

PRIORS DEAN VINEYARD

FINE ENGLISH WINE

www.priorsdeanvineyard.co.uk

Information and sales.

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The year in the vineyard

This started with the pruning as usual, and we had so many, and such good, helpers that we got it done in good time. This meant that we could renew the broken trellis poles some of which have been there almost since we started, at least twenty years. We have been patching them up for some while as replacing them is expensive but now nearly all the posts and wires are capable of holding a heavy crop. If there is a breakage while the grapes are ripening and the vines go on the ground this provides a field day for badgers who are very partial to grapes.

The first harvest went pretty well, there is always a problem about the actual date, should we leave the grapes a bit longer so they get more sugar, or if we do will the mould kick in. This year we got it pretty right, there was some mildew, but most were in good condition. The result was 1403 kg of grapes which should give us a good few bottles. The second picking was more doubtful, the Seyval grapes are usually easier to pick and require fewer people. But in 2013 I underestimated the quantity and we were harvesting them into the afternoon. This year there were not so many but I panicked a bit and signed up too many people, so the total harvest only took about an hour, and I never had time to get lunch ready. For those who haven't been, we finish the picking with a picnic lunch which is a nice cheerful occasion with everyone satisfied after the morning's work and relaxing in the sunshine. This year it was all very disorganised for which I apologise. However the result was 564 kg which will be blended with the first picking to make a medium dry wine, similar to the 2011 vintage which was so popular.

The wine

Because we had such a big crop of Seyval in 2013 it was decided that this should be made into sparkling wine. Although not a traditional Champagne grape, Seyval is capable of producing excellent prize winning wine but we never had enough before to make it worthwhile. The winemaking is much more complicated with two fermentations, and other complicated procedures. So ours will not be ready until May at the earliest. Although it is made in the same way as Champagne we cannot put this on the label as the French object!

Our winemaker

Our wine is now made at Hattingley Valley Vineyard near Medstead. Emma Rice, the winemaker there has had fantastic success over the year, winning competitions against all comers including the French. She was voted 'Winemaker of the Year' for 2013. We feel our sparkling wine is in very good hands; certainly the still wines she has made for us have been excellent.

Vineyard dogs

I mentioned in a previous newsletter that we now had Vineyard Collie number 4 and people enquired about him and the previous holders of the position. First was Rough Collie Sandy, passed on to me by someone who couldn't keep him. He came to work with me and as Neil and I spent our holidays hill walking he did his Munros and Wainwrights with us. When we started the vineyard he seemed quite content to follow us round, occasionally making off with the balls of string. He was assisted by Patch, the family Springer spaniel, a great digger, who was responsible for most of the holes under the vines.

When Sandy died I got Buster who had been found dumped in London, he was hyperactive with a hatred of anything that moved particularly horses. His self-appointed vineyard task was to wait by the gate and run up and down barking savagely if a horse or a motor bike came down the lane. Rough Collie number 3 was Shane who also came from via a rescue organization. His previous owner had just died and Shane had obviously been very spoilt. He was very overweight, about twice what he should have been, but a strict diet and activity soon got him to a reasonable shape. He was quite happy to come to the vineyard but had a tendency to be suspicious of strangers and give them a nip. Work party volunteers had to be told not to stroke him.

Now I have Flint. When Shane died I cast about for another middle-aged Rough Collie but none were available. Lassie collies are not so popular now so few are needing new homes. I could have had a puppy, but as all our others had lived till 15 I thought that by then I might be too old to cope and the dog would have to be found a new home. So I trawled the internet and found Flint, Border Collie cross, at Dogs Trust Newbury. He was about the right age. but when I went to see him, the staff told me in one previous home he had fought the other resident dog, and in the next home he had bitten the owner's mother. He seemed very friendly and with a horribly empty house without a dog I decided to give him a trial. In fact he has been very good, not aggressive to other dogs and never tried to bite us. He has been ill treated in the past as certain movements make him cower and cringe, which may account for his bad press. He has been very good in the vineyard, staying near me most of the time. He particularly liked the grape picking as people made a fuss of him, and he was able to help them with their lunch. With a rescue dog you never know what you are going to get but this time I have been very lucky.

Work parties

We have started to think about the winter pruning and would be very grateful for volunteers. In fact we cannot manage without you. The work parties are just for the morning from approx. 9.30 to lunch time with a coffee break. No money is payable but Priors Dean wine is available.

Provisional dates for January are **Sunday 4th** and **Sunday 18th**. Weather permitting. Anyone is welcome, get in touch with me if you want more information.

Wine for sale – the ideal Christmas gift.

Usually we have two vintages for sale but we are still suffering the effects of two bad years, and this year there is just the 2013 Classic Dry. This is the latest example of our dry wine which we have now been producing for over 20 years. It is made from blending together our three varieties, but as some do better some years than others each vintage is slightly different but always made to the same style. The 2013 is largely from the Madeleine Angevine and Bacchus Grapes and is dry, fresh and fruity. It is excellent as an aperitif and with fish. It makes a very welcome present.

. Price from us £8.50 per bottle, £100 .00 per case of 12 bottles. Local delivery free.

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A Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all
Pam and Jim