

PRIORS DEAN VINEYARD

FINE ENGLISH WINE

www.priorsdeanvineyard.co.uk

Information and sales.

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NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2010

I know people have been asking about a newsletter, but really there has been nothing to report. Usually at this time I can tell you about medals we have won, but this year we did not enter anything. The National competition is in June and we only got the 2009 wine back a week or so before the entry date. Wine is never at its best just after bottling so it is best to leave it a while before tasting, and we have also found that it improves with ageing so next year should be a better bet. The Wessex area competition is in November so we will see how it does then.

The Crop – bad news!

This year started well with a bright and breezy spring, just what the vines like at flowering. In consequence we had a potentially large crop. Then things started to go downhill, the electrics went on our tractor and took longer to mend than expected. Our dear vintage tractor is all of 50 years old, and parts are difficult to come by. Then the sprayer started to give trouble, and finally there was a spell of hot humid weather. The result was that powdery mildew set in. This is always a problem for English vineyards, and the sprays we use, which are basically non-toxic, are only preventative. Once the mildew has taken hold it is almost impossible to eradicate. The position at the moment is that the early varieties, Madeleine Angevine and Bacchus, have lost about two thirds of the crop, and it is not cost effective to pick them. Every load we send costs £400 in crushing fee, and also there is the cost of van hire and wages.

The third variety, the Seyvals, are resistant to mildew and look fine, but the trouble with them is that this year they are reluctant to ripen. There just has not been enough sun. When I tested them last week the natural sugar level was very low. It is possible to increase the alcohol in wine by adding sugar but if a lot is needed the result tends to be a bland flavourless drink. Our aim has always been to produce high quality wine so we don't want anything sub-standard. However all is not yet lost, the sun may yet return and we could have an Indian summer. I shall be doing another test about 20th October and assess the matter then.

I was very disheartened with this crop failure as there had been so many reports of record yields. However I have now found out that many vineyards have had similar troubles, including Stanlake Park where our wine is made. Luckily we had a good crop last year so we still have adequate stocks.

Grape picking

As you see from the above paragraph we shall only be having one picking this year and that is a bit doubtful. If we do go ahead it will probably be the last week in October. If so I will be in touch with all who have picked recently or who have expressed an interest. If you don't hear from me then it is not on. Let's hope for better luck next year.

Tax

Once again the duty on wine went up at the budget. Now we pay £1.69 per bottle to the Government. Tim Aitkin writing in The Times in April made the point that this is the equivalent of buying 12 bottles of wine, and delivering 6 bottles from this directly to the Chancellor. Then we have to pay for winemaking, wages, machinery repairs, insurance and many other sundry expenses most of which have a VAT element. There seems to be a feeling in the Government that charging high taxes on alcohol will stop teenage binge drinking but how many of them drink wine? For a small industry, subject to the British weather, this tax increase seems unduly harsh.

The Vineyard

People have commented favourably on the new area above the chalet. It has been cleared, grass sown, and we hope to have a picnic area there next year, with its excellent views. The extension of this, fenced off to keep the deer out, will become a wildflower area. There are already many primroses there in spring.

Volunteers

Once again we have had excellent help from our team of volunteers. We have work parties during the year mostly to do the pruning, winter and summer. These are just on Sunday mornings and are quite a social occasion. Even if we don't have a harvest this year the work is very important. In the vineyard you are always looking to the future, and the thinning out in the summer lets the sun in to form the buds for the following year. Many thanks to you all.

Sales

We have some new local stockists this year, notably Applegarth at Grayshott, and Liss Forest Post Office Stores. Also Froxfield Stores now has our wine again.

The current wines on sale are the 2006 Medium Dry, and the 2007 Classic Dry which will be succeeded by the 2008 Classic Dry which is very similar. At the Wessex Area Competition last November the judges' verdict was 'aromatic, well-balanced, grassy, fragrant nose, clean citrus fruit.'

We had an excellent day at Alresford show, and will be at Blackmoor Apple Day, this Sunday, October 10th. Come and see us.

Price from the vineyard. Both wines £8.00 per bottle £90 per case of 12 bottles

Delivery is free locally (within about 20 miles) of 6 bottles or more, and we 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 wine is available in the shops, but please note the price is not necessarily the same as ours. Also some have very limited stocks so best to check before making a special journey.

Applegarth Farm Shop, Grayshott
Blackmoor Farm Shop (Apple Shop)
Durleighmarsh Farm Shop
East Tisted Post Office Stores

Froxfield Stores
The Handy Store, Medstead
Hindhead Post Office Stores
Liss Forest Post Office Stores
Selborne Post Office Stores

Not a very cheerful newsletter this time, but the sun is now shining so all may yet be well!

Best wishes to you all

Pam and Jim