

RATHFINNY



— NEWS FROM RATHFINNY ESTATE • ISSUE 3 • SUMMER 2012 —



VINE PLANTING WELL UNDER WAY IN LATE MARCH

What better way to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee or the Olympics in London than with a glass of English wine?

A couple of weeks ago, English wine maker Bolney won a *Gold Outstanding*, the top award for sparkling wine, in the International Wine and Spirits Competition (IWSC), beating a host of French Champagnes. In recent competitions other English producers, such as Hush Heath, Gusbourne, Ridgeview and Camel Valley, have also won medals. We, on the other hand, have been busy planting and planning!

The plans for the new winery are at the final stage



before tender documents go out. We hope to start work in August. Work on the new office is about to commence and we are about to submit a planning application to rebuild the old flint barns into a 46-bed hostel to accommodate seasonal workers during harvest and pruning. During the rest of the year our hope is that the hostel will be used for educational purposes by school groups to learn about the ecology of the South Downs.

We have also been busy redesigning our website to show who we are and what we are about, and we've been rebranded with the new Rathfinny

logo, which uses an old Eric Gill font, cut just up the road in Ditchling.

I have now completed my two year course at Plumpton College, which I thoroughly recommend if you are thinking of working in the wine business. So I can now concentrate more fully on matters at Rathfinny.

English wine sales continue to soar

English wines are going from strength to strength, in terms of both quality and sales. Over the Jubilee weekend, Waitrose saw "a significant surge in sales of English wine," which had its biggest week on record - sales increased 96%. Andrew Shaw, buyer, said the Thursday and Friday following the Apprentice programme were record sales days, as "some stores saw 1,000% uplift in week on week sales."

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• Blog: rathfinnyestate.posterous.com

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Warmest, wettest, then coldest...

By Cameron Roucher, Vineyard Manager

In the last newsletter I said we were hoping for a warm wet spring... well, we got it! The wet bit that is.

The vines and planting machine arrived from Germany towards the end of March, with planting beginning on the 26th. All 57,000 vines were planted within the week in what was unseasonal brilliant sunshine and warmth.

April arrived soon after, with a vengeance. 250% above the average rainfall fell for April bedding in our newly planted vines nicely. So we had the warmest March, wettest April, and coldest May in 100 years (although the last week of May will have bumped up the average a little). The vines got off to a slow start, mostly due to the cool ground temperatures in April and early May, but

now that things have warmed up they are going well, and are looking good.

Once the vines went in the ground they needed support stakes and ties. Then it was time to mark out the post positions and start putting in the posts, wires and end assemblies to support the vines as they grow.

While this is going on we still have to carry on with all the other vineyard jobs, such as spraying, mowing and desuckering. A few statistics for you:

- 57,000 vines, and support stakes
- 171,000 rubber vine ties
- 12,000 posts
- 1,000 end posts, tiebacks, and anchors
- 2,500 wire tensioners
- 16 tonnes of wire

And that's just for the first year!



JONATHAN MEDARD, RATHFINNY'S WINEMAKER, HAS RECENTLY ARRIVED

Meet M Médard

By Jonathan Médard, Winemaker

I have been in England for over three months now and, even though general plans for the winery existed, I am very happy to say that a lot of progress has been made on its continued development.

One of the highlights is that the vines are planted and seem to be doing great (pictures on the blog) thanks to Cameron and his team, who have been consistently working even in inclement weather. Also, the plans for the infrastructure and the layout of the winery are well advanced and respecting anticipated timelines. Construction is expected to start on time, in August of this year, and we'll be ready to harvest and process whatever Mother Nature gives us in 2013. I have already been to France three times, each time visiting different wineries, checking on buildings and equipment. I travelled with our South African consultant, Gerard de Villiers, we've met a lot of manufacturers for tanks, equipment, and I am impressed with the quality that some offer. Now we just need to select which manufacturers we really want to work with.

On a final note, encouragement and support from colleagues in Champagne and around the world, who are so willing to share their experiences and savoir-faire, has been extremely helpful.

(Jonathan hails from Epernay in the heart of Champagne, bringing with him a wealth of international experience to Rathfinny. With a degree in biochemistry and a master's in Oenology (Université de Reims), he trained in the wineries of Chateau Mouton Rothschild, Champagne Louis Roederer, Moët & Chandon and Champagne Boizel, prior to honing his expertise in California and Virginia at Newton Vineyard and Kluge Estate respectively. Fluent in three languages, Jonathan was most recently Vice President of Winemaking for up and coming California winery, Conway Family Wines.)



CAMERON MANHANDLES A FEW OF THE 57,000 VINES THAT WE PLANTED IN MARCH

Making environmental progress

By Liz O'Neill, Assistant to Mark Driver

One of the many exciting changes here at Rathfinny Estate is that the farm has now entered into environmental stewardship schemes overseen by Natural England.

At the time of our last newsletter we had brought the farm into Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) - we have since progressed to Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). HLS involves more complex environmental management, bringing support and advice from our local advisers, to develop a comprehensive agreement that achieves a wide range of environmental benefits over a longer period of time, for wildlife, landscape, the historic environment and resource protection.

As the farm retracts and the vineyard grows we are also trying to increase the biodiversity and wildlife by the way we manage the site.

One of the big projects relating to this is the regeneration of the chalk grassland on the 12 hectares of headland that surrounds Rathfinny. For many decades it has been covered in thick scrub and poor grasses but over the winter volunteers and rangers from the South Downs National Park spent many hard hours knocking it back. We are now about to fence the area and bring in ponies with the help of the Sussex Pony Grazing Conservation Trust. The ponies will graze down the area, which will then allow the flora and grasses to regenerate. Watch this space!

MAGNIFICENT VIEWS ACROSS THE ESTATE IN APRIL THIS YEAR



Rathfinny Trail takes shape

By Sarah Driver

It has been a busy six months with a lot of work going on behind the scenes. I don't think Mark and I ever realised how much goes into setting up a new major business! Branding, PR, new web design to say nothing of all the legal issues and documents: Health & Safety, employment contracts, registering trade marks both here and abroad, building contracts – the list goes on and on.

However, the most exciting thing as far as I'm concerned has been developing the new Rathfinny Trail in conjunction with the South Downs National Park and the National Trust. Having always been a strong supporter of the latter, it has given us great pleasure to invite them onto the land and discuss ways in which we can open it to the public. Alongside the existing amazing landscape there will be

the added value of the meadows we are creating and the lines of vines that encourage corridors of wildlife.

I had a 'taster' of what is in store when I walked the proposed trail with the SDNP Ranger, Richard James, who pointed out and talked about rare bees, flowers and the habits of larks. We are working on the practicalities of gates and signage, but watch this space for its grand opening.

Tied in with this is the development of the old flint barns, which Mark has mentioned on page 1. The idea is that the use of this will, as well as providing accommodation for our seasonal workers, promote the aims of the SDNP. The Rathfinny Trail will pass by it providing welcome accommodation, the chance for a reviving cup of tea and a scone and who knows, in years to come, the chance to taste Rathfinny bubbly! What could be better?

WE ARE CREATING MEADOWS TO ENCOURAGE WILD FLORA AND FAUNA



RATHFINNY'S PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



2012

The first 57,000 vines, covering 20ha, were planted in March. A further 20ha of vines have been ordered for planting in 2013. The plan is to plant further vines each year until 2017.



2012

Building work starts on our new winery in August, plus other buildings on the Estate, including the office. Planning applications go in for the conversion of the old flint barns into a 46-bed accommodation block.



2013

The first grapes are harvested by hand and Rathfinny produces its first wine - a still, crisp, dry white.



2016

Rathfinny's first sparkling white wine is ready for launch.



2017

By 2017 the intention is to have 160ha (400 acres) under vine.