



# Two decades of duty-free

I've just been on a booze cruise – but, please, don't stop reading now. It was the most genteel of occasions, and a very historic one.

When, at the beginning of 1993, the European Single Market smashed through the barriers which had prevented UK citizens from bringing home duty-free wine in anything more than tiny quantities, The Wine Society was extraordinarily quick off the mark. At 9am on the morning of January 1, 1993, the first society members walked into the new collection point at a distillery in the northern French town of Hesdin.

They were already happily prepared to buy, as the previous evening they'd enjoyed a celebration dinner dance in the Grand Hotel, Le Touquet.

On New Year's Eve 2012, some of those pioneers were back at the same hotel, with newer members, to celebrate two decades of duty-free purchases.

Their buying destination next day was even nearer the Channel ferry ports – Montreuil, the rich-in-history walled town where the UK forces had their headquarters in the First World War.

Those dreadful days are remembered in startling photographs in a museum inside Montreuil's citadel, the focal point of the massive walls raising the town above the plain of the River Conche below – the river which, in distant days, was the reason for the "sur Mer" extension of the town name.

But enough of battles, back to the bottles. Montreuil was my destination last month and the basic facts of why are simple. The Wine Society, after initiating the UK-wine-shops-in-France experience, has happily carried it on. While the location has changed, Véronique Chaumetou



■ Inside The Wine Society's Montreuil shop

– who, when it all began, stayed outside in the snow welcoming members for so long that she had to be thawed out for three hours afterwards – is still in charge.

The deal is great: around 200 wines from the society's regular stock, including many of the most popular bottles and stretching to all corners of the wine world, are on sale in the smart shop, priced in euros and with a guaranteed discount over UK prices of at least £18 on a case of 12.

#### Fill up the boot

So, for example, the splendidly fresh and delicious Cheverny, Domaine du Salvard 2011 is €6.75 rather than £7.50, the summer-perfect fragrant Bordeaux white Château Bel Air Perponcher Reserve 2011 is €7.95 (£8.50), the dry, stylish, mineral-rich Exhibition Riesling 2011 is €11.95 (£12.50), two great-value happy reds, enticingly cherry-edged Vittoria Refosco dal Penducolo 2011 and tasty, balanced spicy-fruited Undurruga Candelabro Reserva carmenère/malbec/carignan, are €4.95 (£5.75) and €5.95 (£6.75) respectively, and the impressive, complex Rasteau Domaine Des Escarvailles 2010 is €7.50 (£8.50).

Fill up the boot and the saving

should easily cover the cost of an out-of-main-season Eurotunnel crossing. But the experience is not simply about saving money – although Wine Society members can also benefit from substantially reduced prices at L'Hermitage, the comfortable Best Western hotel in whose outbuildings the society shop is housed.

Montreuil is an interesting town, well furnished with excellent places to eat – from the wooden-tabled, bench-seated, spit-roast-oriented Froggy's tavern to the Michelin-starred, classic cuisine Château de Montreuil. The 3km circuit of the walls provides just the right long walk to use up all those French calories.

The purpose of my trip, with three other wine writers, was to enjoy The Wine Society's best – fabulous wines with a memorable six-course tasting menu at Le Château – and to be able to share with you the advantages of a short stop-off in Montreuil on the way home from a French holiday or of a wine-inspired short break in the town.

I'm planning to go again, and I'm happy to pay my own way.

■ See [www.thewinesociety.com](http://www.thewinesociety.com) and [www.tourisme-montreuillois.com](http://www.tourisme-montreuillois.com).

# Unfortunately Lord Palmerston is with us today in name only

Twice prime minister, the famous statesman could not only solve the nation's ills but occasional lapses at pub that took his name

So where is Lord Palmerston, when most you need him ...? For he is just exactly what this country is aching for – a proper, grown-up prime minister who tackles the hugely important issues of the day, leaving all fiddling while Rome is burning to the shilly-shallyers and lunatics. He was actually PM twice, having held all the other major offices, and was in government virtually constantly for 60 years. Apart from famously being instrumental in the abolition of slavery in a nameless place so very much less enlightened than ourselves (America) he

also banned child labour and introduced vaccination to ensure the health of the little mites, now that they no longer had to climb up the inside of chimneys. Penal reform, smoke abatement and little local difficulties such as the Crimean War – all were grist to Palmerston's very considerable mill. He started out as a Tory and became a Liberal – though nowadays, of course, no such choice is necessary because ... we have a coalition! One great big happy family of Conservatives and Lib-Dems who always see eye to eye on absolutely everything, and therefore are free to legislate on the vital things: banning the

“Touted on an A-board: A Cowboy and Indian fancy dress party! Maybe the cabinet could come along ...? Cameron would have to be Sitting Bull, Osborne a right cowboy and dear little Nicky Clegg the very sweetest papoose

王 府 井 Silks & Spice  
Yum Cha Restaurant, Bar & Karaoke

**FREE DELIVERY**  
020 7428 0565  
FOR ORDERS OVER £15 WITHIN 3 MILES  
DELIVERY FROM 17.30 UNTIL LATE

**50% off**  
**Dim Sum**  
Every Monday, Tuesday  
& Wednesday after 5.30pm



**Yum Cha Silks & Spice**  
is an **Oriental restaurant and bar**  
with **4 karaoke rooms**  
We specialise in Dim Sum and also Far East Asia cuisines.

**Yum Cha Silks & Spice** 27-28 Chalk Farm Road, London, NW1 8AG.  
Table Booking and General Enquiries: **020 7482 2228** Deliveries and Takeaway Orders: **020 7428 0565**

Over 50,000 rugs to choose from  
**Traditional to Modern**

Sales, Restoration, Valuation

Professional Repair and Cleaning

Special offer **20% off**




0208 341 9191

www.erug.co.uk info@erug.co.uk  
24 Aylmer Parade, London N2 OPE





Picture: Polly Hancock

### ■ Joseph with the Ham&High's editor Geoff Martin at the Lord Palmerston

smoking of a cigar in a members' club, banning foxhunting in the shires where it has formed the backbone of natural existence for thousands of years ... and introducing Gay Marriage, the one change in the constitution for which the whole nation has so eagerly been pining.

#### Pubby and welcoming

All this is as nothing to what this mighty coalition has pledged to achieve during the second term that from within the la-la-land of their own imagination they actually do seem to believe they are to be granted. The idea is to make homosexuality absolutely mandatory for all British citizens except female archbishops and illegal immigrants – who by then, it is projected, will conservatively make up 72 per cent of the population. This majority will be housed gratis in new-build Boris houses of no more than eight bedrooms, within which they will be permitted to install up to five wives apiece, these to be of any

gender they please (mix 'n' match being actively encouraged) though none of them must be below the age of consent – which is to be lowered, in the first instance, to four-and-half.

Yes well. Though why the name of Lord Palmerston should live on in a corner pub in Dartmouth Park, whose flaking and dowdy exterior was sorely in need of a brand new coat, is moot indeed (the scaffolding went up the week after my visit and the new lick of paint has been duly applied). It is one of 33 London pubs owned by Geronimo Inns ("our pubs are delicious and fresh" is their rather weird claim) – and possibly it was the name of this legendary Apache chief that inspired the forthcoming event that was being touted on an A-board on the pavement: 'A Cowboy and Indian fancy dress party!'. Maybe the cabinet could come along ...? Cameron would have to be Sitting Bull, Osborne a right cowboy and dear little Nicky Clegg the very sweetest papoose.

The interior is nicely pubby and welcoming – butcher block tables and the sort of jumble sale job lot of chairs one has come to expect. You can walk through to a more "dining room" bit with greenish sort of Chinese wallpaper alive with sinuous vegetation and what look like Venus Fly Traps, these ensuring that the blissfully unaware pink butterflies also featured will surely not be lasting long. A jug of water comes unbidden to the table (oh rare heaven!) and Geoff Martin, the editor of this very journal, and myself set to studying the solid and nicely printed menu, this being supplemented by a blackboard full of specials from which I had already selected a "flat-iron" steak – an unusual Yankee cut. But lo – it turned out I was looking at last night's specials (rapidly erased) and so from the new lot I was torn between pheasant pie and a roast beef sandwich: the latter won. Geoff doesn't eat meat, so was preceding his smoked mackerel, kale and

blood orange salad with a vegetable rosti and poached duck egg (he'll eat the egg, but not the duck – what are you going to do with a man such as this?). Before the sandwich I was having a tin of home smoked fish. Oh no – hang on, no I wasn't: I was having a tin of home smoked fish, that's more like it, with horseradish cream. This, though rather cold, was very good indeed: haddock, mackerel and salmon, I think, the horseradish complementary, and not throat-clutchingly overpowering.

#### Fries superb

The far wall is given over to a motley of books: an ancient Encyclopaedia Britannica, ring-bound partworks, the 1977 Yearbook of Nature ... I'm telling you: had a gang of neo-Nazis burst in for an impromptu bit of book burning, no one would have lifted a finger. "I went to Fortnum & Mason for breakfast this morning", Geoff said. "Oh yes – how was it?" "It wasn't. Place was closed". Okay, then: it's good to have these foody chats. The menu said that it dwelt upon British seasonal food, which in March, you are informed, includes brussel sprouts, cauliflower, salsify, black truffles, turnips, guinea fowl, hare, partridge, turkey, venison, clams, langoustines, lobster, oysters, mullet, turbot, winkles ... on and on. Trouble was, not one of these was on offer. So we ate what was: Geoff's rosti was lovely – bronzed and dense, the egg poached perfectly. His salad too – bouncily fresh, though he would have liked a good deal more mackerel in it. And what of the roast beef sandwich ...? Not a quarter as scrumptious as it sounds: toasted ordinary bread and thick tepid slices of maybe topside – chewy, and cruelly overcooked. Wodges of tomato and lettuce made sure that the thing was far too fat to fit into your mouth, so you cut it up on a bloody bit of wood (naturally). It was not great. But the accompanying fries were superb: if only they were always like this – utterly hot, crisp and just salted enough. We had fat ones too, and they were equally good, and went

well with the good value Sicilian Nero d'Avola.

The slightly intrusive jangle on the sound system got us talking about music. Geoff is a Rolling Stones fan, and fondly remembers the concert he went to in his home town of Ballymena in Northern Ireland. "My father was a builder. He said if I moved 3,000 bricks, I could have the 10 shillings cost of the ticket. I went with my sisters, one of whom was much more of a Jim Reeves fan. And at the end of the concert it was announced that Jim Reeves had just died". These days he nurses unspoken criticism for Jagger, saying that Bob Dylan, his other great enthusiasm, is ageing "more properly". He very much enjoyed a home-made rhubarb and apple crumble with cream (Geoff did – not Dylan) and I didn't much enjoy the cheeseboard: £7.50 for three exceedingly mean slices – one each of Cornish Yarg (very dull), Stithians (an unusual hard cheese, like mature cheddar) and Oxfordshire Blue (akin to Gorgonzola, though without the aroma). There was just one sort of cracker, and it wasn't anything good like Carr's Table Water, which is all you ever need.

Then Geoff nipped outside for a fag, an offence which I fully expect our enlightened government to soon decree to be punishable by death. So, then: where is Lord Palmerston, when most you need him ...?

■ Joseph Connolly's latest novel ENGLAND'S LANE is published by Quercus as a hardback and ebook. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## FACTFILE

- LORD PALMERSTON  
33 Dartmouth Park Hill, NW5  
Tel: 020 7485 1578
- Open daily for lunch and dinner.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Cost: Usual gastropub: mains from £7-£15. Wine reasonable.

Harness your feminine sensual/sexual power through



Unique series of workshops for women

Bellydance | Meditation | Yoga  
Sound Therapy | Live Percussion

Monthly at Sadler's Wells:  
26 March, 23 April, 21 May, 16 June...

[www.KushProject.com](http://www.KushProject.com)

**Namaaste kitchen** **salaam | namaste**  
A New Sensation In Indian Dining

Winner of "Best Newcomer Of The Year"  
& "Best Asian & Oriental Chef Of The Year"

ASIAN CURRY AWARDS 2012

**£10 Voucher**  
Valid till :31st March 2013  
Can be use in both branches, Min 2 Guest

**Namaaste Kitchen**  
64 Parkway, Camden  
NW1 7AH  
020 7485 5977  
[www.namaastekitchen.co.uk](http://www.namaastekitchen.co.uk)

**Salaam Namaste**  
68 Millman Street  
London, WC1N 3EF  
020 7405 3697  
[www.salaam-namaste.co.uk](http://www.salaam-namaste.co.uk)

**CRAFT FAIR**

Sat 6th April  
11.30 - 5.30

REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE

The Baptist Church.. 84 Heath St.. NW3 1DN

### ENTRY IS FREE

and craftspeople will be selling handmade ceramics, prints, textiles, wools, jewellery, woodcraft and lots more.

There will be live music freshly baked cakes and coffee.