

Forum Wine Group Report September 2023.

It is over two years since our last vineyard trip to Gloucestershire and Wales, so we decided it was time for a shorter, single vineyard visit. We approached Ryedale Vineyard near Malton and booked a tour and tasting for ten of us which also incorporated a meal at the nearby Jolly Farmer pub. I am pleased to report that the outing was a great success largely due to the friendly welcome we received at both establishments, the quality of the tour, and the standard of the pub food (at a very reasonable price).

The vineyard was not easy to find being situated out in the country near the villages of Westow and Leavening in North Yorkshire. Here a three-person family team met us in the shape of Jon and Michelle Fletcher and their son Jack who (along with absent son Kit and volunteers) form the total workforce. Ryedale is one of the UK's most northerly vineyards, but the family make light of the problems this brings and have, since taking over in 2016, increased the productivity by extending the number of vines to allow the production of 10,000 bottles of wine annually. Jon split us into two groups and he and Jack took a group each for an hour's tour. The production area was essentially contained within a two-room shed which allowed us to get a close-up view of the apparatus; it also made understanding the process relatively straightforward and Jon went to great pains to answer all questions. Ryedale make a full range of still white, red and rose wines, as well as both white and rose sparkling versions and we were taken through the differences between the various production methods. Jon then took us out to the rows of vines, which are based on grapes known to be resistant to the weather of northern England. These feature a number we came across on the Welsh trip, including the red Rondo and Pinot Noir grapes and our old white favourite Bacchus; new to us were the white varieties Paradise and Solaris.

So the tasting followed. We tried no fewer than seven wines, the two sparkling flagship wines, both retailing at £30 per bottle and five of the still varieties. Opinions were mixed where the sparkling were concerned. Several members preferred the rose ('refreshing'; nice hints of apple') while the white was met with 'nothing special'. The Solaris still white had character ('I love it!') but again views were mixed on the 'Yorkshire Lad' and 'Yorkshire Lass' whites with the former in particular being 'rather ordinary'; the 'lass' produced more positive responses ('lovely and aromatic'; 'this is my favourite' etc.). The still 'Rosie' rose (named after a vivacious Yorkshire aunt!) was quite well received, while that problematic British attempt at red (The Strickland Red, based on Rondo, and our strongest tasting at 11.5%) had a nice bouquet but rather a short finish. Michelle provided a fabulous range of cheeses to accompany the wines (and even a small pot of curry). All in all this was a most enjoyable evening and we would thoroughly recommend a visit to Ryedale.

The next meetings ('Recent South African Wine') will be held on Tuesday 17th October at Stella and John's at 2.00 pm.

Tim Meacham.

