2020 - A Transformative Year for The Wine Society – A Co-operative Like No Other

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While people have had to stay at home, Wine Society membership and sales have soared, as chairman Sarah Evans explains: *"While, sadly, the Covid-19 crisis has been catastrophic for many businesses, for us it has provided the catalyst to strengthen The Society in ways that we couldn't have imagined at the start of 2020 and created a strong platform from which we can build The Society of the future for generations to come."*

Since it is a mutually-run, non-profit-maximising organisation, all profits are ploughed back into the business and members benefit from excellent value wines and low margin pricing. The increase in sales has accelerated the generation of funds for several new projects such as the new website platform, a revamped IT infrastructure and the building of a new warehouse on the Stevenage site.

The multi-award-winning Wine Society, the world's oldest co-operative wine retailer, closed its doors for two weeks on 23rd March 2020 in order to keep staff safe while new socially-distanced measures were devised and implemented. At the same time The Society took the opportunity to make operational changes so that, on re-opening, staff were able to work in a safe and secure environment where efficiency and productivity had increased significantly, enabling The Society to cope with the continuing higher demand caused by lockdown. A two-shift system was introduced, so the same number of people could work the same number of hours, but with only 50% of staff being present at one time. The new system improved logistical efficiencies by easing bottle necks, resulting in a dramatic increase in capacity.

To put into context, in the financial year 2019/20, The Society despatched £250k of wine every day on average, while today they have the capacity to process £500-600k. Christmas 2020 saw 232,000 bottles being picked and packed in 15 days, compared to 90,000 in same time period the year before. The greater efficiencies have also resulted in the majority of name-the-day orders being delivered within two days.

951,000 orders, equating to over one million cases of wine, were taken during the last financial year, around a 40% increase on 2019. Total invoiced sales were up by 28%. While people stayed at home, they signed up to The Wine Society in their droves: lapsed members started to order again, new members signed themselves up and active membership grew 17% to 171,000.

Following the immediate cessation of tastings and events that The Society hosts around the country (over 200 a year), events swiftly went on line. Over the 12 month period of almost constant lockdown, The Society put on a series of over 90 virtual events, including winemaker masterclasses, food and wine pairing and video recommendations from the buyers attended by 7,000 Society members. These events were all live, but recordings can be found by clicking on The Wine Society's YouTube and Instagram

The Wine Society is proud to report that all monies received via the government's furlough scheme have now been repaid in full to HMRC.

Chief executive, Steve Finlan, concludes: *"We are building The Wine Society of the future: The Society is a very special business where winemakers, staff and members feel very much like one team, celebrating a mutual joy of wine. This feeling has strengthened through a very difficult year and illustrates just how relevant it remains to be a mutual organisation in the 21st century."*

-ends-

Chief executive Steve Finlan is available for comment and/or interview by arrangement

A copy of The Wine Society's Annual Review can be found by clicking this link

Notes to editors

The Wine Society is the world's oldest cooperative wine retailer, a non-profit maximising organisation,

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owned by its members, which are its customers. https://www.thewinesociety.com/value-charter

Reasons to join The Wine Society (for a one-off payment of £40, £20 of which goes towards your first order)

- **Beginner to aficionado**: the range suits those who simply enjoy drinking wine, to those who wish to learn more, to those who are already highly knowledgeable.
- **It's easy:** customer service is second to none. Informative, easy-to-navigate website and knowledgeable people on the end of the phone.
- **Members before Profit:** The Wine Society is a cooperative retailer, owned by its members, existing solely to sell interesting, great quality wine to its members at a fair price. This is why it offers such amazing value.
- **There is no pressure to buy**: absolutely no minimum purchase, no cold calls, no hard sell. This is NOT what The Wine Society is about.
- **Best buyers:** The Society is widely regarded as having one of the best buying teams in the industry. All eight buyers are experts in their fields – all committed to sourcing the best possible quality/price ratio wines from every corner of the wine-making world.
- **Huge choice:** 1,400 wines from all over the world on the list at any one time, spanning a wide price spectrum, although most wines are sold in the £6.50-10 category.
- **Tastings & events:** The Wine Society (in normal, non-pandemic times) holds over 200 tastings and events a year, all over the country, for its members. Currently, there is a programme packed full of virtual tastings and talks.
- **Education/information:** For anyone interested in developing their wine knowledge, there is a wealth of information on www.thewinesociety.com.
- **Lifetime membership**: membership lasts a lifetime and may even be bequeathed.

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