

# THE JUDGES' NEWSLETTER



THE NATIONAL GUILD OF WINE AND BEER  
JUDGES

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have been using this system for many years (JNL 2/99).

I had the pleasure of sharing a table with Paul at the '92 conference and remember his excellent Trockenbeerenauslese-style wine made from Canadian grapes - Hello Paul - I am sure it won Gold !!

I see much merit in the new system for our competitors. We have tried in many ways to indicate good wines or beers that have not won a prize certificate by collars, stars, red ribbons and comment labels - how much better to receive a Bronze award instead.

As with any new system I see problems in introduction, administration and implementation.

1. The cost to Show organisers in producing new Gold, Silver and Bronze Diplomas with redundant 1st, 2nd, 3rd and H.C. cards (I have at least 5 years supply for the Stockport Metro Show).

2. Awarding of trophies; we have 38 for 28 classes, although this could be overcome if Judges are instructed to award "Best in Class" regardless of award given.

3. Time: I have advocated for a long time that usually we do not have enough time to do total justice to our competitors especially in respect to completing comments labels. For example, at this years National, we did not start judging until gone ten and were given until noon to finish. I was even told off for trying to get ahead before the briefing by numbering my bottles! I had no steward, 2 classes, 1 of which was the Circle Barley Wine, over 30 bottles in total and did not actually finish until one o'clock. I felt

## **Going For Gold**

### Bill Lowe

What a hornets nest has been opened with the excellent article (JNL 1/99) from New Zealand regarding Gold, Silver and Bronze awards in place of First, Second, Third etc, and now we find from our Guild member Paul Dunsheath in Canada that they

pressurised; am I slow? Or do other Judges feel that we need more time? Now, if we have to further assess the wine and beers for Gold etc, we certainly will not manage in the usual time allowed, especially if we adopt the system advocated by Paul, with multiple Judges tasting every exhibit, and then discussing each finalist !! It would be interesting to know how long the Canadian and New Zealand Judges are allowed. I know that in Holland they take all day.

4. Educating the Judges - oh! What a task we have ahead ! At the Wales & West this year we had for the second year comment labels where we had to give a score between ten and four. This year Peter Coombs had even printed instructions on the comment labels; excellent I thought. To quote: "0-4 below average, 5-7 above average to good, 8-10 good to excellent quality. Wines displaying 9 or 10 may well have been finalised or given awards". He asked us not to mark below 4. I filled in my comment labels from my notes as I believe many Judges do, and awarded 10 to most prize winners and 9 or 8 to all finalists (as they were worth it) and so on down. I thought it a good system and on my own exhibits was pleased to gain an 8 or 9 without an award. However, the Master Winemaker, who is a member of my Society, won a first in Rose medium dry, and a second in white table dry (over 100 entries), but only received a score of 8 in both classes. In discussion with a few Judges in the evening, I mentioned this (to me) anomaly, and had comments thus: "I never award 10", "I mark as I go along and do not know at

the time that wine will win the class", "I give the first 10 and so on down". To me this proved that with some Judges a Gold Award would be as rare as rocking horse manure!!

5. Federations: I think we should consult with Federations and not just bring in this system for the National.

Finally, I believe we must go forward with the competitors we still have and I think that with careful administration, instructions to our show organisers and our Guild, this could be the way ahead.

## NEW MEMBERS

In response to Pauline & Barry's pleas to advertise, and promote our craft, I still continue to write an article for our Ratepayers magazine, delivered to 7,000 homes in our village, local press, library and village hall, and we still cannot gain "new" members, except by introductions. We have 67 members, many who no longer make wine or beer, so our programme does look a little like the WI! We have a good social life and a healthy bank balance, which enables the wine and beer makers to still have a local Society. Ten members went to the Wales & West. I give out one gallon beer kits and wine recipes and encourage them, but we are all getting older, and find that we cannot attract the 40-year-olds, and younger, who seem to have different values to us (too much money ?). Did you read about the vicar in Wilmslow (our next village), who said his population worshipped

money, and ignored his church? Who needs homebrew?

We have youngsters (20-40 years old) at our socials, who enjoy our beer, but when I tackle them, they say it's too much trouble. I'll keep on trying.

Bill Lowe.

Bill- I'm afraid you are definitely NOT on your own- it is happening all over the country - Ed.

## **Wild hops and wild beer!!**

I am inspired by Doug Hodkinson's article in the last issue of the JNL on the "North Shields Hop Field". It details how he grew, dried & used home-grown hops quite successfully.

This takes my mind back to the early 1960's, when I worked at Aldermaston, and lived in Tilehurst, Reading, and gathered hops there.

How different the Home Brewing scene was in those days - and also Reading was then still a brewing & biscuit town.

Making your own wine was quite legal, but brewing beer was illegal (before Reginald Maudling changed it all). To get good ingredients for brewing, you had to pay for a license from Customs & Excise and they visited your premises where you brewed. I forget the exact date Reginald ended all this (was it 62 or 63) ?. Anyway, I was making beer long before then, using whatever ingredients I could get my hands on.

The "Teaside brewery" started in about 1955, when I found I could acquire malt extract from Boots, hops (of very dubious quality) from the herbalist, and cheap soft brown sugar from the grocer - and, of course - bakers' yeast. The brewery consisted of 3 empty sweet bottles, holding about 5 pints each, and the location was my first abode of married life, a flat rented from ICI at Norton-on-Tees.

I was very scientific, mind you. I measured my temperatures and took the specific gravity of the wort with a "No 1 Twaddell hydrometer". That, & thermometers were readily available to chemists. I quietened my law-abiding conscience by saying what I made was barley wine NOT beer. To justify this, I started each brew at 150 Twaddell, which is a specific gravity of 1.075, which results in an alcoholic strength of over 10%.

The sugar to malt proportion was slightly greater than 1:1, so the brew, when fermented, looked like bitter, it was light-bodied, and did not taste particularly strong. Indeed, bottled in screwtop lemonade bottles, it looked quite innocent, and was what is called in Yorkshire "lunatic broth", which refers to beer that is quite strong but does not really taste so. By the way, each jar of wort had a slice of toast on its surface, and the yeast was sprinkled on that (I always thought that the desired effect was to carry the yeast to the bottom - Ed !!).

The brew & I became very popular and the recipe was much in demand. I experimented with variations but the 150 Twaddell brew, toast and all, was the favourite.

I remember being unpopular only once with this brew, and that was with Pauline. It had finished fermenting in a warm corner of the flat, and I was carrying 2 full sweet jars out to the garage to cool & settle. I'd forgotten to screw one of the lids up tight before I did this, and the bottle parted company with its lid all over the hall carpet !!

When we moved to Reading in 1959, the same malpractice

continued, much to the delight of old & new friends. Indeed, one of the new friends told me that wild hops grew near the river Kennet, on the way to Burghfield. The hop vines were mainly supported by wild brambles, and in the autumn, they looked lovely together, the green hopcones, and the purple blackberries.

Mind you, I followed this progress during the growing season at regular intervals, because there was a pub nearby called "The Cunning Man" (that sounds appropriate - Ed), where the landlord kept Symonds's bitter in superb condition, straight from the wood, and, naturally, I had to visit there.

The hop picking time duly came, when the brambles were fully ripe. I took Pauline a picnic (and wine), and my 2 sons aged 5 & 3, to join in. I still have photos (somewhere) of them wreathed in hops, with darkened faces from blackberry juice! A truly bacchanalian scene!! We picked a canny lot of hop heads - like Doug- and some green, some brown, but God knows what weight. I had a warm, dry loft above the garage, where I dried them to heaven knows what weight. All I do remember is they got a lot lighter, & hop content? - never heard of it then! I tried a brew from them. It was less than ordinary!, so the rest went on the compost heap. No more wild hops in my "wild brew". Soon after that, beer making was freed from its shackles, so I could get lovely fresh green hops from Boots, and later from other good sources, and brewing started to be more serious - but that was when we

moved back to ICI at Runcorn, and that, dear reader, is another story!!

Philip Dransfield.

What a lovely little tale Philip! - Ed

## ***Sweetness without gravity***

There have been quite a few articles recently on sweetness in wines.. One aspect of sweetness that has always bothered me, is the difficulty for the amateur to stabilise the lower alcohol sweetened wines for long-term storage. Often, on returning from shows where I have entered table wines, social wines and fruit wines that have been recently sweetened with sucrose, I find that they are prone to re-fermentation. Although they stay stable for the duration of the show, and have been topped-up and re-sealed, instability soon shows in these wines. Potassium sorbate in conjunction with metabisulphite could be used, but with either the risk of a geranium bouquet of unpleasantness due to excessive sulphite & sulphur dioxide I have never been keen on this approach. Alternatives are to use an unfermentable sugar such as xylitol, or an artificial (non-sugar) sweetener.

A few years ago, Cyril Beck wrote an interesting article in the Judges Newsletter, No: 1, 1996. In this, he compared Meads that had been sweetened with either sucrose, honey, xylitol, saccharine, or aspartame. In general, there was little

difference detected in levels of sweetness or quality of the wines. The results presented here concur with Cyril's findings, and I have followed-up by contacting Monsanto, the makers of the aspartame-based product Canderel.

I'd just started experimenting with aspartame and xylitol, when I realised that I needed a medium white table wine, to take to the next meeting of North Thames Judges. Deciding that I would take a wine that had been sweetened with aspartame, I turned to my source of aspartame, Canderel. The bottle lists the ingredients as maltodextrin and aspartame. The instructions are that an equal volume of Canderel will give the same degree of sweetness as an equal volume of sucrose. Therefore, I sweetened-up 1 litre of my dry white base wine to sg 1.010, noting the volume of sucrose required. I then added an equal volume of Canderel to 1 litre of base wine. On tasting the 2 products I was quite impressed, there being no apparent difference in sweetness or quality. 2 other wine friends tasted these 2 wines blind, agreeing that they tasted very similar in all aspects. Except for the specific gravity, of course. The SG of the wine sweetened with aspartame was still only 0.995, although there was no noticeable difference in the weight or viscosity of the wine. So, I bottled my wine that had been sweetened with aspartame, and headed towards North Thames Judges's meeting.

Alan Thurlow took a specific gravity reading of each wine, before it was served, disclosing the sg after tasting & discussion. Following after

2 wines with sg's of 1.010 & 1.000, Alan's eyebrows were twitching when he compared the taste of my wine to the gravity reading. Although Alan immediately realised that it must have been sweetened with a non-sugar sweetener, the rest of the Judges, who did not yet know the sg of the wine, had no concerns about the sweetness of the wine or its suitability as a medium-style wine. Here are the notes on the wine by Anne Mills: "some found the bouquet delightful, while others did not. Very pleasant in the mouth, good balance. Bill had sweetened this with aspartame, which accounted for its very low sg reading of 0.994". Bernard Lamb queried the stability of aspartame in wine, and this was something that would obviously have to be inspected, if the product was to have a future as a sweetener for long-term storage of wines.

With a view to examining longer-term storage, I next looked at the use of aspartame to produce a sweeter-style wine. This time, I introduced xylitol, a non-fermentable sugar with a sweetness very similar to sucrose. As the same concentrations of xylitol and sucrose have similar specific gravities, a dry sherry-style wine was sweetened with these 2 sweeteners to sg 1.028. Aspartame was added as before, to make a third wine, using the same volume to wine ratio, as used for the sucrose. Although the sg of the aspartame wine was 0.996, it was very similar in sweetness, body and flavour to the other 2 wines. All tastings were done blind, even by me, as someone else would pour them blind for me. The first tasting was by a panel of 7 who,

although they each thought that there were small differences in the wines, could not show any consistency as a group, and could not tell which wine was sweetened with aspartame. One of these tasters was a quality control expert for a leading drinks manufacturer, and 4 of the panel were National Judges. The wines were tasted again at intervals of 1, 2 and 3 months by a panel of 3. There were no obvious differences in the 3 wines, except that at 3 months, there was a trace of a medicinal flavour in the xylitol wine. Surprisingly, the aspartame wine still had a similar degree of sweetness, showing no signs of instability. The sweetness of aspartame, a hybrid compound of the 2 amino-acids, aspartic acid & phenylalanine, is due to the spatial positioning of the various groups in the molecule. If there is any hydrolysis, i.e. if it should split-up into aspartic acid & phenylalanine, all sweetness would be lost. An interesting article in the New Scientist (19th June, 1986) points out the long-term instability of aspartame in water, suggesting that it breaks-down at a rate of 10% per month at room temperature. For this reason, I contacted Monsanto, asking for information on the stability of Canderel, and also asking if there was any information on the use of aspartame in wine. Another question asked the ratios of maltodextrin to aspartame in the product. They passed my letter on to their company in France, and I enclose the reply from France.

Dear Sir,

My colleagues from Monsanto plc. Nutrition and Consumer UK, have conveyed to my attention your letter in which you raised several issues and questions about how to sweeten the wine, instead of using usual sugar, or alcohol sugar. As you have well observed, Canderel could provide a good sweetness, and you have already performed some shelf-life determination study ( so far up to 3 months).

So far, to the best of my knowledge, no trial has been done to sweeten the wine with aspartame, except a personal tentative to sweeten the cane sugar "brandy" with success, but without analytical support data - just the sensory limited tests. I will be back with consistent information in September, to provide you, in order to answer your various questions. Meanwhile, I would suggest that you continue to keep samples of wine in room or cellar temperatures and to taste them to satisfactory.

Aspartame is unstable on a long-term basis in water solution, but in a complex medium such as wine, and with the presence of alcohol, it could reserve some surprises.

With my best wishes and  
Sincerely yours,  
Albert T. Luong.

Certainly, his English is streets ahead of my French. Unfortunately, I did not set-up my tasting trial with years or even months in mind, and the bottles are now empty (shame - Ed).

However, this would be a good time to restart. If I could find enough 50ml or 100ml containers, I



could dispense the wine in these, using one aliquot of each wine for tasting at suitable intervals. However, such things don't fall of the back of lorries for me any more. I will forward any further information I receive from Monsanto.

### **Bill Smith**

Bill - I've been using Canderel in powder form and also tablets for ages, but I suppose a lot haven't. NOW - does anyone have these containers for Bill, to allow him to carry-on with the experiments ???  
Over to you !!!!- Ed.

## ***Guild Handbook***

The NEC is considering a review of the Guild Handbook, to include recently-agreed modifications to procedures to Judge multi-bottle &/or split classes. If anyone has any further comment to make regarding these, or any other aspects of our Handbook, please contact Doug Hodgkinson as soon as possible, and certainly before the end of the year.

## ***Conference 2000***

We require volunteers to produce 10 pints of barley wine for our Conference 2000 (made to our Millennium recipe, previously published). Bill Elks is arranging this one, so please give him a ring if you can help

## **Thoughts on Recruitment**

The other day, my thoughts turned to ways of recruiting more members to the Guild.

Suppose each Regional Group organised a seminar on "Judging of home-made wines", and invited members of Circles, or anybody else interested, to attend. The sessions would be biased towards practical tasting of a selected number of wines, chosen to show the spectrum from the atrocious to the divine, and would serve to illustrate the qualities that make a wine a prizewinner, those which condemn it, and how a qualified Judge knows the difference.

Those who attended would be taken through the standard procedure for judging wines, with an explanation by a Guild member of the specific qualities of each wine. A selection of 'Smells' could be made available to supplement the tasting.

The aim should be to demonstrate that with a logical approach, the wines essentially sort

themselves out, and that wine judging is a straightforward process. The Guild examination procedure would be explained, with the emphasis on the aim of allowing each candidate to judge the wines in a relaxed atmosphere.

Doug Hodkinson.

## **More thoughts on recruitment**

From Chris Randall

I read with interest the Chairman's article in the Newsletter on recruiting new members for the wine circles. I do agree with all your sentiments, as Mike & I have seen the same decline & although we have a healthy membership in our wine club, the actual makers are getting fewer & nothing is more demoralising than giving a talk to a club where only commercial wine and beer is on display, or, when you give a tasting whacking great tumblers appear.

Last year, our club, Grove Hill, had a recruitment evening. Flyers were prepared & distributed to members, asking them to put them on any notice board, newsagents, libraries, shops etc, that they could find in their area. Local newspapers were also contacted & adverts placed. Everyone on the committee took time to prepare the hall, showing equipment, bubbling wine, photos & the like, and all wore club sweatshirts. Only 2 couples appeared throughout the whole evening! So, after all the work and preparation, was it worth it?

**You bet it was, 4 new members who are wine makers!!**

The evening will be repeated **next year**, & we are getting involved **in village** open days. There are like-minded people around, who do not realise there are clubs for them, but we **can't** be everywhere, & all we can do is try.

Chris Randall.

### ***From the Chief Examiner***

As I write this, preparations are being made for the the next examination, to be held at Northolt on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September. There are four candidates for wine at the moment, and no beer candidates.

Informal discussions with some members of NGWBJ about recruiting more candidates and the convenience of only two examinations per year resulted in the suggestion that the exam could move to a particular area if there were a group of candidates ready to take the exam.

I would certainly consider running the exam on two consecutive weekends in two different venues if there were sufficient demand.

There is a lot of work involved in putting together each examination, and it would be sensible to make maximum use of the wines which are prepared for the exam.

I would be grateful for any thoughts that members may have about this idea. I would also like to hear from anyone who is running a training group for the exam, or who is

considering running such a group. Training manuals are available from the Supplies Officer, and I would be happy to help and advise if required.

The next examination will be in March 2000 at the National Show at Weston-super-Mare on the Sunday morning. Please encourage any prospective judges in your area to steward for you and persuade them to get their applications in as soon as possible. Application forms are available from the Secretary, or from me.

John Scottow

## ***Bouquet minus 15***

### An anonymous reply.

This happened to me, and the only course of action I could think of, was to station the Steward on the other side of the table (ie, as far away as possible), put the cleaning bucket on

his side, station my glass holder in a central position, and hope he didn't come any closer ! I think the main problem is that these people really do not know !!!

Now for 2 delightful articles by Bernard Lamb. I have them together for obvious reasons !! They certainly put an edge on your appetite !!

**National Judges' Wines  
& Puddings. Bernard  
Lamb.**

On 30th July I put on a tasting of National Judges' home-made wines and my puddings for the London Branch of the International Wine and Food Society (IWFS). The aim was to show these lovers of commercial wines just how good our home-made ones could be. The 18 places were fully booked, with a waiting list, and the event was held on a hot evening in a large garden in Notting Hill Gate.

I spent the previous evening making 38 puddings, and was really looking forward to tasting these wines from some of the best wine-makers in the North Thames area. The tasters were asked to award marks to find the best wine of the evening.

**1. Fred Chaloner (Richmond; not a judge). Fresh grape, dry, 1997.**

Greenhouse-grown Middlesex Mueller-Thurgau grapes 20 lb, 1 litre grape juice, ½ kg sultanas, tartaric

acid, 2 lb sugar. - Pleasant but not exceptional.

**2. Alan Kimber (Harrow). Light white, off-dry, blend of mid-1998 and 1999.**

From commercial cartons of fruit juice; grape and apple, with some apricot and peach. - Good bouquet with some tropical fruit hints. Soft, pleasant.

**3. Anne Mills (Harrow). Sherry-style aperitif, dry.**

4-gallon stone jar with loose top. Puts odds and ends of clean dry wines in when she takes any wine out - "mother barrel", not solera system. More than 15 years since starting the jar off. - Genuine sherry oxidised smell. A good, clean dry sherry; better than some commercials, and more obviously fruity.

**4. Bill Smith (Chiltern Masters). Chianti 4, dry red 1998.**

Finest elderberries and morello cherries from his garden, with minor additions of raspberries and strawberries. 4 months in English oak. - Lovely fresh red colour. Lots of alcohol. Fruity bqt., including soft fruits. Very good flavour and length, but a hot finish. Elegant and complex. Tasters' general verdict: much too good to be a Chianti!

**5. Bernard Lamb (Richmond). Red dry, first take, 10/97 - 3/98.**

2 lb 9 oz very ripe elderberries. 9 oz blackberries. 1 lb sloes. 1 kg California seedless raisins. Gervin No. 2 Montrachet/Burgundy yeast. ½ teasp Tronozymol. 1 ½ lb sugar. Fermented

on pulp 7 days; strained. - Excellent deep red-black. Lots of alcohol. Deep fruity nose. Complex; huge length. A serious food wine.

**6. Alan Thurlow (Harrow). Dry red table wine, 1996, unfiltered, oak matured.**

Blackberry and elderberry. - Excellent deep red. Big legs. Very good bqt., complex of fruit and oak. A very fruity wine, with plenty of tannins - should improve as they soften. Long and definitely oaky.

**7. Bernard Lamb (Richmond). Raspberry, medium dry, 4; 8/94-4/98.**

3 lb raspberries; 2 lb sugar. Strain off fruit pulp after two days and eat it. 4 fl oz old red grape concentrate; ½ tablet pectozyme; Gervin No. 5 yeast; 1 heaped teasp Tronozymol. After maturing dry, added 3 Gervin stabilising tablets, sulphite and 4 oz sugar to sweeten. - Deep rosé. Big bqt. of raspberry/strawberry/Pinot Noir. A light, simple, fruit-driven wine. A little thin.

**8. Sandra Claydon (Chiltern Masters). Sauternes-style sweet white, 1997.**

Rhubarb, apple and strawberry. Oak? - Gold-apricot colour. Good sweetness and balance but not as good a wine as her usual one of this type, which is superb. Several people said that it smelled of cheese, Brie!

**9. Bernard Lamb (Richmond). Satsuma white sweet, 2/92-12/94.**

18 satsumas, 3 clementines, 4 large Navels; halved, squeezed; used only

juice. ¼ teasp. Minavit nutrient, ½ tin very old Boots medium-sweet white grape juice compound, 1 ½ lb sugar. 1/3 pectolytic enzyme tablet. 3 frozen skinned bananas. 500 g blended sultanas. Gervin No. 3 yeast. More sugar later, after adding 1 stabiliser tablet and sulphite. Peel of 2 oranges put in mark 1 oven for 10 minutes; added for 2 weeks. Final gravity 26. - Lovely rich colour, amber-gold-apricot. Big deep bqt., more complex than straight citrus. Great balance, body and length. People's comments: "raisins, plums, apricots, Christmas pudding".

**10. Bloke in a pub, not a judge, via Alan Kimber. Wine left by man's late father in a demijohn. Madeira-style, 8/87.**

Blackberry mainly. - Slightly red amber. Maderised bqt., but not oxidised. Excellent flavour and length. Enjoyable. People's comments: "Madeira; amontillado; to go with cake."

**11. John Holgate (Harrow). White/brown after-dinner wine, 1997.**

Sultanas, dates, raisins, figs, dried rose hip shells, bananas, white grape concentrate, sugar, oak granules, tartaric acid. - Deep copper-amber. Big legs. Dried fruit/figs/apricot bqt. Huge body. Excellent length and balance. Very concentrated flavour - too intense to drink much of it. True after-dinner style.

**12. Brenda Holgate (Harrow). After-dinner red, 24/2/96.**

Sloes, elderberries, blackberries, black plums, raspberries, bananas, red grape

concentrate. - Lovely colour. Big legs. Excellent bqt., with hints of cherry kernels and sloes. Good body; sweet. Balanced. Could be deeper, but very enjoyable.

**13. Bernard Lamb (Richmond). Red after-dinner 2, 10/90-4/94.**

1 ¼ lb elderberries, 2 lb 10 oz blackberries, 7 oz raspberries, 6 oz dried rose hip shells, 7 oz blackcurrants, 250 g very old black apricot halves (1986); boiling water. Mashed. When cold, added ¼ tablet pectozyme, ¼ tsp. Minavit nutrient, Gervin No. 3 Bayanus yeast, 1.2 lb sugar, 1 lb old bottle Polish bilberries. Fermented on pulp 7 days; strained. Later added 3 tsp. acid-reducer and ½ lb sugar. Later, 15 oz sugar. 1 stabilising tablet. - Red-amber/deep tawny/black. Excellent bqt., with sloes and complexity. Luscious; sweet and fruity. Great length. I love it!

**14. Pam Brunning (not a judge).**

**Rowanberry sweet, 1978.**

Copper amber. Big legs. Good bqt., with no oxidation, but hard to describe. Complex flavours. Keeping very well, although not made to keep. Excellent balance. A very interesting wine; enjoyable.

**Puddings: crème brûlée; tiramisu.**

The puddings and wines were very well received, especially the sweet wines. One French woman did not think any of them smelled like wine, although she liked the flavours. A cookery writer loved the crème brûlée and the red after-dinner 2.

**Best wine of the evening.** The tasters did not know whose wines were which during the tasting. I was surprised that none of the three very good dry reds received any votes. Alan Kimber's light white off-dry got two votes, and my satsuma sweet and red after-dinner 2 each got seven votes, but the tasters were not judges. Six of the people present, including me, had been to an IWFS tasting of old Sauternes two nights earlier, going back to 1947, 1940, 1938 and 1904 (a wonderful wine, still keeping very well), and I thought that our home-made wines stood up well in comparison, even without allowing for the huge price difference.

***Exquisite tasting  
torture ! (or the battles  
of Bernard Lamb)***

On 16th July, I competed in the André Simon Trophy of the International Wine and Food Society, for blind-tasting of food and wine. The torturers-in-chief were David Natt, a wine-and-food writer and former deputy headmaster, and cookery writer Silvija Davidson. They love giving us things which we have never heard of, let alone tasted. This makes for a fascinating meal to analyse as one eats, drinks and chats. Some questions were open-ended, but the multiple-choice ones gave everyone a chance of some points.

We began with a sparkling purple liquid. Was it beer, bir or byrrh,

and what vegetable did it contain? I have drunk a purple elderberry beer, but this smelled and tasted of beetroot, so I put bir from beetroot, which was right. Our host invented the name "bir", for beetroot kir.

Tasting the five fruit chips, I got apple, pineapple, jackfruit and starfruit, but put plantain instead of banana - those names overlap anyway. I thought that the Riesling wine was Australian, but it was from New Zealand. No one got the bread, which was bouillabaisse without the fish!

For the caviar substitute (from black roe of golden herrings), I fortunately chose Avruga, not Poutago or Jeripigo, which I knew was a South African sweet wine. I identified the mayonnaise correctly as Japanese-style but missed the ginger ingredient. We then had to decide whether the boiled eggs we were eating were from S. American Araucanas in the Cotswolds, Arctic gulls settled in the Orkneys, or Chinese squint-eyed ducks from Herefordshire! My S. American guess was right.

The next question was very well devised. We were told that the wine was 1990, Californian, and we had to guess the two grape varieties and name the valley with which they are normally associated. It was a dry white, so I tried to think of two appropriate grapes from one valley which were often blended, which rules out Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. Writing "Marsanne, Rousanne, Rhone Valley" earned me a valuable five-point lead as no one else guessed them. The wine tasted of white Hermitage, with a typically odd - not entirely vinous -

flavour. No one knew the red wine described as sounding as if abducted by aliens; it was Cigare Volante, French for flying saucer.

During the main course, I guessed that the very beefy dark sausages were from bison, not camel or llama, and identified one vegetable as cracked green wheat (Australian Freekeh), but failed to get the greens as cavello nero, although I did guess Italy as their country of origin. The relish could have been Indonesian made in Wimbledon or Hungarian from Sussex, but I opted for Australian capsicum and pepperberry chutney made at Wickham Vineyards, Hampshire, which was right. I was lucky with the next red wine, which I put as Aimé Guibert's Mas de Daumas Gassac from Languedoc.

With the three cheeses, I failed to recognise a Devon version of gouda, though I identified the caraway seeds in it. The cheese log I put correctly as being from Montenebro goats from Spain, not Mendip buffalo or Welsh cows, but the Coulommiers-style cheese I put as Mendip, when it was from Italy, from Brinata ewes. No one guessed sun-dried tomato flavouring in the water biscuits, and the organiser couldn't taste it either.

For the Chilean dessert wine, I knew it was not from Botrytised blanc de noirs Pinot Noir, but I guessed Torrontes grapes, when Semillon was the answer. I identified the Greek shortbread made in Britain; for the pudding, I was right about rose petal flavour for the yoghurt ice cream, but missed the guava jam. Finally, we had to identify the vinous element in three truffles, with no



multiple-choice help. By psychology rather than taste I got the champagne in the strawberry truffle, but no one guessed Royal Tokay in a brown truffle, nor Cabernet Sauvignon vinegar in the chocolate truffle.

It was my Rhone valley grapes answer, plus some careful eliminations as well as a few instant recognitions, which gave me the elegant engraved decanter trophy, with 28 points out of 50, a lead of four. The André Simon Competition is difficult but is enormous fun for the senses and for the mind.

Well done indeed! Bernard - Ed.