

Grand Chapitre ~ Hannover June 2014

by Ormond Smith

All the arrangements had been made and the eagerly anticipated trip to Hannover and Wurzburg was finally under way as members of Goustevin Scotland met up at Edinburgh Airport for the flight to Hannover. Connetable Nicol and Beverley welcomed the party, Angus & Anne-Marie Meldrum, David MacAllister and Marjorie Maule, Sandy Catto and Karen Jarvis, Freda Muir and Ormond Smith and we were soon winging our way to Frankfurt where we would connect with our flight to Hannover. After a warm welcome from Hartmut Reick of the "Weinbruderschaft zu Hannover" ("Wine Club of Hannover") we were taken to our hotel, the Mercure in the centre of the city for first leg of our visit. Awaiting our arrival were Dick and Ellen Beach who had opted to drive and also by Karin McDougall who drove over from London.



The "old town" of Hannover party and the American contingent who had flown in earlier and we joined up with our German hosts for a welcome party at the Neue Rathaus, the (100 years old but referred as the new) Town Hall, within walking distance of our hotel – a most enjoyable evening ensued with an extensive barbeque/buffet held on the terrace of the Gartensaal (Garden Room).

Saturday morning saw the group arrive for a guided tour of the Neue Rathaus (opened in 1913 - the third in the history of Hanover as the city grew larger) and complete with a unique elevator which climbs over 100 metres to the top of the tower – unique because unlike conventional elevators which climb vertically, this one follows the contours of the dome of the tower. The original elevator was replaced in 2007/8 and from the top, spiral staircases take you up a further 10 metres to the viewing platforms which give commanding views of the city and surrounding countryside.....and the fresh air whistling between the pillars could certainly be described as "bracing"! The tour of the building which followed was equally interesting with some magnificent rooms including the council chambers and down in the main hall, with its austere but finely designed marble pillars and domed roof some 38 metres above us, were four large horizontal scale models showing the city as it was in 1689, how it looked in 1939, the aftermath of WW2 and the present day city – most interesting with the 1945 model showing graphically the devastation on

Friday dawned bright and sunny and as we had a free day ahead of us, an exploratory wander around the altstadt "old town" of Hannover was enjoyed. For those unaware of the devastation of Allied bombing raids during WW2, some 90% of the city was destroyed, but has now been rebuilt and some of the buildings in the "old town" retain their character although the Aegidienkirche has been left as a ruin as a memorial to those who died in the bombings. The city today is clean with excellent road networks and imaginative architecture. Once back at the hotel, we welcomed both the French



Hannover's Neue Rathaus (Town Hall)

the bombings. After lunch at a nearby restaurant, it was back to the hotel where we caught up with Iain and Midge Bett and Alan and Ros Stewart who had flown in to enjoy the evening's Chapitre.

The Neue Rathaus was again the venue for the Chapitre, which was organized by our Zeltingen Embassy colleagues, Wilfried Wesch and Urban Lamberty in conjunction with Hartmut in Hanover. This Chapitre Exceptionnel was in celebration of Hannover's twinning with Rouen and also marking



the 60th anniversary of the Hannover Weinbruderschaft, the Baron d'Honneur being His Excellency Herr Stefan Weil, Prime Minister of Lower Saxony and former Mayor of Hannover – a long standing friend of the Goustevin. The ceremony was held in the splendid surroundings of the Mosaiksaal (mosaic-room) and the podium party included Connetable Nicol Manson, Beverley Manson, Ormond Smith and Dick Beach, with some twelve new inductees being welcomed into the Confrerie by the Grand Connetable Christian Pellenc. After copious photographs were taken we re-assembled in the Gartensaal for a reception followed by the Gala Dinner. The five

course menu was both imaginative and satisfying on the tastebuds and accompanied by most enjoyable wines. The opening course was a fish dish named "The Pleasures of Trout" and was accompanied by a Weissburgunder Kabinett. Second dish was a bowl of cold Summer Potato Soup served with Lomo Ham and Truffles paired with a Grauer Burgunder from Weingut Manz in the Rheinhessen. The main course which followed was a Saltimbocca from Guinea Fowl on an Asparagus sauce and accompanying vegetables, served with a red wine cuvee, "Black Hole", again from Weingut Manz. This wine would also compliment the selected Cheese course, served with fig mustard. And to round off a memorable dinner, a crème brulee with coconut and ginger, mango strawberries and semi frozen coffee – imaginative and moreish and served with an Ehrenburger Kerner-Kabinett.

The evening reached an unexpected conclusion with the skirl of the bagpipes out on the terracing – the nearby State Museum had been running a display dedicated to the close ties of the House of Hannover and the British Realm and members of the cast suitably adorned in period clothing were persuaded to come across to the Neue Rathaus, the piper giving a rendition of Scottish airs, including "Highland Cathedral" culminated inevitably with "Auld Lang Syne"! On return to the hotel, post Chapitre activity centred on a large TV screen showing World Cup football.....and a couple of drinks!!



A relaxed 10am start to Sunday saw us aboard an open top coach for a tour of Hannover's old town and its environs, our guide ably explaining the numerous buildings en route. The tour ended out at



The water cascade at Herrenhausen

Herrenhausen, (www.schloss-herrenhausen.de/en/castle) the site of the summer palace of the former kings of Hannover, sadly badly damaged during the war and not restored until recently, opening in 2013. The palace now houses a museum dedicated to the regional history of Hannover. The gardens are quite magnificent and there are numerous buildings

housing, among others, orchids, cactus, tropical plants and various other worldwide flora and fauna. By this time, the sun was beating down and lunchtime called. This would be in the form of a picnic in one of the smaller gardens, pre-packed picnic baskets with a starter, main course and dessert, accompanied by a bottle of wine, as we sat relaxing in the shade.....most enjoyable. It was then back to the hotel by tram to freshen up for our evening meal and in time to bid farewell to the Betts/Stewarts who were flying back to Scotland on the evening flight. Onto the trams again for our trip to the well known Wienecke IV restaurant on the southern outskirts of the city for a traditional white asparagus meal.

Monday morning dawned and our touring coach awaited to transport us the 370 kilometres south to Wurzburg in the heart of Franconia, initially through rather flat agricultural countryside which gave way to rolling hillsides liberally sprinkled with lush woodland, interspersed with villages with their red tile roofed houses. Easing off the autobahn, we trundled into the small but extremely scenic town of Melsungen for



The picturesque town of Melsungen

lunch, regional dishes accompanied by a rather pleasant Silvaner. Suitably “replenished”, it was back

onto the coach for the remainder of the journey, past countless windfarms and fields of solar panels (a lot less intrusive than wind turbines and probably a sight more efficient!). We arrived in Wurzburg in late afternoon and reached our hotel, Wittelsbacher Hoh (www.wittelsbacherhoeh.de). Perched on a ridge on the south west part of Wurzburg, the hotel commands arresting views to the east and north, dominated by the Fortress Marienberg (www.schoesser.bayern.de) on a hilltop

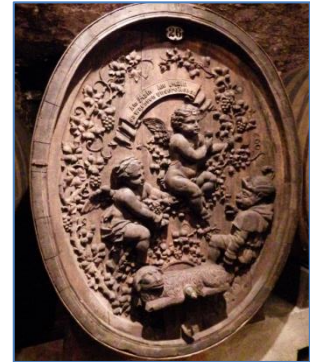


The mighty Fortress Marienberg

overlooking the River Main. After checking in and freshening up, we assembled in the dining room for a presentation on Franconia and its wines by the President of the Franconia Wine Growers Association, Stephan Schmidt who was accompanied by the Franconian Wine Queen, Marion Wunderlich. This was followed by dinner in the hotel.

On Tuesday morning we were transported down into Wurzburg for the start of a tour of the town centre. Like Hannover, Wurzburg also suffered extensive bombing damage during the war and has been almost totally rebuilt, but retaining some of the character of the older style of architecture. Our tour commenced on the 15th century Alte Mainbrucke bridge complete with its 18th century statues of the Saints – the Main river below and its accompanying canal section catering for those huge freight barges and sightseeing boats so common on German rivers. Unfortunately for some, our guide was rather soft spoken and deliberate with her presentations and sadly much of her information was lost to surrounding traffic noise and general hubbub. However, the tour itself took in a lot of the old quarter and although most interesting, by the time we reached our first wine tasting venue, most of the group were in the mood for some libation!

We headed for Juliusspital (Julius Hospital), (www.juliusspital.de) which was founded by Julius Echter from Mespelbrunn in 1576 on the grounds of a Jewish cemetery with the endowment of the abandoned monastery of Heiligenthal. It continues to function as a busy hospital today but is particularly notable for being, at 170 hectares in the Franconian wine region, the second largest wine estate in Germany and the biggest individual German wine grower.



Ornate barrel at Juliusspital

The party regrouped in the restful hospital gardens, divorced from the hustle of the city, before we were taken to the old apothecary for a visit (most interesting) before heading for the cellars, down steep stone steps into the comparative darkness, like Orpheus entering the underworld. With a glass of 2013 Scheurebe in hand (a dryish aromatic wine with low acidity and a hint of spices on the palate) we toured the cellars with their elaborately carved old wooden barrels, and suitably impressed, we then tasted a 2013 Silvaner, presented in the traditional Franconian squat Bocksbeutel (see below). The Silvaner grape is considered secondary elsewhere in Germany



Burgerspital's Gold Medal Silvaner

but in Franconia, being relatively far north in grape growing terms, it reaches "stardom" and in Kabinett form (which we tasted) it gives a floral nose, is well bodied and lingers on the palate. Emerging from the impressive cellars we headed for lunch and our second tasting of the day at Burgerspital Weinstuben. Our lunch, a traditional schnitzel dish, was both satisfying and tasty after which we headed for the ancient cellars of this 14th century estate (www.burgerspital.de).

Here again the cellars proved most interesting and our first wine, a 2013 Riesling Trocken, dry, aromatic – the typical qualities of this grape, certainly found favour with the group. The second wine, a 2012 Absleite Silvaner Trocken (Gold Medal winner) was more robust, with aromas of stone fruits and flowers and a subtle mineral tone on the palate.

Once more into the daylight, we headed for our third tasting in *the* most impressive surroundings, the 885 year old Staatlicher Hofkeller below the majestic Baroque palace known as the Residenz (www.residenz-wuerzburg.de) (formerly home of the Prince Bishops of Wurzburg). Now a Unesco World Heritage Site with its magnificent marble interiors, spectacular ceiling paintings and priceless artefacts, it is difficult to appreciate that this building was virtually destroyed by bombing in March 1945 and has been painstakingly rebuilt at a cost of 20 million Euros. Down to the quite fantastic cellars with our guide Gisela, with something like 250 candles giving a warm glow to the subdued lighting, we opened the tasting with a Randersaker Silvaner 2013 which had aromas of citric fruits, was robust and well structured with mineral overtones on the finish. The second wine, a 2013 Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc) had good fruit on the nose, fresh acidity, a well bodied wine with a dry finish = very pleasant! Deeper into the cellars



The Staatlicher Fruhburgunder

and we sampled our third offering – a full bodied and rich 2013 Fruhburgunder (a Pinot Noir mutation). At 14%, a powerful wine but with deep colour, rich fruits, full bodied and a nose that just got better and better!!



An unusual tree trunk bottle holder

Another dawn and another adventure. After breakfast, we were off to the pleasant little town of Nordheim, east of Wurzburg where we were dropped off at the Divino Wine Co-operative for a visit and tasting. The winery is ultra modern and features many paintings and artistic works from local artists, the wine bottle holders hewn out of sections of tree trunks were most interesting but a bit heavy to lug back to Scotland! One interesting table consisted of wine glasses giving all the different aromas which can be found in wines of the area. Our tasting got under way with a most acceptable Silvaner, and interestingly, the bocksbeutel was sealed with a glass stopper with a plastic ring – it certainly sealed well. We then moved upstairs to the gallery where our second wine

awaited, a 2012 Rieslaner. *Rieslaner?* This comparatively little known wine is produced from a hybrid vine cross between the delicate Riesling and the more robust Silvaner (a grape considered secondary to the mighty Riesling elsewhere in Germany, but finding its rightful place here in Franconia where it compliments food splendidly). The nose gave a whiff of typical Riesling while the wine was rounded, mouth filling with a touch of minerality on the finish. Then it was down into the cellars with their elaborately carved wooden barrels contrasting with ultra modern stainless steel equipment and onto our final wine, a 2011 Pinot Noir with a good nose and palate.

And then it was but a short amble down to the River Main and boarding a 20 ton oak beamed raft in glorious sunshine for our gentle cruise down the river (www.flosserlebnis.de) with a buffet lunch, wines and beers, an accordionist who got things going with a swing and lovely local scenery, vineyards and wildlife. A most restful way to pass four hours apart from some very energetic paddling with the oar from two “volunteers” who were asked to turn the raft in a



Our raft trip on the River Main – relaxing!



“Come on....put your backs into it!!”

circle.....not quite sure why Sandy and Ormond got “volunteered” by the skipper but by heck, it certainly got the heartbeat up!!!! Back aboard the coach, it was a restful return to the hotel and dinner.

Our final day in Franconia saw us meet up with our guide for the day, Baron Max von Vacano, a colourful character who was most informative. We made our way south-east to the delightful little wine town of Iphofen where, after entering through the town walls at the medieval Einersheimer Gate, Baron Max gave us a most interesting tour of this charming baroque styled town with its gaily

painted houses, many half timbered, to its cobbled marketplace in front of the elaborately styled Rathaus with the attractive Marienbrunnen (fountain). Strangely enough, the tour ended at a



Iphofen's marketplace fountain

winery.....! We were to visit the Iphofen Vinothek where Guest Leader and Wine Lecturer Heidrun Kaufmann awaited our arrival – she explained the format of the Vinothek, representing many growers in the area and showcasing their wines. Out of the blocks and into a 2012 Silvaner Spatlese from one of the best Iphofen vineyards, Julius-Echter-Berg on the Schwanberg mountain. A robust wine, with good fruit and a lingering

mineral finish is deservedly a Silver Medal winner. With our hostess Heidrun filling in the technical info, we then tasted a 2012 Riesling from the same vineyard area but a different producer, with typical Riesling nose, good fruit, well bodied and a most pleasant finish. As they say, moving on, we were offered (and did not refuse!) a 2012 Silver Medal winning Rieslaner Spatlese, well bodied with good acidity and pronounced berry fruits – a well structured wine indeed.

Lunch was taken in a local restaurant, the “Goldene Krone” where the waitresses were smartly attired in traditional Bavarian dresses – the lunch was most enjoyable by the way! Back onto the coach and Baron Max took us through rolling countryside with countless vineyards eventually running down alongside the River Main where we had rafted the day before, to the wine town of Dettelbach and a visit to the picturesque Maria im Sand Pilgrimage Church, dating back to the early



Goustein Scotland on the hotel patio

16th century, very restful and beautifully decorated inside by several noted craftsmen. It was then back to Wurzburg for the closing dinner of the trip.

Assembling on the patio in early evening sunshine, drinks were enjoyed as the Scots handed over bottles of fine malt whisky to the three organizers, Hartmut, Urban and Wilfried, for what had been a most enthralling tour. Into

the dining room and dinner commenced with an Asparagus Salad paired with the same Silvaner which we had enjoyed at Staatlicher Hofkeller at the Residenz a couple of days earlier. Pike Perch on Noodles preceded the main course of Cheek of Calf in a Burgundy Potato/Celery Puree with Buttered Baby Carrots, paired with a rather splendid Silver Medal 2009

Spatburgunder(Pinot Noir), sparkling ruby red, robustly bodied and complimenting both the Cheek of Calf and indeed the cheeses to follow, Marinated Camembert and Bavarian Blue. Closing off the rather excellent dinner were Baked Apple Doughnuts on Vanilla Ice Cream.



The closing dinner-Wittelsbacher Hoh

The following morning we left Wurzburg and headed for Frankfurt airport for our trip home, perhaps a little “jaded” by the tour, the numerous wine tastings (nobody complained!!!) and the sightseeing, including the relaxing raft trip down the Main. The memories of that visit will certainly remain and until we meet up again (Indianapolis 2015?) it’s “Auf Wiedersehen”.

Goustevin Scotland Delegation to Hannover

