

Brentwood Wine Society

The Wine Press

Spring Edition

March 2026

EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to the Spring edition of
the Wine Press

In this edition I will explore the role of
monastries in the history of wine,
take a look at the growing Welsh
Wine Industry, round up some of the
current news stories and of course
introduce some corkscrew facts.



All contributions for the summer edition are welcome please send them to Philip Knowles at
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A BARREL OF LAUGHS

As I was leaving the Wine Society meeting last month
I heard someone shout "I was a grape" but I guess it was
just the wine talking.

NEWS IN BRIEF

All the Flavor, Half the Hangover

The first 0.5% ABV red wine from Saint-Emilion has hit the market, it is a single varietal Merlot, from the 2023 vintage, produced by the Chateau Franc Mayne it is marketed under the name ILEX. Very little has yet to be released on the open market most has gone by 'allocation' to top French restaurants.



A Sour Note in U.S.-France Relations: Trump Floats 200% Wine Tariff

After president Macron publicly refused to join Trump's Board of Peace, Trump threatened a 200% tariff on French wine imports into the U.S.

VIVI Economics has recently published its assessment of the likely impact. *"Currently a French bottle of wine landed in the US has an average value of \$11.80 per bottle. The tariff would take it up to \$23.60 before state taxes, distributing costs and retail mark up. Under such conditions imports of bottled French wine to the US would collapse. However given that French wine imports to the US was 70 million cases in 2025 this accounts for only 15% of total imports and 5% of domestic consumption. So while the impact may be disruptive and restrict consumer choice it would not create a noticeable shortage."*

The impact on sparkling wine would be more profound, France supplies 45% of the sparkling wine consumed in the US. The tariff would push entry-level Champagne into luxury territory.

Of course in his first presidency Trump excluded Champagne from tariffs and he may do so again. If not, given that French wine

exports to the US totalled €5.2 billion in 2025, the new proposed tariffs would be yet another blow for the French wine industry already reeling from sharp reductions in domestic consumption.

The French Government support scheme targeted grubbing up 74,000 acres in 2024-25 and it has announced a scheme for subsidising the uprooting of a further 80,000 acres in 2025-26, industry experts report that a further 100,000 acres, about one in eight vines, will need to be taken out of production to rebalance the market



Losses Down Under, Bubbles Up in Europe

To continue the story of the impact of tariffs the Australian wine Giant Treasury Wine reported a significant loss of \$649 million AUD in the first half of the financial year following a US business write down.

On a more positive note Prosecco has become a major success in France. It is now the third largest export market for the Italian wine with exports up 21.1% in the past year.

In 2025 Italy exported 667 million bottles worldwide. The USA then the UK remain the top two markets. The USA takes 23.8% of the export, the UK market grew by 1.1% in the last year to make up 22% of Prosecco exports.

UK vineyard acreage up

In the UK total vineyard acreage has increased 123% in the last decade and exports are up 35%.

World OF WINE

Wales: A New Frontier for British Wines

The wine industry in Wales is relatively young compared with traditional European regions, but it has grown rapidly over the past few decades and is now one of the most dynamic parts of the UK wine scene. Once considered marginal for viticulture because of its cool, wet climate, Wales has benefited from a combination of improved grape varieties, better vineyard management, and notably gradual climate warming, which has made grape ripening more reliable. It is now considered to be a 'hot spot' for vine cultivation as climate change pushes the possibility of wine production northwards.

Modern Welsh wine production really began in the late 20th century, with small pioneering vineyards experimenting with cool-climate varieties. However the first commercial vineyard, not just in Wales but in the United Kingdom, was planted in 1875 near Castell Coch, just outside of Cardiff, by the Marquis of Bute.



After some experimentation the grape variety Gamay Noir was selected. The vineyard was never a commercial success and was finally uprooted in 1920. During its 40 years of production thorough ripening of the fruit was only achieved in seven of those years. Even in these seven years the wines were of dubious quality and required the addition of considerable amounts of sugar during fermentation.

Today there are 59 vineyards in Wales compared to over 900 in England. The Welsh vineyards are concentrated mainly in South Wales and along the border counties where conditions are slightly milder. Many producers focus on sparkling wines made in the traditional method because the naturally high acidity of grapes grown in cooler climates suits this style particularly well.



One of the most prominent producers is Ancre Hill Estates, known for biodynamic practices and award-winning sparkling wines. Another well-established vineyard is White Castle Vineyard, which produces a range of still and sparkling wines from varieties such as Pinot Noir, Rondo, and Solaris. In North Wales, Pant Du Vineyard demonstrates how viticulture is spreading into new areas once thought unsuitable.

Many Welsh wines have recently won prestigious prizes, for example in 2021 the Pinot Noir Precose Reserve produced by the White Castle Estate in Abergavenny won Gold at the Decanter world Wine Awards.



The Vale Vineyard located in Denbighshire's Vale of Clwyd, North Wales, produced a blend of Rondo, Cabernet Noir and Divico which won the

trophy for Best Alternative Red at the 2025 Wine GB awards, and in 2012 the Ancre Hill Estate's 2008 first vintage of Sparkling white was voted the best Sparkling wine in the WORLD by the Euposia magazine in Verona, beating 20 champagnes in a blind tasting!!!!



Hybrid grape varieties — crosses developed to handle cooler climates and disease pressure — have played an important role in Welsh success. Grapes like Rondo, Regent, and Seyval Blanc ripen earlier than traditional European varieties.

Though tiny in global terms production capacity doubled between 2015 and 2025 and now stands at around 150,000 bottles a year. Given low production and high production costs prices remain on the high side typically ranging between £20 and £30, though cheaper wines are appearing on the market.



Wine tourism is also becoming an important part of the sector, with vineyard tours, tastings, and local food pairings attracting visitors. Projected figures predict wine sales will be worth £14.4 million in 2035 while associated tourism and the industry's growth will add a further £75.9 million to GDP by the same year.

Overall, Welsh wine reflects a broader trend: regions once considered too cold for viticulture are now finding opportunities. While production volumes are modest the future looks promising.

Wales is establishing a reputation for fresh, aromatic still wines and particularly high-quality sparkling wines — a niche that may continue to grow in the coming decades.

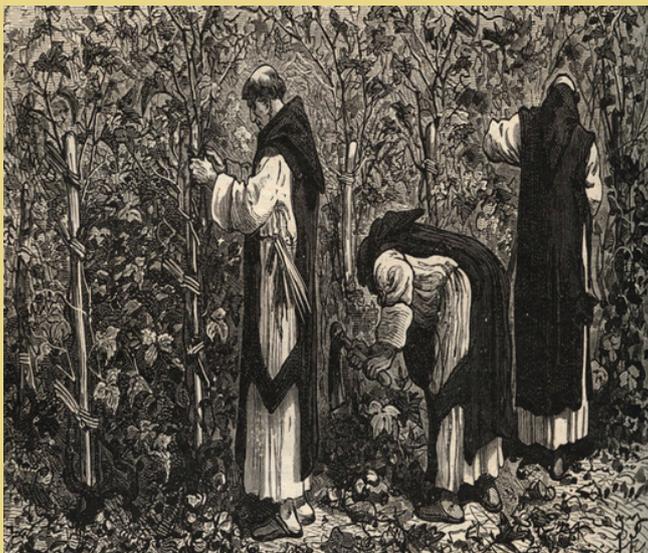
WINE TIMES

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

Divine Vines: The Monks Who Shaped the Wine We Drink

Monks and monasteries played an extraordinarily important role in shaping the wines we know today. During the early Middle Ages, after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, much of Europe's agricultural knowledge risked being lost amid political instability and economic decline. In Italy, Spain but particularly in France monastic communities became centres of stability, literacy, and record-keeping, and viticulture was one of the crafts they carefully preserved.

Wine held deep religious significance in Christianity as part of the Eucharist, so monasteries needed a reliable supply. Orders such as the Benedictines and later the Cistercians cultivated vineyards not only for sacramental use but also for hospitality, trade, and income. Over generations, monks observed how soil, slope, drainage, and climate affected vine performance.



Their meticulous records helped lay the foundations for the concept we now call terroir — the idea that a wine reflects the place where it is grown. The concept of 'climats' plots of land with distinguishable characteristics was a monastic invention and today many thousands of these 'climats' are still in existence. The concept of 'clos'

a walled vineyard is also down to monks – originally the walls were built to keep animals out and the word is still used in labelling many French domaines.

There is also a story, possibly apocryphal, that the concept of pruning stemmed from an accident in a monastery. A donkey, it is said, was left by mistake in amongst the vines. It ate everything down to knee height. The monks left the plants which the following year produced the best quality grapes they had ever grown!!!!

Their records helped lay the foundations for the concept we now call terroir



Some of Europe's most famous wine regions owe much of their development to monastic work. In Burgundy, Cistercian monks carefully mapped vineyard plots, identifying parcels that consistently produced superior wines. Many of today's prestigious vineyard boundaries trace directly back to these medieval observations.

Similarly, the Benedictines contributed significantly to viticulture in Champagne, where improvements in vineyard management and winemaking techniques gradually enhanced quality. The famous monk Dom Pérignon is often associated with early developments in Champagne production, even if later legends exaggerated his role.



Monasteries also served as hubs of innovation and knowledge exchange. Because religious houses were connected across regions, techniques could spread more easily than in the fragmented feudal landscape outside their walls.

Monks improved pruning methods, experimented with grape varieties, and refined storage practices in cellars designed for stable temperatures — an important step toward consistent wine quality.

Perhaps most importantly, monasteries provided continuity. Vineyards require decades to mature, and political upheaval can easily destroy long-term agricultural projects. Monastic institutions, with their multigenerational outlook, ensured vineyards were maintained, replanted, and improved over centuries. Without that stewardship, many historic European wine traditions might not have survived at all.

Today, when we speak of historic vineyard sites or centuries-old wine regions, we are often seeing the legacy of monastic patience, observation and dedication — a reminder that some of the world's greatest wines owe their origins not only to nature, but also to devotion.

Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Chablis, Champagne, Chenin Blanc, Clos de Vougeot Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Chablis, Champagne, Chenin Blanc, Clos de Vougeot are among many of the great wines which owe their origin to monastic orders.

It is thought that there are now only four monasteries still producing wine in France, including the Cistercian Lerins Abbey famous for its Saint Honoret wine, with about a dozen more in other European countries particularly Italy where the Augustinian monks of the Abbazia of Novacella produces renowned white wines.

Although mainly a pursuit of monks, nuns also produced wine at their convents, and some of these still flourish today. Probably the most famous is the Monastero Soure Cistercensi about 30 miles north of Rome, where 80 nuns manage vineyards producing organic white and red wine, while in France the Benedictine nuns of Notre-Dame de Fidelite in Provence produce around 25,000 bottles a year of mainly Rose wine.



The Corkscrew Corner

Helices & Worms

Just as there are many designs for corkscrews so are there different types of helices or worms.

Here are some from my collection.

The cyphered wire helix



This helix is attached to a nice C19th ebony handled straight pull with an spike for breaking the bottle's wax seal.

The bladed worm



A 1930's Cornish Pixie corkscrew. Brass corkscrews were produced in many designs as souvenirs, throughout the UK in the 1920s and 1930s

The speed worm



A longer 'thinner' helix excellent for damaged corks though I have successfully used it to extract a reluctant Champagne cork. A mid-late C19th century straight pull with a nicely decorated shank.

Archimedian Screw



Normally associated with early pieces but just to show things don't change this one is a 1970's Marriot Hotel minibar corkscrew - useless in practice.

Wire Helix



Very easy to make, often found on C19th corkscrews, though this one is a nice Scandinavian, silver example from the 1970s.

Double helix



Double bladed to give extra purchase – not common, this is a modern C20th example.

Grooved wire helix



The helix is grooved to give added strength and purchase. This is beautiful C19 English 'peg and worm' with a grooved helix.

Clough corkscrew



This is a simple wire corkscrew made from a single length of wire. It was patented in the late C19th century by William Rockwell Clough in New Hampshire. Cheap to make it has been produced in vast numbers since its patent.

Often used for advertising corkscrews, medicine bottle corkscrews and in standard straight pulls like those above.