

# Society Outings



## Tenterden Vineyard & Chapel Down Winery



Mr Pat Sherratt

The Society trip in July started on a fine note. That is to say, when we arrived the sun was shining and continued to do so all day and we arrived in plenty of time for a coffee before our organised tour.

The first vines were planted at Tenterden Vineyard in 1987 on south facing slopes were of the Bacchus variety. That was the most suitable for our climate at the time. With a 4°C temperature increase in the last 35 years Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and Pinot Noir, more suited to warmer regions, replaced them in 2004. The vineyard now covers 25 acres (average size is 5 acres) with 4 red and 9 white grape varieties being grown.

As a winery, Chapel Down sources grapes from other vineyards in Kent, Sussex and Essex with a growing area of over 180 acres and has an annual production of half a million bottles per year. Because of the climate change our temperature is only 1°C below that of the Champagne area of France and 30% of production is now sparkling wine. This spends up to 3 years "sur lie" (on the lees) and is produced in the "Méthode Champenoise" style. Planning is already underway for an expected high demand for sparkling wine in 2012 as it will be important that English bubbles are top priority.

The growth of Rosé in popularity, particular with the "fairer sex" is

showing a new trend, but the majority of production is white with a limited amount of red.

Our tour host gave us a detailed account of the growing and pruning of the vines. The grapes are all handpicked and transported to the winery in small bins as mechanical pickers often damage the grapes. After picking they are "soft crushed" in modern membrane presses and the resultant juice fractions collected in enormous steel cylinders. All wines are fermented with selected yeast strains at cool temperatures for up to 3 weeks. At Chapel Down the normal alcoholic strength is 11.5% to 12%. The wine is then stored in large steel containers, with have internal heaters and water-cooling to keep the contents at the ambient 12°C.

Some wine maturation occurs in oak barriques (barrels). American oak imparts a



spicy flavour and French oak a tannin flavour. British oak has too soft a texture. Each barrel holds 320 bottles and the cost of the barrel is £350. The barrels that have contained the red wine are then sold on to the Scottish whisky distilleries. We then saw thousands of new bottles all imported from France. So no glass manufactured here in the UK then? The sparkling wine production continues with the bottles being hand transferred to modern Gyro pallets for riddling. This replicates the traditional method of hand turning. The neck of the bottle is then dipped in freezing brine to create a frozen plug of wine. The wine cap is popped and the plug, complete with lees flies out (*dégorgement*). The bottles are then mechanically sealed with corks, labelled and packed in boxes. This machine has two operators who process 500 bottles per hour.

Having seen the winery we now had the pleasure of tasting. Normally guests are offered three different wines, but earlier I discovered that our host worked with a former colleague of mine and we were offered five wines. Firstly a dry sparkling wine, **Century Extra Dry**, a blend of Reichensteiner, Rivaner and Pinot Noir grapes, then a white **Flint Dry 2007** of mainly Rivaner, Schönburger and Bacchus grapes. Next was **Bacchus 2006** followed by **English Rose** a Rosé with Schönburger, Rondo, Dornfelder and Pinot Noir grapes. Finally came a red wine **Rondo Pinot Noir 2005** blended from Rondo and Pinot Noir grapes.

After this a visit to the shop ensured all took away a little something to remember the visit to Chapel Down.

Chapel Down is in fact at Small Hythe, which, prior to the silting of the River Rother was the port for Tenterden. Ships of up to 400

tons were built at Small Hythe of oak from the Wealden Forest.

Our journey took us back to Tenterden and it was interesting to see a recently planted cherry orchard - long may this fruit be grown in the Garden of England!

Lunch was taken at one of the various excellent restaurants in this beautiful town. Those who preferred some retail therapy seemed to find what they wanted whilst Patricia and I found a most interesting museum. One display depicted 1449 Rye that became impoverished by years of fighting the sea and coastal raiders. Henry VI had pressed Tenterden to join the Confederation of Cinque Ports as a limb of Rye. Another was a selection of weights and measures, including a splendid example of 1825 market scales. A hop industry display detailed a march of 16th May 1908 in Trafalgar Square to "Save the Hop Garden of England". The growers protested because for each £6 of production costs they were only receiving £3... Where have we heard this again in 2008???

A leisurely return (taking the scenic route) passing through the beautiful village of Smarden and Kent's most haunted village Pluckley saw everyone back in Dover by teatime.

