

BUSPIL 1790

## WINE LABELS

### d'Arcy Orders

'Wine label' has become the generic term for those silver labels hung around the necks of decanters. Originally, they were called 'bottle tickets' and were made of wood, bone or thick paper and it appears that they were first used for this purpose early in the 18th century.

By the middle of that century silver and, to a lesser extent, enamel, ivory and mother-of-pearl, were being used and individual silversmiths were producing ranges of designs with a wide variety of names.

Dating labels made before 1790 and, usually, with incomplete markings can require a great deal of research. However, the Marking of Silver Plate Act of 1790 made it compulsory for all silver items even as small as wine labels to be fully marked with the maker's mark; a mark indicating the town where the label was made; a letter denoting the year of manufacture; a lion passant and the Sovereign's head proving that the duty had been paid. Wine labels continued to be produced in great variety and profusion until an Act of 1860 permitted the sale of single bottles providing each bottle had a paper label affixed describing the contents. This tended to make the wine label superfluous. But by that date silversmiths and others had produced labels with a variety of names referring to wines, spirits, medicines, sauces, lotions and cordials. The Wine Label Circle has recorded nearly 3,000 names.

Not surprisingly, the most common Portuguese names on wine labels are Madeira and Port. Of Madeira there are no less than fifty recorded variations and spellings including Malvoisie de Madere, Medira and Spanish Madeira! Almost as many for Port such as Portvin, Port 1840 and Cossins Port.

Others on labels are Bucellas with fifteen variations in spelling; Colares indicating a red or white wine produced near Lisbon; Carcavellos, a sweet white wine popular only until about 1825, with twenty-five varia-

tions such as Calcar-vella, Calcauilla and Calcavalha; Palmella; Lisbon; Setúbal Aguardenta; Arinto, almost certainly another name for Bucellas wines which are made from grapes of that name; Rio Torto, thought to be a type of port and Touriga a port wine grape; Bordeos, Portuguese for Bordeaux wine and Espírito Santo, possibly referring to a wine from the Espírito Santo area near Mértola in southern Portugal. Eau de Portugal has been recorded but there is some dispute as to whether or not this refers to a gentleman's hair lotion. There exists an undated label marked 'Pico' which is thought to have been made in Portugal and refers to a wine made in the Azores on the island of Faial, the vines there being completely destroyed by disease in 1852. Apart from that label it appears that no wine labels were made by silversmiths in Portugal which is surprising. If any member knows of any, the author would be very pleased to receive details.

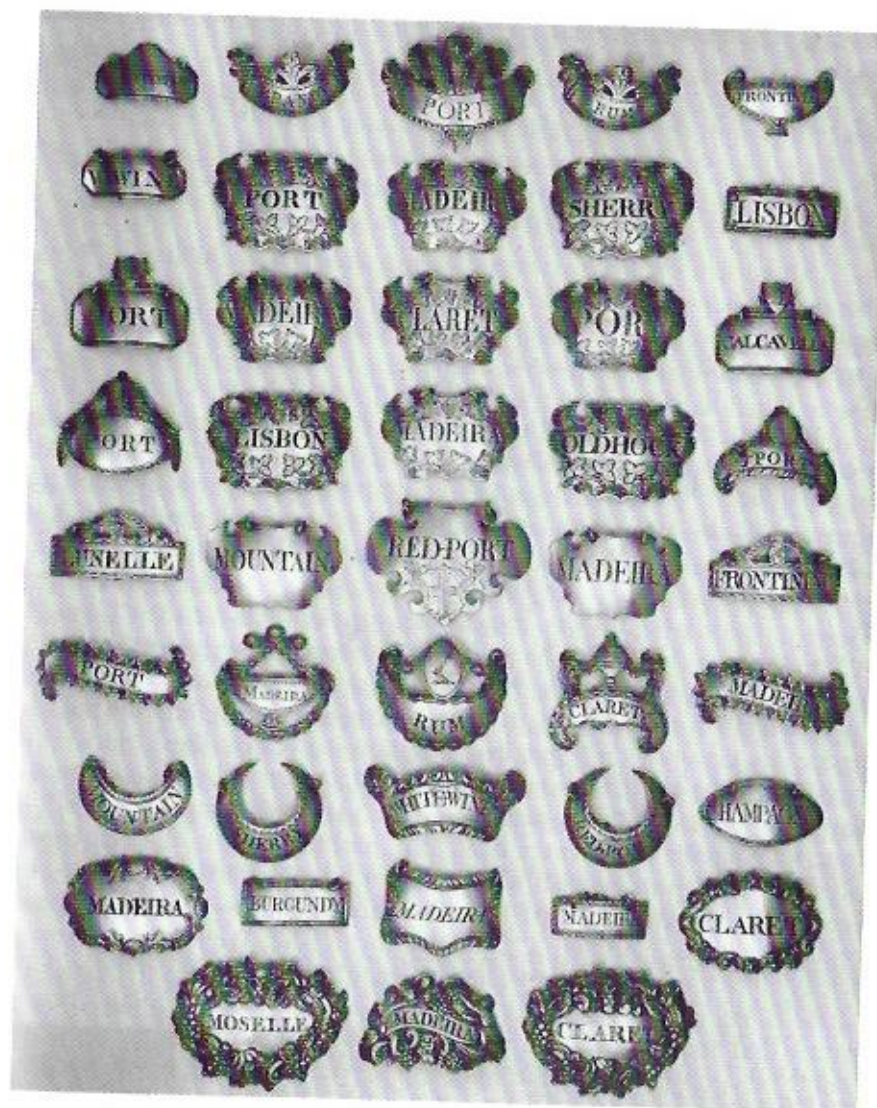
Until about the end of the 19th Century the design of labels although most imaginative and attractive were lacking in fine detail but the changeover from hand-working to die-stamping thereafter enabled labels of superb craftsmanship to be produced.

In addition to making labels for general sale, silversmiths were sometimes commissioned to produce labels specially designed to the order of a particular customer and these are now unique and of especial interest to collectors. The author well remembers attending a college reunion and being confronted by a collector's dream — a unique silver label, Madeira with the college crest. By chance, he had, that day, purchased a run-of-the-mill Madeira label and it occurred to him that a quick swap might be possible but being replete with rich food and fine wines he felt that his dexterity might be somewhat impaired and was forced to abandon the idea.

The purpose of this article is to enquire whether in Portugal there are, either on sideboards or lying in drawers, any wine labels the existence of which may be unrecorded as it is not impossible that wine-shippers in Portugal may have commissioned silversmiths in either the UK or Portugal to produce a range of specially designed labels.

Collecting wine labels is a fascinating hobby but whereas twenty-five years ago examples could be obtained for a few shillings now there are few of interest costing less than £50 and rare specimens fetch hundreds of pounds in the London sale-rooms.

Research is co-ordinated by The Wine Label Circle which has about 150 members, holds meetings and produces two journals per annum. Further information about the Circle may be obtained from the author.



*A selection of the most common designs*