

An investiture with a difference

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Three of the Dignitaries of the Chaîne, Madame Daeniker, the new Chevalier d'Honneur the Swiss Ambassador, the Editor and Mr. W. Bachmann.

AN INVESTITURE WITH A DIFFERENCE

We have been told that the professional life of a journalist is never dull, if often rushed and harassed. This I have found out already to a far extent since I have become editor of the "Swiss Observer". But the interesting occasions outweigh the moments of despair, and the routine office drudgery is soon forgotten in an exciting assignment.

One of the most unusual events was the Special Reduced Chapter of the *Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs*. This Guild of Turning Spit Roasters was founded in 1248 under Louis IX. Right up to the French Revolution it was a highly respected company. An apprentice had to undergo rigorous training and was only allowed to call himself *Maître Rôtisseur* if qualified through the *Chaîne*. During the last century the spit lost its importance and the guild's significance declined.

In 1950, five men assembled in Paris to restore the turning spit to its rightful place in roast cookery, and to bring the guild back to its former place of importance. The British Chapter was founded in 1959. Its *Bailli Délégué pour la Grande-Bretagne* is the most Hon. The Marquess of Milford Haven. Its Acting Chancellor and *Sénéchal* is our compatriot, Mr. W. Bachmann, a well-known figure amongst the experts in gastronomy. Amongst its members are the Duke of Richmond and Gordon and Sir John Barbirolli.

The *Chaîne* is the most important and largest of all gastronomic societies, and the only one which blends professional and amateur gastronomes in general and spit roasters in particular. There are almost 10,000 members in nearly forty countries. The *Chaîne* is controlled from Paris (Conseil Magistral), except in the USA, and there are but few investitures every year. The last one in Great Britain took place four years ago. In Switzerland there is a very considerable membership, and, in fact, the Presi-

dent of the Confederation, Federal Councillor Chaudet, is a *Chevalier d'Honneur*.

A professional may qualify as a *Maître Rôtisseur* (i.e. Mr. Sartori of the Coq d'Or and Mr. Charles Forte). If you possess a spit at home as an amateur you may become a *Chevalier*, and if you are simply a food enthusiast (without a spit) you may qualify as an *Ecuyer*. There are also *Dames de la Chaîne*.

Two investitures took place in October, one in London, the other in Manchester. On Friday, 19th October, a ceremony was held at the Trocadero Restaurant in London's West End. Two Grand Chancellors of the *Conseil Magistral* had come over from Paris to create new dignitaries. Amongst these were The Duke of Bedford, the Swiss Ambassador and The Rt. Hon. Ernest Marples, M.P., Minister of Transport, who were created *Chevaliers d'Honneur*. Several *Chevaliers*, *Mâtres Rôtisseurs*, *Chef Rôtisseurs*, *Officiers* and *Ecuyers* were also invested.

The oath, which has not changed for 700 years, was spoken together and it contained a declaration never to spoil but always to tend carefully a joint roasted on the spit and a solemn promise to act in a brotherly manner and to show respect to fellow members. In his introductory speech the Grand Chancellor, M. Jean Valby, reminded the audience of the Guild's significance and that to a gastronome not only good food but also good table manners mattered. The speech, in eloquent French, was ably translated by Mr. L. F. Lowenthal, the Committee Chairman and *Conseiller de Bouche*. Then Monsieur Valby invested the first of the Knights. After the accolade the Chain of Honour was put around his neck. All members are entitled to wear a chain, which is mounted on a wide silk band whose colour indicates the rank of the wearer.

After the *Chevaliers d'Honneur* had been duly in-

vested, Mr. Charles Willis, Editor-in-Chief of the "Evening News", was made an *Officier*. Then the only woman to be honoured, Mrs. Schleyen, widow of the owner of the *Mirabelle*, was created *Dame Maître Rôtisseur*. Amongst the others invested were four more Swiss: Mr. Ernest Burgazzi, Traffic Manager of Swissair, who was made a *Chevalier*, and Mr. Harry Fugner, Catering Manager at Selfridges, who received the title of *Maître Rôtisseur*; the other two compatriots were the Chief Chef of "Heinz", Mr. Alphonse Bertschy, and the proprietor of the Ember Grill at Pinner, Mr. Marco Graf.

After the ceremony the illustrious dignitaries and their ladies adjourned to partake of a *Vin d'Honneur*. Then followed an excellent dinner for some sixty guests. Two items on the menu deserve mention. The trout were brought into the room in a large vessel, the fish was taken out of the hot water and skinned in full view of the diners. The *pièce de résistance* was the roast. Four long spits with some sixteen grouse on each were carried in by chefs and then put on stands. The birds were covered with brandy, set alight and served *flambé*.

Another interesting characteristic of the dinners of the *Chaîne* are the three golden rules of which the Chancellor, Mr. Bachmann, reminded the guests, that no speeches are ever made before, during or after a banquet, that no smoking is allowed before coffee is served (automatic in this country, but not abroad) and that water may be asked for as some people do not like alcoholic drinks.

The whole evening was indeed a great success and much enjoyed by expert and amateur food enthusiasts alike.

Mariann.

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