

BRIGHTON CENTRE, 1988 - ROY EKINS' VIEW

After months of preparation by the Executive and their willing helpers, Conference 1988 finally arrived. The Show and AGM were staged at the Brighton Centre, a superb modern building on Brighton's sea-front Kings road.

FRIDAY saw a marvellous crowd of stewards helping with the setting up, and the bottle entries reception, working hard until well into the evening. There were some 4250 entries in total, a few more than at our last visit to Brighton.

Unfortunately our weekend coincided with the Retail Trade Association weekend at Buxton, so several traders were unable to visit us. But we did have some stands to browse over: Musts of Yapton, with a good range of home brew ingredients and equipment, and featuring the new Cecil Vacuum Systems' large size juice extractors; President Travel of Manchester were there to publicise their English and Continental wine tours, and Marion Whittow displayed her book, 'Great Fermentations', and a range of amusing 'Puffin' cartoon cards she designs herself; watch out for new ones next time! Lastly there was Derek Pearmain, of Loftus fame, selling all sorts of homebrew goods, and featuring the Johnson Vinamat kits. And of course there was the NAWB table, organised by our Hon. Secretary Judith Irwin, selling ties and badges, teaspoons and keyrings, stickers in different styles, and souvenir glasses to take into the tasting; taking subscriptions, issuing tickets, and half a dozen other necessary tasks. We owe a lot to all our helpers - Doris Hughes, Mike and Susan Hayter, Sarah Chiverton, Ann and Peter Johnson, that I can remember - who man the stand during the weekend.

FRIDAY EVENING brought the Dance and Fancy Dress competition, for which the results are given elsewhere. A lively band gave us a good variety of music for different styles of dancing, so everybody should have been satisfied.

SATURDAY. MORNING brought the Judges' and Stewards' briefing, run by our Convenor, Tom McArthur. after a microphone had eventually been found. The judging followed, with all the usual splashing and spitting and strange gurgling noises that other people seem to make. I had a small class - just 29 bottles - but as these had been entered by judges I had to be extra careful with my findings. My steward was Jan van Schaik, our Dutch colleague, who had come across to visit the show, to see how we carried out our judging, and to meet a variety of Association, Guild of Judges, and trade representatives while he was here. An unexpected bonus for him was to share with me in a live broadcast on Radio Sussex, when we were interviewed for the Chris English show. Jan was asked if it was true that Dutchmen told Belgian jokes, like Englishmen told Irish jokes. He said it was true, and told one of the worst jokes I have ever heard: "Why does a Belgian take a brick to bed? To throw at the lightbulb to put the light out! And he always takes a torch so he can see if the light has gone out or not!" Despite the groans, I must confess that I couldn't have told a better Irish joke off the cuff. During the morning we also had a chat with two BBC Plymouth TV staff, who were visiting the National to see what all this homebrew fuss was about; I think they were rather surprised at the size and scope of the show. It seems they are to make a pilot TV programme, and if that is successful, there may be a series of six or even ten programmes to follow. If the programme(s) is/are not broadcast nationally, then we shall have to make sure that they are video-taped by our Southern brethren so everyone can have a look at them afterwards. Judith Irwin seemed to be in the know so perhaps she will keep us informed through these pages.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON was the time for Judges at the Bar, and a lot of competitors took the opportunity to talk to the judges about their entries.

This was followed by a Bulgarian Wine Tasting given by Judith Irwin on behalf of Bulgarian Vintners of London, who generously gave us the six wines for the tasting. The second wine had just been distributed by my trusty band of pourers, when disaster struck! The centre section of the table holding all the opened bottles collapsed, dumping some sixty bottles or so onto the floor with an horrendous crash, the tinkling of broken glass, and the glugging of the unbroken bottles emptying their contents onto the floor. Chaos! We dived in - almost literally! - and rescued the half-emptied unbroken bottles, and opened the few remaining bottles from the cases under the tables. Splashing around in a pool of wine is a novelty I would much rather never experience again, and John Scottow's trousers will never be the same again after their baptism. Wisely, a rather shell-shocked Judith struggled on with her talk despite the calamity, and although she was somewhat thrown out of her stride, recovered well and amused the audience with reminiscences of her visit to the vineyards of Bulgaria, until normal service could be resumed. Unfortunately, that was when the Centre staff kindly came to clear up the NAWB Wine Lake with a large industrial vacuum cleaner, so our Speaker had to contend with a loud racket from the machinery. It just wasn't her day, but Judith won the acclaim of her audience of some four hundred and twenty

winemakers for the way in which she doggedly battled on. And it's not true that it was a bit of sabotage by me on behalf of Sainsbury's!

SATURDAY EVENING brought the Mayor, Councillor Ray Blackwood, honouring us with a Civic Reception and Ball, with a buffet supper included. Again an excellent evening, spoiled only by an unfortunate choice of band that played only pop music. They were bright and lively, and many of the audience enjoyed their music - even old crocks like me! But some found the music's tempo and volume too much for them, and opted for an early night.

Unhappily, one celebrant must have imbibed a little too freely, and rudely accosted the Mayor personally to voice his views in a crude manner, quite overlooking the fact that he was a guest of the Mayor, and bringing the Association into disrepute as well as insulting his host. Unforgivable.

SUNDAY was the occasion of the Annual General Meeting. The Minutes will not be published until the Spring '89 edition of News & Views, but for those who could not - or chose not - to be present, I will give a summary of the happenings separately. The Meeting passed without dissent - in fact with an unusual degree of amicable agreement - between the Executive and the Members present In the hall. Would that politicians could work with the same degree of accord and amity, we could then spend the billions wasted on 'Defence: on better causes such as nurses (save one for me) or increasing my pension, or paying me to have a driving licence - there must be many better ways to spend all that loot! Back to the AGM, Ekins!

The President brought the proceedings to a close, and then after a short break we enjoyed the Grand Draw before welcoming the Mayor and his attractive wife, to distribute the Trophies won at the Show. The results are printed elsewhere, but I must record that they included three new trophies, the (Gerry) Sparrow Trophy, for the General Steward with most points in Show, the (Stan) Baker Wine & Dine Trophy, for Class 60, and the (Ivor and Marion) Morgan Savoury Salver, for class 58.

Thus the weekend came to an end. There is one small item that might amuse you: after our little bit of publicity on Radio Sussex, when the competitors came to remove their bottle entries to the loading bay late on Saturday afternoon, some of them at least found that the word had got round and most of the winos and down-and-outs in the area had congregated for a free handout of booze! Such is fame!