

Asia Pacific Zone Newsletter

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The Wine and Food Society, later the International Wine and Food Society, was founded in London, England, by André Simon in 1933. He set the official date as October 20, and plans for the first event were made over dinner at the home of The Dowager Lady Swaythling in Kensington Court on October 31. In attendance with André and his wife was AJA Symons, the Society's cofounder and first Secretary. In January 1934, a Society banquet for nearly 400 people was held at the Savoy in London, launching from a small nucleus an international organization which burgeoned to proportions that even André initially could not have imagined.

1. At that time, the Society was the world's only association of gastronomic enthusiasts not associated commercially with the wine and food trade. Today, there are hundreds of organizations that fit this category, but the International Wine and Food Society remains the most prestigious, most widespread, independent gastronomic society in the world.

The very thought of a society for wine and food was, in the early 1930s, a bold idea indeed. That period was not a propitious time in which to start an international association of gastronomes. Nazi Propaganda Minister Goering spoke of "guns before butter", children were being told that nasty tasting food was good for them, and anything that smacked of extravagance was distinctly unfashionable.

André rose to the occasion. Although some considered him an eccentric, he espoused a philosophy that worked during that era of austerity and has continued to appeal since. He urged high culinary standards while deploring waste, declaring it criminal to ruin valuable foodstuffs by bad preparation. He believed that quality could and should be maintained while adjusting to restraints imposed by the economic circumstances of the day - with dispensation, of course, for the occasional special feast.