Farm Street yesterday

5 Oct 2012 by Jancis Robinson

Yesterday afternoon, as reported here, a very moving memorial mass for 53-year-old wine merchant Patrick Sandeman of Lea & Sandeman was held at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street in London.

A photo session at Texture restaurant with my *World Atlas of Wine* co-author Hugh Johnson (just back from Paris, having collected a prize for his tree book) had to be cut short so that I could get there with a chance of a seat in this vast Victorian church. As it was, I got practically the last seat, round a corner at the very back, more than 20 minutes before the start of the service. I think even Father Edward Corbould OSB, who led the 90-minute service, was surprised by quite how many hundreds of people were crammed into his church that sunny afternoon.

Each of Patrick's three children, all in their twenties and including his doppelganger son Ed (in media buying), gave a reading with wonderful eloquence. We were also treated to memories from Sebastian (Beau) Reid, who had known him since prep school (where he had advertised himself as 'sherry royalty', apparently) and Alex Smith, who had introduced him to his wife when she was Katie Fuller. Beau's particularly risqué story about a skiing trip and two bottles of what he called cherry brandy (surely eau-de-vie de kirsch rather than the Prince Charles sort?) gave us all the chance to laugh and clap. Alex, ex Percy Fox but now in horse racing, reminded us enviously how much effort Patrick put into keeping in shape.

The Lea & Sandeman team, including Patrick's partner Charles Lea, all wore buttonholes. What was particularly impressive was that only about a fifth of those who attended were in the wine trade; Patrick clearly had a very wide and loyal acquaintance, including many members of the next generation, friends of his children, who viewed him as a friend. His active role as godfather to eight godchildren was fully acknowledged, as was his firm commitment to the Catholic faith.

I shared a hymn sheet with Ian Harris, head of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, who has, I can exclusively report, a particularly fine singing voice. I also found myself next to wine enthusiast Charlie Berman, who works in finance and so kindly supported our Wine Relief dinner in 2005. I reminded him that it was at that dinner that he warned us about a phenomenon of which we had never previously heard: sub-prime mortgages.

On the way out, I signed the slips that had been given out with the order of service, along with a collage of photographs of Patrick with his family, explaining I was representing Nick (currently promoting *The Art of the Restaurateur* in Australia), Julia and Tamlyn, all of whom were particularly fond of Patrick.

Most poignantly, uniformed representatives of the Vintners' Company flanked the doors of the church on the way out, one of them holding the velvet cap with swan's feather and the silver swan medallion of the Swan Warden, worn by Patrick in the photograph above.

We all swarmed about in the street outside the church before walking across Grosvenor Square, past the superannuated, fortified American embassy, to One Mayfair, the deconsecrated church, now event space, in North Audley Street. Here we were entertained to far better champagne, wine and food than is usually the case in these circumstances: Larmandier-Bernier, Bon Gran Viré-Clessé 2004 and the delicious Tassinaia.

Nick and Jo Mills were over from Ripon in Central Otago expecting to spend the week promoting their New Zealand wines with Patrick. Roberto Guerrini of Fuligni had come specially from Montalcino (Patrick's friend Pucci of Castello del Terriccio having had a mass said for Patrick in Rome last weekend). And of course there were several representatives from Jerez. Patrick's mother had had to cut short her usual early autumn stay in Jerez but was unable to make it to the post-mass reception. She had already lost Patrick's brother Christopher in a car accident in Spain when he was in his late teens.

There were young Averys and Lebuses, and much older members of what used to be called The Under Forty Wine Trade Club - many of whom are now old enough to hold office in various livery companies. The fourth estate was represented by Oz Clarke, Tim Atkin MW, Anthony Rose, Joanna Simon, Jane MacQuitty, Natasha Hughes and doubtless many more

I missed in the throng.

One thing I learned was that it was Patrick's widow Katie who first introduced him to skydiving, giving him a course in the 1990s as a present. She was the most vivacious hostess in a most appropriate setting – half church, half nightclub – for a most appropriate celebration of a particularly hospitable and vibrant personality.

On the way out, I happened to be collecting my coat (pink, spotted, as previously advertised) at the same time as the serene and sympathetic Father Corbould. One of the many young men who had been lurking on the steps outside enjoying a smoke, came up to him and asked admiringly, 'are you the guy who led the service?'

'Yes, I'm that "guy",' he admitted wryly.

I'm sure he'd never had that appellation before, but then the whole thing was a most extraordinary occasion. Apparently the only stipulation Patrick had ever made about his funeral was that Meatloaf's Bat out of Hell should be played. It was. Very loudly.