

The Culture and Traditions of Cider

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
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Report By Anthony Thorogood

To study the culture and traditions of cider
in the eight major cider regions of the world.

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Signed - Anthony Thorogood

Dated - 4th January 2008

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Introduction

In October and November 2007 I flew, trained, bussed, drove and walked my way around the world with the sole objective of drinking and eating and having a good time. But there was a little more to it than that! I visited the eight main cider regions of the world, Somerset and Hereford in England, Brittany and Normandy in France, Asturias and the Basque region of Northern Spain, Old Sachsenhausen in Frankfurt, Germany and New England in the U.S.A.. My mission: to drink the unique ciders of those regions, eat the local cuisine that accompanied those ciders and get involved in the local traditions that were part and parcel of each cider region. I was on a Churchill Fellowship and the final objective wasn't for me to have a good time but to bring home to Australia a greater understanding of the world of cider and to disseminate that knowledge to the benefit of all Australians including cider makers, restaurateurs, chiefs, liquor shop owners and the general public. Especially the general public.

Visiting dedicated cider houses and cider bars was of fundamental interest and at times I felt like an anthropologist undertaking a study of exotic tribes as I sat and watched, listened and noted, and quaffed the odd pint - I had to keep up appearances. I was also keen to discover the culture of cider such as dance, song and poetry and I was able to experience much of this especially at Cider Festivals.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my wife, Susan, who stayed behind in Australia, ran the cider farm and managed the business for six weeks while I toured the world of cider. Also, I must thank the Churchill Foundation who made this trip and the research I did possible. I found the people in all walks of life all around the world extremely friendly, courteous and helpful and I also found the people involved in the cider industry around the world very welcoming and helpful. I would like to thank the many cider makers who took me on personalized tours of their facilities such as Jehan Lefevre at St Cast le Guildo and Corentin Mauffret at Val De Rance both in Brittany, the two Spanish ladies who took me on personalized tours of the Cider Museums in Nava and Astigarraga Spain should not be forgotten. Jim Binder the singer of the wassail at Carhampton, Somerset and the Leominster Morris Men also deserve a special thanks. I would also like to thank Nona Monahin who gave up her time to drive me around America and finally I would like to thank all those friendly and helpful cider makers and enthusiasts whom I met at the Apple Days, Franklin County New England.

Executive Summary – The Culture and Traditions of Cider

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I left Australia in early October 2007 and spent six weeks visiting five countries, the aim was to study the different styles of cider produced, the culture and the traditions and, to a lesser extent, the marketing strategies of the eight main cider regions of the world. I visited cider farms and outlets, I went to cider fairs, fetes and conferences, cider houses, cider restaurants and cider museums and I met up with individuals involved in the industry. In fact I was interested in talking to anybody and everybody involved in cider in any way around the world.

At one stage I met up with a fellow Australian cider enthusiast who was studying cider apples in France and the U.K. and we did some work together from which I was able to get a much better understanding of the apples used and from me he was able to get a better understanding of the end result, that is the cider the apples actually make and how it all fits into the society of each region.

Highlights

There were many highlights of the tour such as meeting Jim Binder the singer of the oldest wassail (mid winter apple festival) in the world at Carhampton in Somerset. Visiting the Big Apple Cider Festival at Much Marcle in Herefordshire and meeting the Leominster Morris Men, a truly remarkable bunch. Meeting up with fellow Australian cider enthusiast, David Pickering in France where he was researching cider apples and working together with him. Going to the apple festival/conference in Franklin County Massachusetts USA and meeting all the passionate American cider enthusiasts. Finally going down to Mystic Connecticut and watching an ancient steam cider mill and press in action and trying their unique New England barrel ciders.

Implementation and Dissemination

This report has been sent to key industrial figures including Pamela Lincolne - Mercury Cider Tasmania, David Pickering - NSW Department of Agriculture and Graham Jones - Associate Professor (Oenology) with the University of Adelaide. I also plan to finish writing my book on cider and have it published later this year. In the immediate future I will be publishing my findings on the internet and will be writing several articles for magazines. The ABC's Landline television programme will be doing a feature on cider which I will be a part of and this will be broadcast in 2008. Tony Love, journalist for the Adelaide Advertiser, is planning to write a story on my Churchill Fellowship and I have been interviewed by the Melbourne Age and that story will appear late in January. I am also going to present a short course on cider and cider making with the WEA here in South Australia.

Programme - Drink up thy cider George Or around the world in 40 days

October 2nd to 9th

Somerset, England

Butchers Arms Carhampton to visit the oldest wassailing site in the world

Somerset Cider Route

Cider houses Newton Abbot and Bedminster

Somerset Cheese and Cider Fair Hetercombe Gardens

October 9th to 15th

Herefordshire, England

Cider Museum Hereford

Cider House Quatt

Cider Route Herefordshire

The Big Apple Much Marcle

October 15th to 19th

Frankfurt, Germany

Visit apple wine gardens Old Sachsenhausen

October 19th to 24th

Northern Spain

Visit the Siderias Villaviciosa

Visit Cider Museum Nava

Visit Basque cider houses Astigarraga

Visit Cider Museum Astigarraga

Visit the Tapas Bars San Sebastian

October 25th to 31st

Normandy and Brittany, France

Visit the Cider Route Normandy

Visit the Fete du Cider Beuvron en Auge

Visit Normandy's British cider maker

Visit the Cider Route Cotes D'Armor Brittany

Visit Brittany's creperies

November 1st to 11th

New England U.S.A.

Apple Days Franklin County

Russel's Orchards Ipswich

Clyde's Cider Mill Old Mystic

A World of Cider

England, Somerset Cider and the Wassail.

Day three of my world exploration of cider had been a great success, I had been to Perry's cider at Dawlish Wake, Somerset. I had watched and filmed cider apples being milled and crushed in the old way and then entered their modern shop and tried their cider, made notes and purchased a bottle of Redstreak cider for later evaluation. I had then moved on to Barrow Hill tasted cider, made notes and purchased a bottle of their medium sweet for later evaluation and then driven to Street near Glastonbury. On the way in I drove past a sign stating Heck's cider, I turned the car around, parked, not an easy thing to do in England and I was soon the happy owner of a bottle of their Kingston Black. The day before I had been miserably lost, driving along country lanes in ever decreasing circles and getting nowhere, so I was overjoyed at my success. I drove back to my accommodation, The Butchers Arms at Carhampton where the famous mid winter festival of Wassailing of the apple trees and rebirth has been a fixture of the local calendar for many hundreds of years. I had a cold shower, I didn't seem able to get the hot water to work and then I walked to Withycombe the next village along where a gentleman named Jim Binder lived.

Jim Binder was the singer of the Wassail and as I wanted to find out about the ancient culture associated with cider I wanted to track him down. Withycombe was a lovely old English village built on the side of a hill. I asked around and the locals directed me to Jim's door. I knocked, introduced myself as an Australian cider maker and after a little bit of hesitancy, I was shown in and introduced to Carhampton's High Priest of Wassailing. He was sitting in an armchair very relaxed, Janet his wife found him a shirt to put on to be polite, and he started to talk. He was a fascinating man full of local knowledge and passionate about the wassail. Jim told me that he heard about the Wassail at Carhampton when he was 14 and he jumped on his bike and cycled down to Carhampton from his home several miles away in Porthlock on the 17th of January that year to see the Wassail and he said he has hardly missed one since.

Twenty years ago the last of the old singers died and he was asked to become the new singer and sitting in his lounge chair surrounded by cigarette smoke he started to sing the Wassail songs. He sang well, he sang very well, he has a deep rich voice, "if only he could be recorded and his voice and his knowledge saved," I thought. I felt a little like the old English folk music enthusiasts who in the nineteenth century had toured England recording and saving old English folk songs. Jim's singing was like an old cider made from real cider apples, a bit rough around the edges but deep and rich and powerful, he was what we would call in Australia a living legend. He gave me a recording of his Wassail which is still coming to Australia by post and I walked back to Carhampton in the dark.

So what is a Wassail? On the 17th of January, the old Twelfth Night, at the Butchers Arms in Carhampton, Somerset the old tradition of Wassailing the apple trees is still carried on. The first recording of the Wassailing of apple trees is from Fordwich, Kent in 1585 but at that stage it was already a well established ritual. Wassailing is carried out to scare away bad spirits, to awaken the apple trees from their winter slumber and to guarantee the emergence of the spring and good crops.

At the Butchers Arms the land behind the pub was once an apple orchard. It is now a housing estate but one or two old apple trees survive and on the 17th of January each year at 7pm people start to arrive for the ceremony. A bonfire is lit and locals gather around one of the veteran apple trees out the back with their old cider crocks brimming with cider and they sing:

Old apple tree, we Wassail thee
And hoping thou wilt bear
For the lord doth know where we shall be
Till apples come another year.
For to bear well and to bear well
So merry let us be.
Let every man take off his hat,
And shout to the old apple tree!
Old apple tree, we Wassail thee
And hoping thou wilt bear
Hatfuls, capfuls, three bushel bags full
And a little heap under the stairs
Hip Hip Hurray!

The crowd joins in the singing, toast is dipped into a bucket of mulled cider and then placed into the branches of the apple tree, this is to attract the good spirits, the singing continues mulled cider is passed around and three guns are let off to make a loud noise to scare away the evil spirits.

The Leominster Morris Men were another highlight. Just watching them in action brought home to me the vigour, passion, commitment and even violent enthusiasm of real folk culture. It was the Big Apple at Much Marcle one of hundreds of events staged in the U.K. to celebrate Apple Day around the date of October 23rd. I had been on a tour of Weston's Cider the big noise in cider at Much Marcle. I had visited a few smaller concerns and then I sat down to await the Leominster Morris Men and when they turned up they were a sight to behold in their traditional heavy work boots, and black trousers. They were decorated with bells and wore highly coloured jackets that looked like floral curtains, every one was different. There were ribbons on their hats, jackets and trousers. And those hats, each Morris Man decorated his own hat with flowers, one man's hat was a pith helmet, the flowers were scrunped from hedgerows or neighbours gardens and they looked a sight, an imposing sight, an impressive sight. As they rolled up each one looked more outstanding than the last, they seemed like giants or demi gods emerging from the woodland. They moved the table I was sitting at so I got invited to their table and they poured me out a pint of Old Rosie a strong cider and we became instant friends. After plying me with cider they got up to dance and dance they did, or should I say commenced battle. They all carried sticks and as they bashed at each other and stamped their big work boots accompanied by violin and accordion the noise was tremendous. In the end I even got roped in to be a Morris Man myself and then we all sat down and they explained to me about the origin of Morris Men, about their decline in WWI and the revival around the middle of last century. They also told me of the apple tree ritual, the Wassail, which they perform mid winter in the local orchards. I watched them perform at a second location and this time they shared some of their own Kingston Black cider with me.

Richard Wheeler from the Leominster Morris Men explained to me that the word Wassail came from the Anglo Saxon "Was hail" which means Good Health and bonfires would be lit in Herefordshire on the 12th night of Christmas and this was called a Wassail, it was described in Hereford in 1791 and has been performed by Morris Men in Herefordshire for a long time and even been associated with a type of folk play called a Mummers Play. When the Leominster Morris Men reformed in the early 1980s the Wassail was one of the first rituals they revived. Their Wassail, I was told, begins with a meeting at a certain watering hole where flaming torches are given out to the crowd of watchers, about 200 strong, the Morris Men and the crowd then proceed to the chosen apple tree. Toast soaked in cider is placed in the tree, cider is then scattered over the roots of the tree. Then the Leominster Morris Men light the burning bush, this represents the sun's renewal and rebirth. Around the apple tree are thirteen stacks of old wood and straw, the 13th stack representing Judas, one of the original disciples in the new testament and the one who betrays Jesus, is lit and immediately doused as Judas is bad, at this point twelve fires are lit to represent the 12 good apostles and the Wassail song is sung, 2 or 3 Morris dances are performed and then the crowd proceed back to the gathering place and a Mummers play is performed. This is all followed by singing, drinking and dancing at the local watering hole.

I asked Richard about the use of a Mummers play during the midwinter Wassail and whether this was traditional in Herefordshire. "Traditional who knows?" he said. "We perform a mixture of traditional customs from Herefordshire and South Shropshire mixed in with our own interpretations. The Wassail and the Mummers Play are both about death and resurrection. The end of the old year and the rise of the new. So to us they fit together. But the "proper" day for the Mummers Play is Boxing Day - the traditional day for dancing out in the Welsh Borders and the proper day for the Wassail is 12th night (although there are lots of different 12th night depending on the calendar you use). For us that is 6th January. So the Mummers Play with the Wassail is a bit of an add-on. But an appropriate one. We also include the burning bush which is a North Herefordshire custom. There is some evidence that this is a corn related custom for New Year's Day but it works well with apples (well, my apples anyway, the year the bush did not burn well I had a poor crop). I don't think that answers your question - but why should it? Tradition should not have to stand up to whys and reasons. Do we lead the cycle or do we reflect it? Who knows - but we are part of that cycle of the seasons and add a bit of colour to the proceedings.

There is quite a good account of the Wassail in Fiona Mac's book - Cider Lore in the Three Counties. It is not quite as we do it now - but then it is not a fossilised tradition and the components can switch back and forth in the order of proceedings. Now we have a shot gun (or shot guns) fired at the end. But we don't go in for banging pots and pans as some Wassails do. The stick clashing from our dancing is noise enough. Look out for a BBC series "The trees that made Britain". One is on the apple and the Leominster Morris Men appear in that for the Wassail. We also finish the series with a "Wassail" of an olive tree! Traditions change to match up with global warming."

Germany, Bembels and Saurkraut.

After England I visited Frankfurt in Germany, in fact I went to Sachsenhausen just south of Frankfurt and discovered a town with a complete cider culture, it was quite amazing. My taxi driver told me that every day after work he would drink some cider and it was good for the blood. "Beer," he said, "was bad." On day thirteen of my tour I purchased a Bembel, a traditional and quite beautiful apple wine jug from two diminutive and ancient frauleines who remembered the bombing of Frankfurt in WWII. I visited an Apple wine museum in the main tourist plaza and tried one of Frankfurts famous dishes that are used to accompany apple wine, Green Sauce, which actually was made from herbs and yogurt accompanied by boiled eggs and boiled potatoes and it was delicious. After the museum I walked to an old apple wine house called The Squirrel, Zum Eichkatzerl, and the owner who befriended me and gave me lots of booklets on apple wine said that the best apple wine garden was straight across the road and called Zu Den 3 Streuben where the 75 year old owner still made his own apple wine in the traditional way.

I crossed the road to see what all the fuss was about. When imagining an apple wine garden don't think of trees and flowers but think of a traditional German bar. This one was very simply decorated with timber half way up the walls, long tables and benches and a long wooden bar. On the bar was mounted a giant bembel full of the local apple wine. The bembel was on a frame to make pouring easy. The place was very busy not with tourists, or even German students or yuppies but with locals. The apple wine was a bit stronger than elsewhere, a bit like old style English farmhouse rough scrumpy. I ordered Rippchen mit Kraut und brot and when the grilled pork, sauerkraut and bread arrived it went beautifully with the local drop served in a special glass decorated with lozenge shapes on its side. This place served local food with the local apple wine and the crowd were all locals. I had entered an enclave of Frankfurt cider culture and it was for this that I had packed my bags back in Australia and travelled across the world to discover and record the tradition and the culture in the eight main cider regions, I felt that I was really getting somewhere.

Apple wine is often a cloudy, sour, apple drink around 5.5% alcohol. It is made from sour apples like the Boscoop and has a small amount of the juice of the Speierling apple added, this apple grows wild in the region and is not an apple at all but the sour pear shaped fruit from the Sorbus Domesticus, a member of the Rowan, Mountain Ash family. About one to three percent of this juice is added to the apple wine instead of sulphur, it also has the quality of clarifying the apple wine and adding to the tartness, other wild fruits are also used as well as pears, quinces, medlars and crab apples. The apples for Frankfurts apple wine come from unsprayed orchards in the hills of central Germany and they include Rheinisher Bonapfel, a brisk, cooking apple that is even used as a street tree, the Boskoop a Dutch cooking apple a bit like an English Bramley and the Kaiser Wilhelm a sweet, sharp and nutty tasting apple grown especially for juice.

During my time in Germany I managed to visit Possmanns a famous apple wine manufacturer from Frankfurt and Germany's leading producer. Phillipp Possmann was a wine cooper from Laubenheim who went to Frankfurt in 1875 to make his fortune. By 1881 he was making a tart and cloudy, pale yellow drink in the basement of his inn at Rodelheim and supplying other local inns. By the 1930's the business

started to really take off and World War One surplus submarines, were used for storing apple juice. Now that is putting weapons of war to a good use.

Obviously Possmanns apple wine was a success and the company publicity states that they still hold true to the old apple wine making traditions the founder learnt and developed. What Possmanns are looking for in their apples is acidity and good sugar levels and this combination will produce a traditional apple wine. In the autumn harvest goes on for 12 weeks, the apples are inspected, washed and then milled and every hour three modern presses create 8,000lt of apple juice. This juice is filtered and then pumped into the huge cool sandstone cellars where the apple wine master decides if it will be used for apple juice or apple wine.

Spain, Throwing the Sidre and the Txoxt.

Spain has some really interesting traditions to accompany their ciders. In the state of Asturias I visited the cider town of Villaviciosa and I wrote in my journal: “I wondered through the twisting and turning streets, every shop seems to sell cider or something to do with cider. The patisseries sell small apples made from marzipan and giant chocolate apples and something else called Borrachiras De Orago De Sidra. I saw a travel agents with a cider display, a haberdashery with apple decorated cloth for sale, nick knack shops sell little plastic men and animals pouring out cider from a bottle held local fashion above ones head. The local hardware shop sells cider bottling machines, plastic cider barrels and even the butcher sells packets of concentrated apple.”

I strolled along to the local Roxs Sideria, there are actually lots of Siderias in Villaviciosa, it was a high ceiled joint with tall windows and shutters, simple tables and chairs, on the walls were old photographs of the town and of cider making and great hams and strings of sausages hung up behind the bar. The floor was tiled and a gutter ran along the bottom of the bar both these features were necessary due to the way the cider was poured and drunk! I ordered sidra, the bar man opened a bottle of cider, grabbed a wide mouthed glass and he held the bottle above his head and the glass down low and he poured the cider through the air catching it in the glass until there was about an inch or two of bubbly aerated cider, then I drank the frothing liquor in one gulp, threw the dregs on the floor and put down the glass. At some stage, and I never worked out when, the bar man would return and pour me out a second glass. It was a fully fermented totally dry cider a bit like German apple wine. If you drink it in the conventional way it is fairly tart but by pouring it through the air the taste changes dramatically, it was like drinking a young cider that was still in the throws of fermentation.

Day 20 of my trip I woke up early and it was raining, it was still raining at 4.00 p.m. when Spain awoke after its lunchtime nap, I ordered a taxi and went to the cider museum in the Basque village of Astigarraga. At the museum I went on a tour firstly through their hillside apple orchard and it was still raining as the tour guide Ainize, explained the different exhibits to me and picked cider apples for me to try. She said that the “mouse” was a big problem as they eat the roots of the tree and as an organic solution they place owl boxes in the trees to encourage owls to live in the orchard and eat the “mouse”. I discovered later in France where the same problem exists that the “mouse” was actually voles another small mammal. In the orchard they are experimenting with new bush orchards as in Astigarraga and Spain generally, the

apple trees are big old standard trees. Ainize showed me the old ways of crushing the apples using a big stick with a heavy lump of wood on the end called a pison and there was a variant of this, a big stick with three thick stainless steel blades on the end, called a trabesa. We went into the museum and turned the automatic narration in the museum to English but she went on talking over the English anyway! Then back in the museum shop she gave me a glass and she said, “now we do the church,”. I thought, what is she talking about, “ now we do the church” she said again, I didn’t understand but I was willing to try anything. She gave me a typical Spanish wide mouthed cider glass and walked over to a great vat of cider and turned on a tap high on the face of one of the vats and a stream of cider came spurting out and I had to catch it in my glass. That was the Txoxtx or with the Basque pronunciation the cheertch, the word was a transcription of the sound of the cider pouring from the barrel and yes, I did catch it. So here in Astigarragra was the Basque variation on the Asturias tradition of throwing the cider from a great height into a glass and come the new year the Basque cideries have a great festival of eating and drinking that emerged from the tradition of the Txotx when restaurateurs come to the cider house and test the new cider and order their cider for the year.

France, Farmhouse Artisan and Industrial.

In France the cider was totally different, it was a naturally sweet and naturally bubbly drink. Normandy is in fact a land of dairy cows and apple orchards and it was to an apple orchard I was heading, but not one owned by a Frenchman, I was to visit L’Aunay Cider owned by a Scotsman and his Canadian wife. So one morning David Pickering, an Australian cider apple expert whom I had met up with at Madam Marie-France’s B&B, and I drove south along the dual carriageway passed Fallais to Carouges to meet our Scotsman. I navigated and without the bother of having to both navigate and drive by myself I did a good job and we turned on to country lanes followed directions and suddenly we were driving passed rows of tall apple encrusted tress and we were in an old farm yard with an array of old half derelict stone buildings. John and Lynne had come to L’Aunay Cidery more than seven years before from Central Africa with the intention of planting trees, apple trees. John doesn’t describe himself as a Scotsman but as an African and he finds French winters with their very short days hard, he wants to get out there and work, he is a bit of a workaholic.

John has a beautifully maintained orchard with lots of lovely tall trees full of a range of traditional French cider apples and when we tasted the apples the tannins and other flavours were very strong. John said, “It must be the soil, but my apples have more tannin than is usual.”. Some of his apples tasted of gooseberries, some of blackberries, and others were just plain sweet but some contained mouth puckering tannins a bit like strong brewed tea. It was a sad thing really because I felt with these apples one could make some really good apple wines but most were sold offsite to go into a general mix that would end up as average French sweet cider, popular yes, but hardly a great expression of the cider makers art.

I asked John how he had learnt to make French style cider and he said that various government and industry bodies run courses to teach budding cider makers how it is done. There is a lot of expert advise available there are people testing the ciders, giving feedback and generally the government and industry provide lots of support. John said he started out using the original old stone weed infested cider mill that they

uncovered on their farm. This mill consists of a large stone wheel that is revolved around inside a large circular stone trough by a horse. He said that it was very hard work and that the first horse they had used to turn the mill was no good as it had to walk around in circles and it was only used to working in the forest and walking in straight lines. So they had to get a new horse and they worked for two to three days and only made a little cider, however it tasted very good.

Today John's set up is a little more modern but only just. John doesn't believe in outlaying large amounts of capital if he doesn't have to and a local farmer brings a mobile mill and a press onto the farm and later in the year a mobile Calvados still owned by a local Farmer arrives. So the old tradition of a mobile press and a mobile still that moves from farm to farm is still alive and well. Talking of distilling John has achieved Appellation Control Calvados status for his farm. The farm is not in Calvados but what he had to do was prove that cider had been made on the farm traditionally and if his soil was right and the apples were right then he was able to apply and get appellation control.

To make French style cider John explained, he used fibre glass tanks because you could see through them and therefore one could see the scum build up when the apple juice was fermenting. The scum or the brown cap as they call it in France is full of nitrogen and nutrients which the yeast uses for energy when fermenting the sugar into alcohol, so when the brown cap forms the clear cider under the brown cap is carefully pumped into a second tank, this separates the yeast from the nitrogen and the nutrients and slows the fermentation down or even stops the fermentation altogether, the idea is to achieve a naturally sweet and naturally sparkling cider. The next stage in the manufacturing of French style cider is a rough filtering and this is usually a miserable process as it is done in the heart of winter and it is very cold indeed. The filtering does not end there however and progressive filtering is undertaken until a very fine sterile filter is used which filters out most of the yeast organisms from the cider and most of the nutrients. After this the cider is bottled during cold weather and left to ferment a little in the bottle and thus they achieve a naturally sparkling and naturally sweet cider.

We tried some of John's cider he had a demi sec which was sweet with some good tannins, we tried some of his young and some of his older Calvados and then John dug out a bottle of five year old demi sec medium dry cider that had been stored away by accident and it was the best cider I had tried so far in France and one of the best on the whole trip. For a French cider it was not very sweet and it had soft tannins, David Pickering the cider apple expert from Orange liked it so much he offered to buy a bottle which was quite a feat for David. However the five year old demi sec is not a commercial enterprise but just a few bottles left over and kept, but it did show how cider, if looked after and aged properly, can be a very sophisticated drink.

Some good cider is made on John's farm but the profit margins in France are very low, most of John's apples are sold offsite and he sells most of his French style cider in bulk very cheaply into England. So life is a struggle John's Canadian wife said: "Although we are not French, we are in Normandie, producing cider from local varieties. It's a tough business because although land is cheaper (than in England) that's not where the costs are: it's the bottling, labelling to European Union norms, distribution and sales which are tough. There are lots of producers but more and more

smaller 'official' producers are giving up because of larger more industrial producers going for volume (water added, sterilized and then gas-injected) rather than quality because cider has such a perceived low-value in relation to more "upmarket" products... I'd prefer a good cider and pay for it than a cheap wine any day but that is taking on huge cultural prejudices...In fact, our cider is produced like a champagne, with all of the costs involved (special corks, heavy weight glass bottles, storage times for fermentation in the bottle) but without the increased value. We cannot afford to ship our cider across country or outside of France because we don't have the volume to offset the costs involved. We have decided to remain a small quality producer (10-15,000 bottles a year) and the word has got around that we produce "real" stuff. This has taken 4 years and for the first time we may have not enough for our farm visiting clientele. Our other main income comes from selling our cider apples to a co-op. They sell them on to Spain, Brittany and elsewhere. And John has a part-time job...even so, I need to find part-time work whilst looking after three school-age kids and home sales. It isn't an easy ride by any means..."

I went to the Fete Du Cidre at Beuvron en Auge. I parked my little car and walked. There were people selling apples, Boskops and Reinettes amongst others, there was great round traditional bread, pain de campagne, for sale, there were sacks of onions, sacks of chestnuts, ducks and geese in cages, appellation controllee camembert, pottery, cast iron things, small barrels, apple donuts, cold meats, Foix Grass and in the centre of it all a French peasant built up a traditional cider press and started to press out the raw cider. And there was cider, lots of cider for sale and calvados, French apple brandy. The place was teeming with shoppers, ladies with little dogs, men with big dogs, English tourists, refugees from the tour de France all kitted up and wondering lost with their bicycles, yuppies from Paris, old people and even locals, and they all bought and carried off the goodies. I spoke to an Englishman whose arms were full of bottles of cider, "What sort of cider did you buy?" I asked. "Who knows," he said "it will all be delicious.". In France cider is an accepted and popular drink but it is not making cider makers like John at L'Aunay cider rich.

In Britany I went to a farmhouse cider establishment and later to a large co-operative. It was pouring with rain as I drove out of the old fortress seaport of St Malo, I crossed a long bridge across a tidal estuary that was also a tidal power station and turned off the dual carriageway at a town called St Briac where the wild and lovely scenery and the old stone cottages reminded me of Cornwall. I drove along country lanes to St Cast Le Guildo and spotted the sign for the cidery of Jehan Lefeure and at the end of a mudded and tyre rutted lane, under a high roof and mounted on a big old French truck was a cider mill and a cider press in full operation. On the concrete floor were great piles of apples with a middle aged man who shovelled them into the apple mill, two young men made up a cheese (layers of apple pulp wrapped in cloth) and then the press was turned on and it squeezed out the juice. I had read about mobile presses in nineteenth century England but it was wonderful to see such an elaborate mobile press in full operation. The man shovelling apples was Jehan Lefeure, the owner, a tall sinewy and tanned hard working farmer and we went into his cider tasting cave, a shed where he showed me his cider. Jehan explained that he had 12 hectares of apple trees and that he had 28 varieties of apples, of these he used 17 varieties for cider and 8 varieties for juice after he had said this he did a quick calculation and then bemusedly looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. He said that he produced 70 thousand bottles of cider a year, 20 thousand bottles of juice and ten thousand bottles

of vinegar. In France he said, 70 million bottles of cider are made by the big industrial producers, one million bottles by the artisan producers and 100 thousand bottles by farmers. Jehan gave me a couple of bottles and we went out into the rain, I shook his hand and said goodbye.

The next morning I drove along the river Rance looking for the Val De Rance cider Co-Operative where I was to meet Corentin Mauffret a man with a number of titles including Asian Area Manager as well as public relations. The only problem I had was that I was on the wrong side of the river. Eventually I sorted that out and found the town of Pleudihen, drove through the town and there was the factory. It was big with rows and rows of stainless steel tanks and piles of freshly delivered cider apples. As I watched, trucks and tractors pulling wagons full of apples were arriving and being weighed, semi trailers were being loaded with pallets of shrink wrapped cartons of cider, a couple of men were checking on the recycled water plant but there was no office! I spoke to the workers in bad French and they replied in bad English and I didn't get anywhere fast. I got back in my little Ford and left, however driving back through the town I spotted the administration and I quickly parked my car, French style, blocking the footpath. Corentin was a nice young fella, he was definitely not a sinewy farmer but an office type in his well pressed suite and mercifully he spoke good English. We shook hands and put on white coats and hats and we went in to one of Frances major cideries. I couldn't find the office earlier because the factory is so big it climbs right up a hill and then sneaks into the back of the local town.

Val De Rance, is a co-operative and most of its 420 members are farmers, they make 10 million bottles of cider a year from 500 types of apples and Corentin showed me the new expansion that was going on, new tanks with cooling systems and under cover were being installed. Corentin talked about the apples and how they were kept separate in four categories, sweet, bitter sweet, sour and bitter and the juice of the apples in these four categories was later blended by their expert cider maker a short man I had met earlier who spent his time in the laboratory, but he was the brains behind the cider. The apples were dumped onto concrete platforms and swept into the mill with water, they were then carried up a conveyer to be washed with a spray of clean water and milled into a pulp, they were then left to macerate (mature on their skins) for 2 to 3 hours and then the apple pulp went through the first pressing and the juice from the first pressing was used for premium quality cider. The pulp was then mixed with water and then pressed again for second quality juice. The juice was pumped into large holding tanks left to settle for a few days at a very low temperature and then the clear juice was pumped into tanks for fermentation. When the cider maker judged that fermentation had gone far enough the sweet cider was stabilized by filtering through a centrifuge, this is a whirlwind type filter that spins the juice at a great rate of knots to throw out particles of yeast etc, any cider for export is pasteurized as well.

We walked through the bottling plant, a very impressive highly automated highway of bottles, that snaked around the large building even the boxes that the bottles of cider were packed in were assembled by machine. Val De Rance make a whole series of sparkling ciders and apple juices. They make party apple juice for the American corporation Disney and exclusive cider made from "hand sorted apples" La Cuvee Prestige for Sainsburys Supermarkets in England. They also supply French supermarket chains and they are the biggest supplier to creperies in France and the

world. The creperies around Brittany that I saw all seemed to have Val De Rance cider bowls. Val De Rance publicity states that “The cider apples in our Brittany orchard give our “Val De Rance” sparkling ciders a broad spectrum of flavours. The authentic taste of sparkling ciders will please connoisseurs of prestigious traditional ciders.” They make Cidre Bouche Doux and Brut, sweet and dry sparkling cider in champagne style bottles with wired on corks at around 2% and 5% alcohol respectively. They also make a champagne style Celtic cider, they make Biologique or organic cider and their cider also comes in PET plastic bottles and finally they make a traditional farmhouse style cider or cidre fermier at the other end of Brittany near Quimper’s, pronounced something like campers, and as well as all the above they are now making cider cocktails with kumquat, lychee and grapefruit. My tour concluded so to top of a visit to one of Frances biggest cidery I went to the local creperie and had galettes complete and a bottle of Val De Rance Brut served in a traditional cider bowl and it was an excellent combination, cider and savoury crepes - bellissimo.

New England, Cider and Cheese

The Americans, especially the New Englanders, once had a great tradition of cider making however with the advent of the temperance movement which encouraged farmers to grub up their orchards, followed by the great depression and then prohibition, the American cider industry collapsed. Farmers sold their orchards to real estate developers and even though the prohibition laws were repealed the cider industry did not recover. Today however a small but ever growing group of Americans are very serious about their cider and they hold an annual Apple Days at Franklin County Massachusetts. I went along and it was unlike any cider fare in England or France, Germany or Spain which are all public affairs like farmers markets and festivals. The Franklin County Apple Days was more a conference of interested people in the cider industry. It was all very serious but I enjoyed it thoroughly and discovered that a lot of good cider is being made in the USA. They use new techniques learnt from Europe but they also use techniques harking back to the traditional ciders of America.

One particularly serious event was a cider and cheese matching soiree and not only were the American ciders of surprisingly good quality but the cheeses were excellent as well. The event was presented by the famous Rubiners, Cheesemongers and Grocers from New York, at the Old Deerfield Inn in the leafy and quite beautiful New England heritage town of Deerfield. My friend, who was driving me around, and I went downstairs to a room full of American Colonial charm, there were tables set with cider glasses and cheese platters. On the platters there was a selection of cheeses ranging across the spectrum of what a cheese maker can achieve. There was a camembert style cheese called a Triple from the artisan organic cheese maker at Champlain Valley Creamery, a goats milk blue from Great Hill Dairy, a firm and slightly sharp sheep’s milk cheese from the farmstead cheese makers at Hope Farm and a particularly nice complex and sophisticated clothbound cheddar from Cabbots Creamery, just to name a few. All these cheeses were tasted in combination with six ciders. A traditional dry from Wstcott Bay Orchards, a semi dry from Farnum Hill Ciders, Roxbury Russet a sweeter style naturally fermented and only slightly bubbly offering from West County Cider, which to me was one of the best ciders that I tried in America, from Canada came the Tideview vintage Cider made from Golden Russets, another Canadian offering was the Ice Cider from Domaine Pinnacle and Eve’s Cidery New York contributed another liqueur style cider called Essence.

Although the American cider enthusiasts waxed lyrical about the ciders some were distinctly young and a little rough, however the standard was high and after each cider was poured a member of Rubiners staff talked about the cheese and Ben Watson, writer and slow food enthusiast, led a discussion about the cider and which of the various cheeses matched with the style of cider presented. It was a very serious and business like affair with some ciders being picked as great with a particular cheese, such as the Ice Cider and the Essence going quite nicely with the Great Hill Blue, but in the end a vote was taken and it was decided that the Semi Sweet Roxbury Russet generally went very well with most cheeses. The fruity apple flavours of this cider matching very nicely with the crumbly, slightly acid deep rich and buttery, not to forget the sharp blue and the strong creamy flavours of the cheeses presented.

Before I left America to wend my way home, I took an Amtrak (train) down to the old Seaport town of Mystic where a steam cider mill was still operating after 150 years. At Clyde's Cider Mill I was able to see something rather special and to try the cider that was made in the pre-prohibition, pre-depression and pre-temperance movement style. It was a version of basic old fashioned New England Hard Cider and it was eye opening to drink it and if I had drunk too much it would have been more than eye opening! I had been forming a hypothesis about old fashioned American hard cider and suddenly it came to me why hard cider was called hard cider and why the temperance movement hated it so. Hard cider is hard in the alcoholic sense, a bit like whiskey and bourbon, a hard alcoholic drink which packs a punch.



Conclusions

I have only written down a few extracts from my notes which I intend to publish in full later. I learnt about food and cider all over the world from big crusty ploughman's in England, to a type of savoury crepe in France called Gallettes, to Chorizos with beans in Spain, Sauerkraut and grilled pork in Germany and the come what may eat what you will casual style of America. I explored the old ritual of cider especially Wassailing the apple orchard, I met and became friends with the Leominster Morris Men and Jim Binder the singer of the wassail in Carhampton. I visited Cider houses in England, Apple Wine Gardens in Germany, Siderias in Spain, Creperies in France and the big open farmer's market style orchard shops of New England. I drank and noted the differences between the tart ciders of Germany, the sweet and bubbly ciders of France, the oxygen infused ciders of Spain and the seriously good single varietal ciders of Somerset and the interesting new wave ciders of North America. I met and spoke with cider makers, I explored, with the assistance of David Pickering from Australia, apple varieties, I was shown over cider factories in every country I visited. I met cider drinkers and spoke with them, I explored shops of all sorts to evaluate the culture of cider, I went to cider fares, fates and conventions, I even drank cider. What I was trying to do was get a feel for the world of cider, where it is today, where it has come from and where Australia, a country that I believe can grow the best apples in the world, fits in with all of this and how the Australian cider industry can move forward. I looked at everything I could because to me an industry is not a state of the art factory or a couple of academics giving a course or a restaurant offering gallettes and cider or enthusiasts copying a foreign cider ritual but all of these things and much more. To me knowledge and understanding is the foundation upon which a new industry can grow and prosper.



Recommendations - Where To From Here

I personally believe that good cider could be a great addition to our way of life here in Australia. It is the perfect beverage for our climate and we grow apples as good as anywhere in the world. I also believe that Australia can potentially make some of the best cider in the world and my world tour has only reinforced this opinion. Good cider is not only a great drink but it is a very healthy drink so I believe that increased consumption of the ancient drop can only be of benefit.

I shy away from telling other people what to do so a lot of my recommendations are for me to implement as well as a direction for other people to consider. As a whole, Australian cider makers need to make the general public and the relevant business community aware of the wonderful culture and traditions of cider around the world. This will help lift the image of cider from a cheap pub drink, only good for kids and getting drunk, to a more sophisticated and complex beverage. Australian cider makers also need to understand the great range of delicious foods that are eaten with cider as an accompaniment and then disseminate this knowledge to restaurateurs and the general public. In my opinion cider is not a pub drink but a drink to imbibe with food and this point needs to be made to the industry and the public at large. Another recommendation of mine is to inform the Australian Apple Industry of the great potential of cider to lift their income by enhanced sales throughout Australia and to potentially create a new export industry. Not only is good cider a wonderful drink but it has potential to create income and employment in Australia.

