

A look at the top awards in past Nationals, which have nearly all been won by men.

Will 1982 Be Different?

by Stan Baker

It has been said that, given equal opportunity, women could equal men at all skills; but it seems from the records that at the National shows it is mostly men who get the top awards! The National evolved from groups of enthusiasts who created an Association of winemaking and beermaking clubs and, with the help of the Andover Circle, staged the first national show in Andover in 1959. The best wine of the show was made by Mr R. James of Bishops Cleeve. No runner-up was declared.

In 1960, Bournemouth was a flourishing club and they offered to stage the second National. The club donated the Bournemouth Master Winemakers trophy, which was won by National judge Roy Roycroft. Harrow members offered to stage the 1961 show and for the first time women gained major awards; National judges Cedric and Dulcie Austin were the Master Winemakers and Mrs R. Evans of Southampton was runner-up.

The National moved westwards to Cheltenham for 1962 and Ken Hill, the big man from the North, gained the top trophy. No runner up was declared. The following year I attended my first National. It was held in the Royal Stables adjacent to the exotic Regency Palace in Brighton. Roy Roycroft became Master Winemaker for the second time and both runners up were men. Sybil and Ken Hill had donated the Hill Cup for this position.

1964, and the National returned to Bournemouth. Wilf Newsom, a lifelong brewer, donated the Wilf Newsom Trophy. Still women exhibitors had no luck – men won all the top awards. The next show was staged in a holiday camp at Clacton, and the membership and the bottle entry exceeded all previous totals. Wine and beer classes were large for the limited numbers of National judges then available; some judges started assessing at 7 a.m. and refreshed their palate at breakfast! All top trophies were again won by men.

The weather at most Nationals has usually been tolerable, but the 1966

show at Harrogate was an exception, being cold with falls of snow. The Master Winemaker trophy was again shared; by Mr and Mrs Dunkley of Hertford and Mrs D. Gray of Cleveland. Men won the other top trophies.

In 1967 the National returned to a holiday camp venue – this time at Bognor. Fred Forster of Faversham was Master Winemaker and Mrs Barker of West Kent was runner-up. Mrs Barker was a courageous woman. She told me that her arthritic hands were often so painful that she had to “reserve her strength” and so only exhibited wines at the National.

If one enjoys a National or not, much depends on the weather. Since I started attending Nationals in 1963, I can only recall one National where there was any rain and it would seem that the end of March is not a particularly rainy period. The National at Torquay in 1968 was staged in glorious weather, warm and sunny with the palm trees waving gently in the light breeze. This exotic atmosphere must have inspired the ladies – they did their best ever by winning both wine awards. Rosa Dodds of Wickford, Essex, was Master Winemaker and Gladys Williams of Faversham, Kent was runner-up. Two men shared the beer trophy.

Back to the breezy North for the 1969 Southport show and this was not a bad year for the women. Rosa Dodds shared the Hill cup with John George (Bexleyheath) and Mr and Mrs Russell of Totnes were Master Brewers. Mr

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Russell had previously won the award in 1967 but had possibly decided that two heads and two sets of hands were better than one.

Caister Holiday Camp on the Norfolk coast was the venue for the 1970 Show and it must be admitted that English holiday camps in those days were not ideally suited for cold weather! The days were bleak and cold but the evening atmosphere was warm and friendly and wine flowed freely. Mr and Mrs Sims of Solihull won the Hill Cup, the only top success by a woman.

Kingston-upon-Hull (to give this East Yorks city its full title) was the 1971 venue. Men won most of the major awards with Vic Treveill, a relative beginner to winemaking, winning the Hill Cup, but one cannot forget Phyllis Farmer of Essex parading back from the presentation platform with the top of the Huge Hidalgo trophy stuck on her head. Amid the pomp of the Victorian architecture of the Grand Hall, it was a very amusing spectacle.

SOUTH AGAIN

South again to Sussex for the 1972 Show at Eastbourne. The big bottle entry and rather restricted space for the judges did create some problems, but at the end of their stint the judges again decided that the men had done the best job and gave them all the top awards. The following year the National returned to Harrogate and this time the weather was mild. It was a vintage year for Freda Botto of the Towers, Ashford Kent; she won the coveted Master Winemaker award.

The seashore leisure complex at Margate was the 1974 venue and competition was very keen; all the major awards were shared. Mr Clements (MELAW) and Mrs R. Kershaw of Crosby were joint Master Winemakers and Dr and Mrs Leadley of Nottingham shared the Hill Cup with Mrs A. Newton of Crosby.

There was no show in 1975, due to a general reluctance to pay the high accommodation costs, but an A.G.M. was held in the centre of Birmingham

to allow members to voice their opinions about the cancellation of the show and to vote on whether to continue with the National. It was worrying that the association might not remain viable after the lapse of one year. Along with 70 other enthusiasts I voted that the Association should continue and subsequent events proved that it was the right decision. Naturally, the A.G.M. was a glum affair and the fact that it seemed impossible to find a route to get a car near to the Conference Hotel to off-load the luggage didn't help matters! Even the local bus drivers could not understand the newly introduced one way system; so eventually I toted the luggage from the nearest car park. It was fortunate that a show wasn't held in Birmingham; it would not have pleased exhibitors with three or four cases of wine to carry.

Unhappy with the show let-down of the previous year, the committee decided upon a new type of accommodation and in 1976 the show was held at the University of Nottingham. Being one of the most central venues it offered little excuse for wine not to "travel" but this was no consolation to the lady exhibitors – men won all the top awards.

POPULAR PLACE

The following year, 1977, the National was staged at Scarborough, an attractive seaside resort on the East Coast. The weather was mild and walking around the town and shore areas was very pleasant; lifts and gentle slopes made access to the venue very easy. Men again won all the top awards with Ken Gunn (Ace of Clubs) becoming Master Winemakers for the second time.

In 1978, the National returned to Nottingham University. Once again it was a pleasant weekend – especially for Jim Cotter (Ace of Clubs) who won the Master Winemaker award for the second time, repeating his previous achievement at the University. The National returned to Brighton for 1979, but this time to the new multi-million

pound leisure centre. The building was so large that on occasions even the committee became lost! Women exhibitors also seemed to lose their way; they had no luck at all with the major awards.

The National moved North again, to breezy Blackpool, for the 1980 show. The accommodation was plentiful and reasonably priced but the show offered little joy to the women exhibitors – the top awards eluded them.

TOO MANY HILLS

South again to the University of Exeter for 1981, which was ideal for the purposes for which it was intended – housing able-bodied students for a three year period; the buildings were too spread out and the gardens too hilly for less active wine and beer makers! Once again, women were not among the top awards.

At the end of March, the 24th National Conference will be held at Scarborough and again the local hoteliers will do everything that they are able to make it a pleasant relaxing weekend, as they did in 1977. After this severe winter, we hope the weather at the end of March will be pleasant. I hope, too, that some women exhibitors will gain top awards. We have yet to gain a Master "Brewster" – but I feel that women are capable of getting this trophy. Let us hope that 1982 will be their year.

