

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2022

The Year in the Vineyard

We were still in lockdown of course but not with the restrictions of 2021. Our volunteers were able to come without fear of being turned back by the police, in fact with all the travel restrictions people were very happy to have an objective of working in the vineyard.

As it happened it was my 90th birthday in June, Stephen had arranged a surprise party, and I was transported to the vineyard. To my astonishment all the vineyard supporters were there, and there was a buffet and of course Priors Dean wine. It was a lovely sunny day, and I was very touched to be sitting there, looking at the view, with a plateful of food, and all these lovely people.

The crop. The spring started alright, with good weather leading to a satisfactory leaf growth. However the weather changed to hot and humid with very little wind, this is just the condition the powdery mildew likes. Our early varieties have always been susceptible to this and sure enough the leaves soon started to go brown. The other variety Seyval Blanc is resistant and looked like producing a worthwhile crop. However we had a long spell of very dry weather followed by rain and the grapes took up the water suddenly which made them split. We could have had a small crop, but the winery has a job with small quantities and as we had plenty of stock due to the pandemic we decided to cancel.

This year is again doubtful. When we first started the spray could be done by almost anyone. Over the years increasing bureaucracy has meant a licence is needed both to operate the tractor and to get the appropriate chemicals. My brother Jim had the licence but of course it has died with him, and to get a new one involves several days of attending courses. There has been a campaign to reduce the use of chemicals anyway so this year we are experimenting with combating the mildew by thinning the vines drastically all season so the air can get through. Sprays have never been 100% anyway. Many thanks to our volunteers for this and all the hard work in the past.

Shows

If all continues to do well and lockdown has finally left us the usual markets are up and running.

The first is the Petersfield Spring Festival June 2nd and 3rd. We have a gazebo in the High Street and previously have had very good sales. We are looking for helpers so if you are available please let me know. Even a couple of hours would be a very great help.

We are also provisionally booked for the South Downs show, 13th and 14th August; the Petersfield Summer Festival, 28th and 29th August, and as usual Alresford Show 3rd September.

We still need someone for sales; this involves going round local shops and pubs and of course helping at shows. Times very flexible, probably just a morning every so often. as it suits. Payment and expenses payable.

Work Parties

As already mentioned the vineyard could not keep going without the volunteers to do the pruning, summer and winter. Luckily all who come seem to enjoy themselves and it is certainly a lovely place to work. We start about 9.30 and finish lunch time with a break for coffee and chat. All are welcome provided you can manage the muddy walk down, and back! And the vines are on a steep hill of course. It is a help if you let me know in advance but you can just turn up. Bring secateurs if possible. These dates may change if bad weather is forecast. No money is involved, but free bottles of Priors Dean wine are available, and you can have use of the vineyard whenever you want, say for family picnics or barbecues. If you have not been before training will be given, please contact me for directions and parking.

The Future

I have got to accept I can no longer manage the vineyard. Old age and other infirmities have finally caught up with me, I can just about get to the vines but the hill is too steep for me to work. I spent most of the winter suffering from chest infections and although I am much better now I get very tired and everything becomes a struggle which includes decision making. Stephen has stepped in to a large extent, but his hip is now very bad and if he ever does get to the top of the waiting list will take some time to recover.

So what are the options?

The logical thing for me to do is sell up completely, but this is very difficult. Neil, my husband, and I spent so much time and effort establishing the vineyard, and spent many happy hours working there. Neil was devoted to it and his ashes are scattered there. We have four dogs buried there who all 'helped' in the vineyard in their own way. . And sentimentally it is the last remaining part of my family home. Also our volunteers and helpers re such nice people, we have a really good community. However it needs someone to do the overall management including the spraying. And there are other matters to consider like replacing vines and re-training.

If I don't sell I could consider appointing a manager, which would mean we could probably carry on as before, but the vineyard has never been particularly profitable and would struggle to afford a salary.

Finally I could just leave everything to grow wild and just come from time to time to sit and admire the view!

The Wine

We are just starting to promote the 2017 Flint Hill Sunset. This is a sparkling wine, made in the same way as Champagne, but a lighter style designed for easy drinking. It got a silver award in the National competition in 2020 and this autumn silver in the Wessex area competition. We still have good stock of the Seyval Blanc sparkling and the 2020 Summer Hills still. Although we lost sales because of the pandemic our wines greatly benefit from aging, losing a lot of the acidity,

PRICES FROM US (For other outlets see web site www.priordeanvineyard.co.uk)

Seyval Blanc Sparkling Wine 2013 1 bottle £20.00 Case of 12 bottles £228.00

Bronze award WineGB Wine of the Year Competition.

Summer Hills Dry White Wine 2018 1 bottle £10.00 Case of 12 bottles £110.00

Silver award Wine GB Wine of the Year Competition 2019

Flint Hill Sunset Sparkling Wine 2017 1 bottle £15.00 Case of 12 bottles £174.00

Silver award Wine GB Wine of the Year Competition 2020

Mixed cases available. Discount for larger quantities

Very best wishes to everyone for a fruitful 2022

Pam