

WINE IN ENGLAND: A CONCISE SURVEY

*from the Roman occupation to the
First World War*



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PREFACE

A personal view

My interest in English wine arises, at least partly, from a document which had been passed down through our family. This, the *Catalogue of the Household Furniture, Plate, China, Glass, Linen, Wines, Books, and Other Effects of John Walter, Esquire, Deceased* was compiled in August 1826 by Finnis & Ronalds, auctioneers of the New Romney estate of my great-great-great-great-great uncle.

John Walter, baptised on 22nd March 1745, had been a gentleman grazier on Romney Marsh. His wife Eleanor had died in 1818, and their daughter Eleanor had lived only for a few days in the summer of 1786; when John was buried on 6th July 1826, therefore, he had no heirs. But he did leave a detailed will, written in 1822 with a codicil of 1825, which contributes greatly to our knowledge of his relationship with his siblings and their families.

The auction catalogue is a fascinating read. The house was large, and had outbuildings which included a well-equipped brewhouse: clearly, John had made his own ale. In the house-cellar was a surprising variety of wine. There were six bottles ‘containing Madeira, Champaign [sic], Lisbon, claret, mountain, and mead’; seventeen bottles of ‘Cape’; three bottles of Calcavella [a sweet Portuguese wine]; nine bottles of sherry; and no fewer than 68 bottles of port.

The cellar reflected the English wine trade of the immediate post-Napoleonic period—reliant almost entirely on imports, and with very little enthusiasm for anything else. A swingeing tax imposed in 1693 by William III still restricted the flow of wines from France, but there was wine to be had from the Iberian peninsula, Italy, Germany and even Cape Colony, where viticulture had been established in the middle of the seventeenth century by the Dutch.

Wine was widely made from fruit such as elderberries and blackberries, but very little truly English viticulture survived in 1826. Many of the vineyards which had once prospered in Kent had been lost: some unable to compete with better-quality imports from Bordeaux in mediaeval times, some given over to

cherries and apples (which promised better and more reliable crops), some destroyed when Henry VIII seized the assets of the monasteries in the 1530s, and others compromised by the cold winters of the seventeenth century.

None of this would have troubled John Walter of Romney Marsh as he enjoyed the pleasures of his well-stocked cellar (and, indeed, an extensive library), but the catalogue of his worldly goods provides an indispensable snapshot of his life even though *Wine in England* is little more than a two-thousand year dash through history intended to stimulate interest and gather new information.

The English climate has always been able to support viticulture, but only if the grape varieties and the ways in which they were husbanded were carefully chosen. Writing in the *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* in 1899/1900, H.M. Tod proposed in 'Vines in the Open Air' that only too little skill and attention divided English failure and French success, and that the northern limit for the exploitation of wine-grapes, then generally accepted as latitude 51° N, could be extended to 53° if care was taken.

It is still often claimed that 52°N marks the northern limit of viable viticulture, defined by a line drawn in England and Wales through Fishguard, Tewkesbury, Milton Keynes and Ipswich. Even though ancient commentators sometimes proposed Paris (latitude: 48° 51' N) as the northern limit, the Roman vineyard at Wollaston is sited about 52°N and mediaeval monks were able to grow vines successfully as far north as Askham in Cumbria (latitude: 54° 33').

Of course, any attempt to use latitude as the one-and-only arbiter is doomed to fail: 52°N also passes between Calgary and Edmonton in Alberta...each of which has recorded temperatures below -45°C. There is much more to be considered.

John Walter, Portslade, Sussex, 2017

PART ONE

Romans and Monks

The popular view that the story of English Wine began only when Julius Caesar visited Britain in 55 BCE, or when the the Romans invaded in 43 CE, is misleading: grape seeds from the tenth millennium BCE have been found in archaeological sites on the border between France and Switzerland, and the origins of wine actually stretch back into antiquity—perhaps to the Near East in the sixth millennium BCE.

The knowledge of winemaking techniques was inherited from the Chaldeans and the Babylonians by Egyptians, Etruscans, Greeks and Carthaginians, who in turn gave their secrets—often forcibly—to the Romans. One of the primary sources of viticultural learning was the Greek colony of Marsillia (now Marseille), founded in about 600 BCE and independent until ensnared by the Roman Empire in 49 BCE. And the works of the agriculturalist Mago, subsequently translated into Greek and Latin, were deliberately saved from the sacking of Carthage by the Romans in 146 BCE.

The Romans were no great theoreticians, but they had the ability to exploit the ideas of others to stupendous effect. In this way they laid the foundations of commercialised winemaking throughout Europe. Growing vines and making wines came to be an essential part of Roman culture.

The wild vine, *Vitis vinifera silvestris*, climbed trees so that the grapes hung down from the branches. This method was readily adaptable to virtually any vertical support, and pictorial reminders of this can still be seen on ancient buildings in Italy. Until comparatively recently, some of the remotest parts of Italy still clung to a form of woodland cultivation, though variations in the amount of light penetrating the canopy meant that grapes of consistent quality could not be guaranteed. In addition, the great height of many vines, if allowed to grow unchecked, made harvesting difficult.

The Romans rapidly improved cultivation techniques, however, and were making wine in huge quantities by about 250 BCE. The immense size of the Empire encompassed a range of vines and *terroir*, giving regional variations not

unlike those of today. Output clearly ranged from good quality to the poorest, weakest slaves' drink known as *vappa* (a term also applied to something or someone of no use whatsoever).

But even the best Roman wine would now probably be judged inferior. It could take twenty years or more to mature; was commonly adulterated with herbs, spices, honey, flower petals, vinegar and similar additives to mask excessive sweetness or astringency; and was customarily greatly diluted before drinking. In addition, *mustum* could be reduced by boiling in lead or lead-lined vats...and had become poisonous.

Yet many of the production techniques would not be unfamiliar today, and the exploitation of many classic grapes (Pinot, for example) almost certainly has origins in antiquity. But how did the wine get to the British Isles? A claim has been made for the Phoenicians, great sea traders who migrated to Carthage after their original kingdom in the eastern Mediterranean had been overrun by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE. Carthage remained their base until destroyed by the Romans in 146 BCE, at the end of the Punic wars.

It seems possible that wine could have been carried out through the Pillars of Hercules, then northward, hugging the Iberian coast, across the Bay of Biscay and up the English channel to landfall. The wine would have been Greek, generally regarded as the best available at that time, but the case—plausible though it seems—has never been proven.

It is more likely that Roman wine simply made the overland journey from southern France, by way of the Rhone–Saône corridor, then down the Seine and across the English Channel. This involved only a short sea-journey, which the Romans would have preferred. They had no particular maritime traditions, and it is recorded that soldiers terrified by the prospect of sailing 'off the map' threatened to mutiny when the sea-borne invasion of Britain was finally (and successfully) attempted in CE 43.

There is evidence to show that Roman wine had made the short trip across the English Channel as early as the second century BCE, supplied to the Belgae, a tribe which had colonised parts of Hampshire and Wiltshire, a hundred years before Julius Caesar first saw our shores. The populist view that Caesar 'came, saw and conquered' is misleading; the landing in 55 BCE did little more than establish a toe-hold in southern England, and the larger invasion of 54, though gaining much more territory and allowing trading links to be forged with local chieftains, was quickly withdrawn to suppress a rebellion in Gaul. After a gap of ninety years, the Romans took time to conquer Britain (CE 43–84).

So though there is certainty of consumption, the widespread existence of vineyards in Roman Britain is less clear. The association of vines with large

villas may reflect nothing but a desire to feel at home: to duplicate decoration which would have been commonplace back in Rome. The use of underfloor heating or *hypocaust* in some Roman villas may have made the task of growing vines much easier. However, references to ‘vineyards’ planted by the owners of villas are now widely considered to be unreliable; vines were not husbanded in sufficient numbers to encourage large-scale production of wine.

To date, only a single Roman-era site capable of growing grapes on a commercial scale has been conclusively identified in Britain. Here, near Wollaston in Northamptonshire, the vines were probably supported by a framework attached to poles, 1.5 metres apart, placed in narrow trenches set at five-metre intervals.

A treatise dating from the first century CE names this method as *pastinatio*, but the Latin term refers specifically to a method of preparing ground by digging the soil and trenching, or, alternatively, to the soil so prepared. There is no mention of poles; however, the tree-climbing origins of *Vitis vinifera* make the use of support-poles almost inevitable. One Roman account tells of the use of chestnut stakes placed similarly to those at Wollaston.

The eruption of Vesuvius in CE 79 destroyed not only Pompeii, a leading wine-exporting port, but also the vine-growing hinterland. Shortages of wine, a Roman staple, were answered by turning fields of grain to grapes: so many, indeed, that bread ran short. To prevent prices of grain rising too far, to protect Roman wine-makers from competition and maintain their profits, Emperor Domitian issued an edict in CE 92 to ensure first that no new vines should be planted north of the Alps and, secondly, that vines in Gaul and Iberia should be destroyed.

It is doubtful if all the offending sites were destroyed, but viticulture in Gaul and Iberia is known to have been seriously disrupted, and it seems unlikely that any high-status Roman living in Britain would have risked the wrath of the imperial authorities by constructing a large vineyard. So it seems more likely that Wollaston dates after CE 212, when advantages confined to the citizens of Rome were extended to freedmen throughout the Roman Empire; or after Domitian’s edict was rescinded *c.* CE 278 by Probus, shortly after the collapse of the Roman administration in Gaul. The size and sophistication of its *pastinatio* suggests that the Wollaston site dates more probably from CE 300 than CE 45, and it may be more than coincidental that William Camden (1551–1623), the noted Elizabethan historian-antiquary and author of *Britannia*, attributed the introduction of vines to Probus...and the Rev. Dr Samuel Pegge (1704–96), writing in *Archaeologica*, the journal of the Society of Antiquarians, dated the same to 280.

The Romans took vines to all newly-conquered territory and there is no reason to suppose that success in Britain entirely eluded them. According to ‘Flavius Vospicus’ (a pseudonym?), Marcus Aurelius Probus employed soldiers to plant vines in Gaul, Pannonia and elsewhere. It is by no means certain if this specifically included Britannia, but English vineyards clearly did exist.

It has even been suggested that, as the Romans customarily planted vineyards to supply garrison towns, the area around what is now Colchester (Camulodunum, or *Colonia Victricensis* to the Romans) could harbour appropriate remains. However, though a legionary fortress was built as early as CE 44, the town—then the provincial capital of Britannia—was razed during the revolt of Boudicca and the Iceni in CE 61. Though largely rebuilt by CE 65, Colchester had lost its pre-eminence to Londonium; and it not only seems unlikely that any vineyards were planted there prior to CE60, but also that, if they had existed, the enterprise was successful.

In March 2014, it was announced that another ‘vineyard’ had been found on the outskirts of Cambridge, where stripes were considered to show the position of trenches. The absence of pole-sockets or holes, however, may suggest that this site was more likely to have grown asparagus than grapes. Analysis of pollen found on the site has yet to produce evidence.

There is still no evidence to show that Wollaston or any other vineyard planted in Britannia was productive. Modern research has suggested that the ‘warm period’ enjoyed by the early Romans, perhaps as much as 1°C greater than today’s averages, had cooled perceptibly by CE 100. This seems to tell against notably longer growing seasons and perceptibly warmer winters by the time the first vines could have been planted in England. The renowned historian Tacitus, writing at the end of the first century, remarked that the ‘objectionable’ English climate inhibited the growth of vines and olives, and, in CE 250, the Thames is said to have frozen over for nine weeks.

The last Roman legionaries left Britain *c.* CE 407, leaving émigré Romans and Britons of Roman descent to fend for themselves. Severing the links with Rome—Britannia seceded from the Roman empire in 440—heralded a loss of intellectual skills, and the harbinger of the Dark Ages was the threat posed by uncultured invaders: Angles, Danes, Frisians, Jutes and Saxons, most of whom came from cold northerly climes where vines would not grow. Yet cultivation of vines and production of wine continued in England on a small scale, owing to the use of wine as a sacrament by the emergent Christian Church.

Christianity appeared in Britain during the Roman occupation, at first covertly, to be freed from proscription by an edict of Constantine in CE 313. Though the majority of the country was not converted until the end of the

seventh century, the establishment of monasteries in which learning could be encouraged allowed English viticulture to survive...even though much of the wine would still have been imported from Continental Europe. Writing in *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* ('Ecclesiastical History of the English People'), completed in CE 731, the Venerable Bede affirmed that vines were being grown in England. The stable framework of the established church recreated many of the skills pioneered by the Romans; and the tools and techniques of winemaking scarcely changed for hundreds of years.

This and a 'warm spell' in the tenth and eleventh centuries, allied with the Norman Conquest of 1066, is usually identified as key to the re-emergence of wine-making in England. However, the absence of unimpeachable data until comparatively recent times makes historical climatology an imprecise science. Many attempts have been made to quantify temperature change, involving proxies such as glacial movement, dendrochronology and the distribution of specific plants, but consensus is still lacking.

However, taking a mean of differing estimates suggests that there was a perceptible rise in average temperature during the Roman period, levelling off about CE 300 then rising again to form the 'Mediaeval Warm Period'. Dates ascribed to this era vary from CE 700–1300 at their broadest to CE 850–1150 at their narrowest, but explain why the eleventh-century introduction of vines to Britain by the Normans of William the Conqueror seems to have been tolerably successful. Even a rise of just one degree—if all other factors remain favourable—can be the difference between a good crop and failure to ripen.

PART TWO

From Normans to Tudors

Domesday Book, compiled in 1085–6 to ensure that William I ('The Conqueror' in England, *le Bâtard* in France) was receiving the tax that was his due, records 45–55 settlements 'below the Trent' in which vineyards were to be found. The two Domesday Books (Great and Small) record vineyards as far north as Ely, in what is now Cambridgeshire, and as far west as Somerset.

Some had clearly been newly created by Normans to whom land had been given, including those in Holburne (Holborn) and Westminster which had been planted only in 1084. Others dated back to pre-conquest days, as wine was being made—not, perhaps in large quantities and certainly of no great character—on the great ecclesiastical estates and by a few Saxon nobles. One man, 'Sweyn', held land in Essex assessed as six *arpenți carré*, a 'square arpent' being a French measure which, in the eleventh century, approximated to an acre as both had been derived from the same Roman standard. Sweyn's vineyard in Wdelsfort in Essex could make twenty casks of wine (precise capacity unknown) if the weather was favourable.

It has been suggested that these Domesday sites were mainly '[table-] grape orchards', but there are many documents showing this to be wrong. The chronicler William of Malmesbury (c. 1095–1143), the foremost English historian of his day, writing c. 1125, confirms that wine was being made in England in quantity; and at least one twelfth-century illustration draws a clear distinction between *pomaria*, orchards, and *vinea* (vines)—the same descriptors used in the Domesday Books.

However, not all English vineyards made wine, often specialising instead in verjuice pressed from unripe grapes, and disputes over classification have raged ever since. This controversy is not helped by the inability of many of the earliest chroniclers to visit the sites they were chronicling; second-hand and third-person information could easily have blurred the distinction between orchard and vineyard...and between vineyards which produced grapes for the table, for verjuice or for wine.

Where were the vines?

Many, of course, grew on church land. Abbeys, monasteries and cathedrals often had flourishing vineyards of their own. A vineyard by Manorbier Castle in Wales flourished in the time of chronicler Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales, c. 1146–c. 1223), while the archbishops of York and the earls of Gloucester made their own wine in Askham and Tewkesbury respectively.

THE SOUTH-WEST. It seems likely that the most productive vine-growing/wine-making districts in Norman England were Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, where large abbeys and monasteries flourished: Gloucester, Hereford, Ledbury, Tewkesbury and Worcester itself.

William of Malmesbury, who spent his adult life in Malmesbury Abbey, related how a Greek monk he names as ‘Constantine’ had come to the monastery in 1084 and almost immediately planted a terraced vineyard on a south-facing slope in nearby Hampton. This was still functioning—how effectively is no longer known—at the end of the thirteenth century.

In 1288, the vineyard of Ledbury Abbey made seven pipes (735 imperial gallons) of white wine and a pipe (105 gallons) of verjuice, together valued at £8, and imported £16 of red wine from France to be kept in the manor of the Bishop of Hereford, Richard de Swinfield (elected 1282, died 1317) in Bosbury. This particular vineyard was still being worked when Henry VIII dissolved the larger monasteries in 1539, though it seems to have been maintained thereafter by the new Bishop of Hereford, John Skipp, one time Lord Almoner to Queen Anne Boleyn, who served from 1539 until his death in 1552. Wine was still being made in Ledbury in the 1680s under the supervision of George Skipp (1633–90), who is believed to have been his great-great-great-nephew.

ESSEX, EAST ANGLIA AND THE FENS. Episcopal vineyards were to be found in Ely, Peterborough and Saint Edmundsbury (now Bury St Edmunds). Ely cathedral had at least two of them in the Isle of Ely, which retained a measure of independence as a County Palatine well into the twentieth century. This ‘vineyard island’, *l’île des vignes*, was set in local fenland; and, according to an inquest of 1229, the priory and convent had ‘a Prison, a Court, and a Vineyard, in the Close of the Priory, which contained sixteen acres of land, a Garden of six acres, and a windmill’. Accounts of 1332 confirm that this vineyard occupied six acres, and according to James Bentham, in *The Historical Antiquities of the Conventual & Cathedral Church of Ely* (vol. 3, 1817), distinguished the pomarium (orchard) from the vinea (vineyard).

KENT. Religious establishments in Canterbury and Rochester both produced wine in quantity. *Domesday Monachorum*—records collected by the Canterbury archbishopric shortly after Domesday—suggests that among more than thirty manors of demesne in the purview in 1088–9, only Taeneham (now Teynham) and Northfluet (Northfleet) had their own vineyards.

Taeneham, the larger of the two, was specifically mentioned in a charter given to the Priory of Saint Gregory at Canterbury by Hubert Walter (c. 1160–1205), who was archbishop from 1193 until his death. The grant confirmed a tithe of wine from Taeneham to the priory. Regrettably, there is nothing in the papers to tell us of the acreage of land under vine. Accounts rendered in 1274 include the acquisition of ‘two palisades and 1,013 props’ for ‘Tenam’, which suggests that production was considerable (some interpretations note the props total as an improbable 20,013). Unfortunately, sales recorded for the best year probably include wine from earlier vintages; it is virtually impossible, therefore, to calculate annual output accurately.

ELSEWHERE. Henry I (reigned 1100–35) bought English wines in Bedford for 10/- a tun, and vines had been planted in little Windsor Park to supply the castle and, therefore, the king. Surplus wine was sold to pay a tithe to the local clergyman.

In London, the Bishop of Ely also had a vineyard planted close to his city residence, Ely House (built c. 1290), which was still being cultivated in 1372. This vineyard has been linked with Vine Street, Westminster, an otherwise inconsequential London thoroughfare best known for its connexion with the board-game Monopoly and a police station.

However, the eighteenth-century street was named for a tavern, and is not now considered to have been linked with the Bishop’s vineyard in any way; sixteenth-century engravings confirm the latter to have been planted at the west end of St Etheldreda’s Church, which had been built alongside Ely House by 1300.

What was English wine like?

There can be no doubt that English vineyards sometimes produced grapes in quantity once William and his Normans had brought the culture of wine to England, even if vines never really flourished in the unpredictable climate. However, though Gerald of Wales observed that (insert quote), there were few in twelfth-century England who would agree.

Henry III (reigned 1216–72) is said to have regarded wine from Hellinge (Halling) in East Kent as the finest made in England. This may have been an over-generous assessment: *Archaeologia Cantiana*, vol. vi, 1865/6, suggests that the wine was likely to be sour, and other sources have claimed that blackberry wine was intermixed not only to make it palatable but also to compete with the sweet wines imported from Iberia and the Levant.

Wines were generally drunk young, as keeping them ‘on tap’ encouraged oxidation. The strongest wines kept best, owing to greater alcoholic content; but their harsh taste, surprisingly popular with many drinkers, soon turned to sourness. Most were sold for a pittance as soon as the new vintage became available.

It is still by no means certain what grapes were being grown in mediaeval England. It is usually assumed that they were Pinot varieties which had been planted in France by the Romans, then imported from Burgundy where they had been grown successfully since the first century CE. In 1947, the journalist and oenophile Edward Hyams (1910–75) rescued a decrepit vine from a cottage wall in the Kent village of Wrotham. Cuttings grew successfully, and Hyams, somewhat lightheartedly, named them ‘Wrotham Pinot’. He also claimed, on no particular evidence, that they had flourished in Kent since Roman times. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries was unimpressed, not only refusing to recognise Wrotham Pinot as varietal, but also banning its use for many years.

Recent advances in genetic investigation have established the Pinot genome, and the links between members of the Pinot family have been demonstrated. It now seems that ‘Wrotham Pinot’ should be included in the list. Its nearest relative is judged to be Pinot meunier, one of the principal grapes of Champagne; and Wrotham Pinot is now an approved synonym for Pinot meunier in British viticulture! Hyams clearly knew more than his critics admitted.

Wrotham Pinot was speculatively linked with “Miller’s Burgundy”, a vine grown against walls and in gardens in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (explaining survival on the cottage wall in Wrotham very neatly), which is now also usually identified as Pinot meunier. In the 1780s, the renowned botanist Joseph Banks (1743–1820) found vines of this type in a ruined mediaeval vineyard in Tortworth, Gloucestershire. The local manor, recorded in Domesday Book as ‘Torteword’, was held in 1086 by Turstin Fitz Rolf and it seems that a vineyard had been added to the estate by the thirteenth century.

Records have been quoted to show delivery of blackberries “to colour the wine of the Bishop’s vineyard” in Rochester, and the Kentish vineyards of Teynham and Northfleet used blackberries and blackcurrants to enhance wine made on the estates of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Elderberries and

mulberries were also popular additives, giving wine distinctive and widely approved flavours.

The underlying rawness of mediaeval English wines could be masked by additives, many of which seem alien to today's standards. Sugar, usually in the form of honey, was often added in what was effectively a mediaeval chaptalisation: boosting post-fermentation alcoholic strength. Excess acidity could be masked with spices and herbs. Henry III obtained a wine from Gascony which contained not only nutmeg but also cubebs (spice berries) and zedoary (roots of the curcuma plant) from the East Indies. Henry and his son, Edward I, also drank wine in which sage camouflaged an unappetising smell.

Among many other ingredients, comfrey, dittany, hops, hyssop, ivy leaves, leek seeds, nettles and rue seeds were all added for perceived medicinal properties; and flower petals (*vinea floriata*), especially of roses (*vinea rosata*) and gilliflower (*vinea gillifloriata*), enjoyed a lengthy period in vogue.

Mixtures of spiced wine and ale were popular, especially in the taverns that sprang up in the fifteenth century, and posset—pottage of spiced milk curdled with sweetened wine—became a treat enjoyed by the rich.

Wine was held in high regard for its medicinal properties, but at a cost: 'Drunkenness was the besetting condition; belief in the medicinal efficacy of the wine made it practically obligatory for the health conscious...'⁰⁰ In addition, the wine was not always as healthy as mediaeval herbalists believed. Though by no means as deadly as the Roman wines that had been boiled in lead vats, the additives were not always benign when ingested in large quantities. At the end of September 1150, the mayor of London, Robert de Segillo, had fatally poisoned himself and several of his friends by eating too many grapes and drinking too much wine.

The French connection

In 1152 Henry, duke of Normandy (*duc de Normandie*), married Eleanor (Éléonore), daughter and heiress of the duke of Aquitaine. Once the wife of Louis VII of France, Eleanor brought her lands to marriage with Henry. These included Bordeaux. Known in Roman times for its vineyards, the town had become the point of export for the wines of Gascony to the south, Poitou to the north—Eleanor's lands—and Gaillac to the south-east.

Few in the twelfth century had considered the land bordering the Gironde estuary to be worth exploiting: it was wet, and too often subjected to the malign influences of the Atlantic. This gloomy view was soon to change. In 1154,

Henry succeeded Stephen as king of England, becoming Henry II, and the flow of wine from France to Britain began in earnest. It was greatly accelerated by King John, younger son of Henry and Eleanor and the last of the Angevin kings of England, who in 1203 exempted Bordeaux traders from *Grande Coutoure* (a tax applied by the English on exports); in 1214, this magnanimity was extended to all forms of taxation.

The wine-trade with England grew rapidly, persuading the Bordelais to grow vines locally to minimise the costs and calamities of transport and so take the profits that would once have been due to growers elsewhere. It has been estimated that of a typical thirteenth-century annual export of 100,000 tuns, a quarter went to England. A *tun* was a large cask containing (on average) 250 wine-gallons. Each wine gallon was the same as the current U.S. or short gallon, about 83% of the imperial equivalent. Consequently, the annual importation of 25,000 tuns into England would equate to about 5.2 million imperial gallons or about 32 million 75cl bottles.

The monarch was entitled to *prisage*, taking two tuns from every ship carrying more than twenty or one tun from ships loading nineteen or less. One cask was to be taken from 'each side of the mast': in practise, this meant one from the fore-hold and one from the after-hold. Better wines were always stowed aft, where they were less likely to be affected by seawater washing over the prow.

Collecting the King's Wine was the prerogative of the Butler of the royal household (the name derives from *Boutellier*, 'bottler', keeper of the royal wine-cellar). One of the first to hold the post was Hervey Walter, Royal Butler of England; his son Theobald (c. 1158–1206), elder brother of Archbishop Hubert Walter of Canterbury, was appointed Royal Butler of Ireland by Prince John in 1185. The descendants of Theobald, first Baron Butler, assumed the surname 'Butler' that has since become particularly significant in Ireland.

Until the emergence of taverns in the fifteenth century, grape-wine (there were countless other wines, as anything containing sugar could be fermented) remained the privilege of the crown, of the aristocracy and of the church. Trade with Bordeaux did not in itself cause the demise of countless English vineyards, but highlighted the traditional problems of poor yield and low quality in English viticulture. Unable to compete with the flood of imports from Aquitaine, added to the unpredictability of harvesting grapes in English conditions, many vineyards were simply grubbed-out. It has been claimed⁰⁰ that as many as 1300 sites were cleared, including Wich (now Droitwich), Fledebirie (Fladbury) and Grimmanleh (Grimley), all once the purview of Worcester Abbey, which had disappeared by c. 1240.

Surviving records indicate that Kentish vineyards were still active, if not necessarily flourishing in the fourteenth century. The Abbey of St Augustine owned Northolme, in the parish of St Martin Canterbury; the Bishop of Rochester owned Hellinge (Halling), Snoddesland (Snodland) and Strode (Strood); the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, had Barton, Brockland, Cearteham (Chartham), Copton and Hoilingeborn (Hollingbourne); and there had been a vineyard in Wingeame (Wingham), a manor of demesne of the Canterbury archbishopric, at least until the end of the twelfth century.

The Hundred Years War and the Black Death

In 1325, the English king, Edward II, had refused to pay homage to the king of France from whom he nominally held Aquitaine and other lands as vassalage. The problems had arisen when William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy, conquered England and claimed the English throne. His lands in France were then theoretically a fief from the French kings, who subsequently sometimes also regarded England as French royal lands held by a vassal and demanded homage 'without crown and sword'.

The French responded to Edward's intransigence by seizing all but a few pockets of English territory. Homage was eventually paid by Edward's son, who became Edward III in 1327, and land was returned. However, continuing unrest between England and France over the latter's support for Scotland, with which Edward was at war, ended when Gascony and Guienne were declared forfeit to the French Crown in 1337...and Edward countered by claiming himself to be the rightful king of France—which in some ways he was!

So began the Hundred Years War. The English had the better of the first decade, gaining a great victory at Crécy in 1346, but the vineyards in Gascony and the Haut-Pays were devastated as fighting surged to and fro. When the Black Death reached France in 1348 and England a year later, the wine trade had already been seriously compromised.

The effects of bubonic plague were without precedent: the greatest single catastrophe to befall mankind. It is impossible to quantify losses, owing to the lack of reliable population statistics, but plausible estimates suggest that about one person in every four in Britain died; and, terrifyingly, every second person in France. Some have claimed that the mortality rate in some parts of southern France reached 75 per cent (three in every four), and a recent analysis of the population of Marseille claims to have shown that six in every ten of the population died. Plague was to recur. The last major outbreak in Britain,

the Great Plague of London in 1665, cost the lives of perhaps 100,000; and an outbreak of similar severity ravaged Marseille in 1720.

Loss of manpower and trade-skills seriously damaged fourteenth-century commerce in general and the production of wine in particular. The French invaded Aquitaine once again in 1369, reaching the gates of Bordeaux, and the peasantry fled 'leaving the grapes on the vine'. Yet English nobles, gentlemen and merchants still bought French wine in quantity; and in 1372, less than two decades after the worst of the plague had passed (but only a year before it returned), more than two hundred wine-ships had made the journey from London to Bordeaux.

Vineyards in south-western France had largely returned to their pre-war condition by 1400, owing to extensive re-planting undertaken during the reign of Richard II (1377–99), but rising costs, additional taxes and the need to convoy ships to protect them from French corsairs had caused the price of wine to double. This had the effect of restricting distribution.

The English continued to progress until, inspired by the martyrdom of Jeanne d'Arc, the French gained an upper hand; by 1453, when the Hundred Years War had been effectively ended by the Battle of Castillon (near Bordeaux), the English had been expelled from everywhere except the Pale of Calais. But even though the map changed dramatically when the treaty of Picquigny was agreed in 1475, the commercial imperative had altered not a jot. The King's Agent still travelled to Bordeaux annually, and the 'wine armada' still carried wine back to London.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the place of claret, hock, moselle, madeira, port and sherry had been firmly established in the upper echelons of English society. English wine had lost not only favour, but also whatever advantages had previously been afforded by climate.

It is popularly believed that Britain entered the Little Ice Age, even though historical climatologists are by no means agreed on time-span. The first Frost Fair is often claimed to date from the winter of 1408/9, even though evidence, admittedly insubstantial, shows the Thames to have been periodically freezing-over back to Roman times.

Yet grapes increasingly failed to prosper even though Edward III created a new vineyard in Windsor in 1361, hiring Gascon Jean de la Roche as vine-dresser. Imported from La Rochelle, the vines soon proved to be productive. In 1365, they allowed three pipes (about 315 imperial gallons) of red and 2 pipes 1 gallon (211 imperial gallons) of white wine to be made, and the 'Old Vineyard', which had been planted in the twelfth century, contributed six pipes of wine of unspecified colour.

However, surviving accounts for Abingdon Abbey show that the abbot's vineyard, still largely given over to grass and woodland in 1369, was able to sell wine, grapes, verjuice and vine-plants in 1388 (alongside apples, cider, wardenes and nuts). In 1412, however, the grapes failed to ripen and the entire crop had been sent to the infirmary as verjuice. By 1450, the only income was listed as 'rent from land and sale of fruit'; the vineyard, assuming it had not simply been grubbed-out, was clearly failing to prosper.

End of the Plantagenets, coming of the Tudors—work in progress...

PART THREE

From Henry VIII to the Stuarts

The desire to obtain good-quality wine was clearly easier to satisfy by importing than by creating vineyards in a climate which was becoming colder, particularly as English wine was so poor that resin often had to be added to camouflage its sourness. Shortly after the accession of Henry VIII in 1509, a survey found only 130 sizeable vineyards in England and Wales. Eleven of these were Crown Property, 52 were owned by the church, and the remaining 67 were in the hands of noble families.

A prolonged disagreement with the established Roman Catholic Church eventually led to the Act of Supremacy of 1534, by which Henry made himself head of the new Church of England, and the dissolution of more than eight hundred monasteries, priories and religious houses followed in 1536–41. Sale of these seized assets raised huge sums of money ‘for the Crown Exchequer’, to fund Henry’s extravagant lifestyle, but had an adverse effect on English viticulture such as it was; many vineyards were left to rot, and the practised skills of monk-winemakers, no longer required, faded away.

Typical was the vineyard of Pershore Abbey in Worcestershire, which had run wild and probably existed in little more than name. It stood on the edge of the village of Abberton, which was held by the abbot of Pershore until January 1540. The Manor of Abberton was ‘granted’, or sold by the Crown to William and Francis Sheldon on 16th January 1544, according to William Page and J.W. Willis-Bund, *A History of the County of Worcestershire*, vol. 4 (1924).

By the sixteenth century, though the King’s Agent and the wine armada still processed annually to Bordeaux, the English climate had deteriorated to a point where viticulture was no longer favoured. There is little doubt that winters in what is now known as the Little Ice Age were markedly colder than today: the Thames froze over in 1408/9 and 1435, and did so periodically until the last of the Frost Fairs in February 1814.

The popular view that every year brought a ‘Frost Fair’—the name dates only from 1608—is misleading, however; there were only 26 instances of the

Thames freezing over from 1407 to 1814, and two of these (1768 and 1785) were ‘more or less’. But eleven freezes occurred between 1595 and 1695, and the winter of 1683/4 was notably severe: the river froze from 20th December to 6th February, and the ice is reckoned to have been eighteen inches thick. In 1814, an elephant was walked from one bank to the other.

The question is simply did the ‘Little Ice Age’ exist, or were factors such as the unconstrained banks of the Thames, allowing the water to grow progressively shallower towards the bank (and thus more easily frozen), and the slowing effect on the current of London Bridge responsible? The question is still debated by climatologists largely because acceptably reliable temperature statistics date only from the attempt by the Royal Society to record them from 1664 onward. (Though the mercury thermometer had yet to be invented, other methods of measurement existed.)

Records do not survive from the period of the pre-1700 Frost Fairs, but a plausible temperature of -12°C is said to have been recorded in Upminster during the night of 4th/5th January 1709. Vines are widely reckoned to be frost-hardy to about -15°C , but not if these temperatures are sustained.

Viticulture did not fade entirely away in the seventeenth century. John Tradescant the Elder (c. 1570–1638), who had been appointed gardener to Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, began to plant the first of as many as thirty thousand vines in the grounds of Hatfield House c. 1611 after returning from the Spanish Netherlands with ornamental fruit trees. Many of these vines are said not only to have been the gift of the queen of France but also to have been tended by French *viticulteurs*. Yet there is no confirmation, written or oral, that their grapes ever made wine. Most modern assessments place 1611–15 in the depths of the Little Ice Age and it is probable that the temperatures were too low for the vines to crop reliably.

Tradescant served William Cecil, who had succeeded his father, but by 1622 was in the employ of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. Gardens in New Hall (Essex) and Burley-on-the-Hill were extensively remodelled, though there is no evidence to suggest that vines were among the plantings. When Villiers was assassinated in 1628, Tradescant’s skills came to the attention of Charles I and his queen, Henrietta Maria. In 1630, therefore, he became “Keeper of His Majestie’s Gardens, Vines and Silk-Worms” at Oatlands Palace, Henrietta Maria’s private residence in Surrey.

John Tradescant died in 1638, succeeded by his son John the Younger (1608–62) but the royal link was broken by the advent of the English Civil War in 1642 and the vines never prospered. Yet grapes were still being grown outdoors in Worcestershire—and probably elsewhere in southern England—when

the fighting began, but most would have perished unless protected within courtyard walls.

Writing in 1665 in the first of several editions of his influential book *The English Vineyard Vindicated*, John Rose (1619–77), Gardener to Charles II, suggested that the decline of viticulture was due to planting in ‘rich, fat land’ and to a lack of proper cultivation. He also derided those who blamed their failures on the soil and climate, when lack of knowledge and ‘mercenary preoccupations’ were responsible. It has been claimed that the enormous Black Hamburg grapevine currently to be seen in Hampton Court Palace, the ‘oldest vine in the world’, has Tudor origins; in fact, as the Palace’s website confirms, it was planted by the renowned gardener Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown only in 1769. A cutting had been taken from a vine in the grounds of Valentines Mansion, Ilford, but even this was judged to be no more than twenty years old.

Wholesale importation of French wine into England continued unchecked until 1693, when William III, a Protestant irked by support for the Catholic Jacobites, applied punitive taxation to French wine—the former king, James II died in Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1701, he succeeded by his son and grandson, the Old and Young Pretenders of the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745.

Destined to remain in force until 1860, William III’s proscription cut the supplies of wine from France to a trickle. However, the shortfall was answered not by widespread planting of vines in southern England but simply by importing Italian, Portuguese, Rhenish, Spanish and other wine in ever-greater quantities.

Additional barriers to English winemaking were erected by ever-increasing prices, restricting wine to the wealthy, and by the rise in popularity of hot drinks such as coffee, chocolate and tea. Coffee had come from Ethiopia, spreading rapidly northward into Egypt, the Middle East and then into Europe, where it was especially favoured in Italy. The Dutch planted coffee in the East Indies and the Americas, and the British took it to southern Africa. Chocolate, found in Mexico by the Spanish *conquistadores*, was brought back to Europe to be sweetened and milked; tea, native to China, was subsequently introduced to India by the East India Company. The first coffee house to be opened in England dated from 1652, the first Chocolate House followed in 1657 and the first Tea-Room (Twinings!) arrived in 1706.

There is also the delicate question of the discovery of sparkling wine, originally made by allowing re-fermentation to take place in the bottle in which the wine was to be sold. What is now called *Méthode champenoise* is usually credited to a Benedictine monk, Pierre Pérignon (1648–1715) of Hautvillers,

who was an important contributor to the success of French viticulture. He is said to have learned about sparkling wine during a trip to l'Abbaye Saint-Hilaire in Carcassonne, and on return was charged to reduce the frequency with which in-bottle fermentation destroyed comparatively weak glass bottles in the Hautvillers cellars; if one exploded, a chain reaction tended to destroy many (or sometimes all) of its neighbours.

Pérignon, who championed red Pinot noir at the expense of white varieties, underook lengthy experimentation with grapes, harvesting and fermentation practices until improvements could be made in wine-making processes. His legacy should never be underestimated, even though is almost always misrepresented—particularly in France. His supposed exhortation 'come quickly: I am drinking the stars' is a myth that does not seem to have been discovered until 1821...when the abbot of Hautvillers was trying to raise funds for his struggling monastery.

In Britain, it has become fashionable to highlight the work of an English physician, Christopher Merrett (1615–95), who in December 1662 presented a paper to the Royal Society extolling the well-known virtues of adding sugar to cider and wine to give them what would now be called a spritz, and questioning if the process would work equally well with wine. However, Merrett was merely drawing attention to something which was well-known even in the 1660s: the addition of sugar produced effervescence in cider, and could revive wine which had not overwintered well in its travels from Bordeaux to London.

There can be no doubt that the improvements in glass-making techniques made in seventeenth-century England, once coal had been substituted for charcoal in the furnaces, created bottles which were far harder and therefore strong enough to withstand the unpredictable pressures generated by secondary fermentation. Yet wine of this character went in and out of vogue throughout the eighteenth century, and its precise history is still too obscure to relate.

Seventeenth-century science could not explain what happened when sugar was added, even though awareness went back to the Romans, who regularly added sugars—contained in honey—to ameliorate the astringency of their wine and noticed the effervescence that commonly accompanied the process. The earliest description of a *pétillant* or effervescent wine is to be found in the writings of Pliny the Elder, who died after observing too closely the effects of the the eruption of Vesuvius in CE 79.

And a rural museum in south-central France still claims that the process was discovered accidentally by Gallic tribes before the time of Christ. Wine in a flask had accidentally fallen into a river, where it remained throughout the chill of winter; when rediscovered and opened in the Spring, fermentation had

begun again in the flask and so the wine effervesced. Whatever the truth of this remarkable claim may be, and it is impossible to verify with conviction, it is true that *méthode rurale* or *méthode ancestrale* was being practised long before Champagne was created.

Arab traders had brought sugar to the Latinised world, but little if any had reached Europe prior to the First Crusade and it is very unlikely that the deliberate addition of sugar to create a sparkling wine occurred prior to the thirteenth century; the first reference to sugar in English does not occur until this particular era, and the commodity was still so scarce in the fifteenth century that it cost as much as the rarest spices. Yet lightly-sparkling wines have been made in Gaillac (the *Méthode gailloçoise*), Limoux and other areas for at least five hundred years; the Abbaye de Saint-Hilaire, near Carcassone, still possesses a written reference to sparkling wine dating from 1531.

Attempts to make sparkling wine in England continued desultorily. One of the best documented was due to Dublin-born Charles Hamilton (1704–86), fourteenth child of the 6th Earl of Abercorn.

Though destined to inherit little from his father, Hamilton, by hard work and perseverance—and his aristocratic connections—amassed enough money by 1738 to purchase a comparatively modest estate at Pain’s Hill or Painshill, near Cobham in Surrey, and immediately began to acquire more land to create an ornamental park. Hamilton is now regarded among the pioneers of the Landscape Movement, rejecting the geometric hedges, paths and plant-beds that had previously been in vogue. His success was considerable. Not only did the estate grow to between 200 and 300 acres (accounts vary), but among the visitors were future Presidents of the U.S.A. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Illustrations inspired by the Painshill gardens graced a Wedgwood porcelain service made for Catherine the Great of Russia, and the *parc à l’anglais* soon became fashionable in France.

Eventually, Hamilton’s extravagance got the better of his finances and, deeply in debt to bankers Hoare & Company, he sold the Painshill estate in 1773 to Benjamin Hopkins and moved to the Royal Crescent in Bath. Hopkins maintained Painshill until his own death in 1794, but the property, after passing through a variety of owners, soon lost much of its lustre.

Charles Hamilton had always intended to create a vineyard. Though few details are known, the presence of grapes mature enough to pick and process in the autumn of 1748 suggests that they had been planted no later than 1744/5. By then he had employed an émigré Huguenot vine-grower, David Geneste, who was to play a pivotal role in the development of Painshill. Comparatively little is known about his life, and a brief biography by Claude Martin, ‘David

Geneste—a Huguenot Vine Grower at Cobham’ published in 1971 in the *Surrey Archaeological Journal*, lies behind most modern attempts to fill the gaps. Martin based his work on eight letters from Geneste to his sister, Marie Borderie of Bougarde, married in 1723, who had inherited a vineyard in Béziat.

Dating from October 1748 to March 1755, the letters give fascinating details of Painshill. However, the 1971 article was written long before the advent of readily-accessible genealogical sources and a few of its assumptions must be challenged. According to Martin, David Geneste was born in Clairac in Guyenne, now Lot-et-Garonne, sometime after 30th January 1692 when his parents Moyse Geneste and Judith Dumas married. The elder Geneste was described as ‘lord of the Manor of Feytou’ and son of the Pastor of Lustrac. This alone would make him vulnerable at this time, owing the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 that renewed persecution of Protestants in largely Catholic France. David Geneste, one among thousands of his faith, fled to England, married Anne Bartlett (by a licence dating from 9th February 1740) and had several children.

Geneste himself says very little about his family in the letters other than mentioning in October 1748 that he had a son who would be eight on his next birthday and two daughters aged 4½ and 3. His wife, said by Geneste to be very ill, is assumed to have died shortly afterwards as a 1757 baptism of David Geneste in St Andrew’s Church, Cobham, names the mother as ‘Elizabeth’.¹ However, there is no mention of this in the surviving letters.

When David Geneste arrived at Painshill in 1748, perhaps from Church Street in the Parish of Saint Anne, Soho, a five-acre vineyard was flourishing well enough to be producing ‘very fine grapes’ though the vines themselves, Geneste wrote, were in poor condition. Hamilton instructed him to plant another ten acres, and the wine-grower, realising that he lacked knowledge and experience, sought instruction from his relatives in Guyenne.

By the end of 1750, several varieties of vine had been planted: Pied rouge, Muscat blanc and rouge, Guillan and Guillan blanc, Sauviot and several early-ripening *hâtifs* (‘hasty’, ‘hurried’) Geneste could not name.² Unfortunately, 1751 brought near-disaster in the form of too much rain, causing many flowers to drop, and an early autumnal frost to inhibit ripening. Only two barrels of juice could be extracted, one being sour verjuice, incapable of proper fermentation, which was instantly discarded. So bad was the vintage that Geneste considered Painshill output to be the only drinkable wine to be made in England that year. It was widely recognised that failure one year could be followed by success the next, and planting more vines brought the total to 20,000–35,000 (again, sources differ). A good white wine was made in 1753, each of a handful of

barrels selling for sixty guineas, and two of the four barrels of 1754 were sold as effervescent 'Champaign' for fifty guineas apiece.

Such success persuaded David Geneste to ask for an increase in his wages, only to be fired by Hamilton. While under notice, Geneste was brought back to supervise output amounting to five barrels of white and five of red 'from the same grapes'. The wine proved to be so good that Geneste was not only re-employed but had his wages increased. By 1758, however, the wine-grower had left Painshill to vanish into obscurity.

The vineyard had flourished during his tenure, but not without problems. The gravelly soil was poor and, although south facing, the land sloped so greatly that water drained away too quickly—especially from the highest vines. It was noted that the vines grew 10–15ft tall with stems 'the thickness of a finger' and shoots running wild. Charles Hamilton reminisced that:

The vineyard...is situated on the south side of a gentle hill, the soil gravelly sand; it is planted entirely with the two sorts of Burgundy grapes, the Auvergnat [now identified with Pinot noir], which is the most delicate, but the tenderest, and the miller grape [Pinot meunier], commonly called the black cluster, which is more hardy. The first year I attempted to make red Wine, in the usual way, by treading the grapes, then letting them ferment in a vat, till all the husks and impurities formed a thick crust at the top, the boiling ceased, and the clear Wine was drawn off the bottom.

This essay did not answer; the Wine was so very harsh and austere, that I despaired of ever making red Wine fit to drink; but through that harshness I perceived a flavour something like that of some small French white Wines, which made me hope I should succeed better with white Wine...

Two vine-tenders had been sent to Painshill from France, but their employment was short lived and the special tools they were to bring—pruning hooks and special short spades—never arrived. Fearful of war between Britain and France, which was to begin in earnest in 1757, the men had returned to their homeland by the end of 1755.

Charles Hamilton then seems to have heeded the advice of his correspondent, Abbé Pierre-Charles Nolin (1717–96), a renowned arboriculturalist who was also director of a nursery supplying plants—no doubt including vines—to the French royal estates. Nolin wrote to Hamilton explaining that vines had to be pruned so that the shoots were no more than 3–4 feet long, and all the tendrils had to be removed to prevent grapes dropping from the plants before maturity and creating 'too much wood at the expense of fruit'.

One result was the development of an effectual white wine, often effervescent. Charles Hamilton explained that after the failure of his red wine to reach standards he had set for it:

...the very first year I made white Wine, it nearly resembled the flavour of Champaign; and in two or three years more, as the Vines grew stronger, to my great amazement, my Wine had a better flavour than the best Champaign I ever tasted; the first running was as clear as spirits, the second running was *oeil de Perdrix*, and both of them sparkled and creamed in the glass like Champaign. It would be endless to mention how many good judges of Wine were deceived by my Wine, and thought it superior to any Champaign they ever drank; even the duke of Mirepoix preferred it to any other wine; but such is the prejudice of most people against any thing of English growth, I generally found it most prudent not to declare where it grew, till after they had passed their verdict...

Several descriptions of the vineyard survive, including a visit in 1754 recorded in *The Travels through England of Dr Richard Pococke* ('successively Bishop of Meath and Ossory, during 1750, 1751, and later years', II, 1889), when ten acres, on two near-adjacent sites, were under vine. Hamilton's own account published in Edward Barry's 1775 book *Observations Historical, Critical, and Medical, on the Wines of the Ancients* ('and the Analogy between Them and Modern Wines'), claimed, prophetically, that he was:

...convinced that much good Wine might be made in many parts of the south of England. Many parts are south of Painshill, many soils may be yet fitter for it, and many situations must be so; for mine was much exposed to the south-west wind (the worst of all for Vines), and the declivity was rather too steep; yet with these disadvantages it succeeded many years. Indeed, the uncertainty of our climate is against it, and many fine crops are spoiled by May frosts, and wet summers, but one good year balances many disappointments.

It seems likely that the yield of Painshill, which was very poor, would have improved in the early 1760s but, regrettably, no data survive. An absence of reliable pre-1766 rainfall records, even though temperature assessments are accessible, makes it very difficult to judge how the vines would have performed and there were several disastrous grain harvests in the mid-eighteenth century.

Such records as survive suggest that 1768 was exceptionally wet, while 1781 was unusually dry. The painter and engraver Francis Xavier Vispré (c. 1730–91)—who had been born in Paris, settled in London and claimed to

have patented a way of tending vines close to the ground—remarked in *A Dissertation on the growth of Wine in England* (1786) that the Painshill site was unsuitable for use as a vineyard. He also remarked that unpredictable climate made output unreliable, drawing particular attention to how:

In the cold and rainy year 1782, I visited the vineyard at Pain's-Hill; the grapes at the end of October were only changing colour; they did not ripen that year. According to the newspapers, the grapes in Portugal, at the beginning of November, were no riper than those of Pain's-Hill... The vineyard at Pain's-Hill seldom ripens its fruit at present, for two reasons: the plants are about forty years old [in 1785], and they are chilled by the damp air from a fine plantation of horse-chestnut trees [dating c. 1765] which borders...[the vineyard]...on the north side.

Records⁰⁰ suggest that 1782, warmer than normal in April, brought the lowest mean temperature ever recorded in November: merely 36.2°F (2.3°C), virtually seven degrees less than the comparable months of 1781 and 1783.

It has been claimed that the Painshill vineyard was still operating late in the nineteenth century. But as early as 1814, in *A History of Surrey*, Manning & Bray noted that the vineyard 'is no longer kept up'; and John Claudius Loudon, writing only twenty years later in *Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, remarked that although some of the original vines were 'still to be seen', the site had been largely covered with 'Scotch pines'.

Encouragingly, in 1981, the Painshill Park Trust purchased some of the original land and a vineyard has been re-created with Chardonnay and Pinot meunier grapes. The production of sparkling wine in Painshill in the 1750s, described above, undermines French claims to exclusivity; secondary fermentation was clearly well-known elsewhere, and its use continues today.

French *Appellation* rules implemented in 1936 allow Blanquette de Limoux, Clairette de Die and some Gaillac wines to complete fermentation in the bottle, creating comparatively low concentrations of carbon dioxide: just enough to give a distinct spritz. A slight disadvantage of this method is that lees are created in each bottle by the reduction of yeast; in Champagne wines, of course, this sediment is removed before corking.

But it cannot be denied that the *Méthode champenoise* is still very largely a nineteenth-century French creation, however. *Dosage*, topping-up bottles with "liqueur d'expédition" after sediment had been removed, was introduced in 1836 by Jean-Baptiste François, a pharmacist of Châlons-en-Champagne; and the cage or *mousselet* which holds the cork securely against the pressure in

the bottle owes its origins to French Patent no. 412, sought on 15th November 1844 by Adolphe Jacquesson, *Négociant en vins* of Châlons-sur-Marne and Paris. Protection was duly granted on 6th February 1845 for *perfectionnements dans les appareils et procédés propres au bouchage des bouteilles renfermant des vins ou autres liquides mousseux ou non* ('improvements in the equipment and correct methods of closing bottles containing wines or other liquids, whether effervescent or not'). Jacquesson apparently patented an improved retainer in 1866, and the idea has since become near-universal.

NOTES

1. Claude Martin identified seven children of David Genest, assuming the existence of two wives. By Anne Bartlett, he had had Isaac (born 8th January 1740/1), Jean (5th August 1742) and Marie Anne (15th February 1744); by 'Elizabeth' (surname unknown), he had fathered David (baptised in Cobham, 11th July 1754 but died in infancy), David (baptised in Cobham on 8th January 1757), Benjamin (baptised in Bermondsey on 16th June 1761) and possibly Matthew (baptised in Margate on 18th May 1773).

Genealogical research for this book suggests several corrections and additions. Isaac was born on 8th January 1741 and baptised two days later; Marie Anne was baptised on 29th February 1744; David Geneste was baptised on 5th January 1757; and Matthew was baptised on 18th April 1773. No trace could be found of Jean, David (1754) and Benjamin. However, Sarah Geneste, born to David and Anne on 20th September 1745 and baptised on 2nd October, is probably the younger daughter mentioned in the letter of 2nd October 1748. There was also Moses, born to David and Elizabeth Geneste, baptised in Cobham on 18th February 1759; and Elizabeth, born to parents of the same name, but baptised in St John's Church, Margate, on 3rd August 1863. The baptismal register entry for 'Matthew Geniste', in the same St John's, gives identical parental names.

The problem lies in the baptism on 9th November 1707 in the 'French Protestant Chapel Leicester Fields' of David, son of Michel Geneste and Marieanne Savenne, living in St Anne Street, Soho; and in the burial of David Geneste, judged to have been born c. 1710, in the Church of St John Baptist, Margate, on 12th September 1787. The key lies in the currently unknown birth-date of David Geneste the Painshill wine-grower, and in the authentication of a second marriage, to Elizabeth.

2. Of the grapes mentioned by Geneste, Pied rouge and Guilan (rouge) are now generally considered to be synonymous with Côt (now known almost universally as Malbec), and Guilan blanc is believed to be Gouais blanc, a white grape of central European origin extinguished by phylloxera in the 1880s. Muscats blanc and rouge are still grown under these names, often suffixed "à Petits Grains" owing to the comparatively small size of the grapes. The identity of Sauviot has never been satisfactorily established, though suggestions have been made that it was related to Sauvignon blanc.

PART FOUR

Of marquesses and scientists

The cumulative effects of the 1693 tax, the French Revolution of 1789 and the Napoleonic Wars, which ended in 1815, clearly inhibited the importation of French wine into England. Yet there was little thought of increasing the acreage of English vineyards. The failure of early nineteenth-century grain harvests, throwing shortages of food and fodder into stark relief, was far more likely to be answered by grubbing-out vines and planting wheat.

By the time of the Battle of Waterloo, 18th June 1815, only eight commercially viable vineyards are said to have survived in the whole of England. Little was done in the decades that followed, though desultory attempts were made in the mid-nineteenth century to revive the fortunes of English viticulture. It was clear to any intelligent observer that profits were to be made by replicating the clarets beloved by the Victorians, which often commanded good prices at auction but had all come from the other side of the English Channel.

The Middle-English term 'claret', which has become synonymous with Bordeaux red wines, derived from the Latin *clarus*, 'clear', by way of *clartitas* or 'clarified'. It originally distinguished good-quality yellowish or light-red wine, which had been fined and filtered to remove impurities, from the cloudy rough-and-ready rustic reds. By the 1850s, 'Claret' had become synonymous with good quality.

The cause of experimenters and entrepreneurs alike was scarcely helped by the advent in Europe first of powdery mildew (*oidium*) and then the wine-louse *phylloxera vastatrix*, now usually classified as *Daktulosphaira vitifoliae* of the Phylloxeridae family—a name conferred as long ago as 1855 by the Scottish botanical artist/botanist Walter Hood Fitch (1817–92).

The wine-louse is an aphid-like insect which feeds on vine-roots, causing irregular nodules and, in most cases, a secondary infection which encircles the roots to cut the supply of nutrients to the rest of the plant. *Vitis vinifera* has very little natural defence against what is still generally called phylloxera; the vines will usually live long enough to bear at least one crop, but then wither

and die in the third or fourth year, and, still worse, will have infected every other vine around them.

Though sulphur had conquered mildew within a decade, many crops were lost and trade had been put at risk. Yet mildew had only been the harbinger of doom; phylloxera was so nearly the Grim Reaper. The problem was noticed in England in the mid 1850s, at a time when importation of vines from North America was fashionable.

The discovery of the louse had no great effect at first, owing to the poverty of English viticulture; elsewhere, however, the story was to be very different. Beginning in 1862 in a small vineyard in Roquemaure, phylloxera raced through France until virtually everywhere had been affected other than a few vineyards on gravel or sandy soil and those that could be inundated for fifty days to drown the lice.

Thirty years would pass before French production regained pre-phylloxera levels: three decades of wholesale destruction and financial ruin which brought viticulture and, indeed, the French economy to their knees. Countless vineyards were burned to prevent infection spreading, usually without success, but even such a drastic scorched-earth policy was unable to stop lice that had a flying stage. In and around the Gironde, less than three per cent of total acreage exploited prior to 1882 had survived unscathed by 1890. And just when the battle with phylloxera seemed to be won, downy mildew (*peronospora*) struck.

The first solution to be tried was simply to plant North American vines, which were different species and had defences against phylloxera: some plants produced a sticky sap when attacked, preventing the aphids eating, and could seal any wound with a layer of new tissue. Unfortunately, these vines were also often carriers of the louse, and wine from their grapes did not impress the European palate. The phrase *goût de renard* ('foxy taste') describes what most Frenchmen thought of them.

A few areas in France and Spain, particularly, remained phylloxera-free. Some vignobles still have vines which are direct descendants of pre-1860 plantings. The secret usually lies in the terroir: if the soil is mixed with or protected by sand or gravel, the wine louse cannot tunnel its way to the roots. Other sites (e.g., in the Camargue, or in the area of southern France still isolated by its Roman irrigation system) have always been protected by water barriers. And, in addition, the limited flying capabilities of the adult louse can be enough to prevent phylloxera jumping from vineyard to vineyard.

Eventually, grafting *Vitis vinifera* onto *Vitis riparia*, *Vitis rupestris* and other North American root-stock was shown to give a sufficiently robust physical barrier to allow first French and then European viticulture to revive. Another

approach to the problem was to develop vines which could withstand disease. Most of these were cross-bred within the same *Vitis* genus, but there have been hybrids of differing species.

The effect on European viticulture had been catastrophic, but the British were unable or unwilling to fill the gap that had been created by the loss of so much winemaking capacity: it seems that only a single commercially-active vineyard was planted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

John Crichton-Stuart (1847–1900), the third Marquess of Bute, had sent gardener Andrew Pettigrew to France in 1873 to investigate viticulture; and so, two years later, three acres of ‘Gamay noir [à jus blanc]’ were planted on a gently-sloping site in front of Castell Coch, Bute’s Gothic folly in south Wales. Facing a little east of due south, the site was near-ideal.

The first vintage was made in 1877 in a winery in Cardiff Castle, which Bute had also transformed. Attempts were subsequently made to bring other areas of the Bute estates under vine, with only partial success, but the ‘1881’ was a particularly good vintage. Twelve thousand bottles were produced in 1892/3, and thirteen acres at Castell Coch and Swanbridge were under vine by 1905. However, after too many cold winters and wet summers (and the death of the marquess in 1900), work effectively stopped in 1911.

The First World War brought any hopes of a revival to an end, and the surviving Castell Coch vines were grubbed-up in 1920. Nothing more was to be done to facilitate commercial exploitation of English wine until the Second World War had ended, even though experimenters such as entomologist George Ordish (1906–92) continued the struggle.

Ordish had worked in France, where he was struck not only by the similarity between the geology of Champagne and Kent, but also by the contrast between products—grapes in one country, apples and hops in the other. He determined to plant a small vineyard in his cottage garden in Yalding (near Maidstone), finished in 1938. Ordish produced a few hundred bottles of red and white wine in 1940, but the advent of war put paid to his experiments. Another decade would pass before work began again in earnest. He subsequently wrote several books, including *Vine Growing in England* (1953), *The Great Wine Blight* (1972) and *Vineyards in England and Wales* (1977), and was to inspire many others after 1945.

In spite of the scarcity of grapes (not subjected to rationing, but virtually unobtainable), the resurgence in English wine-making began almost as soon as the Second World War had ended. Many of the French vineyards had been devastated, and nothing had come from Germany since war had been declared in 1939: clearly, there was a profit to be turned if the right types of vine could

be identified.

The greatest credit was due to Raymond Barrington Brock (1907–99), Chief Air Raid Warden of London during the Second World War and a Master of the Worshipful Company of Scientific Instrument Makers (1969/70), whose career encompassed the managing directorship of makers of laboratory equipment Townson & Mercer Ltd; interests in colour printing; a successful involvement in car-racing (second and third in his class in the Spa–Francorchamps 24-hour race); and membership of the British bobsleigh team (which he gave up when he broke some ribs...at the age of fifty!).

In 1943, Barrington Brock determined to investigate viticulture, initially growing table grapes under glass to see which varieties suited the *terroir* of the south of England. The work was undertaken in ‘Beebrock Vineyard’, which then became the ‘Oxted Viticultural Research Centre’ (some commentators have seen pomposity in this title, but it is more likely that Brock was simply being self-deprecating in the manner of the day).

In 1947, Barrington Brock became acquainted with Edward Hyams (1910–75), an accomplished writer who had not only settled in Kent but had also been influenced by the work of George Ordish. Hyams had returned from service in the Royal Navy determined to live off the land, which he and his wife did successfully for many years.

Hyams is best remembered for *The Grape Vine in England* (1949), a milestone in the promotion of English viticulture; *Vineyards in England* (1953, editor and contributor); *Vin—the Wine Country of France* (1959); and *Dionysus—a Social History of the Wine Vine*. He moved to Devon in the late 1950s, no longer convinced that viticulture could ever be made to turn a profit in England.

Hyams planted a few hundred vines in 1947/8, including Seyval Blanc, Gamay Hâtif des Vosges and Riesling, and made his own wine. He even rescued what became known as ‘Wrotham Pinot’ from a cottage wall! Associating with Hyams had a profound effect on Barrington Brock, whose focus was turned from the table to the glass, beginning in desultory fashion but soon to the exclusion of virtually everything else. One of the strengths of Barrington Brock was his willingness to forge links in his quest for answers: France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, the U.S.A., even the Soviet Union. He gathered an amazing collection of vines (sixty varieties by 1950), which was all the more remarkable because he was entirely self-funded. His unaccepted doctoral thesis submitted to the University of London in 1951 was a monumental depository of painstakingly-accumulated data.

Brock’s recommendations changed subtly as the years passed, more vines were tested, and manufacturing techniques were refined (‘Riesling-Silvaner’ or

Müller-Thurgau didn't suit everyone), but it's probably true to say that the emergence of an embryonic English wine-making industry in the 1950s owed everything to his diligence. His publications included *Outdoor Grapes in Cold Climates* (1949), *More Outdoor Grapes* (1950), and a series of small reports published privately in 1949–64.

The first man to plant a commercially-viable English vineyard for more than seventy years was another quintessential Englishman: Major-General Sir Guy Salisbury-Jones (1896–1985), aide-de-camp to King George VI and Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps during the reigns of George VI and Elizabeth II.

'S-J' had served the British Army in two world wars, winning the Military Cross in 1917. By the late summer of 1944, he was a brigadier serving with SHAEF (the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force) in Versailles. 'S-J' was a great francophile; he had seen French viticulture at first hand, and had a deep-seated love of wine. He could also see that war had ravaged much of north-eastern France, greatly hindering production, and that German wines would not be available in quantity for some time. The popularity of Bordeaux clarets and Burgundian reds endured, but wine from the southernmost parts of France was not greatly favoured in Britain. Consequently, British experimenters could see not only the need for English wines but also the chance of a profit.

So Guy Salisbury-Jones bought about 1.5 acres of land in Hambledon, midway between Portsmouth and Southampton, where in March 1952, after consulting Barrington Brock, he planted three thousand vines (mostly Seyval Blanc, with some Aurore and Chelois) on 0.83 acres. Hambledon was 'just the ticket' for Salisbury-Jones: not only an ideal site for his vineyard, but also once home to England's pre-eminent cricket club, pre-dating the Marylebone Cricket Club ('MCC') by at least twenty years. It has recently been announced that the Hambledon vineyard is to be restored to its original condition—a fitting tribute to its unique contribution to the English wine industry. 'S-J' deserves a special Blue Plaque!

In 1955, by then enlarged to 4.5 acres, Hambledon had released the first English white wine to be sold commercially since the First World War.* Red and sparkling wines followed, by which time another new vineyard had been planted at Horam Manor ('Merrydown') in East Sussex, not so very far from Bolney. Six vines planted experimentally in 1954 were followed in 1955 by two acres of (mostly) Müller-Thurgau.

Lt.-Col Edward and Mrs Margaret Gore-Browne planted 5.5 acres of Müller-Thurgau and Seyval blanc at Beaulieu in 1958, in the grounds of what had once been a vineyard planted shortly after 1204 by the Cisterian monks of Beaulieu Abbey. The first vintage was released in 1961.

Interest in English wine had clearly started to grow, though the products were generally regarded as unremarkable and had a difficult time establishing themselves as worthy competitors of the many imports. However, it is greatly to the credit of the pioneers not that they persisted, but that they persisted long enough to lay the basis from which award-winning English wines are now being created.