

a Civic opening, lectures, a six-class wine competition open to all attending, followed by a Social Evening. The event was called "The National Congress of Amateur Winemakers", and was attended by 170 people. Representatives came from circles all over the country. The list, which may not be complete, has in it the names Bristol, Cardiff, Bishop's Cleeve, Cheltenham, Farnborough, Coventry, York, Winchester, Southampton, New Forest, Leeds, Chelmsford, Norwich, Portsmouth, Bournemouth, Watford and Twickenham. There must have been members of other circles present in a private capacity because the entries in the Wine Competition, 184 bottles altogether, came from 25 circles. The business session which followed the tea break was notable for its complete lack of enthusiasm for anything resembling a National Organisation. Only three delegates favoured the setting up of a committee to look into standards for shows and competitions, and only five voted for the creation of a National Committee. Nevertheless, the Congress was voted a success and takings covered expenses, just.

Undismayed by the lack of enthusiasm for a national organisation, the Bournemouth Winemakers' Circle announced in the January number of the "Amateur Winemaker" in 1960, that a Conference of Amateur Winemakers would be held in the Town Hall, Bournemouth on Friday evening and Saturday, April 22nd and 23rd, 1960, with a Civic reception, lectures, discussions, exhibitions and a 20 class Wine Show, the largest open show solely for wines undertaken at this time. In March the title used was the "Second National Conference and Show", with the optimistic overtone implied and subsequently vindicated that there would be more of them. Again the event was a great success. Over 300 attended and the show contained more than 600 bottles entered in 21 classes. As many as nine judges were required and the list of prizewinners names 26 wine circles. The organisers took advantage of special terms offered to Conferences by Bournemouth Corporation, setting a guideline for many later Conferences.

That there was a place for a National Conference and Show was by now quite clear although the majority of those who attended the Bournemouth Conference did not think so. In the autumn of 1960 an invitation was sent to all known organised bodies of winemakers to attend a meeting in Andover to discuss the possibility of forming a central body to organise annually a National Conference and Show. Delegates from most of the established circles in the southern part of the country and the Principality of Wales assembled in "The Star and Garter Hotel" under the chairmanship of Mr. C. J. J. Berry, and after much discussion elected a committee of nine to reorganise an annual event. The committee consisted of C. J. J. Berry, who was elected Chairman, R. C. Lucas, who was elected Secretary, I. C. Morgan who was elected Treasurer, together with S. W. Andrews, L. W. Gilbertson, E. A. Malin, C. W. Martin, B. G. A. Turner and R. A. Webb.

To provide some financial backing, it was agreed that the Treasurer should ask wine circles to contribute to a guarantee fund, voluntarily, suggesting 1/- per head of their membership as a reasonable figure. The question of creating a Federation of Member Circles was discussed but the majority of the delegates preferred to keep the Show open to all,

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE AMATEUR WINEMAKERS' NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND SHOW

The big increase in home winemaking which occurred in the early 1950's made inevitable at some time or other the formation of a National Conference and Show. Although the making of wine at home in Great Britain is a craft centuries old, it was a vague exploitation of a natural phenomenon until science became involved and the mystique of country winemaking, with its open basins, floating toast, yeast and no-yeast recipes was rationalised. Guided by the few books available in 1950, winemakers adopted the new techniques of yeast cultures, starting inocula, regulated sugar and acid contents, the closed vessel and the fermentation lock, and moved from an era of hit and miss to one of reproducibility where experience is valuable and can be handed on. The first step in organisation seems to have been made in Andover in 1953, when a group of winemakers got together to exchange ideas, experience and information. The association was mutually so advantageous that in the course of only a few years many other groups were formed in other towns and cities, to which the main production of wine had shifted from the country areas.

Any product which can vary in quality invites some sort of appraisal, involving the comparison of like with like leading to the selection of one product as the most preferred. By tasting wines made by others and asking for the recipe and production details whenever a preferred wine is encountered, the individual can seek to improve his product within the scope of his acquaintances, usually other members of a Wine Circle. In the wider field, the task of selecting the preferred wine must be delegated to a person whose judgement will be accepted by a majority of people. These are the judges at the various shows. With the vast amount of experience accumulating and rapid improvements in quality which occurred, the need for comparisons not only in the areas catered for by many local and county shows but on a country-wide scale began to be felt.

The first proposal to hold a show for wines only, open to all, seems to have come from The Amateur Winemaking Society of Wales. The November issue of "The Amateur Winemaker" in 1958 carried a notice that this society was giving serious consideration to the idea of a National Convention at Cardiff in the spring of 1959. In December the plans were given for a 2-day Convention, Saturday and Sunday, 11th and 12th April, and details were sent to most known circles. In the event support was not sufficient to justify the financial risk involved, and in January, 1959 the "A.W." had to announce that the Convention could not be held.

Whatever may have been the reasons for lack of declared support, the idea did not die. In February, the Andover Circle announced their intention to hold a 1-day Convention in Andover, counting on a lower financial commitment and a more central location to get through where Cardiff failed. Expenses were guaranteed beforehand by members of the Andover Circle, and the date chosen, Whit Monday, 18th May, 1959. The scale was less ambitious than that of the Amateur Winemakers of Wales, and events confined to one day, but the pattern was similar with

without imposing any membership conditions. The Circles which responded to the appeal for a guarantee fund were :

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Amersham | Harrow | South Essex |
| Andover | Heighington | Southampton |
| Bournemouth | Hertford | South Down |
| British Timken | Hesa (Hayes) | Taunton |
| Bishop's Cleeve | Ilkeston | Twickenham |
| Bristol | Kings Lynn | Wakefield |
| Cheltenham | Liverpool | Wales |
| Churchill Gardens | Lymington | Watford |
| Coventry | Luton | Weald of Kent |
| Croydon | Leeds | West Kent |
| Dorking | Marconi | Winchester |
| Emmer Green | New Forest | York |
| Farnborough | Nottingham | Youlgreave |
| Farnham | Oakfield | |
| Gosport | Rugby | |

A total of close on £100 was provided. With this support the committee organised the 1961 Conference at Harrow, Middlesex on a larger scale than hitherto. Attendance exceeded expectations, and 750 bottles were entered in the competition. There was a clear but small profit, leaving the guarantee fund untouched.

The Harrow Conference was the result of an invitation from Wine Circles in the area, and at this conference invitations came from other groups to hold The National in their area. Several Circles were in positions to enjoy special facilities offered by the so-called Conference Towns. In successive years the National Conference was held at different places, with a progressively increasing entry in the show as the list indicates :

| | | | | | |
|------|-------------|------|------|------------|------|
| 1959 | Andover | 184 | 1966 | Harrogate | 2075 |
| 1960 | Bournemouth | 600 | 1967 | Bognor | 3320 |
| 1961 | Harrow | 753 | 1968 | Torquay | 3265 |
| 1962 | Cheltenham | 1222 | 1969 | Southport | 3500 |
| 1963 | Brighton | 200 | 1970 | Caister | 4100 |
| 1964 | Bournemouth | 1670 | 1971 | Hull | 2554 |
| 1965 | Clacton | 2000 | 1972 | Eastbourne | 4351 |

Success in terms of numbers brought its own problems. Staging a show of 2,000 bottles demands a considerable space, and the necessity to have alongside another hall suitable for lectures and meetings has over the years reduced the choice of venues. With increasing size has gone increasing expenses and increasing risk, and the committee has on occasion been compelled to guarantee expenses well in excess of its assets. With the aim of avoiding this situation, a Membership Scheme was devised by a sub-committee, by which anyone planning to attend The National was invited to make early payment and become a Member, thus providing the Committee with funds to meet early expenses without building up a large reserve. Circles were also invited to enter the scheme and a constitution was developed based on membership. Individual Members had one vote, Members Circles two votes, usable at the Annual General Meeting. This scheme did not meet with the approval of a number of Founder

Circles, who withdrew their membership, without of course affecting the right of any of their Circle members to enter the National Open Competitions. Later, in an attempt to meet the demand for more voting power in Circles, an Associate Membership Scheme was introduced.

Not least of the problems associated with increasing size was the problem of organising sufficient judges. The 200 entries at Andover were managed by five or six judges known personally to the organisers, and known to be competent. The 600 at Bournemouth in 1960 created more of a problem, but the nine judges used were still known personally to the organisers. By the time entries reached 2,000 it was too much to expect a convenor of judges personally to know the competence of every judge he invited. It was at this time that need for some sort of qualifying test for judges was felt, and at the Brighton Conference Mr. B. C. A. Turner called for such a test. Shortly after this, the National Guild of Judges was founded and has undertaken the selection of judges since then. Nevertheless, with entries in the region of 4,000 bottles all available judges have to be engaged at judging time, leaving no latitude for illness or inability of some judges to travel the long distances sometimes required. The creation of more judges is a slow process. Not everyone is capable of being a judge, and those who are need to acquire considerable experience which cannot be obtained from books.

Since the formation of the original National Committee in 1960, the home winemaking scene has undergone great changes. There is now a network of large Regional Shows covering the country, the interest in making wine at home scarcely needs promoting and the organisation of lectures and shows is being done very well through local organisations. That The National will undergo changes in the future as it has in the past seems almost certain and this history will be added to.