

**T**HE Last of the Summer Wine. So very poetic and evocative a line, don't you think? One feels it really ought to be Shakespeare.

Keats, conceivably. Or maybe from Wilfred Owen or another of the War Poets: it does have that wistfulness, a touch of Flanders fields about it. But it's not in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, and although a lot of people seem to imagine that they know its source, no-one I have met can quite put a finger on it. Possibly it is just the very familiarity of the phrase that renders it bardic. Certainly it has lurked in the public consciousness for a fair old while – 37 years, as a matter of fact, this making the much-loved BBC series with Compo, Cleggy and Foggy the longest running comedy in the world, bar none. Way over 300 episodes, each of them written by just one man, Roy Clarke, who was also responsible for Keeping Up Appearances – a rather different sort of thing, though equally enduringly popular. And because one is so used to seeing the Summer Wine protagonists, those overgrown scalliwags, wandering the Yorkshire Dales in an unspeakable motley of flat cap, pacamac and wellingtons, it is very refreshing to meet Peter Sallis in Marylebone – not at all got up as Norman Clegg, but very dapper indeed in a Jermyn Street blazer, high-buttoned waistcoat and Windsor-knotted silk tie. And the voice is what was once called Received Pronunciation, or even Oxford English, because despite what conclusions you may have drawn from the flat vowels of both Cleggy and the wondrous Wallace of Gromit renown, Peter is a Londoner who quietly marvels at the fact that his one-size-fits-all northern intonation has brought him such success. "I'm very lucky," he says, with characteristic softness and modesty, "because I can't really do accents. Irish, Scottish ... Liverpool, Welsh ... can't do those at all. But Yorkshire seems to be all right. They love it in Yorkshire, anyway."

Peter is of the old school, in the best sense possible – as befits a gentleman who is about to be 90. His eyes are not so good these days, although you'd never

# No more meat, Gromit!

What promised to be a grand day out with Peter Sallis turned out less so for **Joseph Connolly** – as the veteran actor battled with tough lamb and bulletproof crackling. Oh well, just have to have the last of the wine ...



Cracking company though ... Joseph Connolly with veteran actor Peter Sallis.

suspect it from the pale blue brightness that shines out from so kind and unlined a face. The hearing and elegantly bone-dry wit, though, are as sharp as ever, his demeanour politely understated and his manners quite perfect. We went to Odin's for lunch as I thought a rather grown-up and long-established restaurant would be just the very thing. And it does look the part – rather like Mayfair restaurants of old with a smart black exterior unrelieved save for the menu in a big brass frame and "Odin's" in tight white copperplate. The large windows are thoroughly obscured by rather drab net curtains that do however hint at more opulent secrets within. The walls are covered in heavily framed oils, the furnishings tending towards velvet, fringes, faded mahogany and touches of gold: very much the country house in town, sort of style. The atmosphere is hushed, though this was largely due to there being only five or six tables taken, and all of them by men.

Clubby, you see – which suited Peter fine, as he is a loyal member of the Garrick (as are two of his more recent co-stars – Frank Thornton, better known as Captain Peacock of Grace Bros, and Russ Abbott, late of the Madhouse). Recently he has also joined the Sloane Club "because," he says drily, "they have lady members there ... who look after me".

As Peter alternated sipping white wine with cranberry juice (he had wanted apple, but they had none) he opined that he'd rather like the soup of the day, which was spinach. I was in the process of ordering for myself a strange-sounding starter – honey roast quail in port sauce with wild rice – and this sounded so good to Peter that he thought he'd go with that instead: to hell with the soup. It was good, properly porty and – as ever with restaurants in the Langan's stable – over generous for a starter: hard to leave any, though. Peter was having roast best end of English

lamb for his main, while I went for the roast of the day – pork, with crackling, stuffing and all the other artery-stopping and irresistible accompaniments you might expect.

There are claims and counter claims as to whether Summer Wine is officially over – Peter though, I feel, has had enough. "But," he says, "it could go on without Clegg, if they want it to." He clearly has enjoyed the series immensely: "I empathise. I myself feel like a Peter Pan." But in his long career, the stage remained the thing. "I got into acting in the Forces. Otherwise I would have been a banker. The War, it saved my life. I liked doing Shakespeare comedies – but Shakespeare is always a bit of a bugger because everyone knows the jokes." Orson Welles became a friend, and Peter remembers with joy acting in one of Welles's own plays, Moby Dick. Rehearsed, alongside Patrick McGeehan, Christopher Lee, Gordon Jackson, Kenneth

## FACTFILE

**ODIN'S**  
27 Devonshire Street  
Marylebone.  
Tel: 020-7935 7296  
Open: Monday to Friday  
noon to 2.30pm, 6.30pm to  
11pm, Saturday 6.30pm to  
11pm. Closed Sunday.  
Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆  
Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆  
Cost: Far too much: £32.50  
for two courses, £36.50 for  
three.

Williams and Joan Plowright, in her debut performance. And at this point in his gentle reminiscences, Peter had a coughing fit. Oh dear. I gave him water. He dabbed his eyes. "I can see tomorrow's headline," he was croaking. "Unknown actor dies in famous restaurant". Well I can't tell you how good that little jeu d'esprit was making me feel. "Are you sure you're all right ...?" I asked with anxiety, though no more than 17 times. And he was, thank God. Oh dear ...

The lamb looked lovely: four large and crusted pink cutlets with broccoli and roast potatoes. And he couldn't cut it. I requested a steak knife, which came quite promptly. And he couldn't cut it. I volunteered my help but quickly discovered that here was no case of Peter's wrists not being up to the action: the lamb was uncuttable – I have never known the like. Oh dear. My pork was thin-sliced and tender, though, so we ordered more of that. Tender, yes – but rather bland; the broccoli overcooked to the point of mush, the roast potatoes okay, the stuffing rather dry and the crackling ... once again, impenetrable: I couldn't cut it, and I couldn't bite it. It was bulletproof. Oh dear. Peter ate

some pork, not much enjoying it, I think. "Pudding ...?" I suggested brightly. "Well yes ... as I don't appear to have had a main course." Oh dear. I resisted saying "Cheeeese, Gromit ...?" which was the least I could have done. Actually, he doesn't like cheese, and has never knowingly eaten Wensleydale. Scoop.

He had a coconut mousse with tanga mango salsa, which I tasted. The salsa was tangy indeed, but the mound of mousse was merely milky. "What do you think ...?" I asked him. "Well," he considered, "it's quite harmless ...". Oh dear. My crème brûlée, I have to say, was magnificent – it's one of the things the Langan's group does really well, and God it was needed. Now I had a further anxiety because the photographer hadn't turned up. Oh dear. "They probably thought," said my guest, "Peter Sellers ...? But he's dead, isn't he?" So the waiter – who had been starstruck from the first ("they don't make programmes like that any more!") was blushing delighted to take a picture (though I suspect that he wanted to be in it).

"Do you ever watch yourself in ancient episodes?" I wanted to know. He looked horrified. "Oh no ... no no. It wouldn't cross my mind. I don't even have any, I don't think." "Really? Well they're all available on DVD." He seemed quite surprised. "Are they? Are they really? Yes – I suppose they must be."

It was a raw late February day, and we were not in a hurry to cope with all the scarves and coats and hats and brave the cold outside. So we sat a little longer, drinking the last of the winter wine. Oh dear ...

Joseph Connolly's *Faber and Faber Eighty Years of Book Cover Design* (Faber and Faber, £25). All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

**T**HERE'S a secret gem in the heart of the West End. Just behind John Lewis, in Cavendish Square, is the Maison de Languedoc-Roussillon, devoted to promoting the wines and foods of sunny southern France.

Sadly, little of that promotion is directed immediately at consumers – although the results of trade and press events must filter through in time.

But this September will see the second Sud de France festival, planned to be much bigger and more inclusive than last year's.

One of the most recent tastings I went to there was different.

It was showcasing wines imported by Great Western Wines, which will deliver them to Londoners and you don't even pay a delivery charge if the order is 12 bottles or more (the case can be mixed).

Mixed is a fitting description of what was there to try, but in the complimentary sense of varied and interesting.

Yet again, the day proved that French wines, even in lower price categories – and these started at

## Heading off to the South of France

5p below £5 – offer a broad drinking pleasure, particularly as part of a meal.

To what appetites, from high in the cooler hills, south of Carcassonne, came a pink Cremant de Limoux 2007 from Chateau Rives-Blanques (£15). With elegant bubbles and soft strawberry fruit, it's a wine I'd rather drink than a lot of pink champagnes. For less effervescence, choose Le Delice des Anges 2008, a stylish apricot-scented viognier-roussanne blend (Domaine de Belle Mare, £8).

If the starter is oysters, there's no better match than Belle Mare's Picpoul de Pinet 2008 (£7.25), mineral-crisp and almost salty. For a creamily-sauced fish dish, a top choice would be the very fine Coteaux du Languedoc La Clape Reserve roussanne-bourboulenc 2006

Mas du Soleilla (£17).

Like an increasing number of the region's vigneron, Soleilla's Christa Derungs and Peter Wildbolz are embracing organic growing, alongside vineyard practices which bring low and concentrated yields from vines buffeted by Mediterranean breezes on the rocky promontory of La

Clape. His Les Chaillies red 2005, from grenache and syrah, (£12.40) is also splendid.

Other food-friendly whites come from Chateau Rives-Blanques, the only producer of a still wine from

mauzac (Cuvee Occitania 2008, £11), the apple-scented grape of the original Limoux bubbly, Blanquette. With this wine, incidentally, the appellation claims its fizzy history dates back way beyond champagne's.

Food is essential with most of the region's reds although they'll match rich vegetarian dishes as well as meat. I'm very happy to recommend all these (blends of grenache, syrah and carignan, in varying proportions): Domaine Marcevol Cotes de Roussillon 2005 (£9.65), a characterful reflection of its terroir;

Domaine de Roudene Fitou 2005 (£10), smooth, elegantly oaked and very appealing; Chateau du Donjon Minervois Grande Tradition 2008 (£7.35), rich, stylish and excellent value; and Domaine des Pres Lasses Faugetes 2006 (£10.65),

where mourvedre joins the other grapes in a perfumed, balanced wine.

To order, visit [www.greatwesternwine.co.uk](http://www.greatwesternwine.co.uk) or phone 01225 322820.

There was also a big Sud de France rose tasting at the maison recently, with a fair number of the wines on retail sale.

Three highlights were Chateau Sainte Eulalie Printemps d'Eulalie 2009,

Minervois, deliciously drinkable (£7, The Wine Society from March 29), juicy and fresh Le Village du Sud (£4.50, Co-op) and Chateau Mourgues du Gres Les Galets Roses, Costieres de Nimes 2009, a wine far more serious than the pink norm (2008 £10, [www.lescaves.co.uk](http://www.lescaves.co.uk)).

But I hope as the weather warms to suggest more ...

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