

# Wines from Franconia

by Ormond Smith

After a couple of non-starts due to date clashes with other events elsewhere, Goustevin Scotland's 2016 Franconian Wine Tasting was held on November 7<sup>th</sup> at the Waterside Hotel, Inverness where some thirty members and guests enjoyed some excellent wines (all 2015 vintage) from the Franken area of Bavaria in Germany. "" By way of a little bit of history, Franken is out of the mainstream of German wine both geographically and by dint of its quite separate traditions. Politically it lies in the otherwise beer-centric former kingdom of Bavaria, which gives its state wine cellars a grandeur found nowhere else in Germany. Franken is unusual in that it makes greater wines from Silvaner than from Riesling and has long specialised in dry whites. The name "Steinwein" (stone wine) was once loosely used for all Franken wine. Stein is, in fact, the name of one of the two famous vineyards of Wurzburg, Franken's wine capital on the River Main. The other is Innere Lieste and both distinguished themselves in the past by making wines that were incredibly long lived. Franken's climate is decidedly continental and climate change has seen the Silvaner become as concentrated and alcoholic as some of Austria's Wachau great wines"" . Hugh Johnston's World Atlas of Wine 7th edition.

Getting the Tasting got under way, after a welcoming glass of sparkling Riesling from our friends Ann and Harold Junglen in the Mosel, Connetable Nicol gave a short introduction into the area of Franken and its wines, with emphasis on grape varieties and "terroir" before the assembly were served with a **Wurzbürger Muller-Thurgau Qba Trocken** from the **Juliuspital** winery. **Juliuspital**



**An introduction to Franken wines and the area around Wurzburg**

was set up by Julius Echter, Bishop of Wurzburg, in 1576 on the grounds of an old Jewish cemetery with the endowment of the abandoned monastery of Heiligenthal, for the benefit of pilgrims, orphans and citizens suffering from epilepsy. It continues to function as a hospital and retirement home today but is particularly notable for being, at 177 hectares in the Franconian wine region, the second largest winery in Germany and the biggest individual German wine grower. The Muller-Thurgau wine (the grape was created in 1882 in Switzerland by crossing Riesling with Madeleine Royale and is regarded in some parts of Germany as a "workhorse grape") proved to be an interesting opener to the evening, with its delicate flowery nose exhibiting good fruit, with fresh, lemony tones on the palate and good acidity. Onto wine two and again from **Juliuspital**, a **Wurzbürger Silvaner Qba Trocken**, displaying pale yellow in the glass with tinges of green, good acidity and fruit and a clean lingering aftertaste. Silvaner elsewhere in Germany is considered a secondary grape to the Riesling but in Franconia it takes pride of place and it is easy to see (or rather taste!) why.



**The selection of Franken wines beckons....!!**

Our third wine came from **Staatliche Hofkeller** whose extensive cellars lie beneath the quite magnificent **Residenz**, (dating back to 1128) the palace of the former Prince-Bishops of Wurzburg and whose spectacular ceiling paintings were done by the celebrated Italian Tiepolo in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. As an aside, this building was badly damaged by Allied bombings during WW2 and was painstakingly rebuilt between 1945 and 1987 at the staggering cost of some 20m Euros! If you ever visit Wurzburg and from experience I strongly commend a visit, the Residenz and wine cellars (plus the other two cellars from the our

Tasting) are a "must-do" visit. Meanwhile back at the Waterside and accompanied by very tasty canapés of German Salami & Tomato and Smoked Black Forest Ham, the **Wurzbürger Innere Lieste Silvaner VDP Erste Lage** was tantalising our taste buds. Erste Lage refers to a first class wine and befittingly it comes from the Innere Lieste vineyard – a distinct green tinge in the glass, a wine of excellent balance and acidity and a lingering, satisfying aftertaste.

Moving ever on, we returned to the wines of **Juliusspital** and a **Wurzbürger Stein Weisser Burgunder VDP Erste Lage** (the Pinot Blanc in other wine producing countries like France, Spain and Italy) found favour with the majority with its greenish tinge in the glass, a pronounced floral nose and a palate displaying excellent acidity and balance with a most satisfying finish. Our final offering from **Juliusspital** was a **Thungersheimer Grauer Burgunder Qba Trocken** from vineyards around the village of Thungersheim just north of Wurzburg. This wine



**The first four wines in their distinctive "Bocksbeutel"**

(otherwise referred to as Pinot Gris elsewhere) was generally agreed to be a wine which really needed food accompaniment like pork or cured meats, but nevertheless showed good fruit on both the nose and palate but a rather short finish. Our third and final producer of the evening, the **Burgerspital** offered two distinctly different wines. The **Burgerspital** hospital in the heart of Wurzburg was established as an old people's home at the gates of the old city for nursing "Christians suffering from affliction" and taking care of the hungry and the poor. The first vineyards, which were planted in 1321 served to supply the endowment's own needs. In 1598, the residents of the old people's home were provided with a tankard - 1.22 litres - of wine. If the residents behaved in an unruly manner, water was mixed with the wine as a punishment. If such behaviour went too far, the wine ration was cancelled - a draconian warning! Soon, Burgerspital was financing its charitable enterprises from the wine proceeds and estate stewardship. Today 750 senior citizens live in eight Bürgerspital residential and nursing homes, being managed, nursed, taken care of and medically treated by skilled staff and the **Burgerspital** wine estate now covers some 300 acres is one of Germany's oldest and largest. The first offering, a **Wurzbürger Scheurebe Qba Trocken** had a

distinct green tinge with a powerful flinty nose with hints of apricots, the palate displaying good acidity and a satisfying finish.



**The remaining four wines just got better.....and better!**

The Scheurebe grape was created in 1916 by crossing the Riesling with what was thought to be an unknown wild vine – in fact recent DNA analysis in the 1990's has established the “unknown wild vine” as the Bouquet Blanc or Bukettraube grape in Germany. The penultimate wine of the Tasting was a **Wurzbürger Stein Riesling Kabinett Feinherb**, and getting away from the dry wines, this one was “up the sugary ladder” but just a wee bit, being described as semi-dry! “Feinherb” is a somewhat confusing terminology, being classed as “off-dry” and in fact is something of an unregulated designation. Back to the wine, which in fact was a special bottling to commemorate the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

**Burgerspital**, and it displayed distinct lemony and peach aromas on the nose while the palate was assailed with flavours of rich fruit with a good balance and a long satisfying finish. The evening culminated with a **Wurzbürger Stein Rieslaner Auslese** from **Staatliche Hofkeller**. The Rieslaner grape is a cross breed of the noble Riesling and the Silvaner, first bred in Franconia in 1921 and it is a late ripening grape and is well suited to botrytis. The pronounced fruity nose led into a rich but balanced palate with good fruit and a clean lingering aftertaste (despite its high sugar content at 79.8 g/l), enhanced by a slice of rye bread and a slice of Bavarian Blue cheese, as well as a piece of dark chocolate. Ah, decadence in a glass!

Continuing the Bavarian theme of the evening, the repast was a Bayerischer Wursteltopf.....and of course you know what that is.....don't you? A Bavarian Hot Pot created with layered meats and vegetables and left to cook. With most of the liquid cooking away, the meal is actually a melange of broth-poached vegetables and Bavarian sausages combined with Kassler (lightly smoked pork). Extremely tasty, filling and most satisfying! Thanks must go to Nicol for a very informative presentation and also to our good friend Hartmut Reick of the “Weinbruderschaft zu Hannover”, the Wine Club of Hanover, who is very much an aficionado of Franken wines and who acted as consultant and “negociant” for the acquisition of the wines from these three famous Wurzburg wineries. What an evening!!