

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: May 2017

English Wines

Presented by Simon and James Hawkins of Hawkins Bros. Fine English Wines

Report by Barbara Jones

English wine has been an incredible success story over the last decade. There are now over 600 vineyards in England, with production set to double in the next two years. England's winemakers produce world-beating sparkling wines and their still wines are increasingly winning awards at international competitions with an emerging, unique, "English style" of wine. In the last few months, English wines have taken off in the USA, with New York City's enthusiastic sparkling wine consumers embracing the latest wines from our country. And British Airways have just announced that they are to start serving English wines to their first class passengers. The Hawkins Bros. are champions of this new wave of high quality winemakers. Simon and James have grown up in the heart of the English wine growing region and are passionate about English wines. They sell English wines exclusively from their shop, based in the Surrey town of Milford. Their portfolio includes wines from 15 different English vineyards, thus including the whole spectrum of wine styles produced. They also make their own Brut Reserve sparkling wine.

With English Wine Week imminent we were delighted to welcome both Simon and James to present our tasting. The evening started with two bottles of fizz, the first of which was their own **Hawkins Bros Brut Reserve 2013 [12% £25.00]** vinified from locally sourced grapes Chardonnay/Pinot Noir/Pinot Meunier, 46/36/18%. This classic cuvee is made on the south-facing chalk of the Hogs-Back in Surrey. MS Xavier Rousset said 'This is an impressive first vintage with great mouth-feel and refreshing acidity'. It won the Silver Medal IEWA 2017!

The second fizz was also good, a **Nutbourne Nutty Brut 2013 [12%, £22.00]** and a different blend – Pinot Noir/Reichsteiner/Chardonnay - 50/25/25%. This wine was more biscuit colour with a little pink blush and was slightly softer on the palate being off-dry and fruity – a Gold Medalist three years running at IEWA.

Our next wine introduced us to other unusual grapes – the **Nutbourne Sussex Reserve 2015 [12%, £13.00]** blended from Bacchus, Huxelrebe and Reichsteiner. This was interesting as it had an elderflower perspective and was light and off-dry but many of us were not convinced about it.

Our views were similar for the fourth wine **Greyfriars Pinot Gris 2015 [11%, £15.00]** that had a delicate pale straw colour with hints of pears and honeyed crispness.

The next wine, a **Stopham Estate Pinot Gris 2014 [12%, £15.00]** was more characteristic of the grape. Off dry and pale yellow in colour with floral aromas this had excellent balance with crisp acidity. Fairly full in body it had plenty of juicy fruit intensity with a lively citrus and stone fruit finish.

It was followed by a blended wine – **Litmus Wines Element 20, 2012 [12%, £19.00]** Bacchus/Chardonnay/Pinot Gris – 48/48/4%. Very pale in colour with a slight hint of oak, this had fresh notes of citrus, vanilla and pear complementing vibrant apple flavours with a touch of butterscotch, silky textures and persistent length.

The next wine was rather unusual – **Albourne Estate White Pinot Noir 2015 [12%, £15.00]** and reminiscent of White Zinfandel, having a pale rose colour. This had a lovely texture and excellent length with delicate aromas of cherry blossom, redcurrant and lime that should develop further with time in bottle.

Our final wine of the evening was a **Hush Heath Manor Pinot Noir 2015 [11%, £17.50]** and was presented as a red wine. For many it looked more like a rose and had it been lightly chilled the notes of cherry and violet would have been more predominant and the wine acceptable. As an un-chilled red it was disappointing.

Our grateful thanks go to Simon and James for a most interesting selection of English wines produced in neighbouring counties. English wines are developing nicely, especially the sparkling wines which are of excellent quality. The still wines have some way to go to equate quality and price with those of foreign imports.