

1824



2024

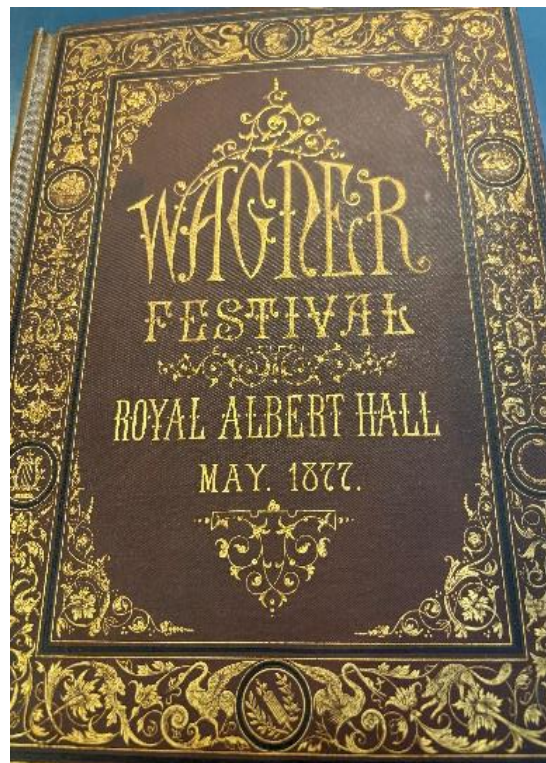
THE
ATHENÆUM
PALL MALL LONDON

The Wine and Music Committees Present

Wagner Night

May 23rd 2024

A Celebration of when Richard Wagner, an overseas member, came to dine in the Athenaeum on May 23rd 1877.



Photograph of Wagner taken the day after the dinner on 24 May 1877 and the cover of the Festival book for his London concerts on May 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19, 28, and 29 with famous soloists and a specially assembled orchestra conducted by Wagner and Hans Richter.

Professor James Crabbe, Chairman (Member)
Musical Introduction, David R F Thomas (Member)
Musical Director, Brian Henry (Member)
Guest Speaker, Professor John Deathridge (Member)

No. 1-2-3-4 ATHENÆUM.

MEMBERS ARE REQUIRED TO WRITE THEIR OWN DINNER BILLS.
 THE STEWARD HAS STRICT ORDERS NOT TO OPEN AN ACCOUNT WITH ANY MEMBER.
 THE HOURS BETWEEN WHICH DINNERS ARE SERVED AND TABLE MONEY
 THEREFOR CHARGED, ARE 4 TO 9½.

NAME *Siemens, M Wagner*
Frankland & D pole
 DATE *May 23* 1877

PORTIONS.	WHEN ORDERED	AT WHAT HOUR.	WHEN SERVED.	PRICE.
4		5		
	OYSTERS	price of shells		2 -
	SOUP	White-bait		3 -
	FISH	Mutton Cutlets		6 -
	ENTREE	Roast-Chicken		4 3
	JOINT	Broiled-Ham		1 -
	ENTREMÉT	Asparagus		4 -
		Apricot Soufflé Table		3 3
				1 8 10
	SALADS			1 6
	COFFEE			
	WINE, &c.			
		Claret		4 6
		Champagne		7 6
		Sherry		2 6
				£ 2, 4 10

Members having any Remark to make are requested to write the same on the back of the Bill.

Bill of the dinner in the Athenaeum coffee room with Wagner and Siemens
 May 23rd 1877.

Music in the Drawing Room 6.30pm

**Introduced by David R F Thomas,
Chairman of the Music Committee**

1. Tannhäuser - *O du mein holder Abendstern.*
Alexander Learmonth
2. Lohengrin - *Einsam in trüben Tagen.*
Charlotte Shipley
3. Die Walküre - *Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond.*
Anando Mukerjee
4. Die Walküre - *Du bist der Lenz.*
Charlotte Shipley

Brian Henry – Musical Director

Richard Hills - Accompanist

Menu and Dinner Wines

The Menu is based on the dinner on May 23rd 1877

Aperitif (served in the Drawing Room)

Bonnet Grande Reserve Champagne NV 12.5% ABV

Dinner in the Coffee Room

Salmon marinated in juniper, dill, mint and gin

(a German recipe)

*Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Trocken Juffer Grosses Gewächs
Weingut Fritz Haar Mosel 2021 12.5% ABV*



New season rack of lamb, with asparagus, morels and young spring vegetables, roasted potatoes with speck, shallot and white wine sauce (Wagner was born in Leipzig, and this is along the lines of Leipziger allerlei)

*Bürgstädter Spätburgunder Weingut Rudolf Fürst Franken 2020
13% ABV*

*Chateau Sociando Mallet Cru Bourgeois Claret Bordeaux 2014
13.5% ABV*



Frozen apricot souffle

*Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Weingut J.J. Prüm Mosel 2022
8% ABV*

Notes on Wines

Bonnet Grande Reserve Champagne NV, ABV 12.5%

Alexandre Bonnet is famous for its Pinot Noir style of Champagne which delivers richness and structure. The village is nestled in the far reaches of the Laignes Valley, on the borders of the Côte des Bar between Champagne and Burgundy. The rolling hillsides emerged during the Jurassic period and growers have been tending its vineyards for centuries. The blend in the Grande Reserve Brut is 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Chardonnay and with 9g / litre of dosage it is dry on the palate. Flavours of white blossom and citrus provide freshness and fruity notes.

Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Trocken Juffer Grosses Gewächs Weingut Fritz Haar Mosel 2021 12.5% ABV

Complex and clear; from hand-picked grapes. Salty and limey and with crystalline definition. Racy, with fine extract and a real sense of energy and detail. A taut structure at its core, with crisp and persistent fruit pepped up with a fresh but fully ripe acid character. You might detect aromas and fruit notes of apple, mirabelle and citrus fruits. Added to this are juicy aromas of peaches and warming aromas of hay and roasted almonds. It manages to maintain the finesse of the vintage whilst not being in any way hard. GG (Grosses Gewächs) wines are a term of distinction for dry, single variety wines. Sadly, only about half a crop of GGs were produced in 2021.

Bürgstädter Spätburgunder Weingut Rudolf Fürst Franken 2020 13% ABV



The Furst vineyards in Burgstadt

The village of Burgstadt in Franken, east of Frankfurt and not far from Bayreuth, is one of Germany's longest-standing Pinot Noir enclaves. The south-facing vineyard has iron-rich decomposed red sandstone. Growers are planting with Dijon clones, which produce silky, precise wines. The wines have a distinctive clarity, red fruit notes, and silky yet firm tannin structure.

Chateau Sociando Mallet Cru Bourgeois Claret Bordeaux 2014
13.5% ABV

Chateau Sociando-Mallet is an outperforming Cru Bourgeois property located in the commune of Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne in the Haut-Médoc. Quality was inconsistent until the property was purchased by Jean Gautreau in 1969. It then consisted of only 7 hectares and in the last 30 years Jean Gautreau has expanded the vineyards to 57 hectares. The vineyards, which lie close to the Gironde Estuary, are planted with, Cabernet Sauvignon (60%), Merlot (25%), Cabernet Franc (25%) and Petit Verdot (5%). The grapes are hand-picked and then fermented in a combination of stainless steel and concrete tanks. The wines are matured in oak barriques (70-90% new) for 12-15 months. They are bottled unfiltered. These are weighty, firm and well-structured clarets that are typically rich in fruit and have excellent ageing potential. The 2014 has notes of blackcurrants, cherries, minerals and toasty oak with a classic Médoc bouquet. Soft, supple tannins.

Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Weingut J.J. Prüm Mosel 2022
8% ABV

Prüm is one of the finest estates in the Mosel. Founded by Johann Josef Prüm in 1911, the winery rapidly built a reputation for its racy, pure expressions of Riesling, grown on the extraordinarily steep, slate slopes in the heart of the Mosel. Today, the estate is run by Dr Katharina Prüm who watches over 13.5 hectares of vines – including some rare ungrafted vines.

The family's holdings include many of the Mittelmosel's most famous sites. Yields are low, with the harvest often stretching to late November. The winemaking is meticulous, but the extra effort is worth it. The resulting wines are known for their purity of fruit as well as their distinctive mineral character. You might detect slightly raw green-leaf aromas in this wine. Lots of acidity and lively, slightly chewy fruit. Some hint of passion- and kiwi fruit but definitely subtle. Fresh and smoky notes. Clean and approachable.

Wagner at the Athenaeum

Some notes by Professor John Deathridge

The Hosts:



Dr William Siemens FRS

1823-1883

(Member 1871)

Together with his brothers Werner and Karl, he was a founding architect of the German multinational energy technology and manufacturing company known today as Siemens AG.



**Dr Edward Frankland
FRS**

1825-1899

(Member 1860)

He studied in Germany with Robert Bunsen and was the first president of the Royal Institute of Chemistry. In 1877 he was already known as a world expert on water pollution and a fierce critic of bad river management.



**Dr William Pole FRS,
Mus Doc**

1814-1900

(Member 1864)

Civil engineer of note, public authority on whist, Pole was also highly qualified as a musician. His 1877 London lectures on music, given just before he met Wagner, were reprinted by Cambridge University Press in 2011.

Victuals

The meal began with a delicious joke. The first bill item – and many thanks to our brilliant archivist Jennie De Protani for deciphering it – is *Prince de Galles*. Jennie thinks, and I agree, that it must be *Prince of Wales Soup*, an obscure dish consisting of slightly sweetened clear veal stock with small turnip balls served poured over bread discs. And so called because, as a key source relates, it was ‘to be distributed among the poor of a considerable village when the Prince of Wales attained his majority [as heir to the throne age 18] on the 9th of November 1859’.

Why this dish? Wagner had met and got on famously with an enthusiastic Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) only eleven days previously. In the interval of a packed out and hugely successful Saturday afternoon concert on May 12th in 1877 in the Royal Albert Hall devoted to excerpts from *Tannhäuser* and *Die Walküre*, he spoke with the Prince of Wales and his entourage at their request, enough to ensure the heir to the throne's enduring support. The day after, at an informal dinner in London, Wagner met William Siemens as well, who had already proposed Wagner 'the eminent composer' as Honorary Member of the Athenaeum. Siemens was 'very impressive', the diaries of Wagner's second wife Cosima record. Thus, the die was cast, both for the meal at the Athenaeum arranged by Siemens on May 23rd (the day after Wagner's 64th birthday) and for the amusing idea of choosing a starter named after one of Wagner's now most powerful advocates in the land.

The rest of the bill lists some items reminiscent of cookbooks like Mrs Beeton's, *the domestic goddess* of the Victorian era. And that includes the combination of drinks: Claret, Champagne, Sherry. Were they served separately? Or mixed, like the 'superior claret cup', a potent brew with a ratio of two bottles of claret to one bottle of champagne plus three glasses of sherry recommended by the 1879 edition of *Warne's model cookery and housekeeping book*?

With Wagner present, the chances are that they were served individually, but not necessarily in the order we expect today. The German writer Eliza Wille, who knew Wagner for many years, remarked that when they first met in the early 1850s, he didn't yet have the need towards the end of dinner to drink 'an obligatory half bottle of champagne to rejuvenate his nerves'. But he certainly did later. In various communications we find him ordering at least 50 half bottles at a time, as well as plentiful quantities of light red Bordeaux (claret), another favourite. 'One full glass of champagne with dessert always does me a lot of good' he confessed in a letter from 1864 to his wine merchant C. Lauteren Sohn in Leipzig. Earlier in the same year angry creditors (Wagner nearly always had a lot of them) pursued him to his rented house in Penzing near Vienna, only to find it empty – except for a cellar stocked with a hundred bottles of champagne! Thinking the impecunious Wagner could never have

afforded such an abundance of fine sparkling wonder, they foolishly assumed it belonged to the landlord and didn't seize it. A few dinners with Wagner would have soon disabused them of that.

Costs and Conversations

'Champagne' is the costliest item on the bill at 7s 6d, some way ahead of the 'Mutton Cutlets' at 6s. Whether the bigger price had to do with quality or quantity we'll never know. But it isn't unreasonable to suppose that Wagner on this occasion really did need champagne to 'rejuvenate his nerves'. The Athenaeum bill came to £2/4s/6d in total, roughly £328 in today's money (£82 a head: not bad). But if we keep in mind that £1 in 1877 is equivalent to £146 in 2024, it is easy to understand why, despite the overall artistic success of his London Festival, Wagner was so depressed about how it was turning out financially. The figures were horrendous. His agents Hodge and Essex had promised a £1,500 profit. Over time that gradually shrank to £700, a mere molehill compared with the mountainous £7,000 debt (nearly a million today) left behind the previous year by the first Bayreuth Festival – a debt for which Wagner was legally responsible and which he had hoped would be radically reduced by income generated by the concerts. The prospect of substantially lightening this huge financial burden was after all the reason why he was in London in the first place.

But things were constantly going from bad to worse. Wagner even had to pay the singers himself to keep them happy. Cheques from Hodge and Essex were 'lost in the post' – the fabulous Amalie Materna alone was expecting an enormous fee of £600 for singing Brünnhilde and at the other end of the scale the Rhine daughters were demanding just £150 for all three of them – leaving him obliged on the spot, if he was to get them to perform at all, to come up with the money himself. By the end of his stay in London (he arrived on May 1st and left on June 4th) he was out of pocket to the tune of £1,200. Remember, all figures cited here in mid-1870s pounds should be multiplied by 146 to get a sense, in terms of the currency's purchasing power today, of just how large the sums involved were. No wonder Wagner needed cheering up.

What did members at the May 23rd dinner talk about? My rough guess is money and the politics of science and music – perhaps not in the first instance related to Wagner’s own problems, but certainly as a background to mutual interests in the issues of the day. Dr Siemens was keen on new applications of electricity, Dr Frankland indignant about the pollution of the environment by industrial waste, and Dr Pole, despite his career as a distinguished civil engineer, passionate about music and its complex practicalities. Boring it most probably wasn’t, especially as Wagner in his concerts was introducing large extracts from *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to London for the first time, a daringly unruly epic rooted in ancient myth and especially at the same time in the stark tensions between nature and society in the modern world. It could scarcely have escaped the attention of three figures deeply rooted in Victorian scientific institutions, already swirling with controversy about that very confrontation.

We do have a concrete hint of a moment in the conversation. It comes via a detailed obituary of William Pole published by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) in 1901 and has its origin in some brief and touchingly modest reminiscences Dr Pole wrote down in the final years of his long and highly productive life. (His many publications, incidentally, include a substantial book about his close friend William Siemens, the instigator of the 1877 Athenaeum dinner with Wagner, who had died suddenly in 1883.) Wagner was obviously curious about the letters after Dr Pole’s name. At first, he probably thought Pole was just another enterprising scientist like his two distinguished colleagues also sitting at the table. But with a closer look he realized that he was a musician, among other things a capable organist, musicologist, well-regarded music lecturer, and a formidable expert on acoustics. Pole was addressed as ‘Dr’ not because of any degree in science – though he was of course a long-standing Fellow of the Royal Society – but because he had been awarded a doctorate in music by the University of Oxford in 1867.

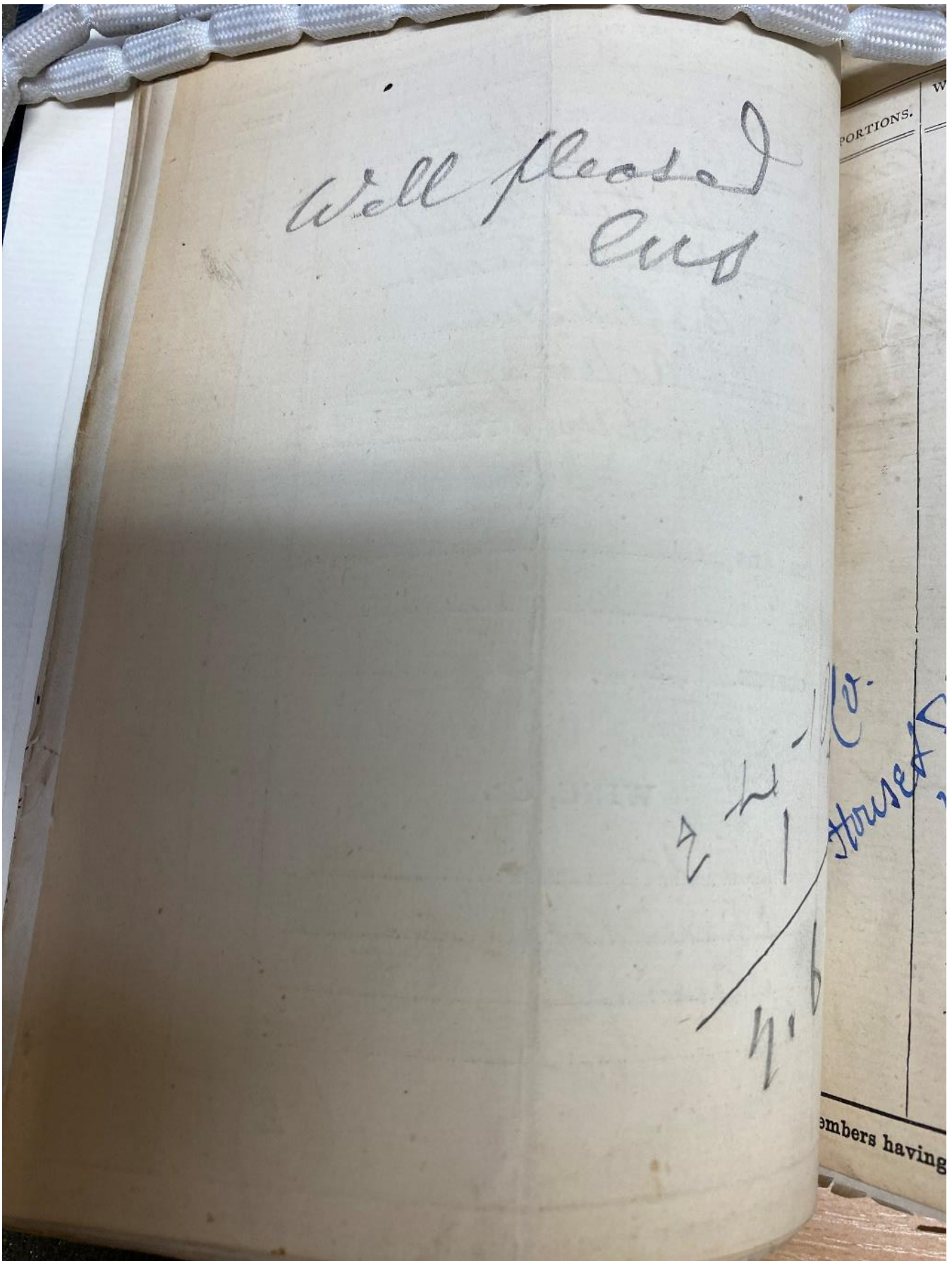
Did this pique Wagner’s interest? Certainly, it did. Everyone in the musical world knew that the University of Cambridge had offered honorary doctorates in music to Johannes Brahms and the violinist Joseph Joachim, two of Wagner’s archrivals. Joachim in fact had received his honorary doctorate in person in Cambridge in March 1877 only weeks before the dinner. (Brahms

had declined his, probably because the English Channel crossing needed to get to the ceremony had seasickness written all over it.) Cambridge was not prepared to offer Wagner anything remotely similar, scourge of many conservative cultural gatekeepers as he still was. Was Pole one of their number? A mere gargoyle of the system? Doing nothing of real substance to earn an actual degree? Wagner was delighted to find out that he wasn't. The relevant part of the obituary reads as follows:

When he [William Pole] met Wagner at dinner in London in 1877 and was asked by the master if his Mus. Doc. was an honorary degree, he was able to reply that he had to write for it a vocal fugue in eight real parts, with full orchestral accompaniments, upon which Wagner clasped him by the hand and claimed him as a 'brother.'

Mr Wagner

Scholars generally agree that the 1877 London Festival is a landmark in the history of British music. It introduced extracts from major works like *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring* never heard in this country and rest of the English-speaking world before, and even two extra concerts had to be hastily arranged at the end of May to meet increasing demand to hear more. It is true that in many fevered corners of London musicians had already been very active on Wagner's behalf. But the 1877 concerts were on a different scale altogether. Wagner never did earn a doctorate, honorary or otherwise, or even get his money back. He was – as stated at the top of the Athenaeum bill – always 'Mr Wagner'. The three 'Drs' who hosted him, however, surely knew by May 23rd from the public's growing enthusiasm as word about him spread rapidly throughout the capital that they were dining with one of the most important musical and cultural figures of the 19th century.



Comment on the back of the Dinner Bill after the Dinner on May 23rd, 1877.
Many thanks to Jennie de Protani, Archivist, for help with Archival material.