

Country Comment Mid Devon Gazette – February 2013

Winter hols will soon be over.

Three months of peaceful chilly bliss come to an end on March 20 when the gates of the vineyard and the doors of the Deli Shack Cafe will be thrown open again.

The monastic charms of silent days wrapped in up thermals pruning the three hectares of vines are almost over. P-day, the end of 60 days pruning, is now set at March 4 – hooray.

Already the visiting wine groups are queuing up from all over the country and the little grey cells are slowly recharging with ideas for the 8th Devon Wine Week at the end of May.

There'll be the popular music n mezes evening on the vineyard terrace of course, and we're hopeful of persuading Master of Wine Alastair Peebles to put on one of his tasting contests involving Devon wines. We've already beaten Loire roses, and done well against the sparkling wines of New Zealand. Last year Alastair and wine chums chose the best Devon wine to go with the South Devon Crab Festival....

But most effort will once again go into trying to persuade our lovely local landlords and chefs to devise deliciously Devon menus matched with Devon wines for the week. We certainly expect to have Clovelly Estates on board, North Devon's best foodie pub The Grove Inn at Kings Nympton, Tiverton's own excellent Flying Pickle, and a host of others. The challenge as always will be to sign up some new names, and the closer to home the better.

The winter months are big for competitions too. Next week will be the result of the annual " Judgment of Parsons Green " - a massive tasting of English sparkling wines in London with an illustrious judging panel.

Then in March comes results from the Lyon Concours, - both our sparkling wine and rose have been entered quickly followed by the May edition of Decanter wine magazine. We already know that our Vintage Brut 2009 is among the winners of a Decanter competition with a score of 85+ and a magazine's recommendation.

It's not cheap entering all these contests - Decanter alone costs £110 per wine plus shipping. But at a time when most people are trading down their wine purchases (from Champagne to Prosecco & Cava) it's no time to cut the marketing budget. The world of wine is not so much a jungle as a pool of piranhas!

Is there a " horsemeat" scandal just around the corner for cheap wine too?

Wherever there's a mass market and the customer is only looking at the cheapest product you can almost bet there'll be some horsey-behaviour somewhere down the production line.

In fact though the horsemeat story has been good news for local food. Local butchers have seen a surge in business. The more scandals in the industrial-food system the better!

For most people it's not a matter of affordability. We spend less of our household budget on food than ever before. It's mostly laziness. So the more worried we are about what's in our food the better!

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Yearlstone Vineyard and the Deli Shack Cafe re-opens on March 20, Weds-Sundays 11-4.