

EDITORIAL



Champagne, Royalty and Haematology

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Champagne-The wine of Kings and the King of wines.

Guy de Maupassant (Fig. 1)
French novelist (1850–1893)

The coronation of King Charles III in the UK stimulated the consumption of much champagne, and many journalists into print [1]. Champagne has for a long time been associated with celebration and as Guy de Maupassant said is the ‘wine of Kings’ (I assume we can include Queens!). Maupassant, a protégé of Flaubert, was regarded as the best writer of short stories in France in his day, but unfortunately died at a relatively young age of syphilis, which may have been congenital, following a failed attempt at suicide [2].

My eye was caught recently [3] by an article by Alice Lascelles in the Financial Times HTSI on May 6/7th 2023. She says that Queen Victoria was the first monarch to order a direct shipment of champagne from Clicquot in 1868. It appears that Clicquot champagne was her favourite tippie. Lascelles claims that it was the British monarch who pushed for the drier style of champagne that led to the popularity of the ‘Brut’ style. The Clicquot house apparently introduced a number of special cuvées to commemorate royal dates. A clever marketing ploy! According to Lascelles, the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth, was also partial to a glass or two of Clicquot with caviar, cheese fondue, goose liver pâté and Chinese egg rolls. How the other half lives!

Lascelles [4] again writing in the Weekend FT points out the importance of bottle size, especially in champagne. As Nik Baker, says in the same article: ‘*Jeroboams ...make the wine much more smoky...you also get a softer, creamier texture*’. He also says that Jeroboams (3 litres) are just about pourable but Methuselahs (6 litres) are a little more of a challenge. He advises: *Plant your feet wide apart, take it slowly and make sure that no one moves their glass unexpectedly*. It’s not a problem that most of us have!

Phillipe II, Duke of Orléans and Regent of France (Fig. 2) following the death of Louis XIV in 1715 helped to popularise sparkling champagne among the French nobility. Before that champagne was a still wine. Sparkling champagne gained steady popularity from the middle of the 19th century until the Russian revolution. Russia went on to become the second largest importer of champagne. Veuve Clicquot was a major player in the export business and due to some clever marketing, and some risk-taking, Veuve Clicquot became a popular drink during the Napoleonic wars (1800–1815).

Happily sparkling champagne is now within reach of ordinary people (non-royals) but continues to command high prices. As I have said frequently in this journal, I am partial to a glass or two

of sparkling wine from Lombardy in Italy. Franciacorta is made from Chardonnay and Pinot Nero using the champagne method. It is considerably less expensive than champagne and makes a very nice aperitif. Sadly it is difficult to purchase outside Italy.

One of the downsides of sparkling champagne is the requirement for heavy glass bottles in order to prevent them from exploding. Not only can explosion lead to a waste of the precious liquid but may also be dangerous. The cost of transporting heavy glass bottles is considerable making them less attractive to the green lobby. As yet the problem has not been solved. A number of vineyards now offer good quality still wines in cardboard containers. The wine society in London, UK, (of which I am a member) is now offering a selection of wines in boxes. Although this method of wine distribution is undoubtedly less expensive than glass bottles, an amount of snobbery needs to be overcome, as originally ‘wines in a box’ were considered to be of inferior quality and many wine drinkers still relish the sound of the removal of corks from wine bottles, whether still or sparkling.

What has this got to do with haematology? The disorder known as haemophilia was spread amongst royalty in many countries via Queen Victoria. However, the origin of the acquisition of the mutation remains obscure. Probably the most well-known individual was Prince Alexei Romanov (1904–1918) (Fig. 3) of Russia, son of the Czar Nicholas II and Czarina Alexandra Feodorovna, who was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and, like her, a haemophilia obligate carrier. Unfortunately he suffered from haemophilia B due to an inherited functional deficiency of the clotting factor, factor IX. His mother, rather dubiously, enlisted the help of Grigori Rasputin. Whether people with haemophilia A or B have more symptoms remains disputed, but it is highly unlikely that Rasputin did much to alter the bleeding suffered by Alexei.

Happily healthcare has progressed since and in many countries, with notable exceptions, access is not dependant on income or private health insurance, but available to citizens according to need. However the availability of treatment free at the point of delivery, is coming under increasing pressure in many countries, due, in part, to ageing populations and an increase in public expectancy. Another contributing factor may be the willingness of doctors to refer patients for very expensive tests/investigations, sometimes to limit the time spent on consultations and also because of fear of litigation. The end result may be that people with very limited incomes may be deprived of medical care. The cost of medical procedures varies widely in many jurisdictions, which is difficult to understand, and as a result certain treatments may become prohibitively expensive.

There is no doubt that there have been many developments in the treatment of haemophilia in the last 20 years, including recombinant factor concentrates, gene therapy [5] and HSCT, although it should be remembered that these therapies are very expensive and unfortunately not widely available in many countries with underdeveloped medical services. One could consider HSCT as the ultimate form of gene therapy however Graft versus Host

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Fig. 1 Guy de Maupassant. Guy de Maupassant, French novelist 1850–1893. Public Domain.



Fig. 2 Phillippe II. Phillippe II, Duke of Orléans and Regent of France (1674–1723) following the death of Louis XIV in 1715 he helped to popularise sparkling champagne among the French nobility. Palace of Versailles, Public Domain.

Disease continues to be a major complication leading to severe morbidity and sometimes mortality.

I have no doubt that many bottles of champagne were consumed in celebration of the coronation of King Charles III but it would be hard to beat Empress Anna Ivanova (1730–40) or her successor Elizabeth Petronovas (1741–61) in Russia, who commonly served over 1000 bottles at one event [6].



Fig. 3 Alexandra Feodorovna (Alix of Hesse). Alexandra Feodorovna, wife of Tsar Nicholas II and mother of Alexei Romanov and an obligate carrier of the defective haemophilia gene. Public Domain.

I certainly can't compete with that but in the meantime a glass of well chilled Franciacorta before dinner will have to suffice. Happy drinking.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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