

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'English Wine Producers' Presented by Roger Marchbank

24 August 2011

Roger brought along a selection of wines from some of the smaller English vineyards to showcase what's happening in English wine beyond the more familiar names

Welcome aperitif

Tesco 'Simply Riesling', Rheinhessen (non vintage) 10.5%
Sweetish palate but nice acidity balance. Simple, clean and refreshing.

The wines

Whites

a'Beckett's Vineyard Sparkling 2006 12% £16.50

Auxerrois/Seyval Blanc blend from a Devizes vineyard. Bright yellow-gold, some age showing. Decent mousse, development on the nose. Palate has fair body but development here more pronounced. Might go well with food. Very fizzy, a slightly bitter finish perhaps? I wondered if this was just a tad past its absolute peak? Still a nice glass of fizz, fruit just a little subdued. These are non-classic grape varieties for sparkling wine, whereas the 'Champagne' grapes Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay are used by the bigger producers Nyetimber and Ridgeview.

Beaulieu White 2009 11.5% £9.50

Bacchus/Reichensteiner/Muller Thurgau/Huxelrebe blend. Vines from Lord Montagu's estate, some 40+ years old. This is the wine Roger himself is involved in producing. Lovely vibrant nose here, plenty of lively fruit - no doubt benefitting from the fabulous 2009 vintage. Visible legs on the glass. Very slightly spritzy, well judged acidity balanced with reasonable weight of fruit. Aromatic, light palate with some nice zip, finish perhaps just a little thinner than the initial attack might suggest. Has been sold to restaurants, including Hakkasan.

Leventhorpe Vineyard – Hill Field 2009 11.5% £8.00

Madeleine Angevine/Seyval blend from George Bowden's vineyard near Leeds, opposite the rhubarb sheds!. Very lightly oaked, 'sur lie' style with battonage (stirring of the yeasts to increase complexity). Nice yeasty nose, tiny bit of oak apparent, and altogether a fuller palate here, very nicely balanced. Ripe fruit (2009 again) with some definite hints of pineapple on the finish. A much less obviously fruity nose than the previous wine, but a very classy palate indeed and a very tasty wine. This looks exceptionally good value at £8 – astonishingly the cheapest of tonight's wines. Wine of the evening for me without a doubt.

Quoins Organic Vineyard – Orion 2008 11% £8.50

From Alan Chubb's vineyard near Bradford-on-Avon. Soil Association certified organic vines. Unfortunately here we got our first indication of the problems that small-scale winemakers in this climate with limited resources at their disposal have to deal with – bottle variation. My notes say: Bottle 1 – reasonable clear, possibly some slight cloudiness (shadiness at bottom of bottle) Bottle 2 – prematurely aged.

Given the variation between the two it was difficult to make a good assessment of the wine, but it did demonstrate the consistency issues that smaller English producers can face.

Northbrook Springs 1996

11.5% £10.00

Wickham Vineyard, Bacchus/Reichensteiner blend with significant bottle age (15 years!) which might be considered risky even for a white Burgundy... Again my notes tackle each bottle separately due to the considerable difference between the two – maybe less surprising here due to the age of the wine. Bottle 1 – very mature nose, hints of honey and orange peel. Deep gold, oxidised, gave the impression of being quite a bit past its best.

Bottle 2 – much fresher, colour much paler with even some greenish hints remaining, but with a slightly odd nose (sulphur?)

So again we could not form a very clear picture of this wine's character or genuine ageing potential due to bottle variation. Having said that, each bottle had its supporters.

Rose

a'Beckett's Rose 2010

11% £9.00

Pinot Noir/Reichensteiner blend. Made by the saignee method (free run juice from minimal contact with skins). My notes say 'thankfully two similar bottles!' Good colour, good strawberry nose (although Roger thought not really comparable to the 2009's nose), a little too much initial spritz on the tongue for my taste, but an interesting full-bodied dry rose of the kind that might be quite well in tune with modern rose tastes. Fresh, with a decent mid-palate and length. Pinot Noir pedigree perhaps showing here?

Reds

Welcombe Hills – Pinot Noir 'precoce' 2009

11.5% £10.00

Early-ripening clone of Pinot Noir from Snitterfield vineyard near Stratford upon Avon. ('Precoce' indicating early or 'precocious' - the opposite of Spatburgunder which is late-ripening Pinot Noir.) Bottled by Three Choirs but the attractive modern style label is the vineyard's own (some attention to marketing here!) Pleasant simple version of Pinot Noir, maybe a bit more reminiscent of Gamay as there's not much obvious tannic structure - Beaujolais rather than Burgundy perhaps.

Setley Ridge Vineyard – Oaked Red 2009? (no vintage on label)

12% £10.00

Triomphe d'Alsace/Rondo blend - some of the grapes bought in from Bishops Waltham vineyard. Fresh nose, purple rim, lively fruit, and a rounded palate. Roger described this as a food wine and good with cheeses. My note says 'good example of the sort of red that English wine can produce with decent weather and careful winemaking'.

Sadly, bottle consistency issues affected our assessment of the Quoins and Northbrook Springs wines – perhaps not too surprising since consistency must be a major issue when resources are limited. English wine isn't cheap - and never will be due to the scale of production - but maybe the recent successes of bigger names like Nyetimber, Ridgeview and Camel Vineyards and growing interest from outlets such as Waitrose will eventually have a trickle-down effect on the consistency of other English wines. A very interesting showcase of lesser-known producers – and one gem hiding among the rhubarb sheds of Leeds!