

NEWS AND VIEWS

AUGUST, 1980

Dear Members,

This is a reminder that annual subscriptions are now due, so if you have not already done so, get your subs sent off right away to our Membership Secretary, Jim Chettle, 45 Oak Tree Drive, Gedling, Nottingham. This will be the last reminder through this Newsletter, because for the rest of the financial year copies will only be sent to paid-up members. You will appreciate that the cost of producing and posting the Newsletter to you is quite considerable and much too costly to supply to anyone who does not intend to renew their Membership.

1981 National Conference and Show

Friday, Saturday & Sunday, 27th, 28th & 29th March

Our forthcoming Conference and Show will be held at the University of Exeter - a modern complex set in beautiful grounds, just one mile away from Exeter City Centre. Accommodation and all meals are provided and there are facilities for making coffee and tea in the residential quarters. The accommodation is in the Halls of Residence, similar in style to that provided at Nottingham University. The University is one mile north of the City and has easy access from the M4/M5 motorways and is only one mile from St. David's railway station. British Rail are allowing 33% discount on the standard fare to those attending the Conference who are booked in for the weekend. There is no doubt that holding the Conference in such a picturesque area may tempt some members to have a spring break in this beautiful area of England. Exeter is well worth a visit and from my own experience of the West Country, we will all be made very welcome.

There is no alteration to the classes which are the same as last year, but I would like to draw Members' attention to the new points system which has been devised in an attempt to avoid too many trophies being won jointly. All will be explained in the Schedule, which is at the printers and will be sent out with the November Newsletter. The following are the charges for the Conference:-

Members: Full board from Friday evening to Sunday lunchtime -	£35 per person incl. V.A.T. and service
Non Members: Full board, as above -	£42.50 per person, incl. V.A.T. and service
Non Member Non Resident Day Ticket, inclusive of Saturday night Fancy Dress Dance -	£5 per person

The accommodation Secretary is Len Drysdale, 17, Richmondfield Drive, Barwick on Elmet, Near Leeds.

Here is a brief run-down of the Programme:-

Friday	Reception of bottles and social evening, also Judges Briefing
Saturday	Judging in the morning with Film Show on Commercial Wines for those not involved in Judging. Afternoon: a Talk by Ken Barrell, B.E.M., on "Talking about Speaking" Bottle collection followed by Fancy Dress Dance and crowning of Wine Queen
Sunday	a.m. Prize Giving, followed by A.G.M.

We are all looking forward to what we know is going to be a wonderful weekend. By the way, bottles can be brought by car right up to the staging area, so no heavy boxes to carry this time.

The Executive have pleasure in announcing that Andy Wakeford, 166 Exeter Road, Exmouth, has kindly accepted the job of Local Liaison Officer. We have got him working on your behalf already. There are still a few bargains to be had, even these days. Our Supplies Officer, Norman Chiverton, Sutton's View, Woolscot, Rugby, informs me that he still has a number of Sterling Silver Ladies' necklaces with N.A.W.B. emblems for sale at the original price of £5, plus 25p postage. As these items have trebled in value since we first purchased them they are a terrific value still at their original price. An ideal gift for your girl-friend, wife, or somebody else's wife. How about it?

We have a pencil booking for Scarborough for our 1982 National. They invited us so we must all have made a good impression when we were last there. You will recall that our Awards Secretary, Roy Butcher, had to miss Blackpool due to acute back trouble (you know what a fiasco that caused) - well I am pleased to report that after a lot of suffering Roy is slowly on the mend and we all hope to see him at the next Executive meeting. Even though he had been confined to bed, lying on his back, he has still been busy working on the '81 National. How about that for devotion to duty?

Tom Caxton Best Bitter Beer Competition for Bitter Beer made by federation members in a national competition was judged in Bristol during the World Wine Fair week and the winner was Albert Wood, a boat builder from the Isle of Wight. Mr. Wood's prize was a fortnight for two in Europe, visiting leading breweries - worth, I believe, £1,000. Congratulations to him! I should think he will need another holiday to recover.

I am informed by P. Helme of Yarm that our Wine Queen, Judy Lloyd, is in fact a member of the Norton Wine Guild, Cleveland. I was sorry to hear that she has been in hospital with back trouble. Happily she is now well on the way to recovery and we all hope that we will be seeing her in Exeter.

A lot of interest has been caused by letters to the Newsletter upon the definitions of wine classes and you may recall that a few issues ago there was a note from Philip Dransfield on behalf of the National Guild of Wine and Beer Judges (I hope I have got that down correctly) Philip is the leader of a technical panel of the Guild who are at present engaged in producing a new edition of the Judges' Handbook. Philip assures me that they are taking note of all the comments made through the Newsletter and these views, along with all others, will be given consideration in their deliberations. Producing a new handbook is a long job as you want to get it right. All winemakers will be pleased to know that the work is still going ahead.

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It is with very great regret that I have to inform members of the sad loss of one of our long-established members, Mary Turner, beloved wife of Ben Turner, one of our Past Presidents. Mary passed away on the 6th June, 1980. Behind every good man is a good woman, and this was certainly true of Mary. She was always cheerful and accompanied Ben on all his many winemaking functions. She will be greatly missed by all of us, and our thoughts go out to Ben and his family during this sad time.

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WINE THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

Derek Smith of the Amateur Wine and Beer magazine has kindly sent me this extract from 'Grapevine', which is the newsletter for the British Columbia Amateur Winemaking Association, Canada:-

'The New Competition Handbook'

The fourth revised edition of the British Columbia Amateur Winemakers Association Competition Handbook has now been published and circulated after many hours of work and discussion (practical, technical and philosophical) by the BCAWA committee formed last September. The Handbook is a step-by-step guide to the running of a competition; the information it contains covers three basic areas.

The first section deals with what has to be done, and who has to do it. Complete duties are outlined for the chief steward, the host club, judges and stewards. Many details and suggestions have been added.

Another area covered is the scoring system, with complete explanations of the system developed by the British Columbia Guild of Wine Judges. Copies of scoresheets for wine, sparkling wine, beer and cider are included.

Finally, the competition categories have been more thoroughly defined than ever before. They are presented in an entirely new format. The committee dealt only with the wine classes, for two reasons: we were pressed for time, and none of us is a beer expert.

Each class is described in three ways. First, a brief paragraph outlines the use for which the wine is intended. Second, a 'technical characteristics' section lists common ingredients, and acceptable ranges of colour, alcohol, body, sugar, specific gravity and acid. I should stress that these ranges are meant to be guidelines only, they are not strict limitations. Third, several commercial examples of each category have been cited. Many wines were purchased and tests performed specifically for the purpose of making these class descriptions more complete.

We made the biggest change in the aperitif classes, and I would like to explain the reasoning behind this change. DRY APERITIF and SWEET APERITIF no longer exist in the Provincial Competition. We were dissatisfied with these categories because, as the definitions stood, the only difference between these two categories was a level of sweetness. The dividing line between dry and sweet was never defined, and this created uncertainty for the competitors and for the judges. It all depended on the judges' interpretation of the terms "dry" and "sweet", and the possibility was far from remote that an off-dry wine could win in both classes, or could be disqualified from both (too sweet for Dry Aperitif and not sweet enough for Sweet Aperitif). There was also the problem of heavily flavoured or bittered wines competing against delicate sherry type wines (or anise vs. Palomino). These flavoured, or herbed, wines are simply not compatible with the naturally made aperitifs. It became clear that the more suitable classifications are APERITIF (the sherries etc.) and HERBED APERITIF (the vermouths, Dubonnet types, etc.). Sweetness is no longer a factor in determining which aperitif category a wine belongs in.

The other category that has undergone a major change is STILL ROSE TABLE. In an attempt to meet the commercially accepted standard, it was decided to allow crackling roses in the rose category. Its new name is ROSE TABLE. This absolutely does not mean that sparkling roses are now acceptable in the table wine class - crackling wines show a rim of bubbles around the glass, and are slightly tingling on the tongue. There is no sustained or intense sparkle, merely a spriziness. Still roses of course remain in this category.

One last important difference this year is in the entry regulations. You may now enter two wines, beers, or ciders in a class. Enter to your cellar's content and double your chances!

NOTE - 1980 Provincial Competition entry regulations and class descriptions have been sent to your club.

Sal Robinson,
BCAWA Steward.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter from -

N. W. Chiverton, 'Suttons View', Castle Lane, Woolscott, Rugby.

Dear Ken,

May I offer what I imagine may well be the last word on the subject of sweetness in wines? I realise that many eminent people have written reams on the subject - but surely a sweet wine is one that tastes sweet; a dry wine tastes dry, and my definition of medium sweet is a wine that is not dry, but not all that sweet.

We all have a different palate, and every Judge's palate (whilst a standard is attempted at emanations) must be different. It must be down to individuals as to the sweetness of a wine and it is quite impossible to have strict guidelines in black and white.

Yours sincerely,

Norman Chiverton

Letter From Arthur Darby, 44 Downside Road, Sutton, Surrey.

Dear Ken,

Some time has now passed since the '80 National and the dust has no doubt settled. I would like to thank the Committee for another good National and to offer the following observations on the "Wine Queen".

It seems to me that the number of entries was a reflection on the - popularity? of this event which takes a 'fair chunk' out of the evening - and at a time when people have had a few drinks and are not at their most receptive or likely to observe the best of decorum.

If it is intended to keep the 'Wine Queen' perhaps the preliminaries could be concluded prior to the reception so that the time taken is kept to a minimum.

Thanks again to all committee members for a nice weekend.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur Darby.

Letter from D. A. Fraser, 172 Rochester Drive, Bexley, Kent.

Dear Ken,

Besides the foregoing letter, I wondered whether you may consider that the readers of N.A.V.O. may be interested in the enclosed poem which I discovered written in "Olde English" script on the wall of the dining room in our Hotel (The New Acacia) at Blackpool:-

"Most welcome guest we here present
our bill of fare for your content.
So, please enjoy your meal and drink
but sir and madam do not think
When you at last call for your bill
that all the cash goes in the till.
Remember, please, as you relax,
you're paying us for income tax,
Graduate pensions, too, and National Health, all fall on you.
V.A.T. put up the price, there's also Customs and Excise,
and licence duty to be met, hold on - we've hardly started yet.
There's import duty, profits tax, P.A.Y.E.,
and rates, inordinately large, and temporary transport charge
on everything we buy and sell, there's wine and spirit tax as well.
You'd think these charges were enough,
but still we have to cook the stuff.
Electricity charges cost a packet -
gas prices are a flaming racket, increasing at an early date,
and still there is the worker rate.
The barmaid's wages must be paid,
and wages for the serving maid.
Soap and polish, laundry, too - the whole damn lot depends on you.
And since among our other chores,
we must allow proportionate for losses quite extortionate;
For capital that we invest - no tax allowance is assessed.
All these taxes, large and small,
Are not, for sure, our fault at all.
We do not fleece you with intent -
Please blame the blasted Government.
Therefore, please eat and drink your fill,
Enjoy yourselves, we hope you will.
Remember when you pay your bill,
Not all the cash goes in the till.

Yours,

D. A. Fraser.

Letter from: Frank Scholes, 7 Warren Avenue, Portobello, Wakefield, WF2 7JW, West Yorks.

Dear Mr. Hill,

May I thank Roy Roycroft for his comments and interesting letters. I will read the article he refers to as soon as I get hold of it. I can also assure him that his advice on brewing wines is already being followed but I am always on the lookout for ideas that will improve mine. I am always willing to learn something new, I have also to try and achieve a high standard in my produce to avoid adverse criticism from the family experts who take a large part of my products.

May I now comment on Bob Marsden's letter in the May issue of N. & V. I agree with his remarks on flower wines classes. There is the danger of someone entering a flower wine which could be poisonous, but the judges do not consume any, I hope. But there is still the danger of someone else drinking some. Not being a great lover of flower wines, apart from one or two I have tried, for Bob's information I have some red clover in hand in which I have from time to time mixed with other herbs for medicinal purposes and I can assure him that it is not poisonous - neither do I think Farmers would allow their cattle to eat if it was poisonous. There is no difficulty in purchasing it. But I have never attempted to make any wine with it as I do not think there is enough bouquet with it.

Bob also raised the question of the cost of postage in returning the Draw Ticket counterfoils. Even if these were returned by Circles and Federations, the cost of postage would be high. In my opinion the better plan would be for them to be returned by those people attending the National. Surely there would be some volunteers to help in receiving them.

Stan Baker's letter regarding palate refreshers - I, too, have for a long number of years noticed the difference in water supplies in different parts of the country, having been involved in the use and treatment of large quantities of water. It can, and does, cause headaches. But I think he answers his own questions when he suggests using the water from the defrosting of the fridge - after all, it is more or less distilled water. I would suggest to him to take a sample of this fridge water along with a sample from his domestic supply and test his palate with them, then boil a sample of each and taste them again. I am also sure that some judges do take their own drinking water with them. A simple test for the hardness of water is to fill a bottle half full, cork it and then give it a good shaking. Very hard water will give a sound like a bottle full of marbles. The degree of sound on shaking will give a rough idea on the hardness of water, but for any accurate testing it needs an elaborate titrating kit and various chemicals together at a certain temperature.

I am also in agreement with the editor's reply to Derek Fraser's letter. In my view it is wrong to ask judges which class they prefer. Agreed that certain classes are difficult but a National Judge - having passed the examination - to refuse to take any class then I think he or she should withdraw. They cannot expect to gain experience by refusing to take certain classes if they stick to the judges' handbook and do their best then no-one can have cause to grumble. Anyone can make a mistake - we all do at times, I think, and learn by them.

I am, Yours,
Frank Scholes

Letter from: A. K. Nicholls, Chaldon, Brandize Park, Okehampton, Devon EX20 1EQ.

Dear Mr. Hill,

I would like to take advantage of the Newsletter to comment on some of the observations of Mr. Scholes in the February edition, and register surprise that no other saw fit to do so, except Mr. Roycroft in the May edition.

With regard to rosé wines, he states that this particular class causes a lot of controversy which is indeed true & I agree that "it is neither red wine nor yellow" but I dispute that the wine should be judged on the wine itself and the colour left to the judge's discretion since, if we are to take terms from the commercial field, then we must try to emulate those characteristics especially where the criteria is colour, rosé and tawny being the two most important examples.

In Acton and Duncan's "Making Wines like those you Buy" there is an item where a blind winemaker is asked to describe the taste of a rosé wine. His conclusion was

that the wine did "not differ very much from the white wines he had tasted but was certainly quite unlike the reds". Would Mr. Scholes advocate the award of a prize to a white wine in the rosé class because it tasted most like a rosé? Further, The Judges' Hand Book, which he recommends the use of, specifically mentions the colour as PINK although a range of colour is acceptable commercially from orange/pink through pelure d'oignon (onion skin) to rose/pink. Once again I reiterate that, despite a wine's characteristics being correct for the rosé class, if the colour is not acceptable, it is not a rosé wine.

May I turn to tawny desserts and pose the query as to how many competitors mature their RED desserts sufficiently long in wood for their wine to take on that brick/red hue browning at the edges which indicates a true tawny colour, instead of exhibiting the dark golden/brown array of OVER oxidised desserts which are invariably entered in the tawny dessert class because, due to their colour, there appears to be nowhere else for them to go?

Finally, as far as Mr. Schole's letter is concerned, as a National Judge, I object to the insinuation that judges have personal likes and dislikes at the show bench. I am ready to admit that when drinking wine we do have preferences but when judging be it dry elderflower or red dessert we are trained to be totally dispassionate in our assessment of the wines before us whether we like it or not. Imagine the chaos if judges refused to judge classes because they did not like the wine they were allocated. I find it difficult to understand the thinking behind the judges invited to judge at the National being asked for their preferences (D.A. Fraser's letter, May Newsletter), a practice which must undermine the basic principle taught to me during my judge's training, that I should be prepared to judge anything and should have no personal preferences at the Show Bench.

Turning my attention to Mr. Roycroft's contribution to the February edition, I would challenge his opinion that 'light red' indicates rosé. Light red is a relative description; claret is light compared to Burgundy or Rhone and Beaujolais is an extremely light red. Perhaps the word 'light' is the stumbling-block. Does it relate to colour, body, flavour, alcohol, or what? When that is decided doubtless some kind of consensus can be arrived at as to whether or not there should be another class, but until then "light will have to be judged against "heavy" or "dark" or whatever.

Mr. Roycroft also seems to imply that social wine or one that wins a prize is a lucky accident, that no-one intends to make a social wine. He says that they are run of the mill wines without specific purpose and deigns to state that they are pleasant rejects from purpose wines, not up to standard for their purpose. There is an art to making social wines whether dry, medium or sweet. Agreed they are just 'drinking wines' but social wine is in itself a purpose wine, designed to stimulate company into pleasant articulate conversation without the imbiber sliding off the chair into oblivion after two glasses, which must involve control over the balance of the wine, especially the sugar content and, in this respect, not any recipe will do. Without social wine our hobby would have died a quick death after its revival in the early '50's.

With regard to the May Newsletter, I am intrigued by the threshold table relating to taste quoted from J. G. Carr's "Flavour & Aroma in Winemaking". May I hasten to add that the following is not an opinion but an observation intended to stimulate discussion:-

In view of the fact that according to the table, the older we get the more difficult it becomes to recognise flavours, would this indicate that a retirement age should be set for judges or that the older we become, the more time we should be given, or a lesser number of bottles allocated to ensure that accuracy is maintained?

Yours sincerely,
A. K. Nicholls (aged 33)

Letter from Stan Baker, Chatham, Kent.

"The principal role of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what others have done. The great danger today is of slogans, collecting opinions, ready made trends of thought. We have to be able to resist individually, to criticise, to distinguish between what is proven and what is not".

When the French philosopher, Piaget, expressed the thoughts quoted above, it was most unlikely that he had the problem of assessing wine quality in mind. However, the panel of wine buyers "convened" by Decanter Magazine to taste and comment on their own wines (with labels covered) certainly did not have any collective opinions for every comment was at some variance to another about the same wine.

The basic properties of wine - body, alcohol, Tannin (in red wines), acids, flavour, sweetness or lack of sweetness are fairly easily discerned by the difficulty in assessment lies in the more complex properties evolved in the wine both during the fermentation and the maturation. Dependant upon the degree of experience, these complex properties may or may not enhance the wine. Quality clarets, for example, may have the bouquet and taste of cabbage water, but I am told by winelovers more experienced on drinking clarets than myself, that this is the real "McCoy".

Price is no index to the quality of a commercial wine. A few poor vintages and a huge public demand - usually of a "snob" nature and a wine hardly better than the average "home-made" commands a price totally out of proportion to its worth.

When the turnover is hundreds of thousands of gallons it is vitally important that quality control be maintained. Graphic charts mounted on the walls of the chemical laboratories of bulk wine shippers, derived from gas chromatography techniques help to indicate the accepted 'pattern' of the product but it would be unwise to suggest that a different product would not be equally acceptable to the public. The world is ever-changing. So, too, is the human palate as purveyors of sweet Port wine are only too ready to point out.

To survive, business must meet changing demands and even the new 'non-alcoholic' lager must have its place in changing drinking habits. For social purposes, people need to be seen 'drinking', but also have the need to drive without endangering the public. Perhaps the new "pill" to reduce the effects of drunkenness may also help in this situation.

Another problem for the judge of 'home-made' wines is - "How to prove that one wine is less drinkable than another?" Personal preferences vary; some people happily sip sweet Elderflower wine morning, noon and night. Other people with bigger pockets and drier palates may prefer "Cru" clarets. At wine auctions, one samples the wine with three objectives - Whether to buy or not at all, for drinking within a few weeks or for 'laying down' for several years.

At "Home-made" shows, the wine should be assessed for quality at that point in time. Consequently, wines with a chemical imbalance which may be easily rectified may do less well, in terms of points, than a wine which has irreversible faults but in less discernible amounts.

Excess oxidation, once an irreversible fault, can now be chemically treated. Yeast autolysis, very bitter in excess, can be retained in for a controlled period of time to improve the complexity of the wine. Acetic acid, among several others are produced during the fermentation and maturation periods of winemaking. These acids combine with the alcohol and produce "esters" which improve the bouquet. Some Americans are now questioning the use of the word "ester" but most winemakers understand the term "volatile molecules".

Mousiness we are told is a transient condition related to the presence of lactic acid bacteria, but I have great difficulty in believing that some of the 'heavy mouse' wines that I have tasted over the years will ever change and make a pleasant drinking wine. Although I must admit that the practice of allowing carbonic acid gas from a new fermentation to pass through the affected wine will often work wonders!

All education is a continual learning process and often some notions about wine that we have accepted for years become obsolete in the light of new knowledge. Corkiness in commercial wines I had always understood as being caused by the activities of the cork weevil. I had often wondered how it managed to drive through lead foil without being detected! Now I find that it is caused by using unripe or green bark from the cork tree.

The fact that one cannot always prove whether one quality wine is better than another, only serves to make wine making and tasting one of the most delightful and fascinating hobbies, well within the pockets of most people who like a tipples.

Yours,
Stan.

Letter from P. Helme, 85 The Larun Beat, Yarm, Cleveland.

Dear Editor,

I have now entered my first National Show at Blackpool and while I was satisfied with my results and had a very enjoyable time, I was disappointed in some of the organisation, namely choosing the Wine Queen. I was surprised at the low number of entries - I expect every Federation to sponsor an entrant - but after the fiasco of naming the wrong winner and then not offering the unfortunate lady a prize as well as a public apology, the Crowned Wine Queen was then left on the stage. At the Saturday evening Ball she was informed by a committee member to wear her robes of office (I assume she was not expected to wear the cape because of the heat), as she was on duty, then left high and dry - not even a request to officiate with the Deputy Mayoress at the Draw.

If we are to have a Wine Queen then let her be treated as one, and given equal (if not better) status to other dignitaries, and let everyone know we are proud of the chosen one.

P. Helme

At Blackpool the Saturday evening function was run by the Civic Authority so the N.A.W.B., as their guests, had little say in the running of the evening.

K.H., Editor

The winning letter this issue is from Mr. A. K. Nicholls, Chaldron Brandize Park, Oakhampton, Devon, EX20 1EQ. Congratulations.

The National welcomes the following new members:-

This list is published when there is space in the Newsletter, and we offer our apologies to those people whose names have not appeared.

Mrs. M. D. Skegg, Maylandsea, Essex

Mrs. A. M. Keer, Newquay.
Barnwell & District Wine Circle,
Peterborough

Mrs. R. I. Peck, Ardleigh, Colchester.

Mrs. M. A. Edwards, Burbage, Leicester.

J. E. Rowe, Colchester.

Mr. & Mrs. A. G. Wakeford, Exmouth, Devon.

Mr. & Mrs. A. S. Clarke, Exeter.

K. J. Chick, Sidmouth.

Miss M. Vanstone, Plymouth

J. W. Fisher, Windermere

Mrs. S. Trinby, Wilmington, Kent.
Old Bexley Winemakers, Kent.

B. D. Mustill, Queenborough, Kent.

Mr. Vickery, Lower Froyle, Hants.

P.H.J. Edwards, Burbage, Leicester.

T. H. Beck, Stanley, Co. Durham.

Mr. & Mrs. A. Eggleston, Spennymoor,
Co. Durham.

Mrs. K. M. Neman, Pinhoe, Exeter.

I again attended the World Wine Fair at Bristol and this year it was better than ever. Much larger with a great variety of wines. The only trouble is that the way it is extending you really need a week to do full justice to the wines on view. The range of Rioja wines was greater than ever but I think you need to move in fairly quickly; as the demand increases and the cost of living goes up in Spain I can see these wines rising rapidly in price. This applies also to Sherry which, in relation to other wines, is really a bargain at the moment.

This state of affairs will not last much longer in my opinion, so get in whilst the market is right. May I suggest you try some of the Old Dry Oloroso's that are now available. They are just over £3 per bottle but are so full in flavour and last so long on the palate that one glass can last a long time. The Malmaison Wine Club has a good range at reasonable prices.

May you never have an empty glass.

Ken Hill,

Editor

18 Laxton Road,
Liverpool, L25 0PQ.