

Dinner with the Bartons

14 Mar 2007 by JR

Nick and I attended one of the warmest, jolliest celebratory dinners I can remember last night held at the Turf Club in London's clubland to mark the appointment of Anthony Barton as Decanter Man of the Year.

A past DMOTY Jean- Michel Cazes presented him with the silver topped decanter (mine, presented in 1999, didn't have a silver top – times must be good for the London- based wine magazine, now part of Time Warner). Cazes, with Barton practically the only Médoc château owner to actually live above the shop as opposed to in Bordeaux, Paris or abroad, said how he felt like a parvenu compared to the Bartons' considerably longer history in the Médoc. He also said how much he and his wife enjoyed dining at Langoa and how he was always telling Teresa that's how he wished they did things. The glamorous Madame Cazes nodded ruefully at this point.

Anthony Barton described his early years of paralysing boredom working for his famous Uncle Ronald in the offices of the family company Barton & Guestier in Bordeaux (later sold to Seagram). The daily pre- lunch tasting "served to remind us that we were actually in the wine business". It took him some years to pluck up the courage to ask Ronald when he might expect to draw a salary, this when he wished to marry his Danish wife Eva who was there last night with his daughter Lilian, now in charge of the business at Château Langoa Barton where both wines, Léoville Barton and Langoa Barton are made.

Anthony gradually took over from Ronald with 1984 being his first proper vintage and installed considerable improvements in both cellar and vineyard, the latter his chief preoccupation and love, having been raised in the Irish countryside. His father sold the family estate which has become the K Club, the golfers' mecca.

Life is considerably more comfortable for the Bartons now, even though or perhaps because Anthony Barton has pursued such an admirably moderate pricing policy. He admitted that they could now think of investing in another property but that it was very difficult to decide where.

This was a thoroughly deserved and popular honour. We drank (lashings of) **Pol Roger 1998**, still pretty tight but clean as a whistle and wonderfully refreshing; with crab **Hugel Jubilee Riesling 2003** which is just starting to unfurl and has great integrity (appropriately enough); with stuffed guinea fowl **Ch Léoville Barton 1989** which is rich and splendid; and with cheese **Ch Léoville Barton 1982** in magnum which was so generously provided but which you couldn't help feeling would have been even more luscious had it been made by Anthony rather than Ronald Barton with his super- traditional methods. And finally **Pol Roger Cuvée Winston Churchill 1988** (see my [tasting notes](#) on a range of top Pol Roger cuvees) which was stunning. I don't usually like the French habit of serving champagne with dessert but this worked beautifully with a lemon and lime tart and ginger sorbet because it was so concentrated.

Much of the guestlist was made up of a rollcall of the traditional British wine trade, a group of familiar faces I don't often see gathered in the same place, but also Johnny Hugel, Christian Pol- Roger, Nicholas Soames MP and - a first public appearance since his major heart surgery in early January - Michael Broadbent who arrived looking a little frail and saying he might well not stay the course but who was still at the table looking as though he was enjoying himself hugely when we left towards midnight.