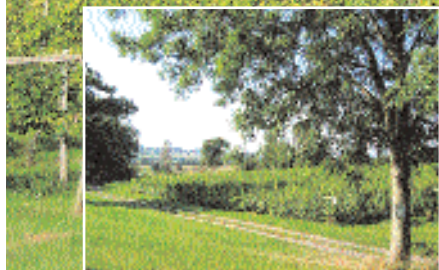


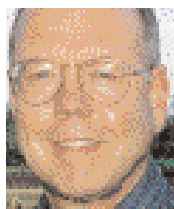
# Kent *United Kingdom*



IT IS THE MIDDLE of winter—and here I am, standing in a vineyard with a few local vineyard managers, discussing the merits of various trellising systems. Not an unusual occupation you might say. Well, if I add that the vineyard is in Kent, England, you might then be surprised. Although the sun is shining, it is 2°C and my fingers are so numb that I can only write with difficulty. Do they grow grapes and make wine in England, you ask? Yes, there are now nearly 400 vineyards in England and Wales and more than two million bottles of wine were produced in 2001.

The Romans introduced viticulture to England in the 3rd century after Emperor Probus relaxed an earlier edict that prohibited the planting of vineyards in most of the Roman colonies. The Anglo-Saxon monks were important in the next phase of growth but there must have been other vineyards as well: for example, the *Domesday Book* (1084) recorded 38 vineyards, just 12 of which were monastic. The wine industry reached a peak in the late 11th and early 12th centuries: this coincided with a relatively warm period in north-west Europe. Vineyards were particularly concentrated in the Severn Valley in the west (modern-day Gloucestershire and Worcestershire). From the beginning of the 14th century, the industry declined due to a combination of factors including climatic change, the dissolution of the monasteries and England's acquisition of Bordeaux. By the 16th century, the demise was complete. The modern revival took place after the Second World War. The first vineyard since the Middle Ages was planted at Hambledon in Hampshire in the early 1950s.

Today vineyards are found in most counties of England and in a few in Wales. The largest areas are found in the south-east: Sussex, Kent and Surrey account for almost half of the total area of the 800 or so hectares. The remainder stretch across the south to the West Country, along the Thames and Severn Valleys, and in East Anglia. The most northern vineyard is said to be near Durham at latitude 55°N. The largest six vineyards make up nearly 50% of total area: the size of the largest (106 ha) near Dorking in Surrey



**Peter Dry**  
*Vineyards of the World*

is exceptional in an industry where the average vineyard is less than 2.5 ha, and half of all vineyards have less than 1 ha.

The main factor limiting viticulture in England is the climate. Here the grapevine is at the very limit of its range. The growing season is cool and cloudy and all except early maturing varieties struggle to ripen. Even when they do the sugar concentration is relatively low and chaptalisation is usually essential. Other regions with similar growing season effective heat accumulation and sunshine hours are near Orleans (eastern Loire, France) and Freiburg (southern Baden, Germany)<sup>1</sup>—however, unlike their continental counterparts, the English sites rarely exceed mid 20°Cs in summer. Although cool, at least the climate is maritime. As a result, there is an absence of the winter freeze problem that is a cause of vine death in other cool climates at high latitudes. However, spring frost is a major problem. The most important site selection criteria are: altitude less than 100 m, frost avoidance, shelter from wind, less than 800 mm annual rainfall, southerly aspect and well-drained soil. Fortunately for English viticulture, the modern resurgence has coincided with a period when global air temperatures have been relatively high. Without this favourable influence it would have been impossible to successfully ripen Chardonnay or Pinot Noir for table wine. If we were to use climatic data that were representative of the 20th century prior to the 1970s, we would predict that varieties such as Muller-Thurgau and Bacchus would not be mature, on average, until 20 October or later.<sup>1</sup> The reality is that these varieties have been picked in early to mid October since the early 1990s.

<sup>1</sup> Gladstones, J.S. (1992) *Viticulture and Environment*. Winetitles

Yields are low: for example, the average yield for all English vineyards in 1997 (a 'bad' year) and 2001 (a 'good' year) was 1.1 and 2.8 t/ha respectively. Budburst occurs in mid April, flowering in early June and harvest from the end of September until November for dry table wines and sparkling wines. There is little variation in harvest date from season to season. Due to the presence of phylloxera, rootstocks such as SO4 and 5BB are essential. The main factors limiting yield are poor fruitset (a consequence of low temperatures) and fruit loss due to rain damage, bunch rot, birds and insect pests.

In its modern form, the wine industry has been based on Muller-Thurgau, Madeleine Angevine, Reichensteiner and Seyval Blanc. Although these are all early ripening with reliable yield, the wines are neither distinctive nor exciting. However, newer varieties are producing interesting wines at price points that are more likely to entice the consumer away from imports. For example, there is excellent Bacchus that could be easily mistaken for a good Sancerre or a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.

Ninety per cent of production is white wine. The main variety, Muller-Thurgau, has declined in importance in recent years. Likewise for Seyval Blanc, an early-ripening French hybrid with good yield and disease resistance. Next in order of importance are: Reichensteiner, which ripens in early October and produces wines of the Muller-Thurgau



Peter Dry, second from left, is pictured with local viticulturists and winemakers in the Tenterden vineyard in south Kent.

type; Bacchus; and Madeleine Angevine, a variety bred in Germany but only grown in the UK, which ripens in late September. Among the remaining white varieties are the aromatic Huxelrebe, Ortega and Schoenburger. The climate is not particularly suited to red table wine and there are relatively few varieties including Dornfelder and Rondo which are used for this purpose. Rondo is a relatively new variety, a hybrid of *Vitis vinifera* and *Vitis amurensis* with red juice. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir rarely ripen sufficiently for table wine and are normally used for sparkling wine. Production of this style continues to increase and there are now some excellent examples available in the marketplace.

The Tenterden vineyard and winery of New Wave Wines is located in south Kent, 75 km south-east of London and 20 km from the coast. At 27 ha, it is the fourth-largest vineyard in the country. The gently undulating land is just 15 m above sea level. The row  $\times$  vine spacing is 2.0m  $\times$  1.2m. Both spur and cane pruning are employed, particularly the former. Much of the vineyard has a VSP trellis with a single fruiting wire at 0.8 m. As is common in England, shoot positioning is done mainly by hand tucking, that is, without the use of movable foliage wires. They also have a high wide tee trellis (curiously this is known as 'Geneva Double Curtain' in England but this nomenclature is inappropriate because there is an absence of the downward shoot positioning that is an essential component of a GDC). The varieties grown here are typical of the English vineyard. For example, Bacchus is harvested from early October (16.5 to 17.5°Brix, 11 g/L titratable acidity) and Pinot Noir at the end of October (17 to 20°Brix, 12-13 g/L titratable acidity). For some varieties, 7 to 10 t/ha is possible but 5 t/ha is a more realistic target on average.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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