



Planned: Pinot to Phytuema: the story of the Rathfinny Wine Estate at Alfriston.

Actual: The story of the Hollow Lane Vineyard at Blackboys.

Fri 11th May 2018

Talks are generally arranged a year in advance, so when on the 3rd May we got an email to say that Richard James would be at a meeting in London and therefore not be present for the talk, we were in a bit of a pickle. Desperate to find an alternative and avoid having to cancel the meeting, Toni rang around every vineyard in the vicinity that she knew of, albeit without success given the short notice. It was therefore fortunate that when talking to Jenny about the predicament that she mentioned that Chris had bought her a nice bottle of wine from the Hollow Lane Vineyard for Valentine's day. Toni rang them to find out that they were available that evening and that there was just enough time to assemble their first ever public presentation.

Therefore on the night we were more than delighted to welcome Chris & Jan Wilkins and their daughter Zoe to the hall. Chris and Jan took it in turns to relate how they had moved down from Yorkshire some 25 years ago and ended up studying a wine making course at Plumpton College in 2004. In 2010 they bought land some that hadn't been worked for 30 years at the Bushmere Stud between Blackboys and East Hoathly. The following year some 2400 Pinot Noir, Chardonnay & Pinot Meunier vines were planted by hand, with 3000 more in 2013. That would generate capacity to produce 10000 bottles annually. That year they also went back to Plumpton to study more about vineyards & winemaking. The strategy behind the business is to complement their equestrian interests, although it could be said that both a competing for the same land.

It turns out that there's never a dull moment during the year when running a vineyard, beginning with pruning in February (before sap rises), through ground treatment in March, bud burst in the latter part of April and so on until harvest in October. The jobs seem to expand to utilise all the manpower resources available, making it a dedicated labour of love. Quite a lot of equipment is required for the winemaking process too, which is always a hurdle for anyone developing such a business. The goal at Hollow Lane has also been to be as self-sufficient as possible, with solar panels being installed in an off-grid system to make them independent of the public supply.

Conventional wines can be produced in a single season but sparkling wines take two. After the initial 6-8 month fermentation in their 350 & 700L tanks the wines are bottled with crown corks and then laid to rest on their side for a 9 month secondary fermentation. Riddling racks are then used to gradually twist and turn the bottles to an angle of 80', then the necks are frozen so that the sediment can be disgorged before the final top-up and corking.

After the talk and question and answer session there was a chance to try and buy the various wines which, not surprisingly, proved very popular. There was a choice of Chardonnay still and sparkling, and Pinot Noir sparkling blanc and blush wines. Blush comes from the second pressing of the Pinot Noir grape which picks up colour from the skin (the flesh is clear) and not to be confused with rose. The wines are light and refreshing, with an ABV content just above the 10% mark.

The evening ended with Chris, Jan and Claire feeling delighted with the success of their first presentation evening; glad that it was organised quickly so as not to worry about it beforehand. We wish them well!

Leycester Whewell, EHADPS secretary, 28 May 2018