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Des O'Connor*
entertains the
troops in freak
snow crisis

The New Sheridan Club

Newsletter

XXIX • March 2009

*No, not that one



The New Sheridan Club traditionally meets in the upstairs room of the Wheatsheaf pub just off Oxford Street. The Wheatsheaf is one of Fitzrovia's historic pubs, a one-time haunt of Dylan Thomas, George Orwell, Augustus John and Julian Maclaren-Ross. In fact Thomas met his wife Caitlin in here and, legend has it, he was known to flash at women here as well. Fitzrovia's associations with literature go back to the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century both Woolf and Shaw lived in Fitzroy Square; Pound and Lewis launched *Blast!* at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel in Percy Street. John Buchan lived in Portland Place and in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* Richard Hannay has a flat there. Both Lawrences (D.H. and T.E.) took rooms here, as did Aleister Crowley, Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and Katherine Mansfield.

The Editor Writes

THERE'S SOMETHING of a Blitz theme this time: on page 10 is a report on the Blitz Party co-run by *The Chap*; while the freak weather wreaked havoc with the Cirque de Crème Anglaise, saved only by a certain Blitz spirit (page 14). And the French invasion described on page 4 might have involved a blitz if they'd had aircraft at the time. (OK, stretching it a bit here...)

The Next Meeting

The next Club Meeting will take place on Wednesday 4th March in the upstairs room at The Wheatsheaf, 25 Rathbone Place, London W1T 1JB, from 8pm until 11pm. Our guest speaker will be the historian Sean Longden, author of *Dunkirk: The Men They Left Behind*, *To the Victor the Spoils* (about the reality of the behaviour of British troops in Europe after D-Day) and *Hitler's British Slaves*, about the treatment of Allied POWs.

Mr Longden's subject will be *Fashion in the British Army during World War II*—the methods by which soldiers made amendments to their uniforms to appear fashionable. He will cover things such as hairstyles, the trend for wearing German army belts and how soldiers had tailors make their uniforms appear more modish.

You may actually have encountered Mr Longden if you were at the Chap Olympics last

summer. "I was wearing a blazer with cravat and cream trousers," he says, before going on to describe exactly what I was wearing too. "I tend to recall clothing very well," he adds superfluously, "the result of spending years as a picture editor." With this pedigree, Mr Longden's talk is sure to be detailed and fascinating.

The Last Meeting

At our February meeting the redoubtable Ensign Polyethyl put us right about the French invasion of Pembrokeshire in 1797, an event of which many outside the area were probably not aware. Jessie took evident delight in regaling us with the manifold inadequacies of the French plan and its execution—such as the use of a taskforce consisting of shackled convicts armed with just 100 rounds each for the entire campaign. In fact the troops who landed were relying upon meeting up with two invasion forces; no one had thought to tell them that these invasions had been cancelled. But the humiliating defeat of the French by a much smaller local force was to a large extent down to the pluck of local peasant women, including the famous Jemima who rounded up a dozen or so Frenchmen single-handedly.

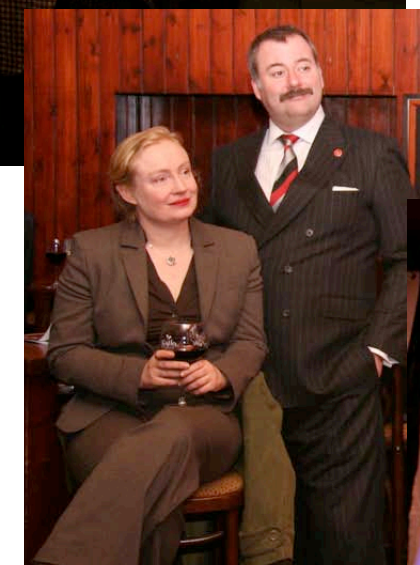
Many thanks to Jessie for a thoroughly researched lecture, presented with clarity and gusto. Bravo! You can read an essay version of Jessie's talk on page 4.



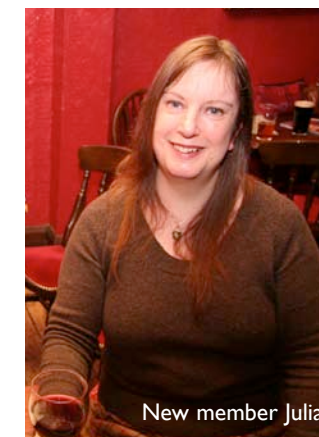
(Top left) new visitor Ian looks dubious while Chris hides; (above) Ingrid and Napster-Skype



Torquil delivers his traditional introduction



(Above) Jessie attacks the core questions



New member Julia



(Far left) The talk causes Chris to choke on his supper; (left) Scarheart has a moment of existential crisis; (above) Torquil quietly pockets the silverware



Capt Coppice amuses the Downers with a bon mot



This cottage belongs to Jessie. And is available for holiday lets at very reasonable rates



An Account of the French Invasion of Pembrokeshire in 1797

As set down by Ensign Polyethyl's Great, Great, Great, Great Uncle

Rev Arthur Hill Richardson,
St Gwyndaf's Rectory,
Llanwnda,
Pembrokeshire

Written this day of our Lord 20th January 1841

My Dearest Descendents,

I believe that the time may come (in about five generations) when an eyewitness account of the evils and foolishnesses of the French might be a fitting topic to educate the idle English drinkers in a Fitzrovia pub. I set down my account to ensure that all may have a proper understanding of what happened.

I write this day that I, the perpetual curate of Manorowen, become the vicar of this little chapel, St Gwyndaf's church, Llanwnda. This house of worship with such a history—where Giraldus Cambrensis once held the living to which I have now been appointed. My writings may never achieve his greatness, but if they can contribute something as a testament to the failure of the French Atheist ambitions then I will be a worthy successor.



St Gwyndaf's Church, Llanwnda



At the time of the invasion I was a youth. My parents were living as Organists in the Cathedral City of St Davids (and a remarkably small city it is, quite the smallest in Britain). Then as now the Pencaer Peninsula, and the nearby town of Fishguard, is very quiet; a rural corner of the furthest reaches of West Wales. There is nothing beyond the headland but the savagery of Ireland. The harbour of Fishguard is good, but very small. The area has no major towns, no industry; it is on no trade routes. The town relies on herring fishing and small-scale agriculture. In generations to come perhaps the pretty little cottages that edge the harbour might be available for holiday lets at very reasonable prices, but for now they are occupied by boat builders, farmers, fishermen and any suggestion that any of them is involved in smuggling is gross calumny. Similarly every ship that is wrecked on the sharp jagged rocks of our coastline is driven there purely by accident or storm. Other coasts might have their wreckers but my parishioners are law-abiding folk. A suggestion to the contrary will limit your abilities to buy any of the brandy with which the area is so well supplied.

The town of Fishguard's one proud boast was its guns. In September 1779 a French-American-Irish Pirate bombarded the town, intending to hold the fishing fleet to ransom. One local fisherman had a cannon mounted upon his vessel (purely to aid his Herring fishing, and in no way an indication of smuggling). A few rounds from the Welshman's cannon were enough to persuade the Pirate to sail away in search of easier targets.

The shock of the bombardment meant that letters were sent to the Privy Council asking for proper defences to be built. The town provided the land and built the gun emplacement and the Privy Council provided the eight 9-pounder guns and three Woolwich pensioners to man

them. The fort was completed by 1785. However neither town nor Privy Council had supplied the necessary Powder. The town requested some from the Privy Council; the Council wrote back saying that the town should buy some. Letters were exchanged, but little was bought. As a result on the day of the events that follow Messrs Mitchell, Benson and Rhodes, our retired gunners, had only three rounds of ammunition and 16 cartridges with which to defend the town.

So our thoughts now turn to the invaders—and why they should choose to land at Fishguard.

The French, as we are all well aware, are a depraved lot. They started as Papists and then turned Atheist—so it was only proper that we had been at war with them since 1793. They had revolted, killed their King, and were so crazed by blood and terror that they believed all the world wanted to follow their example. They had involved themselves in America's revolt, and their pernicious influence was trying to break into Ireland. They even believed that the simple farmers of Wales were longing to revolt against the natural order of society—their reasoning based simply on a few malcontents who were toying with nonconformist Methodism.

So the French planned a three-pronged attack. One force was to sail to Ireland, another to Newcastle and a third to Bristol. The three attacks were to support each other and lead the local people into revolt.

The Irish invasion force set sail in December 1796. Led by the Irish traitor Wolfe Tone, they made it as far as Bantry Bay. Unfortunately the only person with any brains behind the expedition, General Hoche, had not told anyone else the plans, so when his ship was swept out into the Atlantic by storms, the plans went with him. Those ships with Wolfe Tone that did reach Bantry Bay did not know what to do and were astonished to discover that there were no cheering armies of Irish supporters. Unable to cope with the adverse winds, the whole fleet decided to return to France without landing.

Meanwhile the Newcastle invasion force was being boarded on to a fleet of flat-bottomed river barges, with the intention of sailing from France to Newcastle. There the 5,000 soldiers

were to destroy local collieries and shipping. Even those of you not familiar with maritime matters may guess that a flat-bottomed river barge is not an appropriate vessel for the winter storms of the North Sea. The force sailed as far as the Low Countries before abandoning the project.

What is curious is that the orders for the Bristol invasion fleet were not now rewritten. It was still despatched to support the Irish and Newcastle invasion fleets—which had already limped back to France. Why? I suppose General Hoche had lost interest in the scheme and so did nothing to make the fleet's success any more likely.

Even more curiously, the ships in the fleet were brand new, the latest, best—and therefore valuable—vessels, straight from the builders' dock yards. After the failure of the Irish and



Fishguard Fort

Newcastle invasions I am baffled why a man as intelligent as General Hoche would risk ships as valuable as *Le Vengeance* and *La Resistance*, two of the largest French frigates, the latter on her maiden voyage. Even the corvette *La Constance* and the lugger *Vautour* were new. The ships were commanded by Commodore Castagnier, a man who followed his orders precisely—regardless of the changed circumstances.

The French army that was to invade Bristol was led by another Irish-American, a septuagenarian called Colonel William Tate, from South Carolina. He had fought against Britain in the American War of Independence. However, after that war he became embroiled in French plans to capture New Orleans and fell foul of the American authorities. In 1795 he



End of the Irish Invasion: or — The Destruction of the French Armada.

fled to Paris, whence he persuaded General Hoche to let him lead the invasion. Thus he gained command of the Légion Noir, named after the colour of their jackets.

The Légion Noir consisted of 600 grenadier soldiers and 800 convicts. These 1,400 men were armed with only 100 rounds each for the entire invasion. These French troops were led by yet more Irish officers, including one Lieutenant Barry St Leger, who had already had a picturesque life. Born in Ireland, sent to America as a child, returning to Ireland as a teenager, only to be shipwrecked and lose all his goods, picked up by pirates, taken to France, jailed, recognised as a fellow Irish-American by Tate and included in his invasion.

This motley collection sailed out of Brest on 16th February 1797, flying Russian colours in an attempted *ruse de guerre*. The convict soldiers were so little trusted by their officers that they were kept in the bowels of the ships still in their ankle chains. (When eventually these men ended up in Pembrokeshire jails their new jailers were astonished to find that they already had calluses and cuts from being kept in chains.) If the soldiers subsequent claims can be believed then they were not told where they were headed.

In fact the plan was to destroy Bristol—England's second largest city, a world-class harbour filled with ships, opinionated sailors, men who know how to deal with irritating Frenchmen. After destroying this seat of naval power the 1,400 ill-armed and untrained men

were to march to Chester and Liverpool, avoiding Cardiff, there to meet up with the (now non-existent) Newcastle invasion force.

As they sailed they revealed themselves to be French, not Russian, by sinking some merchant ships off Ilfracombe, thus ensuring that the alarm was raised and messages sent to the Royal Navy.

At this point they decided that the winds were bad for Bristol so they changed the plan and

sailed for Cardigan Bay instead.

On Wednesday, 22nd February 1797 they arrived off the coast of North Pembrokeshire. By now all ashore knew they were French. A retired sea captain had walked along the coast keeping watch on them. A customs ship had spotted the fleet and retreated into shallow waters to avoid them. A Pembrokeshire Merchant Ship had been seized and the crew taken prisoner.

The first ship attempted to sail into Fishguard Harbour, giving our retired Woolwich gunners the opportunity to dine out on the story for the rest of their lives. They fired a single blank round at the ship—and it fled.

So the French troops were forced to land at Carreg Wastad Point. If you visit the spot you will see that there is no beach, no gentle slope, no landing place. Just jagged cliffs plunging straight into the rock-strewn sea.

During the landing one launch overturned, drowning eight men, and the artillery was lost. This left 1,400 men—with no horses, transport, artillery, spare ammunition or food—wandering a barren headland. Indeed the reader should remember that in this part of Wales the people do not even speak English, and the invaders had not thought to bring any Welsh translators.

The French established themselves on a prominent rocky outcrop and started to wave their Revolutionary Flag, in the belief that the locals would flock to them. Why they thought that a Pembrokeshire farmer would know enough of French politics to recognise the

meaning of the flag remains unanswered. Unsurprisingly the Welsh instead guided their flocks of sheep and poultry away from the hungry newcomers, preferring to head inland towards safety.

Thus started the days of rape and pillage. Forage parties were sent to maraud. Every farm, hovel and barn was raided and two farmers were killed trying to protect their livestock. Even this sacred chapel was sacked. Farmer William's wife was raped and shot and his sheep were eaten. The French seized Trehowel Farm from Farmer Mortimer, to be their headquarters. However, the discipline of their troops was undermined by the fact that, in preparation for a wedding, the farm was stocked to the beams with drink. In fact almost every farm had some alcohol as a Portuguese wine ship, on its way to Liverpool, had recently accidentally, legally and entirely without any local encouragement wrecked itself on our coast.

Beer, wine, port and plentiful food hurriedly cooked had the usual impact on the bellies of convicts who had been starving in chains. The army fell ill.

Meanwhile the fleet concluded that they had completed their task in successfully landing the army. So they sailed away, leaving the men on shore watching their only means of escape depart. While this may have been in the original orders—to allow the fleet to sail to support the Irish Invasion—no one had thought to warn the troops. Now enough of their morale and discipline vanished for mutinous men to start threatening their officers.

Perhaps it was at this point that Commander Tate realised all was not going well—as the Welsh response was now beginning to gather strength. In the field now known as Parc Y French, five untrained farmers killed two French

soldiers. Tate watched the scene from the rocks and knew that his invasion was going to be short-lived. Welshmen were now gathering from all across Pembrokeshire, armed with anything they could lay their hands on. A Customs ship at Milford Haven sent their press-gang men and their guns. The lead was stripped from the roof of St David's Cathedral to be melted into shot.

And then there was Jemima Fawr. Fishguard's cobbler, she would then have been in her forties, and a person very capable of getting her way.

Armed only with a pitchfork and her opinions, she single-handedly rounded up 12 French soldiers, imprisoning them in St Mary's Church (where now she is buried).

During all this commotion the brave lads of the militia and yeomanry were far from inactive. Their leader, Colonel Knox, was enjoying himself at a dinner dance when first news of the French ships arrived.

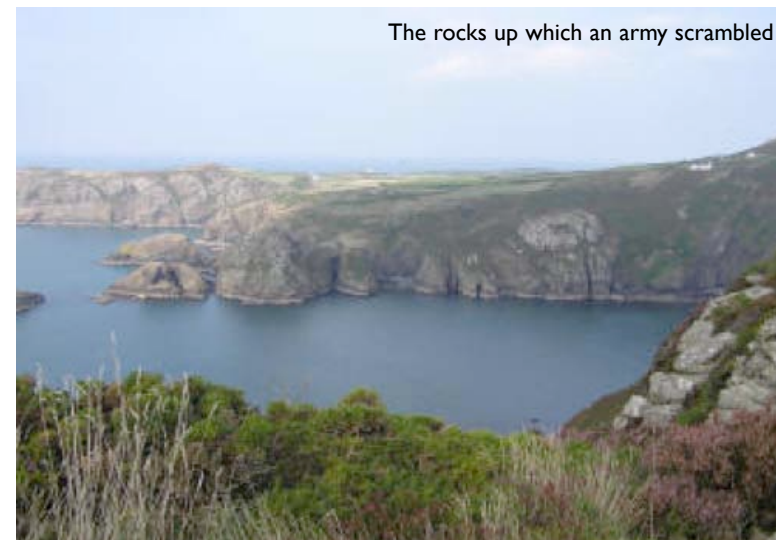
He was not well loved by the local people. His father was a newcomer who had come with his money and had tried to throw his influence around, without succeeding in winning friends. The elder Knox had paid for the local militia force, Fishguard Fencibles, so his son was given the Colonelcy. Colonel Knox was 28 years old with no combat experience.

His first thought was to gather his men at the Fort. Initial reports suggested there were 800 French, which meant his 150 Fencibles were utterly outnumbered. Any thoughts of an immediate attack were quashed.

Meanwhile, across the county, militia forces were gathering. Lord Cawdor's Castlemartin Troop of the Pembroke Yeomanry Cavalry was fortunately already assembled for a funeral on the following day. They marched at once to the rescue. As soon as dark fell Lieutenant Colonel Colby of the Pembrokeshire Militia left his



Jemima's gravestone



The rocks up which an army scrambled

troops on the march and galloped through the night to Fishguard to get an accurate situation report. Finding Colonel Knox holed up in the fort and the French marauding through the farmlands he advised ringing the area with troops (at a safe distance) to give an appearance of strength, and to keep a watch on the French. Having given his military advice to the novice Knox, Colby once again galloped through the night, back to his advancing troop column.

Col Knox and his Fishguard Fencibles were left in the fort as more reports arrived establishing accurate numbers of the enemy as 1,400. Totally outnumbered, he concluded that the only thing to do was retreat, to meet up with the advancing reinforcements. In a life-changing decision Col Knox marched his men away from Fishguard leaving the town entirely undefended. (His order to spike the fort's guns was angrily rejected by the gunners.)

The two forces met at Trefgarne Rocks, and promptly argued over who had command and took precedence. The novice Col Knox thought that just because the French had landed in his area that meant that he took command, despite the greater experience of Colonels Colby and Cawdor. Cawdor won the debate and restarted the march, but he did not forget Knox's presumption.

The British troops approached the area after nightfall. Col Colby led his Pembrokeshire Yeomanry with the intention of launching a



224 (Pembroke Yeomanry)
Transport Squadron (V)

night attack on the unsuspecting French. Unfortunately the French, led by the young Irishman St Leger, were very much expecting it. Perhaps you have not had the experience of trying to make hundreds of men walk silently through the

night. I can assure you that their kit rattles, someone coughs, boots tramp, and all hope of secrecy and surprise evaporates. The French realised the British were coming and prepared their defensive line, and in the dark of the night the British could hear that the French were active and expecting them—so the night attack was called off. That was the only military manoeuvring of the invasion and yet, as a result, the Pembrokeshire Yeomanry will be granted the Battle Honour “Fishguard”; the only battle honour to be granted to a regiment on British soil.

The next morning Tate wrote this letter:

To the Officer commanding His Britannic Majesty's Troops. 5th. year of the Republic. The Circumstances under which the Body of the French Troops under my Command were landed at this Place renders it unnecessary to attempt any military operations, as they would tend only to Bloodshed and Pillage. We therefore desire to enter into a Negotiation upon Principles of Humanity for a surrender. If you are influenced by similar Considerations you may signify the same and, in the meantime, Hostilities shall cease. Health and Respect, Tate.

In an act of phenomenal bluff, Cawdor replied:

Sir, The Superiority of the Force under my command, which is hourly increasing, must prevent my treating upon any Terms short of your surrendering your whole Force Prisoners of War. I enter fully into your Wish of preventing an unnecessary Effusion of Blood, which your speedy Surrender can alone prevent, and which will entitle you to that Consideration it is ever the Wish of British Troops to show an Enemy whose numbers are inferior.

Cawdor had at best 660 Fencibles, Militia and Naval men, with no more on the way. Yet his claims of superiority of numbers might have been believable to the French due to the growing crowd of Welsh men and women who were gathering, armed with pitchforks, determined to see off the foreigners. When Tate's force surrendered, on Goodwick Sands, to a local militia force on February 24th, 1797, the surrounding hills were packed with people. This gave rise to the legend that the scarlet cloaks of the Welsh women looked from a distance like British soldiers and thus fooled the French into believing they were outnumbered.

The aftermath of the Invasion saw many unexpected consequences. Firstly the King sacked his French chef. Secondly, when news broke in London of a French invasion fleet the immediate result was a panic run on the bank. The withdrawals of gold coins stretched the Bank of England to its limit. As a consequence, just over a week later the Bank issued the very first promissory pound note as paper currency in the form that we know it today. The oldest surviving note held by the Bank is dated 6th March 1797.

The Royal Navy sailed out to hunt for the invasion fleet, and found the four new French ships off the coast of Ireland, where they were still supporting the non-existent invasion. Once captured *La Resistance* was renamed HMS *Fishguard*.

The French soldiers were reintroduced to their old friends, ankle chains, and thrown into every available prison in Pembrokeshire, before

being packed off to Portsmouth's prison hulks. A few managed to escape, in the process seducing two Pembrokeshire maidens and stealing Lord Cawdor's yacht.

Here in Pembrokeshire the most amusing result of the French fiasco was that it broke the reputation of the whelp Knox. Cawdor remembered the insult of Knox's failure to acknowledge his superiority. And the gunners remembered their fury at being ordered to spike their beloved guns. As a result letters were sent. Cawdor induced his fellow officers to sign a letter threatening resignation if Knox was not sacked. Only Colby, the man who had galloped through the night to speak to Knox, stood by him.

Knox repeatedly requested a court martial in order to present his case and try to clear his name, but the Duke of York preferred that the matter should be hushed up. Officially Knox and all the other officers had received the King's thanks, so it was thought best not to look into the matter further. The only option left available to Knox was to challenge Cawdor to a duel. Although I know that they did meet, I am sorry to report that no one knows what happened at that duel. Did they talk? Did they fight? Your guess is as good

as mine, but certainly neither was injured at the meeting. But Knox ended a broken man, an object of public ridicule, debt-ridden and living with a woman of easy virtue in London. Thus should end all men who retreat before the French.

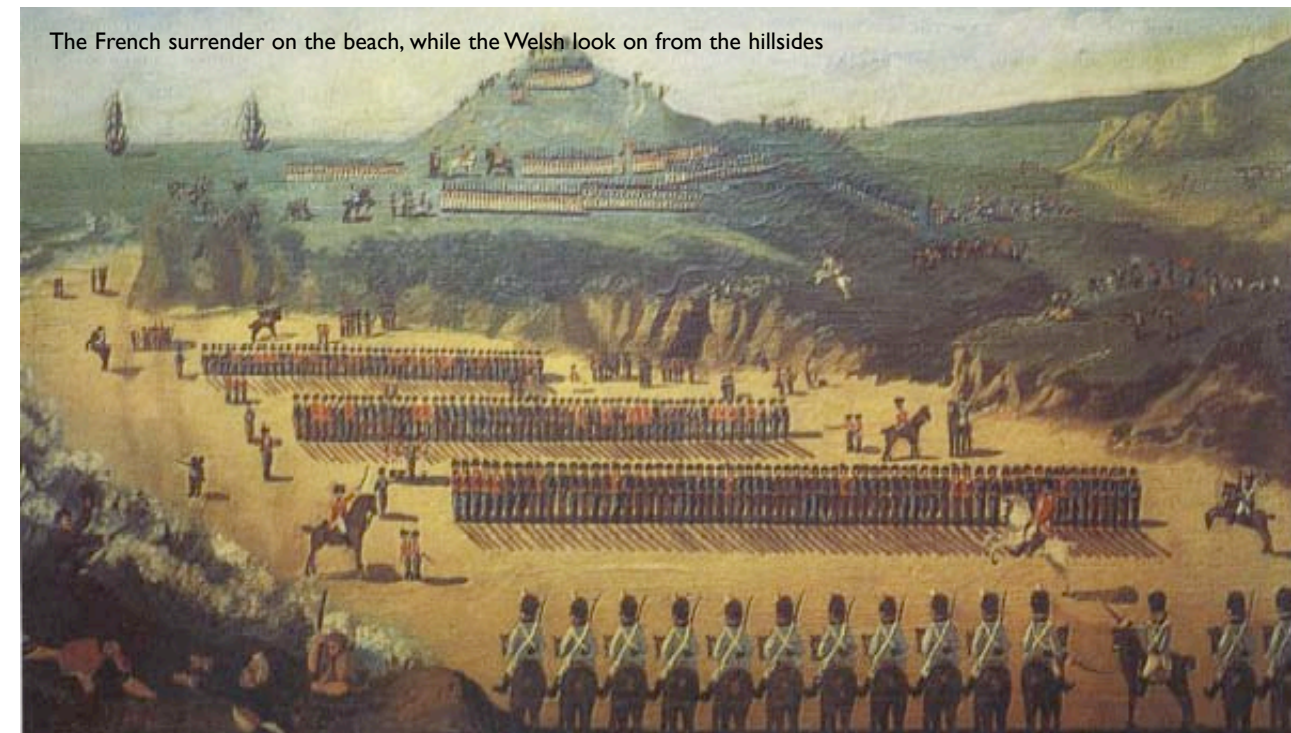
Here I end my tale, recounting events that happened many years ago, when I was a young man. Events that engulfed this remote area; saw this historic chapel desecrated; and which will still be remembered for years to come—at least every time you open your wallet to pay for a drink using paper money, not gold.

I am and remain your humble Servant and fond Ancestor,

Rev Richardson



One of these is HMS *Fishguard*



The French surrender on the beach, while the Welsh look on from the hillsides



Put Out That Light!

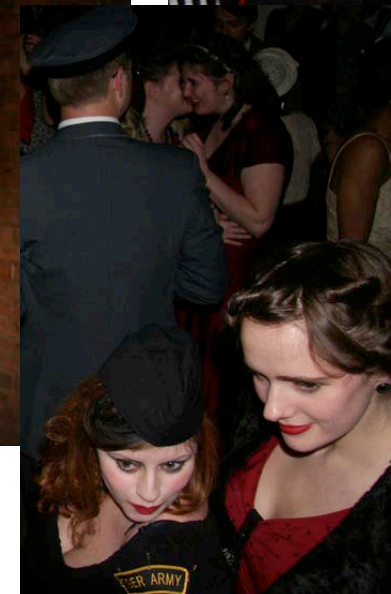
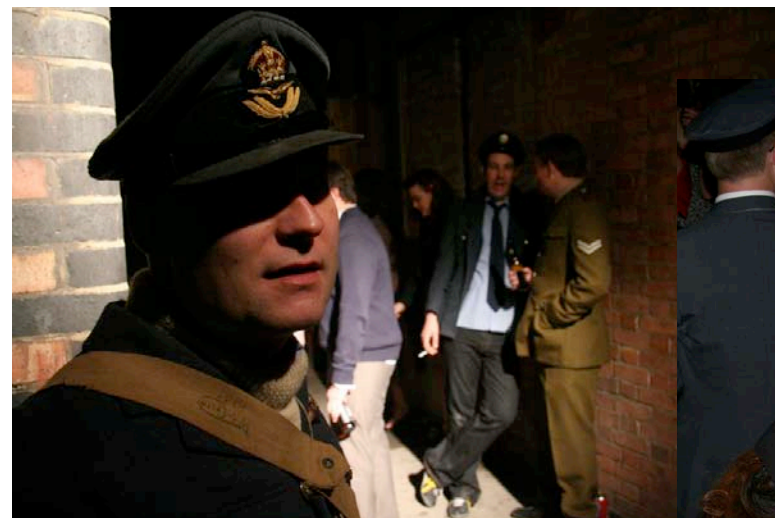
SATURDAY 7TH FEBRUARY saw the first of what will presumably be a series of parties with a Blitz theme—the venue, some converted railway arches in Shoreditch, had been decked out with sandbags and wartime food products, the punters came in wartime uniforms and 1940s fashions and even the drinks menus were styled as ration books.

Entertainment came in the form of swing disc jockeys and the live band Twin and Tonic, a combo fronted by the lovely Holland twins. It was co-hosted by *The Chap* magazine (though quite how much input Gustav Temple had, I'm not sure) so the usual crowd were out in force. There were, to be honest, plenty of people there who didn't really have much interest in the period or its stylings, and saw this as just another fun theme, but a lot of effort had gone into the costumes—with special mention having to go to the chap who came as an evacuated schoolboy (as it were), even if he did bear a striking resemblance to Angus Young out of AC/DC...

(Top) The bar area was decorated with period grocery items—in suitably short supply; (right) the swing combo Twin and Tonic entertained the troops; (below) much effort had been made on the costume front and the place was a sea of uniforms, pipes and silly moustaches. Shame the vaunted Spitfire ale was served out of aluminium cans...



(Top) Laurence and Catherine affect an air of mystery; (above) period packaging clashes somewhat with a rather 21st-century pout; (below) Fruity steps outside to sort out this absolute shower of so-called servicemen



(From the top) Something tells me this young man isn't really a Royal Fusilier; the smoking party conspires to undermine the blackout; these two ladies attempt to rise above the beer-soaked squalor of their surroundings; (left) the Andrews Sister look was much in evidence



The Royal Air Force Club

THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF CLUB REVIEWS

By Artemis Scarheart

THE RAF CLUB was founded in 1918 and has its premises on Piccadilly, opposite Green Park. From the outside it is rather unassuming and if it weren't for the RAF flag it could easily be missed. In my experience military Clubs can be hit and miss, with the Royal Scots now little more than a couple of rooms attached to a modern hotel, and the In and Out having an excellent "feel" and surroundings but with a bar often closed when you need it most (i.e., three in the morning on a Tuesday). The RAF looked small, but tripping up the stairs into the reception area I started to see the TARDIS-like nature of the Club, which became more and more apparent as I ventured deeper into it.

But first things first—to the cloakroom. This takes you down the first of many wide and seductive corridors with walls draped, dripping

and drenched in history. From a Sopwith Camel to a Vulcan Bomber, from a Lancaster to a Typhoon, the RAF Club is a vast museum of paintings, photos, memorabilia and remnants. You would expect that of course, but here it can take 20 minutes to walk three steps because what is on every surface is so interesting. A good deal of military museums are not as well stocked and fascinating as this Club.

Souvenirs, paintings, blueprints, portraits, after-action reports, interviews and much more make it hard to stroll blithely along the corridors, but if you want to see the rest of the Club and have time to grab a spot of lunch it is vital that you do. Ignore the beautiful and enormous stained-glass window on the staircase and turn down the delights of the Bar, Library, Study, Squash Courts and their very own traditional London boozier (the Running Horse Tavern), resist the urge to sign up on the spot, drop off your hat, coat and umbrella and make haste to the heart of a Club—the dining room.

Here the service is quick and efficient (as you would hope) and there is a different roast every day as well as standard Club fare. A rather modern-feeling room perhaps and the white china with a blue line around the edge means you can't quite shake the feeling that you're eating off tin plates in a mess. On the whole the food is reasonably priced whether *à la carte* or from the *table d'hôte* menu and there is a decent wine list. As a civilian it did feel that some of the food tends towards being a better version of mess grub, as opposed to fine dining, but this was the *table d'hôte* menu in very early January and it was still most toothsome.

Perhaps they don't always have a Club Table, or perhaps it is for Members only but I had to lunch alone which is a shame. A great way to get a feel of a Club is to eat with other Members, but then I suppose there is a war on and they are all at action stations or pushing toy planes around on a giant map.

After lunch—*paté* followed by pork roast with diced winter vegetables and jam roly-poly with custard and a half bottle of Club red—exploration. Up the staircase takes you past the aforementioned and beautiful stained-

glass window to a long corridor featuring the motto and symbol of every RAF unit ever formed—seemingly including Imperial, Colonial and Commonwealth units as well. There were hundreds of them from all corners of the globe and one almost hears the drone and feels the vibration of thousands of phantom engines in that place. Tigers, lions, bears and every other beast Noah took with him feature here alongside mythical creatures and stirring words exhorting the reader to "Fear Not", "Rain Destruction", "Stand Fast" and suchlike.

At the end of this corridor, past their very decent-sized ballroom, you find the Cowdray Room which looks out over Green Park. The traffic can be heard but snaffle a seat by the window, pick up a paper and you soon forget it. Coffee is replenished automatically by the staff and their selection of harder beverages would shame most pubs and bars. A few hours here with whisky and gingers to accompany flicking through the papers took the edge off the afternoon most wonderfully.

The Club seems to take a more relaxed attitude to dress than some others, but perhaps that is because it was just after Christmas when some places do relax a little or perhaps it was the lunchtime crowd. The regulations for uniform were as confusing as they can be to a non-military man but no surprise there. ("Full dress uniform to be worn after lunch, before the Sovereign's Birthday, if you're not on active service, only if you're returning from pre-TOM, but not if you're serving under a G7, if you're staying for dinner, when the Air Marshal is present..." was how it seemed to this civvy.)

Eventually it was time to take off and go into Town, so I collected my affairs and was taxiing my way out when I noticed that reception sells the Chef's chutneys, pickles, jams, etc, to take away. Having had some at lunch I couldn't resist it and to my delight the receptionist

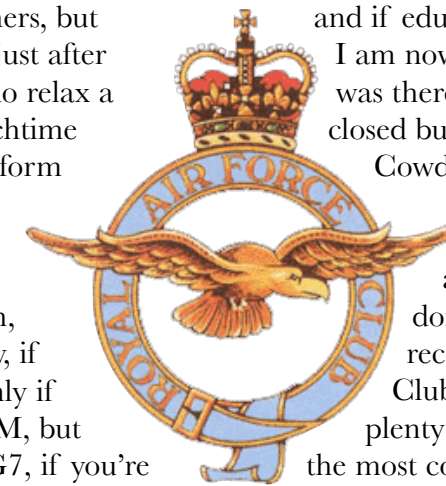


presented me with a refreshingly old-fashioned jam jar with a label featuring the roundel of the Club (see below) and "BROWN PICKLE" written on it. No ingredients. No "Product May Contain Nuts" warning. No allergy advice. No calorie count. Just the bare facts.

All in all the RAF Club is an excellent place to spend the day. Even if you're not an aviation buff, the sheer quantity and variety of living history is incredibly absorbing and distracting and if education by osmosis is possible then I am now an expert on the RAF. When I was there the main bar and tavern were closed but time flew by at Mach 3 in the Cowdray Room and the Members and staff were helpful to an obvious new bug who didn't know where anything was or how anything was done. If you can, I would recommend dropping into the RAF Club but make sure you give yourself plenty of time there. It's like being in the most comprehensive British aviation museum in the world which also offers a variety of fully stocked bars.

Needless to say it is a most excellent pickle.

The Royal Air Force Club is located at 128 Piccadilly, London and was visited in early January 2009. For more information see www.rafclub.org.uk, though note that there does not appear to be an online pickle shop.



Ukulele god, Desmond O'Connor



Custard-Crazed Musicians Rampage

HOSTED BY THE FURBELOWS, a beat combo that features three Sheridan Club Members among its number, the Cirque de Crème Anglaise is a musical evening of dark humour and tomfoolery, blending raucousness with theatricality and cabaret finesse. The venue is the Cross Kings in London's King's Cross. For the Cirque's third outing on 3rd February, The Furbelows were joined by Orlando Seale, a singer of intense and frankly rather sad songs

(imagine Nick Drake crossed with an acoustic Radiohead) and the MC was the delightful Des O'Connor, who sings witty, and frequently rather rude, ditties to the ukulele. There was supposed to be a third band, Whitestar, but sadly the freak snowy weather had paralysed the transport network and half the band were stuck in Kent. Thanks to those hardy souls who braved the ice storms to be there.

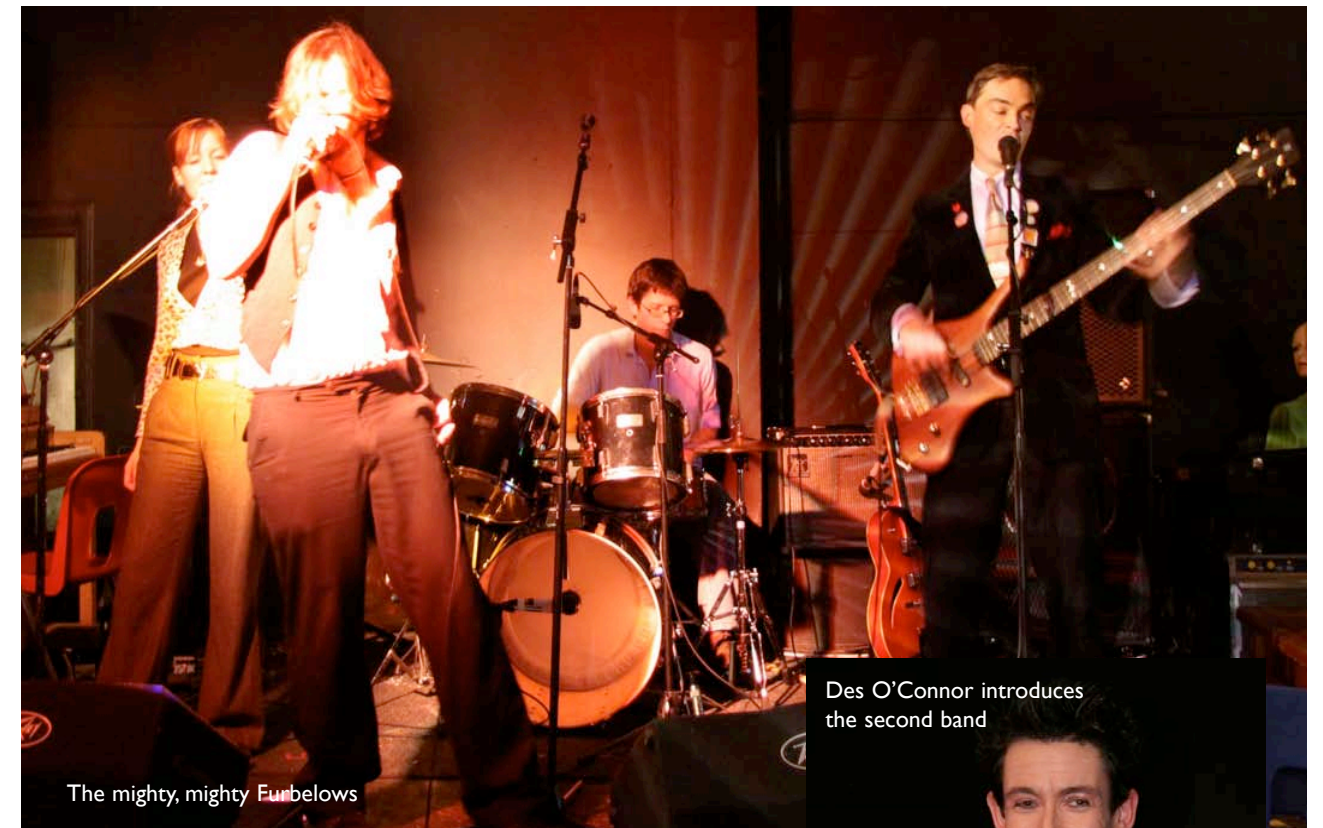
The Cirque returns on Saturday 16th May, when The Furbelows will be joined by Anthony Elvin, an acoustic imp who sings about scones, pipes and ladies; No Cars, a surreal Japanese trio who sing mostly about their favourite foods (they claim to be from humble peasant stock and therefore always hungry); and David Cronenberg's Wife, a Nick Cave-esque troupe who sing about runaway prams and lovelorn mortuary workers.



Frontman Alex Hepburn of The Furbelows



Orlando Seale and his band



The mighty, mighty Furbelows

Orlando Seale



Desmond O'Connor quells the masses

Des O'Connor introduces the second band



Alex and Helena



TRINKET OF DREAMS!

I have to confess that the author of this testament is not a Member of the NSC, and indeed has doubtless never heard of our Club. He sent these words to Reader's Digest magazine, where I earn a crust, but I thought the content might appeal to our crowd (OK, I'm particularly thinking of you, Actuarius)...

Colin Mills writes:

It was during National Service that I purchased a dilapidated 1934 two-seater sports car which let me down so many times I never knew if I would survive a trip. In 1957 a high-speed accident (not my fault!) put the car on the scrap heap and left me with no means of transport. Service pay of £1.40 a week had provided no excess cash and I was on the verge of marrying a girl I met in the forces.

I removed the old crashed car body, straightened the chassis and embarked on the job of redesigning and rebuilding the car. The ash frame bodywork was started, but getting married and starting a family meant that car work was postponed. Moving house, enlarging the home for the family—doing all the building work myself—meant the part-finished car languished in the garage for 37 years.

It wasn't until the five children had left home in 2000 that I realised the car work would be now or never as a retirement project. Five years later the car stood there gleaming in its new paint. I had designed the body not exactly as it used to be, but as I would like it to be; and by adding a foot to its width there was now ample room in which to manoeuvre my personal bulk—which had grown over the years. Back in 1961 I had also made the small gap behind the seat much wider to take a carrycot for my first baby Julie—thinking then that the car would be finished in a few months. In 2005, when the car finally took to the road, baby Julie was 44.

My nine grandchildren are now all out of the carrycot stage, so space is still available for any great grandchildren. The car is used virtually every day and is very reliable. It is rewarding to be constantly reminded of the rebuild aspirations that were there so many years ago and which are now fulfilled.

Do you have a Trinket of Dreams? Why not write and share your lust?



Victrola Favorites

(Various Artists) Cat No. DTD-11

Reviewed by Count Martindt
Cally von Callomon

THE RECENT EXCELLENT BOOK *17* by artist Bill Drummond declares that “all known recorded music has run its course” and goes on at some length to predict what will happen to modern music in the near future. Until this near future arrives, one is free to delve into what could be described as the recent past. This past I refer to is somewhere beyond such recent atrocities and crimes against music as Shed Seven, The Babyshambles and (worst of all) Oasis, and it lies under tables in junk shops throughout the land. I refer, of course, to the beautifully scented word of the shellac 78rpm gramophone record.

Whilst record collectors argue over the “value” (for that they mean “cost”) of Spandau Ballet picture discs, and whilst the youth of today part with vast sums of pocket-money for so-called “limited edition” Pigeon Detectives singles, the real gems lie gathering dust in junk shops for mere pennies (decimal) in a format that requires the treasure hunter to buy a special machine on which to play them.

The machine itself was once known as the Victrola and two intrepid colonial cousins decided, one day, to transfer the recorded delights on to “cassette tapes” and exchange these amongst a few members of the American cognoscenti.

Before the Hitler War the record companies of the day probably agreed that “all known recorded music had run its course” as they seemed hell-bent on dredging up the most obscure sounds to cut on to these black discs.

The two-CD collection I have here contains only the best of the bizarre: I give you: Bololo O Kolilo from the Congo; a Guangzhou Cantonese Opera Troupe; *The Alleyways Of Istanbul* sung by the Greek

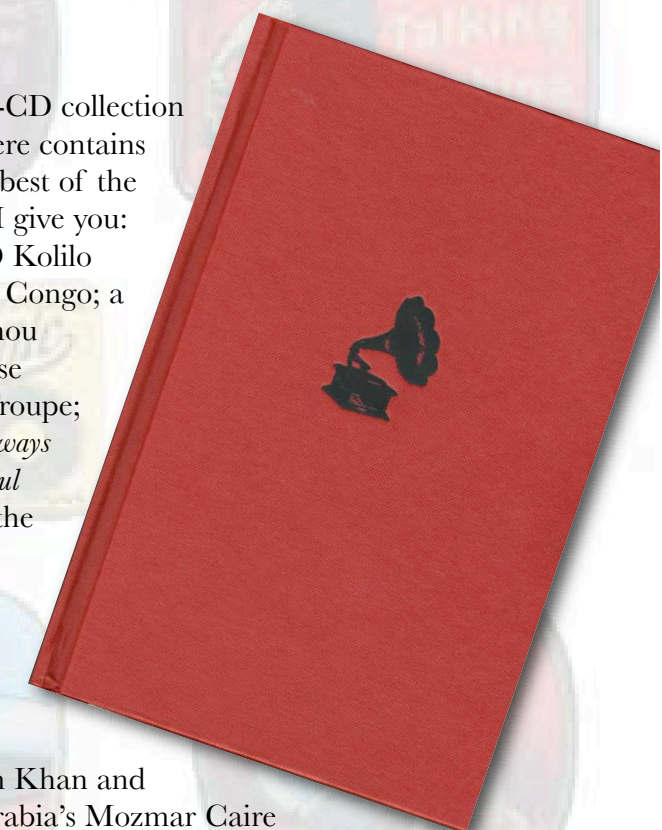
popsy Stella Haskil; India's famed Bismillah Khan and Party; Arabia's Mozmar Caire Orchestra (1920); Music for Bamboo Xylophone; the indecent *Two Liquorice Drops In Jail* (call the PC Constable!) by Cook and Flemming of the USA (1930); Mameyigudi and His Dancers (Zulu vocal with drum and sticks) and, who could forget the timeless *Actual Recording of Big Ben and Traffic Noises* by Stanley Roper in 1929, the latter never off my turntable.

My one gripe comes from the sterling efforts our heroes have taken to eradicate scratches and pops on the original discs, but that is simply a matter of taste to these ears of the old country: like their over-restored Vintage Cars, the Americans still put great stock in “showroom condition”.

All of this comes housed in a beautifully illustrated cloth-covered hardback book and is available from www.dust-digital.com/victrola-favorites.htm so, no need to brave the patronising youth-club scrum that is run by

messrs. HM and V. Buy this now, cancel the economical

nightmare that is your disappointingly scaled-down Grand World Tour, relax in an armchair by a “CD Player” and travel the globe of a none-too-distant past whilst browsing through the book.





You Mean They Can Make Wine in America?

A WINE COLUMN

By *Lainie Petersen*



I had a spot of trouble getting this month's review done. My original choice for the column was **Bonterra Sauvignon Blanc** (a delicious wine). It was only when I was

preparing my review for submission that I realized that it is not available in the UK. As a result, I had to purchase, and consume, *another* bottle of Bonterra wine.

(I wish that the remedies for all my mistakes were this pleasant.)

The second bottle was **Bonterra's 2006**



Chardonnay from Mendocino County. Made from organic grapes, this is a curious example of how careful crafting can result in a California chardonnay that isn't over-oaked or over-unctuous whilst still remaining distinctly Californian. Its nose is reminiscent of apple pie: a hint of vanilla, spice, baked apple, and a dollop of oaky-butter. On the palate one encounters a bit more of the butter (but not so much that it is overpowering or rancid) along with a bit of apple-tang. The wine itself is light-to-medium bodied with a bit of astringency in the finish.

What I like about this wine is its balance: it is not a structured wine (an extremely unlikely feature in any California bottle), but it is restrained. Yes, the butter-oak dominates, but it is neither offensive nor insipid. It is a good choice for non-adventurous wine

drinkers as an accompaniment to cheeses of mild to moderate complexity, poultry (I kept wanting a nice roast chicken whilst drinking this wine) or mild fish. Avoid pairing with spicy or aggressively seasoned foods: they would overpower the wine.

Visit Bonterra Vineyards online at: www.bonterra.com

Bonterra wines can be purchased from Booths, Majestic, Oddbins, Sainsbury, Waitrose and via mail order at www.everywine.co.uk. It typically retails for £9.99 a bottle.



The Cocktail Cabinet:

Wherein Club Members pass on the hard-won knowledge of what works, boozewise, and what does not

Some Martini Variants

Clayton Hartley

Considering the asceticism of its composition (as one wag observed at our Martini-themed Club Night, "Is it not just very cold gin?") the Martini seems to have something of a hold over the popular imagination—to the extent that people and venues are forever devising "new" forms of it. Many of these are so overladen with mango juice, physalis liqueur, dishcloth water (just one and a half drops, mind) and engine oil (must be 10w-40, you fool!) that the resulting concoction has little right to call itself any kind of Martini at all.

However, if you stick to the basic concept of Martini—yes, very cold gin, adjusted by a very small amount of dry, white vermouth—you can indeed come up with some worthwhile variants.

Of course there is the **Vodka Martini**. I do like a neat vodka: served from the freezer it has an oily consistency and a slightly sweet, almost vanilla taste. As a plainer spirit than gin I imagine it would also make a more versatile base for the addition of bitters and other aromatics. But I confess I prefer gin in a Martini.

James Bond fans will doubtless already know about the **Vesper Martini**: the gin is augmented by 25% vodka (I've tried it and can't quite see the point, myself) while the vermouth is

replaced by Kina Lillet. This is no longer made, though experts tell us the closest simulacrum is Lillet Blanc (quite a sweet vermouth-style drink) with some Angostura bitters to recreate the bitterness of the original.

A curious beverage I encountered recently is the **Fino Martini**: instead of vermouth you use fino sherry. In theory this makes sense, though having tried it I can tell you that (a) it

takes considerably more sherry than vermouth to make a noticeable difference against the gin, and (b) this is a very dry drink.

By far the most successful variant I have encountered in recent times is the **Akvatini**. You might argue that I would say this, because I invented it myself. On my travels last year to Copenhagen I took the opportunity to probe some of the local spirits (see Newsletter 26, where there is a dagueurreotype of me and Alfred Chapman scrutinising shelves of strong drink) and came home with a bottle of Aalborg Tavel Akvavit (a pleasant concept that, the "table spirit"). To me it tastes like vodka heavily infused with caraway seeds, and thus sweeter than most vodka. If you use some of this in place of vermouth in a gin Martini—perhaps slightly more than you might use vermouth—the result is a very worthwhile drink, in my



opinion. You can adjust the caraway influence to be quite subtle and it is in any case a much less bludgeoning presence than, say, Pernod or absinthe (I'm told that around the turn of century it was normal enough to take a dose of absinthe in one's Martini: if you like the taste, try an Akvatini); it's a sweeter, softer, more accessible, coniferous sort of flavour. Try it with a cocktail onion (as with the **Gibson**, another Martini variant).

And the picture? It's actually a **Cardinal**. Which is not a Martini variant at all but a twist

on last month's cocktail, the Negroni. Instead of the sweet red vermouth you use dry white vermouth (thus nudging it closer to the Martini—this is essentially a Martini with a splash of Campari). If you like Campari as much as I it is a nice drink, though be warned that it is very dry. (I think I prefer the Negroni, a snifter to which I have become quite addicted since last month's installment...)



CLUB NOTES

New Members

I WOULD LIKE to throw the moist cloak of clubbability around the neglected shoulders of Mr Charles Rupert Bingley and Miss Michelle Gregory, both of whom have joined the Club in the last month.

Forthcoming Events

FOR THE LATEST developments, see the Events page at www.newsheridanclub.co.uk.

Hats: An Anthology by Stephen Jones

Till 31st May

The Porter Gallery, The Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, SW7 2R
10am–5.45pm (Friday 10pm) £5 Adults, £4 Seniors, Students, 12–17 yrs, ES40 Holders

Working with radical hat designer, Stephen Jones, the V&A will present an “anthology of hats”. Drawn from V&A and international collections and ranging in style and period from a 17th-century Puritan’s hat to a 1950s Balenciaga couture piece to hats by Jones and his contemporaries including to the latest creations by young milliners such as Noel Stewart, the exhibition will investigate the cultural and historic importance of millinery. The exhibition will be arranged in four main themes—*Inspiration* looks at the myriad sources including historicism, exoticism and the natural world; *Creation* explores the techniques, materials and processes; *The Salon* focuses on the buying and selling of hats and the millinery shop; and *The Clients* will examine the wearing and etiquette of hats and will feature headgear worn by well-known clients, and some of some of the world’s top milliners, including Audrey Hepburn, Anna Piaggi, Dita von Teese.

Fray and Deville’s Circus of Marvels

Monday 2nd March

Doors 8pm, cabaret 9–11pm
Madam JoJos, 8–10 Brewer Street, London W1F 0SE (020 7734 304)

Admission: £10 in advance, £12 on the door
Your hosts for the evening are the Irrepressible Mr Flay and the Connoisseur of Depravity, Balthazar DeVille. As well as performing for your delight and delectation, they have the honour to present to you:

The Frivolitease: Voted “Best Troupe” at London Burlesque Festival 2008, this gorgeous pair mix humour with sophistication to offer double the fun from 9 to 5.

Spikey Will: Acclaimed street performer and cheeky chappy—will astound you with the ancient Fakir test of endurance, the Bed of Nails.

Owen Lean: Having performed from Melbourne to Dublin, self-styled Road Mage Owen Lean brings his unique brand of magic to the Circus of Marvels.

Miss Rose Thorne: Winner of the 2007 Tournament of Tease, this “sassy lassie with the classy chassis” brings a heart-warming tale straight out of grimy Victorian London.



NSC Club Night

Wednesday 4th March
8pm–11pm

Upstairs, The Wheatsheaf, 25 Rathbone Place, London W1T 1JB

Members: Free

Non-Members: £2 (first visit free)

See page 2.

NSC Quiz Night

Saturday 7th March
7pm–11pm

Venue: The Basement Room, The Fitzroy Tavern, 16 Charlotte St, London W1T 2NA

Admission: Free

The sterling Mr Scarheart is putting together a Chappist pub quiz. The exact details are veiled in secrecy and incompetence, but it is likely to include rounds on proper geography, Imperial history, Chappist quotations and a “brogue’s gallery”...

In the meantime, if you’re interested in attending, please email Mr Scarheart (mrscarheart@newsheridanclub.co.uk) so he can get the measure of just what sort of a hare-brained undertaking he has birthed.

Nosey Joe’s

The Royston Club, 85 Royston Road, Penge London SE20 7QW

Saturday 7th March

Doors 7.30pm, bar till 11.30, dancing till 12am

Admission: £12 available in advance from Caron and Steve on 02082654020, or £10 on the door

A 52nd Street Jump joint, this is a club night presenting an eclectic mix of music from the 1930s to the 1950s from DJ Dr Swing plus live music, this time from Little Harlem.

Kitchener’s Travelling Circus presents:

You Have Been Watching

Tuesday 10th March

8pm–12am

Bourne & Hollingsworth, 28 Rathbone Place, London W1

Admission: Free

Simon Kitchener presents an evening of rather theatrical and vaudevillean music—not



unlike the Cirque de Crème Anglaise, and in fact this month does indeed feature none other than The Furbelows, though we’ll be attempting to play a slightly low-key (if not actually “unplugged”) set. It’s rather a fun venue, a bit like your granny’s living room just after a rather successful air raid. Also performing will be Kitchener himself, delightful loon Antony Elvin and perky ragtime funsters Jarmean?

Holiday in Harlem

Saturday 21st March,
8.30pm–1.30am

Civic Suite, Wandsworth Town Hall, Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 2PU
Admission: £18 in advance online, £25 on the door, if available.

A one-off night of swing music, 1930s/40s-style glamour and much more in a period venue with huge sprung wooden dance floor. There will be a live band, DJs, cabaret, dance competitions, a vintage stall and a vintage hair parlour. See www.swingland.com.



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FOR THE LATEST information on what the Club is up to, who has been arrested, etc., have a squizz at www.newsheridanclub.co.uk. For more photos of Club events go to www.flickr.com/sheridanclub. Those of a more technological bent can also help spread the word by befriending us electrically at www.myspace.com/newsheridanclub or indeed www.facebook.com.