



THE
ATHENÆUM
PALL MALL LONDON

WINE LUNCHEON

To be held on

Wednesday 22nd November 2023

The Wines and food of Catalunya (aka Catalonia)

at 12:30 pm

Devised by:

Mr Jonathan Asquith and Dr Jonathan Punt

Presenter:

Dr Jonathan Punt

Introduced by: Professor James Crabbe



La Diada – La Senyera and La Estelada

MENU & WINES

Aperitivo

Raventòs i Blanc, Textures de Pedra, 2018, ABV 12%

First Course

Tuna loin in escabeche, Xató (Penedès Salad)

Celler Alimara, AmbPells Brisat, Terra Alta DO, 2020, ABV 12.5%

Mas Vilella Blanc, 2019, ABV 12.5%

Main Course

Braised Ox Cheeks in Spicy Tomato Red Wine Sauce, Mixed
Charred Vegetables

Celler Carles Andreu Viticultors Elaboradors, 12@ Trepà, Conca de
Barbera DO, 2020, ABV 13.5%

Braó, Vinyes Velles Nobles, Acústic Celler, Montsant DO, 2019
ABV 15%

Edetària, Finca La Personal, Terra Alta DO, 2020, ABV 15%

Pudding

Crema Catalana, Carquinyolis

Josefina Piñol Dolç Negre, Terra Alta DO, 2017, ABV 15%

Coffee/tea & Chocolate-covered Marcona Almonds

WINE MAP OF SPAIN



Penedes wine region with Montserrat mountains in the background

Homage to Catalunya

I came to Catalunya for the first time some 25 years ago to visit friends who had taken up residence there. A Spanish speaker since my youth, I had spent six months in the Basque region in the mid-1970s, hitch-hiked across the country as a student and cycled from Paris to Compostela, but nearly all of my Hispanic adventures since then had been in South America.

Our friends lived between Girona and the sea, in the middle of the north easternmost region known as the Empordà, or Ampurdan, to give it its Catalan name. The region is rural, given over to growing apples, rice, maize and grains. With the Pyrenees rising only about 40 miles to the north, there is good groundwater and a lot of natural woodland. The combination of these with an abundance of heavy clay contributed to the success of the area over many years as a centre of pottery and fired earth products, and the landscape is dotted with deep clay pits and the chimneys of abandoned kilns.

We became regular visitors, attracted by the warm but temperate climate, the quality of the food and wines, the charm of the countryside, the solid reliability of the people and the many opportunities for walking in the rolling hills which characterise much of the landscape. Eight years ago, we purchased an old Mas near the mediaeval village of Cruïlles, where we try to spend about 1/3 of the year. At the time, I thought how ironic it would be for me as (then) an EU National if Catalunya gained its independence and left the Community; little did I dream that the reverse would happen!

So, what is this place, Catalunya? To someone whose exposure to Spain started in the febrile atmosphere of Basque separatism in the early 1970s, when Franco was still alive and the streets of Bilbao were ruled by the grey-uniformed Policía Militar, there are some familiar features, of which separatism and a yearning for self-determination are the most obvious. Like the Basques, the Catalans are set apart from their neighbours by their language, which descended from the Latin

of the retired legionary settlements of the littoral to find a distinct place between the langue d'Oc in south-west France, the Aragonese dialects to the west, the Castilian of central Spain and the Arabic-infused Spanish of Al-Andalus. Also like the Basques, the Catalans straddled the Pyrenees; for many years Perpignan (Perpinyà) was the second city of the Catalan region, which included the Cerdagne and the Roussillon.

But – to this foreign observer, at least – Catalans have a lot more in common with their Castilian and French neighbours than do the Basques, who retain their resolutely distinct culture and ethnicity. To anyone who has studied the two languages, this is barely surprising; Catalan often feels more like a Franco-Spanish dialect than a distinct language; this is not a mistake that anyone could make when faced with the profusion of Xs and Ks in Euskera, the Basque language whose origins are sufficiently obscure that it is hypothesised to be a lost cousin of Finnish and Hungarian.

Despite the similarities it bears to its neighbours, Catalunya still aspires to nationhood, although its claims to national identity remain controversial. If you follow the (possibly dubious) principle that aspirations to nationhood should be founded, as a minimum, on distinctness of identity in the Middle Ages, then Catalunya struggles to meet the test. Established as a series of more or less independent counties in the ninth and tenth centuries to act as a buffer between the Holy Roman Empire and the Moors, the history of Catalunya over the next 500 years is of a patchwork of alliances, betrayals and conquests among the nobility financed by the routine oppression of a large feudal population and supplemented by occasional negotiated contributions from the few major cities, of which Barcelona was pre-eminent. Studying the history of the period requires an encyclopaedic knowledge of the different noble families and their intermarriages and good mapping system. You need to understand the pivotal role in the ninth century of Wifredo el Velloso (Wilfred “the Hairy”), learn to distinguish between Ramon Berenguer II (“the Woolly-Headed”) and his brother Berenguer Ramon II (“the Fratricide”), who

killed him; you need to track at any time which Catalan noble was – or thought he should be – King of Sicily, Count of Mallorca, the lord of Naples, Sardinia, Corsica and even – for a while – Athens. Frankly, it is a bit of a relief when Ferdinand and Isabella get together and the 200 year-long fusion of these marcher lords into the consolidated Spanish crown begins in earnest.

To give you an idea of just how complicated life could get for the ones in charge in those days, when the revolt of the Sicilian Vespers in 1282 (immortalised later by Verdi) led to the locals offering the island to Pedro “the Great” (King of Aragon), the latter found himself immediately at war with France, the house of Anjou, his brother Jaime II of Mallorca and the Pope (who, naturally, excommunicated him and his family). When his son Jaime II of Aragon (“the Just”) (not to be confused with his Mallorcan uncle) took on the throne in 1291 he had to spend three years orchestrating the Treaty of Anagni, in which he (i) made peace with France, (ii) promised to return the Balearic Islands to his uncle, (iii) gave Sicily to the Pope and (iv) married Blanche, the daughter of Charles of Anjou. That got his excommunication lifted and the others off his back, while opening the way for him to have a crack at taking over Corsica and Sardinia with the blessing of Rome, although it took another 30 years to achieve it. Meanwhile, he had 10 children by Blanche of Anjou (already his second wife, after his disappointing first match with the 8-year-old Isabela of Castile was blocked by the same Pope) and married twice more before he died, as well as fathering at least three bastard sons by various Sicilian women. Busy, busy, busy!

Whatever its divisions, the region was a dynamic and expansionist one in the Middle Ages, reaching a population of 500,000 or more in the early 1300s. The ravages of the Black Death, internal fighting, high taxation and poor harvests halved that number by 1500. The early feudal period left its mark on the countryside: Catalan village settlements were small and correspondingly numerous; each area was dominated by its local castle which served as the basis for feudal control and tax

collection; agriculture (and matrimony!) were focused on the retention and growth of land rights within the family and most economic activity was based in smallholdings. To this day, the effects of the feudal period are visible in the region; in the Empordà, small villages are scattered quite densely across the land, separated by as little as three or four kilometres. Despite their proximity, they tend to retain a strong sense of individual identity: the three villages nearest to us (total population, including surrounding hamlets ~1,400) were combined for administrative purposes 50 years ago but each still maintains its own town offices; municipal workers simply move from one village to another according to the day of the week!

In economic terms, Catalunya ties with Madrid at the top of the table of GDP contributions of the 17 mainland Spanish regions. Given its geographical and climatic advantages, one might have expected more, but events have not always been kind to the province.

While there is much talk in historical commentaries of the special rights won by the citizens of Barcelona vis-à-vis the aristocracy, the strengths of its guilds and the dynamism of its textile and leather industries, the rest of the region was subject to an escalating feudal suppression from the ninth to the seventeenth centuries which left it with an under-invested agrarian economy and a malnourished rural population which had been more or less taxed to death. They revolted from time to time (who wouldn't!), but never really won much that was lasting by way of relief.

The nobles, meanwhile, made a series of bad choices; it was expensive to garrison and maintain foreign possessions across the Mediterranean and over time their overseas holdings were whittled away. In a series of European wars they developed the unfortunate habit of wobbling at key moments, going over to the French in both the Thirty Years War in the mid seventeenth century and again in the War of the Spanish Succession in the early 1700s. Settling the former (1659) cost the annexation by the French of the Catalan counties north of

the Pyrenees; their capitulation in the latter (1714) allowed Felipe V to dismantle the local autonomy within the Catalunya and bring it under centralised control from Madrid. If Catalunya was an identifiable – if fractured – entity before this point, it was reduced to merely a troublesome provincial unit thereafter. The fact that the day of this crucial defeat, 11th September 1714, is now celebrated as the Catalan National Day, provides an interesting insight into the national character.

1714 may have been a disaster in terms of self-determination, but tariff-free integration with the wider Spanish market and relative peace set the conditions for considerable economic and social improvements in the region throughout the eighteenth century. Agriculture (particularly wine and spirits) and the textile industries developed apace and life expectancy – together with population numbers – increased dramatically.

But it was not to last. The French Revolutionary war against Spain, followed by the Napoleonic campaigns, converted Catalunya into a battleground for 20 years from 1796 to 1815. The region emerged from the conflict, during which it fought a series of military and guerrilla campaigns against its French occupiers, impoverished and depopulated once more. Its problems did not stop there; nineteenth-century Spain was riven by a series of internal disputes around the royal succession and the development of a more modern constitution. Most of these found expression in internal armed conflict (notably the various Carlist Wars) but there was also considerable social unrest in the background which further inhibited growth and investment in the region. Impoverished Catalans left in numbers to try their luck in the sugar trade in Cuba; the lucky few who survived and prospered returned to their home villages and built smart new houses (“Cases d’Indians”) to show off their wealth, many of which have been preserved to this day.

Meanwhile, as elections were gradually introduced the Catalan bourgeoisie evinced pronounced republican sympathies. Hand in hand with these went a search for identity

that naturally focused on the concept of Catalan nationhood, which, even if it lacked something in the area of strict historical underpinning, was definitely supported by cultural and linguistic differences.

Even as Barcelona started to take advantage of the boom in trade and manufactures of our Victorian era and the city was rebuilt and expanded into the graceful place that we know today, the seeds of the Catalans' next trial were being sown. Their Republican stance in the Spanish Civil War, the losses that it brought and the repression that followed, coupled with the starvation of capital that characterised the Franco era, have been well documented. The 20th Century, in common with many of its predecessors,

was not particularly kind to Catalunya.

Looking back over the last 1200 years, it is tempting to conclude that the Catalans made a lot of bad choices. That does not necessarily mean that they were the wrong choices at the time, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that they were jinxed in some way. The juxtaposition of great potential and perennial disappointment in Catalan history leaves one with an impression of heroic failure very similar to the experience of watching the English cricket team lose to Afghanistan.

Such heroic but inevitable failures excite admiration, affection and frustration in equal parts. I once asked a sensible Catalan friend why he favoured independence from Spain, expecting to be treated to a considered economic, social and cultural justification. He looked at me, clearly puzzled by the banality of my question. "*It is our destiny*", he replied. Herein lies the charm of the Catalans: despite being successful in business, wonderful artisans and indefatigable bureaucrats, they remain - like English cricket fans - hopeless romantics at heart.

It shows in their wine, too.

Jonathan Asquith



Castellers Tower, Tarragona

WINE MAP OF CATALUNYA



WINE & FOOD FACTS

Climate:

Primarily Mediterranean, but great width of geographical diversity with crops grown at altitudes ranging from sea level to 800 metres; a wide range of average temperatures (0°C to 17°C) and annual rainfall (400 mm to 1,200 mm). The effect is that there is a microclimate for a wide range of vines and a richness of vegetables (peas, beans, artichokes, asparagus, peppers).

Viticulture and viniculture:

Traditionally, indigenous varieties, especially Moscatels (*aka* Muscats) were grown to produce powerful oxidised *rancios* and sweet *vinos de licor*. Garnatxa (*aka* Garnacha) was deployed to produce *rosados*. In the 1870s José Raventos introduced production of sparkling wine by the Traditional Method, founding the firm Codorníu, thereby generating Cava. The major step forward came in the 1940s with the late Don Miguel Torres Carbó and his son Miguel Torres who promoted indigenous varieties and also introduced international varieties, especially those of French origin which may be vinified unblended or in combination with the indigenous varieties.

Some grape varieties vinified in Catalunya:

Autochthonous

Xarel-Lo vermell.

Bastard Negre.

Sumoll.

Trepat.

Samsó.

Garnatxa Peluda.

Traditional

Malvasia de Sitges.

Garnatxa Blanca.

Garnaxa.

Cuisine:

The long Mediterranean coastline and ancient culinary traditions afford a wide range of shellfish and other seafood that may be prepared in numerous ways. Since Roman times, fish have been preserved and this continues in Catalunya, which has an active canning industry including tuna and anchovies, those from the town of L'Escala being especially fine. Family-owned shops (*botiga de queviures*) survive producing tinned seafood, pickled vegetables, and conserves.

Meat dishes are prepared from beef, lamb, and chicken, but especially from the pig. The latter include hams from Ibérico pigs and a local version of white pudding (*butifarra*). There is also a native rooster, the Penedès Black-footed Rooster, with its Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status.

Traditional sauces include those made with garlic, olive oil, vinegar and egg yolk (*allíoli*); with almonds and red peppers (*romesco*); and with green peppers, onion, and tomato (*sofregit*).

Bars in Catalunya provide *tapas* by way of small snacks (*pica-pica*) and skewers (*pinxos*).

There are many local cheeses. The best-known (*Garrotxa*) being made from goat's-milk.



Garrotxa

**Raventòs i Blanc, Textures de Pedra,
Blanc de Noirs, 2018, ABV 12%**



Vinya Més Alta, Turó del Serral

- Grapes:** 50% Xarel-Lo vermell. 16 year old vines.
[aka Xarello Rosado, Pansa Rosada, Pansa Rosa, Pansa Roja].
25% Bastard Negre. 44 year old vines.
25% Sumoll. 61 year old vines.
- Soil:** *Vinya Més Alta* vineyard at 199 to 205 metres ASL.
Calcareous silty-sandy soil of marine origin with high content of sedimentary rock. Warm mesoclimate.
- Viticulture:** Certified organic in 2009 and biodynamic in 2013. Spontaneous plant cover. Animal manure. Plant infusions to limit use of copper sulphate.

Harvest: 2018 was rainy and wet with usual average temperature of 15.2 °C, but highest recorded temperature of 40 °C in August advancing the growth cycle.

Vinification: Harvested grapes, gravity led with atmosphere controlled with dry ice. Low pressure pressing. First fermentation of each grape variety separately in stainless steel vats at controlled temperature. Following blending, second fermentation in bottle. Ageing in bottle for minimum of 48 months. No dosage added on disgorgement.

Character: Pale, colour with fine, persistent beads. Hints of acacia on the nose. Intense, layered palate of fig, walnut, and acacia honey. Firm with good length and savoury tinges at the end.

Food pairing: As an aperitif, with smoked eel, or to accompany unadorned white fish.



Xarel·lo-lo vermell



Bastard Negre



Sumoll



Pepe Raventós

**Celler Alimara, AmbPells Brisat, Terra Alta DO,
2020, ABV 12.5%**



- Grape:** 100% Garnatxa Blanca [*aka* Garnacho Blanco].
- Soil:** Trufes vineyards north of Batea at around 400 metres ASL. Rich limestone fragments, with a low content of organic material.
- Viticulture:** Regenerative Viticulture. A process comprising minimal or no tilling in the vineyard; covering crops to fertilise and protect the soil, conserve water and prevent runoff; minimal treatments with organic controls; and working the vines by hand from pruning to picking, as subscribed to in line with The Regenerative Viticulture Foundation, [www.regenerativeviticulture.org]
- Vinification:** The grapes were chilled overnight and then destemmed and crushed. Natural fermentation with no added yeasts on their skins in a conical concrete tank. After 50 days the must was pressed and the wine was matured on its lees in a 1,500 litre oak *foudre* for six months, before

being bottled unfiltered. Minimal sulphur was used. Only 2,030 bottles made in 2020.

Character: Notwithstanding *Brisat* being the Catalan term for “*Orange Wine*”, the wine is a full, clear yellow to the eye. Hints of apricot and tangerine on the nose. On the palate the wine is dry, [residual sugar less than 0.5g/l], with a suggestion of yellow plums. Natural acidity and soft texture without any astringency, but with a hint of chalky tannins.

Food pairing: Escabeche of blue fish such as tuna or swordfish; grilled langoustines, milder goat's cheese or spinach dishes.



Mas Vilella Blanc, 2019, ABV 12.5%



Albert Jané

- Grapes:** 100% Malvasia de Sitges.
- Soil:** Poor, stony, calcareous clay at 250 metres ASL, 15 km from the Mediterranean, in La Bisbal del Penedès between Barcelona and Tarragona.
- Vigneron:** Autòcton Celler. Albert Jané, also of Acústic Celler in Montsant and Rime in Priorat.
- Vinification:** The wine is fermented and aged for 10 months on its lees, with weekly *batonage*, in a blend of

300 to 400 litre French oak barrels and clay amphora.

Character: Good concentration of flavours that include green fruits and spicey, floral notes. Quite complex with potential for ageing.

Food pairing: Suits grilled fish, sea food, or vegetables.



Autòcton Celler's XVIth Century Catalunyan Masia Viella

**Celler Carles Andreu Viticultors Elaboradors, 12@ Trepat,
Conca de Barbera DO, 2020, ABV 13.5%**



Grapes: 100% Trepat.

Soil: Vineyards scattered around in the poorer, small-lot subsistence Northern side of the Conca de Barbera.

Vinification: Grapes are harvested in 20 kg bins and cooled to 10°C overnight. Following passage through a selection table, fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks, undergoing *autopigeage*.

Character: Strawberry tones and slightly meaty hints on the nose. On the palate there are red fruits and cherry, with notes of white pepper and cloves.

Food pairing: Can stand up to spicy tomato dishes and suits slow-cooked pork or beef.



**Braó, Vinyes Velles Nobles, Acústic Celler,
Montsant DO, 2019, ABV 15%**



Albert Jané, Acústic Celler



Montsant

Grapes: 90% Samsó [*aka* Cariñena, *aka* Mazuelo].
10% Garnatxa [*aka* Garnacha Tinta, *aka* Lladoner].
60 to 95 year old vines on 16 plots in 3 different locations in La Serra d'Almos, Capçanes, Marçà, El Masroig and Cornadella de Montsant and Siurana.
Very low yields of 1000 - 2000 kg/hectare.

Soil: Poor terrain with mixture of clay, sand, slate, rounded pebbles and *panal* (fossilised sand dunes) at 300 to 700 metres ASL. Organic since 2017.

Vigneron: Albert Jané.

Vinification: Grapes are hand-picked into 20 kg cases. Bunches are hand selected in the vineyard and when unloading into the destemming machine. There are 15 days maceration with skin contact and *pigeage* several times *per* day, followed by pressing in a small vertical wooden press. The wine is then racked with its lees into underground barrels for malolactic fermentation with indigenous yeast. 12 months ageing in new French oak barrels and one year in old

lightly toasted French oak barrels. Bottled in 2021, without fining or filtration.

Character: Deep, dark colour. Substantial nose of plum and blackberry, with notes of rosemary and mocha. Very full, creamy and multi-layered in the mouth with great depths of black fruit, liquorice, Mediterranean herbs, and chocolate. Great length with rich, full tannins and balanced acidity.

Food pairing: Made to accompany cured pork, or slow cooked dishes of pork, beef or pigeon.

**Edetària, Finca La Personal,
Terra Alta DO, 2020, ABV 15%**



Joan Àngel Lliberia



Garnatxa Peluda

Grapes: 100% old vine Garnatxa Peluda [*aka* Garnacha Peluda].
The oldest 1,200 vines on the Estate, planted by a Grandfather.

Soil: 5 different soils:
Loamy textured soils with underlying clay material ("*Tapas*").
Shallow soils with carbonate fragments ("*White capás*").
Quaternary fossil dune ("*Panaí*").
Old riverbed, with surface stoniness ("*Pebbles*").
Silty, fertile and deep soils ("*Valley*").

Viticulture: Ploughing is alternated with the use of vegetation covers. Fertilization is by application of vine prunings, mowed cover plants, and manure from various animals. Chemical fungicides and insecticides are totally avoided.

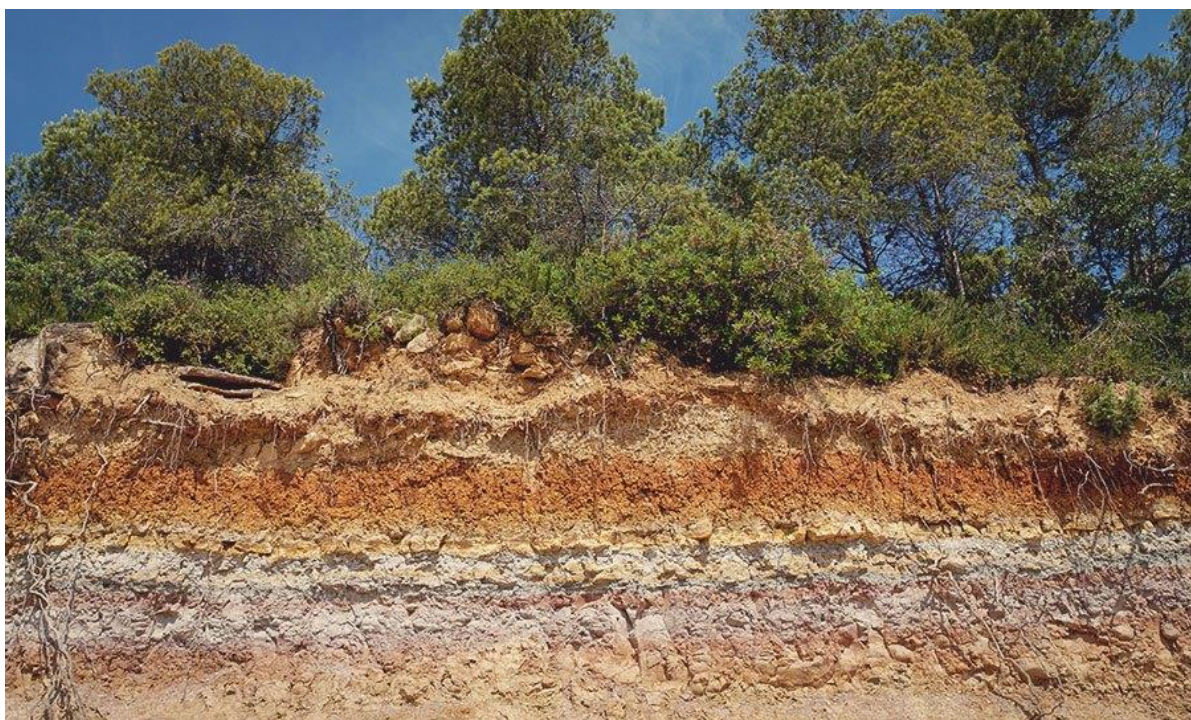
Vinification: Manual harvest of selected grapes placed into small boxes. The grapes are cooled to between 0 C and 5 C and a second selection of individual grapes is

made. Grapes from different plots are vinified separately in small vats. The wine is matured in barrels selected to preserve and enhance the characteristics of grapes from the different plots, before a final blend is made to achieve the nuanced personality desired. The usual production is 1,200 bottles.



Character: On the nose there are layers of red fruit and forest berries, Mediterranean herbs and a balsamic ending. On the palate there is an expansive wide texture and a wild sense of persistent fleshy red fruit, along with a nice wide texture, a wild touch, and a long elegant finish.

Food pairing: Made to accompany cured pork, or slow cooked dishes of pork, beef or pigeon.



***“Tapas”* soil**

**Josefina Piñol Dolç Negre,
Terra Alta DO, 2017, ABV 15%**

- Grapes:** 100% Garnatxa [*aka* Garnacha Tinta, *aka* Lladoner]. Vines more than 80 years old.
- Soil:** Clay, chalky soil, poor in organic matter.
- Vinification:** Late harvested grapes, handpicked at the beginning of November. Slow fermentation, stopped by the additional of alcohol, followed by maturation for 12 months in American and French oak barrels.
- Character:** Dark garnet cherry colour with violet rim. On the nose there is a complex aroma, including wild fruit jam, dates, roast tomato confit, spicy touches, cocoa, hints of coffee, and a touch of liquorice. On the palate it is concentrated, moderately sweet, richly nuanced, round, polished with great harmony, and some tannins, giving an alternating sweet-bitter effect. There is a lingering aftertaste.
- Food pairing:** Ideal with regional Catalan puddings, with chocolates, or with a selection of artisan cow and goat milk cheeses.



Nevat



Sarró de Cabra



Queso de l'Alt Urgell y la Cerdanya



Members and Guests

Ann Anderson
George Anderson
Dr Ian David Ansell
Caroline Baker
Dr Colin Barrow
Graham Beer
Margaret Bickford-Smith
Stephen Bickford-Smith
Professor Kathleen Burk
Andy Carl
Dr Peter Collins
Bruce Cope
Matt Cousins
Professor James Crabbe
Dr John Crook
Peter Crystal
Richard Cumming-Bruce
Kim Dovell
Elizabeth Lavers
Sir Brian Fender
Roger Flynn
Christopher French
Professor Laurence Gormley
Marcel Haniff
Martin Hare
Sam Harry
Dr Timothy Harry
Dr Stephanie Hathaway
Irene Hegarty
Judge Thomas Hegarty
William Higham
Zoe Higham
Stephen Hodge
Christopher Kelly

Professor Hubert Lacey
Susan Lacey
Marcia Lanyon
Nick Lanyon
Professor Roland Littlewood
Laurence Lobo
Professor David R London
Frederick Lyons
Mae Shaw
Richard Mair
Rita Marks
Prof. Richard Marks
Dr Michael Parsons
Dr Jonathan Punt
Nina Punt
Keith Ross
Dr Peter Scott
Professor Robert Shaw
Dr Jonathan Sklar
David S Thompson
Paul Thornton
Professor Charles Watkins
Simon Wethered
Nigel Whiston
Dr Adrian Winbow
Cathrine Winbow
Michael A C Wood
James R G Wright