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Andy Roberts (left), chairman of Selborne Wine Society, presents a cheque for £1,000 to Rosemary Irwin (second left), chairman of the trustees of The Wakes, assisted by Ronnie Davidson-Houston, Hugh Johnson and Judy Johnson (right)

Hugh's wine tutorial

A PERFECT English summer's evening saw members and friends of Selborne Wine Society enjoy an exceptional wine tasting by Hugh Johnson, wine expert and the world's best-known wine writer.

The setting was in the grounds of the home of pioneering English naturalist Gilbert White, The Wakes in Selborne.

Hugh Johnson may be well known for his expertise and love of wine, but he also has a keen interest in horticulture. On June 24, his two passions came together when he hosted the wine tasting with the theme 'Expect the Unexpected'.

Gilbert White is regarded by many as England's first ecologist, and one of those who shaped the modern attitude of respect for nature. He is best known for his Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne.

The White family house now contains the Gilbert White Museum. As a regis-

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tered charity, The Wakes relies on donations to help maintain the property.

With his interest in horticulture, Hugh was keen to visit the gardens and raise money for a worthy charity.

At the end of the evening, a cheque for £1,000, the profits from the evening's event, was presented by Andy Roberts, chairman of the Selborne Wine Society, to Rosemary Irwin, chairman of the trustees of The Wakes, which will go specifically to the development of the stable yard.

As guests arrived they were greeted with a glass of fizz and canapes in the beautiful setting of The Wakes gardens with its glorious views toward the Selborne Hangar and the famous zigzag path, built by Gilbert White in the 1750s. Once ushered into the marquee, the tasting began.

For two hours, Hugh entertained more than 100 people with his humour and opinions on wine, and stories of his career, from the early days as the Sunday Times wine correspondent and becoming president of the Sunday Times Wine Club, part of Laithwaites, to making wine himself at his Hungarian vineyard. His talk was accompanied by an eclectic mix of wines from around the world that have a personal relevance to Hugh.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all the wines selected are available from Laithwaites, and the evening began with Wyfold English Sparkling 2010, from Barbara Laithwaite's own vineyard.

A Romanian Rose followed, Paris Street Romanian Rose, described as "knicker pink" and a country which is an example of "new world wine growing within Europe".

Wine from Hugh's own vineyard was next, the Royal Tokaji Dry Furmint Spe-

cial Reserve. Hugh took guests on a journey back in time to the 1970s when he first visited Hungary tasting ancient bottles of wine from old cellars. The Communist command economy ruled in the 1970s and wine growers were paid in tractors! Hugh began making wine in the 1990s when he started the Royal Tokaji Wine Company.

Portugal featured next with X by Duorum Douro, much like a Rhone wine, then the South African Newton Johnson Granum 2013, at twice the price of the Portuguese wine. Finally, the evening finished with an often overlooked drink, Madeira, the Barbeito Malvasia 2000 Cask 721.

A tradition in the wine society is to have a vote on the favourite wine of the night. If price was no object, or you were not paying yourself, the Madeira at £31 won. If buying oneself, the Portugese X by Duorum Douro at £9.99 won.