

PRIORS DEAN VINEYARD

FINE ENGLISH WINE

NEWSLETTER CHRISTMAS 2004

My last newsletter was rather depressing, telling you all about the difficulties physical and financial that the vineyard was facing. Things seemed to be at a really low ebb. But following this we were overwhelmed by the many people who contacted us, offering sympathy and support, and saying how much they had enjoyed visiting the vineyard and drinking our 'excellent' wine, and how much they hoped we would keep going. This made us see everything in a new light, and suddenly everything seemed much more hopeful. So we will definitely keep going for another year. However we would be very glad of help of which more anon.

The harvest (the last bit of bad news for the moment I hope!)

We normally have two picking days, one for the early varieties, and one for the Seyval grapes, which ripen later. The trouble with this is that the winery charges a crushing fee of £400 regardless of how much is sent up to a maximum of four tonnes. However we rarely have as much as two tonnes each time. So this is a very high cost. We decided to reduce this by picking all the varieties at the same time with the idea that we might lose a few of the early ones, and the later ones might not be quite ripe, but the saving in cost would be worthwhile. This might have worked where it not for one factor – the weather! As soon as we started thinking about picking the rain set in. Sid, our tractor driver can only manage Wednesdays and Thursdays, and every week the weather on those days was terrible. At last there seemed a possibility of a fine midweek, but when we went to check on things we found there were not enough grapes left to make it viable, and we had no alternative but to cancel. **Here I have an apology to make.** I rang round a lot of potential grape pickers telling them the bad news but where I couldn't get through instantly I left it till later. Then I decided to get away from it all and headed for Pembrokeshire. I meant to leave a message on the answer machine, but in the rush to get off I forgot to do this. So my apologies to any of you who were waiting for a call.

BETTER NEWS NOW!

We have won our first Gold Medal. This was for the 2002 Medium Dry, which was entered in the Wessex Area Wine of the Year competition. Just five entries got gold medals, ours being the only Medium Dry. The judges comment was that these wines were really outstanding –“head and shoulders above the rest”. Our best result previously was a Silver medal for the 1997 vintage, so this is very satisfactory. Certainly our wines benefit from having a year or two in bottle, but another factor is that the vines themselves are maturing; their roots are now deep into the chalk, picking up the minerals, which help to produce a complex vintage.

The 1993 vintage is now ready for sale. With that beautiful summer the grapes were really ripe and needed no added sugar. In fact they could have reached a very high alcohol, but due to EC regulations – yes, again! - the maximum allowed limit is 11%. However a lower limit probably suits our wine better. Its delicate flavour, it has been compared to citrus and elderflower, might well be lost if all you notice is the after effect of fiery spirit coming down the throat.

Licence

After much form filling, and considerable expense, we now have an off-licence and can sell single bottles. This licence is applicable to the vineyard only, so please do not turn up at 5 St. Mary's Road for wine, it is illegal for us to sell less than 12 bottles from there. We can of course deliver, and this can now be in smaller quantities than the case of 12 bottles that was the minimum we were allowed to sell before. On the other hand we cannot afford to drive round delivering single bottles, so the minimum we will deliver will be 6, less than that there will be a charge. Single bottles are available from the shops;- Blackmoor Farm Shop, East Tisted Stores and Froxfield Stores

HELP IN THE VINEYARD

As I said earlier we are very grateful to all of you who offered to help. We have two ideas for this, one is that we should have a series of working parties throughout the year, these should turn out to be an enjoyable time, and a bit of a social occasion, similar to grape picking. Alternatively, or as well, people could adopt a row and work on it when they chose. Keys to the vineyard would be provided, and families would be welcome to use the picnic site. Of course all helpers will have a good quota of Priors Dean wine.

The first task is pruning, this requires a bit of training but is no more physically demanding than grape picking. We want to get on with this as a lot of the supports for the trellis need renewing and it can only be done after pruning when the weight is off the wires. For this reason I would like to arrange a working party day in about the second week in January. What I am not sure about is whether to have it on a weekday or weekend. Please would people let me know any preferences. At first it would probably be for three or so hours only in the morning, as if you get tired, or are too wet and cold, then mistakes happen. One advantage over grape picking is that we don't need fine weather; the only difficulty would be snow and ice making it difficult to reach the vineyard. This would be followed with another day in February, and a good clear up time over Easter.

For those who want to adopt a row we can meet you by arrangement, and show you the ropes, you can then come when you are able. Keeping a row going would probably take about 4 hours per month, depending on the variety and the length of the row.

So please contact me with any ideas. Incidentally Email addresses would be helpful where applicable. And many thanks in advance for your support.

CHRISTMAS SALES

Just a reminder of the excellent present our wine makes. It is especially good to give to someone you don't know very well because as we are only small producers many people will not have heard of us so won't be giving them something that they already have masses of. On the other hand you can be sure it is a quality product.

In view of its exalted status, the 2002 Medium Dry will now retail at £6.00 per bottle, £72.00 per case of 12, and the 2003 will be the same. The 2001 Dry will remain at £5.50 per bottle, £63.00 per case. As yet the 2003 will only be available from us and not from the shops.

We have free delivery locally (within about 20 miles) of 6 bottles or more, and can deliver smaller quantities locally for a small charge. For anything further afield we can arrange carriage at cost. Please contact me for details.

The Pembrokeshire Cottage

Several of you have already stayed there and have given us good reports. We have made a few improvements including a much better shower and there is now patio furniture and a barbecue. We go down about once a month, but for most of the winter season it is empty, which is a pity, as the country is beautiful and the walks and beaches devoid of people. The cottage is very suitable for off-season lets as it has every mod. con. and excellent heating. It seems a pity it should not be used, so we are offering people we know the chance to rent it from now until May (excluding Bank holidays) for a reduced rate of £100 per week, everything included except linen. Please phone for details.

A Morley thriller!

Jim has just published his first novel, 'The Nemesis File' by James Morley. This is an exciting story with a sailing background, and a lot of the settings are local, including some close to the vineyard. Just the thing for a holiday read. It is available from the One Tree Bookshop in Petersfield or direct from Jim. Tel. 01420 538688.

So we start a new year with a lot more hope and expectation than last year thanks to all the good wishes and support we have had. Many thanks and a merry Christmas to all

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