known grape varieties included a Poulsard red and a Trousseau red. Charlotte served cornfed (Bresse) chicken cooked with dried morelle mushrooms and crème fraiche plus vegetables followed by a charlotte aux cerises for dessert. The numbers attending were rather low, with so many members away on holiday. (18) I will return to this point at the end of my report.

October's tasting involved **Duncan Ross** from Berkmann Wine Cellars talking about his native **New Zealand wines**. Duncan is so enthusiastic that it is always a pleasure to meet up with him again. We treated ourselves to a NV Pelorus from Cloudy Bay as the aperitif before embarking on wines from Nautilus, Coopers Creek, Matakana and Prophets Rock. The highlights of the evening were the Nautilus Sauvignon Blanc matched by two reds, the Pinot Noir from Nautilus and the Matakana Estate Moko 2007. Roast lamb had to be another favourite cooked with thyme and lemon and served with dauphinoise potatoes followed by white chocolate cheesecake served with poached berries. (40)

We were delighted to welcome a new presenter to our November meeting – **Kate Dowdeswell** from Awin Barrett Siegel. Kate was asked to prepare a tasting of **Dr Loosen** wines produced in both the **Pfalz** at **Villa Wolf** and the **Mosel**. Particular emphasis was placed on the impact of different terroirs on the same grape variety, a point proved by the Riesling produced in the Mosel compared to that grown in the Pfalz. The evening began with an unusual 1990 Graacher Himmelreich Sekt. Although more expensive than our usual aperitif wines it was considered an excellent alternative to champagne, scoring 8 marks. Having sampled the white wines, we tasted 4 different Pinot Noirs, including a Pinot Noir rosé. Although not scoring as highly as the New Zealand Pinot Noirs, they provided an interesting comparison. Kate proved to be another speaker whose enthusiasm for her subject was highly infectious – we hope that we will be able to entice her back on another occasion. Always on the look out for new dishes, Charlotte discovered pork and beer stew served with red cabbage, followed by Stollen bread and butter pudding. (30)

Lunch at the **Walter Arms in Sindlesham** was obviously a popular venue for our early December Christmas get together. Starters ranged from tomato soup, chicken liver parfait, smoked haddock, leek and gruyère fishcakes and goats' cheese tarts; the selection of main dishes included rib-eye steak, corn-fed chicken and sea bass fillets, the latter proving to be particularly good. Portions were not small but with a little space left for dessert meant members were able to enjoy roasted banana pudding, sunken chocolate cake, passion fruit pannacotta or honeycomb ice cream. An Italian Pinot Grigio and a Cabernet Sauvignon from Concha Y Toro accompanied the courses. (27)

It was touch and go whether we would be able to proceed with the January tasting but the weather forecast proved accurate and the snow had melted sufficiently to allow members to journey across the wastes of Berks, Bucks and Oxon in order to make their way to Waltham St Lawrence. This was another new presenter, recommended by Colin Mair. **Tony Hill**, accompanied by John Green, from **Bordeaux et Beyond** talked on just that subject, presenting a selection of wines from around Bordeaux. Tony is a member of the Association of Small Direct Wine-Merchants and therefore buys his wines direct from the vineyard - these included cru-artisan and garagiste wines. Clarets are always a favourite and although members will be familiar with Côtes de Castillon, Saint Emilion and Margaux it was good to be able to introduce them to vineyards they had not heard of before. Bottles of the Chateau Micalet 2001 and 2002 have been purchased for the Society's cellar, to be held over for future years. En route to Bordeaux we took a quick detour to Chablis country so that we could help Tony and John decide which 1er cru they should be adding to their wine list. Unfortunately for them, the result was the same as elsewhere with a 50/50 split! Hopefully they will reach a decision in due course. Charlotte was taking a well-earned holiday and so our supper was provided by Deliciously French in Cookham. (35)

The last meeting of the Society's year proved to be yet another challenge as **Pat Curtis, Doug Miles and Charlotte Turner** prepared a **Food and Wine Matching** evening. The aim was to investigate how the taste of wines can be modified by the food and vice versa. Smoked mackerel paté with or without lemon accompanied by duck eggs were tested with a pouilly fumé, pouilly fuissé and a gewürztraminer. It was hard to imagine which wine would go with the fragrant green Thai chicken curry but we tasted the same three wines and made our comparisons. A selection of cheeses followed by a chocolate fondant and fresh pineapple provided the final challenge with three new wines, a priorata, jurançon and Madeira. It would be unfair to comment on which wines went with which foods as inevitably everybody's opinions and taste buds varied but it was a fascinating experience all the same. (37)

General Matters

My first comment is to thank all those members who have contributed to the presentations over the year. In putting together the programme, I aim to achieve a balance between new and familiar, applying this to both the wines and presenters. The members' evenings are always popular and it makes one realize how much expertise there is amongst "our own". I always welcome suggestions for events so please let me know of any new contacts or ideas you may have as I start to plan the 2010-2011 programme.

I mentioned in the paragraph related to the September meeting that a large number of people were on holiday. During the AGM I will therefore be asking your thoughts on the proposal that we should hold a meeting in August and abandon September. This assumes that we can find a presenter who is not him or herself on holiday.

Finally, a few personal thank yous: to Pat Curtis, our Chairman, who is always at the end of the phone should I require guidance or advice on a matter; to Charlotte Turner, whose excellent meals contribute significantly to the success of the evenings; to John Farren for maintaining our web-site (www.iwfsberkshire.org); to Shirley Burt, who washes, sweeps and generally cleans up after us; and finally last but not least, for all your help in clearing away at the end of the evening – I can assure you it is greatly appreciated.

Julie Graham

March 2010