

## Wine books shrivel

13 Mar 2009 by Jancis Robinson

See also [England 0](#), [Belgium 1](#).

Drinks book publishing is in a parlous state if this year's André Simon Awards are anything to go by. Named after the famous gastronome and patron of Hugh Johnson (who turned 70 on Wednesday and is seen on the left of this blurred old picture of him and Simon), these are the last surviving British awards for food and drink books, the Glenfiddich Awards having been wound up, or at least mothballed.

Last night at the Goring Hotel the drinks books assessor Peter Richards and food books assessor Ivan Day gave their verdicts on last year's crop of books. Most tellingly, while Ivan Day had to read and evaluate 111 food books submitted, Peter Richards had to adjudicate over a mere 18 books. And it was perhaps significant that the shortlist of four drinks books included just one wine book – Charles Sullivan's *Napa Wine: A History from Mission Days to Present*, which is hardly the most recent production.

The other shortlisted drinks books, incidentally, were Iain Gatley's *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol*, Taylor Clark's first book *Starbucked* and, the winner, *Ciderland* by James Crowden. The winning drinks book is a lyrical, bucolic celebration of cider's place in Britain with a heavy historical bias. All three of these books are rattlingly good reads, but neither Gatley nor Clark is a specialist drinks writer. A sign of the times?

It was a good night for historians, however. The winning food book was the extremely scholarly *Cooking and Dining in Medieval England* by Peter Brears and published by Tom Jaine's small imprint Prospect Books. Michel Roux's classic how-to book *Pastry* was given a special award. There were no fewer than seven shortlisted food books, the others being *A Day at El Bulli* by Ferran Adrià et al, *Forgotten Fruits* by Christopher Stocks, *Ottolenghi: The Cookbook*, Bee Wilson's *Swindled* about food scandals and Richard Corrigan's Irish-influenced cookbook *The Clatter of Forks and Spoons*.

All rather gloomy for wine book publishing really. Is it because previously published books weren't good enough? Because publishers are too cautious? Because of the growth of online comment about wine? Any thoughts?