



Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Luncheon of the « Chevaliers du Vin »

Ransomes Dock, 27 February 2012

Gentlemen,
Messieurs les Chevaliers,

It's a pleasure to see you assembled here today and to share with you this convivial event dedicated to "*la Dive Bouteille*" (the Divine Bottle"), to quote the title of a famous poem by our great 16th-century French author François Rabelais. In the poem – a calligram where the words on the page form the shape of a bottle – Rabelais sang the praises of a divine bottle "whose mysterious deep does ten thousand secrets keep", full of "Wine that mounts us to the skies". Thank you for inviting me to spend this wonderful, friendly occasion with you.

Your gathering of *Chevaliers du Vin*, devoted to the precious nectar – the "monarch of liquids", as the famous French gourmet Brillat-Savarin put it – is unique in the UK and maybe in the world! Indeed, I'm not aware of any other such elite clubs of distinguished connoisseurs of French wines anywhere else. For this, we owe a debt of gratitude to the two founder members who dedicate so much of their time and effort to increasing its membership and organizing this annual event.

Allow me to begin the ceremony with a word about the *Ordre du Mérite Agricole*, a distinction created under the Third Republic in 1883 by Agriculture Minister Jules Méline as a reward for services rendered to agriculture. Jules Méline, who went on to become Prime Minister, also made his mark by introducing the first legislation on accidents in the workplace, the hygiene and safety of workers, and mutual aid societies. As a French deputy, Méline continued to take a close interest in agricultural matters and never failed to remind people that the nation's wealth derived from farming. He was very popular among the rural community and resumed his post as Agriculture

Minister during the Great War, during which our soldiers fought side by side and shared their rations.

I can tell you gentlemen – two of whom will become its *Chevaliers* in a few moments – that this distinction is a source of pride for those it is bestowed upon, particularly in the rural world so dear to the French. You'll have only to wear it on your lapel when visiting an agricultural show, a “*comice agricole*” to see the respect it inspires among all those who value work on the land, the noblest work of all.

We are today honouring two gentlemen : two new *Chevaliers* in the *Ordre du Mérite Agricole*, two men who have devoted and continue to devote their talent and energy to the promotion of French wine. I will begin with the outstanding role played by

John Livingstone-Learmonth,

“Monsieur Rhône” – if I may call you that, as I understand it is how you are known amongst wine connoisseurs – you've devoted much of your free time as a writer to promoting the wines of France's Rhône Valley.

And how can we fail to share this passion for the Rhône Valley! Anyone who has strolled among the vines of the region knows the meaning of the word “serenity”. That's particularly true in the golden light of September, captured so well by French director Eric Rohmer in his film “Autumn Tale”, depicting the romantic hesitations of a wine-grower in the prime of her life.

You've written three specialized books on wines of the Rhône, one of which, “The Wines of the Northern Rhône” published in 2005, won the Louis Roederer

International Wine Book Award and received a special prize in the André Simon Award.

Your third book, “Gigondas, Its Wines, Its Land, Its People”, was published in French and English.

You’ve also created a very useful website where you share your latest tastings and help people find the best-value wines. You thus show that a harmonious marriage is possible between the age-old tradition of viticulture and the most modern technologies, providing enthusiasts with the highest quality wine.

Your passionate work to promote the wines of the Rhône was officially recognized when you were given the title of Honorary Citizen of the Rhône village of Châteauneuf-du-Pape .

Far from being an expert only on wines of the Rhône, you’ve also written about the wines of the Loire, Beaujolais and Bordeaux, with articles published in a wide range of British magazines, from “Decanter”, “Wine”, “World of Fine Wine”, “Harpers” and “Wine & Spirit” to “Good Housekeeping”, “Sainsbury’s Monthly” and “The Connoisseur”.

True, you devoted a few years of your life to the promotion of whisky, under the auspices of James Buchanan and Company, Scotch Whisky Distillers; but we have no trouble forgiving you this youthful error – if I may call it that – because you then actively promoted French wines by holding conferences and tastings not only in Britain but also in France, the United States and Asia.

As you’ve spent so much of your time promoting French wines with passion, alongside your own professional career, John Livingstone-Learmonth, it is with

great pleasure that, *au nom du Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation, de la Pêche, de la Ruralité et de l'Aménagement du Territoire, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole.*

Douglas Morton ,

many would envy you, as you've had the good fortune to have a career devoted to something you're passionate about, namely French wines.

Over the past 30 years of your career you've been fortunate enough to visit wine-growing regions in all the major producing countries. Among other places, you've worked in the California's Napa Valley; but there again, we'll let you off because, firstly, you were working there for the prestigious French company Baron Philippe de Rothschild and, secondly, your heart always remained in France: throughout your career you've striven to share the pleasures of French wine with every new generation of enthusiasts.

At the beginning of your career, when you were Wine Marketing Manager at Charrington brewery in London, you promoted French wines through seminars and educational visits to the main wine-producing regions of France.

As Marketing Director of Hedges and Butler, you successfully developed the popularity of Mouton Cadet Blanc, thereby establishing Mouton Cadet as the UK's leading Bordeaux brand and one of the top-selling premium wines on the market.

If John Livingstone-Learmonth is nicknamed "Monsieur Rhône", you could quite legitimately be known as "Monsieur Bordeaux". Indeed, you've devoted

the bulk of your talent and energy to that region, even though you've also played a key role in successfully introducing the varietal range of wines from the Languedoc.

You thus continue the tradition of special relations between Bordeaux and London, “capitals of freedom” in the words of the writer Philippe Sollers, who was born in the Bordeaux region. Sollers has finely depicted the traditional Anglophilia of Bordeaux's inhabitants, and in “Portrait du Joueur” he tells how the motto of his wine-growing family – and I don't think you'll contradict me – was “*Les Anglais ont toujours raison*” – “The English are always right”.

As Managing Director of Baron Philippe de Rothschild UK, you continued your efforts to promote the diverse range of Bordeaux wines through presentations and tastings, establishing them as the ideal accompaniment to food by launching several national restaurant dining competitions.

Today, as UK consultant for The Bordeaux Wine Council (CIVB), you're in charge of overseeing the new campaign strategy, aimed at promoting Bordeaux wines by celebrating the natural relationship between Bordeaux wines and food.

Before decorating you, I'd like to quote a sentence you wrote in the magazine “The Pleasure of Bordeaux”:

“The magic of Bordeaux lies in the fact that the personalities of the 10,000 châteaux are reflected in their wines. There is no mass production here – more an annual labour of love.”

And I would add this brief quotation from Baudelaire, which I think perfectly sums up the passion for wine: “Boire du vin, c’est boire du génie” – “Drinking wine is drinking genius”.

Douglas Morton, it is with great pleasure that, *au nom du Ministre de l’Agriculture, de l’Alimentation, de la Pêche, de la Ruralité et de l’Aménagement du Territoire, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l’Ordre du Mérite Agricole.*

Gentlemen,

John Lennon once came up with this maxim, which is both unfair and funny: “French rock is like British wine.” Well, to paraphrase the giant of Liverpool, allow me to say that “Wine is to France what rock is to Britain” – an inextricable part of her identity and a gift she gives to the whole world.

Once again, thank you for this invitation, and I’m delighted to be among you today./.