



GUSBOURNE

# VINI-CULTURE

STORIES, ESSAYS AND ARTICLES FROM THE VINEYARDS

2024

HOW TO SERVE  
AND SAVOUR  
ENGLISH WINE

THE VERY  
BRITISH ART OF  
THE PICNIC

PUTTING DOWN  
ROOTS

ESCAPE TO  
WINE COUNTRY

A STILL MOMENT



CELEBRATING THE BEST  
OF ENGLISH WINE



Welcome to *Vini-culture*, the magazine dedicated to exploring English fine wine — from the people who make it, to where to enjoy it.

This issue marks a milestone in Gusbourne's history: it's 20 years since our first vines were planted. To celebrate this coming of age, we asked brilliant young wine writer, Sophie Thorpe, to take a break from her Master of Wine studies to explore what vine age means for the fine wines we love to drink. Read more on p22.

Continuing the vineyard theme, on p34 we spend time with Merlin Sheldrake, fungi expert and author of the best-selling *Entangled Life*, to talk about how the key to making better, more sustainable wine might just lie in this forgotten kingdom.

If that all sounds a little niche, then fear not. We also hear from writer Henry Jeffreys on why English still wines are having something of a moment. Discover his favourite bottles on p26. Then, on p38, we escape to the broad horizons of Camber Sands to find the perfect base for an English wine-country staycation.

But to whet your appetite, we start the issue with some expert advice from two Gusbourne pros as they share their tips for enjoying and serving our favourite sparkling wines. It's mouth-watering stuff.

If all that leaves you inspired to come and enjoy Gusbourne wines with us this season, we'd love to welcome you to our vineyards in Kent. You can find out more at **Gusbourne.com**.

*Laura Rhys*

LAURA RHYS, MASTER SOMMELIER  
GUSBOURNE HEAD OF WINE - COMMUNICATION

# GUSBOURNE

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Could fungi be the key to more sustainable winemaking? Or more delicious wines? Merlin Sheldrake, author of best-selling *Entangled Life*, delves into these questions and explains why unlocking the potential of this forgotten kingdom is so essential.

## ESCAPE TO WINE COUNTRY

Immerse yourself in the lush countryside and sweeping seascapes of our part of Kent. We've got the perfect base for your stay — plus recommendations for where to enjoy your bottle of Gusbourne out in the wild.

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Our Sussex and Kent vineyards are 100 miles apart. To join the dots between these two distinct terroirs, Emily Miles sets out on a long-distance adventure from the heights of the South Downs to the expanse of Romney Marsh.

## FOR ALL THE VINTAGES TO COME: SUSTAINABILITY AT GUSBOURNE

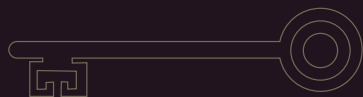
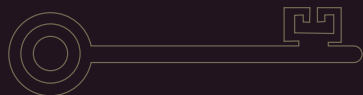
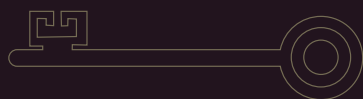
Since we first planted our vines, we've worked with a nature-first approach. From cover crops to bee hives, find out about our journey towards sustainability.

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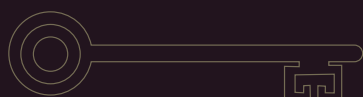
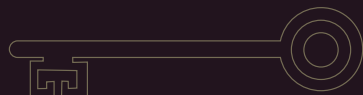
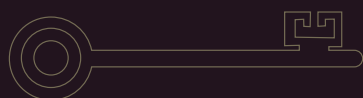


# GUSBOURNE

## MEMBERSHIP

WE'RE PLEASED TO OFFER TWO GUSBOURNE MEMBERSHIPS, EXPLORED AND COLLECTORS.

THESE MEMBERSHIPS ARE DESIGNED TO HELP YOU DEEPEN YOUR APPRECIATION AND ENJOYMENT OF ENGLISH FINE WINE.



ENJOY HAND-PICKED SELECTIONS OF OUR FINE ENGLISH WINES, REGULARLY DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR



BECOME PART OF A COMMUNITY OF FINE WINE LOVERS WITH EXCLUSIVE MEMBERS-ONLY EVENTS



BE THE FIRST TO ACCESS OUR RAREST WINES - PLUS, ENJOY PREFERENTIAL PRICING ON OUR CLASSIC RANGE

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ASK THE EXPERTS

# HOW TO SERVE AND SAVOUR ENGLISH SPARKLING

Ensure you always know which chilled bottle to open — and what to serve alongside — with fail-safe tips and brilliantly useful advice.

When you venture to Appledore, Kent, you'll find our welcoming tasting room, The Nest. This is a place for wine lovers to indulge in gorgeous bottles alongside freshly prepared, seasonal menus. It's also a place for those who are completely new to English wine to dip a toe in the water.

Needless to say, there's a whip-smart team on hand to make your tasting experience memorable. These skilled folk know our wines inside-out — so, to help you make the most of your Gusbourne (wherever you're enjoying it) we've plundered their expertise.

Julie Warner-Gladish, DipWSET, is one of our most knowledgeable guides. She's a dab hand at answering the trickiest of questions and dispensing advice on our wines. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, culinary talent and Head Chef Anthony Coppard makes food and wine

matching look effortless. To give you a taste for the kind of flavours which will make each wine sing, Anthony's shared a canapé suggestion for each of our classic bottlings. "Try not to get too tied up by wine and food matching rules," says Coppard. "Stick with fresh, seasonal ingredients — whether that's spring's wild garlic and mushrooms, or autumn's lovely squashes and root vegetables — and you can't go wrong.

"I always avoid too much heat or spice when creating menus to match with our wines. But you don't need to be scared of bold flavours. I often find that something pickled — a bit of sauerkraut for example — can work well with the acid profile of a cuvée like Blanc de Blancs.

"Another tip is that you can match the wine to a secondary ingredient — say, a citrus dressing — to bring out different flavours in the wine. Taste, experiment — and just get stuck in."

## GUSBOURNE BRUT RESERVE 2020

"This is my favourite wine to show people," says Warner-Gladish. "The acidity is lovely and balanced; it's soft, it's creamy. It's got such a generosity. This is the wine take to a friend's party. It's the perfect introduction for someone who's never tried English sparkling wine. It's easy-going and crowd-pleasing — my go-to wine. And the fact that it's our entry-point into the range is staggering because it's just so good.

"Make sure you don't serve it too cold; that will squash some of its pretty characteristics. Brut Reserve is great on its own; perfect at a picnic; incredible for a wedding or speeches. It's completely adaptable."

## Anthony Coppard's food match:

Whipped carrot and chickpea hummus with roquito peppers and toasted black sesame.





#### **GUSBOURNE BLANC DE BLANCS 2019**

"This wine is characterised by its linear acidity; you'll know what I mean when you take a mouthful. The acidity is right there in the middle of your palate — and it's completely exhilarating. You'll want it with some beautiful fresh oysters, or something from the sea. Or a little bit of cheese — nothing too heavy, but something with a little fat in which will be a wonderful counterpoint to the wine. Just-cooked fish and chips are also an incredible match.

"The 2019 vintage has got so much citrus going on; it's incredibly lively. For me, this is a wine that should be paired with the right food for it to be at its best.

"This style of wine is really age-worthy: it suits those tertiary flavours — pastry, toast and nuts — which develop with time in the cellar. I always feel that our Blanc de Blancs is a wine which can be laid down for a period of time."

#### **Anthony Coppard's food match:**

Fresh crab with Kentish rapeseed and lemon emulsion, fennel tops and pickled shallots.

#### **GUSBOURNE BLANC DE NOIRS 2019**

"This is my personal favourite," says Warner-Gladish. "I'm a protein-head and I enjoy eating meat; for me, this is a sparkling white wine for red-wine lovers.

"It's got this superb depth of flavour; it's got that backbone. It's got that intensity. It even has slightly more golden colour to it. Just everything about it is bigger. It's bolder, it's fruity. It's got so much going on and it can stand up to dishes like lamb or duck.

"At Christmas, it's my go-to because it doesn't matter what anyone's eating: it will go with it, whether that's nut roast, or turkey."

#### **Anthony Coppard's food match**

Twineham Grange (a local Parmesan-style cheese) and black pepper Arancini.



## NOT JUST ENGLISH “CHAMPAGNE”

**You'll appreciate your glass of Gusbourne even more once you understand where it fits into the English wine scene. Here, tour host Julie Warner-Gladish outlines what makes Gusbourne so special.**

“When I introduce people to Gusbourne,” she says, “I explain that we’re on an equal footing to leading Champagnes. We’re a grower, so we look after our fruit from the vineyard to the glass, and that sets us apart.

“It was the vision of our founder, Andrew Weeber, to create English sparkling wine that could surpass his favourite vintage Champagne. And, for many people, it’s only once you visit the vineyards and the winery that you can really appreciate the care and the craft which sets Gusbourne apart.

“We’re vintage-only, which is a huge deal in English wine and in our marginal climate. Our sparkling wines enjoy extended lees ageing to build complexity, which takes time and investment.

“Our quality is extraordinary, and our product is special. It always surprises people to hear that Norway is our biggest export market, but it makes perfect sense; their cuisine is often seafood focused and they appreciate good quality. So, naturally, they love our wines.” ♦

### GUSBOURNE ROSÉ 2019

“The Rosé is probably the most underrated wine at Gusbourne,” says Warner-Gladish. “And it’s also the biggest surprise. Because people assume a rosé will be sweeter. When they taste ours, they’ll find it beautifully dry and complex, crisp and refreshing.

“It goes really well with a little bit of charcuterie – whether that’s prosciutto with a little fat, or some cheeses. Something like that, enjoyed in the sunshine, would be perfect. You could even have it with something like strawberries too. It’s got a lot of sweet-fruit tasting notes, but it’s not actually a sweet wine; it’s got this wonderfully crisp, red-fruit driven finish.”

#### Anthony Coppard’s food match

Local hot smoked salmon — or chalk-stream trout — with lemon and herb cream cheese blinis.

### JOIN US AT THE VINEYARDS FOR A TOUR AND TASTING

If you’d like to experience our guided tastings and wine-and-food matching first-hand, we offer expert-hosted tours and guided wine tastings year-round at our vineyards in Appledore Kent. The most popular experience, the Estate Tour, includes a three-course lunch, prepared by Anthony Coppard, and matched with a range of Gusbourne wines. Find out more at [gusbourne.com/tours](https://gusbourne.com/tours)





# BOTTLE

BEHIND  
THE

**Crafting fine wine isn't all about crushing grapes: for AJ Benham, Head of Wine Operations, it's the last of the truly artisan vocations. Here, we step behind the scenes to find out more about the man who puts the sparkle into your sparkling.**

Photography: Sam Walton

**T**houghtful, precise and eloquent, winemaker AJ Benham is a keen talent. In May 2023, he was named in Harpers "30 under 30", recognising publicly what the team at Gusbourne have long known: AJ is a winemaker who's destined for great things.

He's the man responsible for the lesser-known aspects of winemaking at Gusbourne: bottling, secondary fermentation, dosage and tasting trials, wine storage and disgorging. And, while this part of the craft may not be as well-understood, or as photogenic, as vine cultivation and grape-pressing, it's vital. In AJ's hands, our juvenile wines are coaxied towards maturity.

AJ joined Gusbourne's crew back in April 2018; in September 2023, he stepped up to take on the weighty job of Head of Wine Operations. His path to this ambidextrous role in the winery and warehouse took him across the globe — and across all aspects of Gusbourne's winemaking.

## THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

"I worked for a year abroad during my degree and got the wine bug in New South Wales

where I was living alongside people who were really into wine," says AJ. "I really enjoyed the idea of creating something from the land. As someone put it to me: winemaking is one of the last artisan jobs. One of the last truly artisan ways you can make a living."

After his degree, AJ worked in hospitality in his hometown, York ("it's where I learned to join the dots between food and wine") before going on to the Eastern Institute of Technology in Hawke's Bay, for an intense year spent studying Oenology. "Hawke's Bay is one of the best new wine regions in the world, just for the sheer quantity of things they can do there: anything from aromatic Sauvignon Blanc right the way up to Bordeaux blends," he says.

"I really got into the craft but also the science; it's a lovely mix of both worlds." Next, AJ sought out an internship that would take him not just through harvest, but a full winemaking year. Cue 12 months in Missouri.

You'll be forgiven for not associating Missouri with fine wine production. Or, in fact, wine production of any kind whatsoever. "It might not



be famous any more,” says AJ. “But it’s got this fascinating history. It’s the original wine country in America. I was working at Stone Hill Winery, in what used to be the second largest winery in the world during the 1800s, where they had a large German immigrant population. And then Prohibition happened and most of the vines were grubbed up.

“It was the most evocative place to go to work every day — they had all these underground cellars, a limestone cave dug into the side of a hill. They even still had pre-Civil War vines there. They were really serious about their winemaking; lots of new oak; lots of experiments and different things going on. They also had a sparkling programme, which was an area I focused on — keeping in mind the burgeoning wine industry back home. I was completely thrown in at the deep end.”

The deep end is, it seems, somewhere that all ambitious winemakers must spend time. It’s this full immersion into autonomous decision-making and responsibility that shapes the ambition

and belief needed to push ahead and take opportunities as they arise. It was exactly what AJ needed to prepare him for his next move — to Gusbourne.

#### RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

Within months of arriving at Appledore, a new role was created, one which focused on the secondary winemaking. “I thought it would be a good opportunity to get experience of all of the processes. And it has just worked out. I’m quite logistically focused and I’ve always enjoyed making things work effectively.”

AJ is characteristically matter-of-fact about “making things work”. In reality, his early years at Gusbourne saw him setting up an entirely new facility from a blank slate. He transformed a former fruit storage depot into a temperature- and humidity-controlled wine warehouse where secondary fermentation and ageing now take place.

“In early 2019, it was obvious we were going to run out of room for disgorging, lees ageing and finished stock storage. The space we’ve got

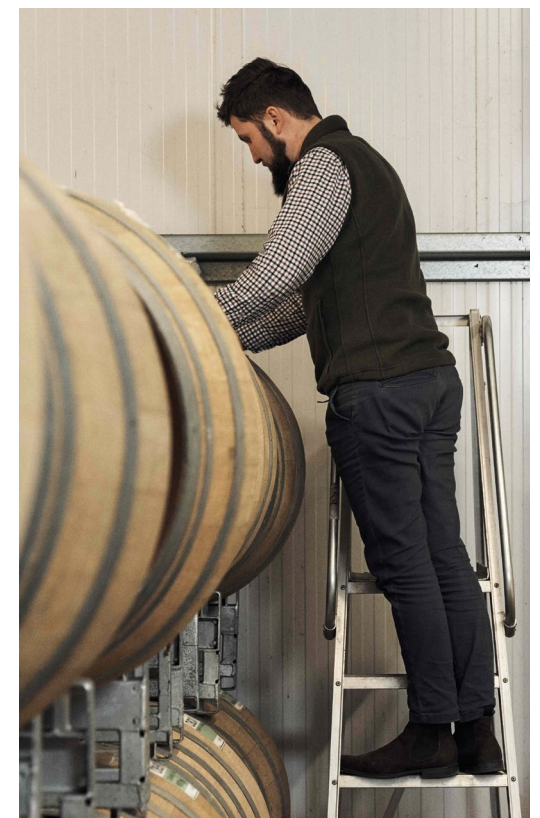
now gives us a lot more control for production, storage and dispatch,” he says.

#### THE CRAFTSMAN

So far so good. But what about the craft — the artisan appeal — of the work which first brought AJ into wine? “There’s a lot about my role which draws on those skills, whether that’s looking after the large-scale trials, lees ageing tasting or blending.

“And, whatever is happening in the secondary wine production, I’m back in the winery at harvest, blending and bottling. All of which are huge logistical challenges. From a winemaking point of view, I still very much have my hand in,” says AJ.

AJ and his team work alongside Head Winemaker Mary Bridges and her team in a neat partnership. “Mary’s skills — with her natural ability to dial in on the technical side of things, the science and analysis — work well alongside mine,” says AJ. “It’s a fantastic team to be part of as we move forwards to Gusbourne’s next chapter.” ♦



# THE VERY BRITISH ART OF THE PICNIC



Picnicking is the last word in relaxed and (quite literally) laid-back entertaining. Here, Laura Rhys, Master Sommelier, shares her tips on making these moments in the sun even more memorable.



“

The Rat brought the boat alongside the bank, made her fast, helped the still awkward Mole safely ashore, and swung out the luncheon-basket. The Mole begged to be allowed to unpack it all by himself. He took out all the mysterious packets one by one and arranged their contents in due order, still gasping, ‘So thankful – oh, so thankful!’ at each fresh revelation.

”

As Kenneth Grahame so beautifully captures in his children’s classic *Wind in the Willows*, there’s something inherently delightful about the adventure of a picnic.

It’s a concept which resonates with our weather-obsessed nation; with our perpetual squint-at-the-clouds sense of optimism. It also speaks to long-held traditions — from the al-fresco-dining obsessed English aristocracy (as immortalised in the cracklingly tense Box Hill scene in Jane Austen’s *Emma*), to its democratisation in the Victorian era and beyond. Culturally and literally, it’s a moveable feast.

These days, we get to cherry pick the best of picnicking’s grand heritage and combine it with the convenience of easily available good food. A picnic can be anything from a bag-for-life stuffed with supermarket dips and crisps to something far more lavish. Centre stage, perhaps, a cherished Fortnum & Mason’s wicker hamper, fastened with its comfortable leather straps and boasting neatly held cutlery compartments, china plates and a larder’s worth of delicacies.

But, whether grand or simple, all picnics are united by an unwritten pact: the quiet determination that, come what may, we will enjoy ourselves. We will turn a blind eye to the drizzle that rolls in, bothersome wasps, toppled-over glasses, damp grass and any other inconvenience.

Naturally, this means it’s almost impossible to bring the wrong thing to a picnic — especially when it comes to wine. But, in the spirit of making a decadent lunch even more delicious, Laura Rhys, Master Sommelier, Gusbourne’s Head of Wine Communication and devoted picnicker, shares her tips for wining and dining in the great outdoors.

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**I love picnics: the spontaneity, the conviviality, the informality** that comes from a meal enjoyed when you’re not sat around a table. Expectations are reset. Someone will have brought home-made sausage rolls, someone will have made fancy salads, someone else has got something that’s slightly too warm in a Tupperware. It’s all going to be enjoyed in the great outdoors and with a wonderful view.

**When it comes to the wine, it’s not a question of still or sparkling.** At a picnic — a really good picnic — you’ll want both. Personally, I end up leaning towards white wine, like our Chardonnay Guinevere, and rosé or a lighter red. Gusbourne Pinot Noir will work beautifully. I tend to go lighter, juicier, fruitier.

**If we think of classic picnic dishes, like a quiche,** then you’ll find a wine such as our Brut Reserve — that blend of the three classic champagne grapes — is totally charming here. For something delicate like smoked chalk-stream trout, opt for our elegant, mineral Blanc de Blancs. Then Rosé can go either way — have it with the sausage rolls or with a bowlful of strawberries and crème fraîche — it will be lovely with both.

**You’ll want to have something to keep the wine cool, but not too cold.** You can get some lovely bottle carriers these days. Or, failing that, opt for a freezer sleeve to keep your wine the perfect temperature for longer.

**For a special occasion picnic, you can’t go wrong with a proper hamper** — complete with glassware. That’s going to raise the bar nicely. If a hamper’s not an option, I would definitely invest in some thin stemless glassware. You’ll reduce the chance of the wine getting knocked over and vastly improve the experience of drinking it.

**Pour small servings, and top up glasses more often.** Wine is incredibly easy to enjoy in the sunshine, but you don’t want it to get warm in the glass. Keep your bottle cool, your servings petite and refresh glasses more frequently than you might when dining indoors.

**Relax and enjoy the moment.** Picnics aren’t the time to worry about perfect pairings or wine etiquette. Just pour a glass of something easy-to-love, like our English Rosé. Then sit back, stretch out and enjoy the company, friendships, conversations and your beautiful surroundings. ♦

**You can browse our seasonal selection of still and sparkling wines at [Gusbourne.com](https://www.gusbourne.com)**

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT AUSTIN



# PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

It's 20 years since we planted Gusbourne's first vineyard — a landmark moment, not just in our history, but also for our wines. Here, writer Sophie Thorpe explores why — for fine wine lovers — old vines matter.

ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGINA ADAM

When the Sycamore Gap tree was illicitly felled last year, it hit headlines across the country. There was outrage at the monument's destruction. The lone, handsome sycamore had been planted in the late 1800s, surviving not just wind, rain and thunder, but war, urbanisation and its big break in Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Yet overnight it was gone, all thanks to a pair of vandals with a chainsaw.

I've never visited the iconic tree, but I can understand the anger that people felt. I've been lucky to stand in some of the world's oldest vineyards, and it's hard to put your finger on exactly why these ancient plants evoke such emotion — but they do. Their thick trunks, twisted and gnarled, speak of everything they've witnessed; their sprawling forms testament to the years they've stubbornly survived, enduring against the odds.

When it comes to wine, there's more than just sentimental value to vine preservation, however. As vines age, their roots sink deeper into the ground, reaching through the layers of soil, sometimes into sheer bedrock, seeking water and minerals, and the volume of grapes they produce starts to drop. It's for exactly this reason that vines are often wrenched out of the ground at 20 to 25 years of age. They no longer fit on a balance sheet, so they're grubbed up, replaced, and the cycle goes on.

For a vineyard to stay in the ground beyond this pivotal age is rarely an accident — and many argue that old vines offer greater concentration, complexity and sense of place, or terroir. Rock-star "master pruner" Marco Simonit has championed old vines his entire career. The platinum-quiffed Italian travels the world armed with his secateurs, advising leading estates on "vine architecture" — and is a firm believer that old vines are key to site expression in wine. "The character, the typicity, the identity of the wines becomes very strong when the vines get older," he explains. And he's not the only one to hold this belief.

"Wine is made by the roots of the vines," says Mathieu Berrouet of Bordeaux's Château Pontet-Canet, whose vines are an impressive average 55 years in age. He feels that not only do old vines

allow them to express their terroir better, but they also temper climatic extremes. This latter idea is a common thread among those farming older vineyards. As global warming brings more challenging conditions for vine-growers (and, indeed, all farmers), older vines are better equipped to handle extreme heat and drought — their deep roots able to reach water reserves that younger vines simply can't access. Chris Cottrell — of California's Bedrock Wine Co — argues that once vines hit a certain age, they move beyond tantrums and teenage moods, they're grown-up, less bothered by things and more resilient.

"Are old vines better? Not necessarily," Dean Hewitson tells me. The Barossa Valley winemaker works with the oldest Mourvèdre vineyard in the world, planted in 1853. For him, age alone doesn't make a great vineyard — but a vineyard is unlikely to survive if it isn't producing a high-quality crop, so the two often go hand-in-hand. The aforementioned vineyard, Old Garden, proves itself year in, year out — with quality he can bank on, proving just why it's lasted over 150 years.

When Hewitson was starting out, he travelled the world to make wine and get to grips with the business — and everywhere he went, producers told him that you really saw the potential of a vineyard at 10 years. After 25 years making wine in the Barossa, he's seen that come true time and again: "Ten years on the hammer and the quality is just a new level," he says. Just occasionally, however, young vines can produce something special — pointing to the 1973 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon. Although the vines were only three years old, the wine famously beat France's best in a blind tasting in 1976 (known as the Judgement of Paris). "Sometimes you just get lucky on that first crop," Hewitson says.

The United Kingdom can't lay claim to centenarian vineyards — but, as of this year, Gusbourne will have had vines in the ground for 20 years, a rarity in England's nascent wine industry. Head Vineyard Manager Jon Pollard has worked at the estate since the very beginning — planting those first six hectares with founder Andrew Weeber in 2004. Twenty years is significant, Pollard feels. "It takes you 10 years to really know that site — and another 10 years to really know the wine from that site," he tells me. Over that time, the root system grows from the

size of a human hand, gradually stretching up to a metre below the surface in their clay-rich soils. Importantly, the team gets to see and understand how a vineyard manages various conditions. "There are all these different parameters that Mother Nature and the vines can throw at you," says Pollard. Wet, dry, hot, cold, disease or pest pressures: after a decade or so, a vineyard will have seen it all — and so has its farmer.

For Head Winemaker Mary Bridges, having vines that have made it to two decades feels like a landmark moment for both Gusbourne and the wider world of English wine — proving that it's not a flash in the pan, but a serious industry. "We're learning all the time — that's what's exciting," says Bridges. There are so many factors at play — especially in sparkling wine — that she feels it's difficult to pinpoint exactly what is attributable to the age of vines alone. Comparing two neighbouring vineyards — Boot Hill (planted in 2006 and 2007) and Lower Mill Hill (planted 2014 and 2015), she argues that Boot Hill is undeniably more reliable, offering more consistency in its

aromatic profile, and more frequently making it into their top blends. But, with each year, the team gains a deeper understanding of every plot and parcel across the estate, the nuances of their site, the fruit it produces and how to translate that in the winery.

Since Weeber first planted this corner of Kent in 2004, there's been a growing movement to champion old vines, to see these pockets of living history preserved, the wines they produce valued and treasured. In 2009, the Barossa Old Vine Charter was created; California's Historic Vineyard Society was established in 2011; South Africa's Old Vine Project was formally launched in 2016; while 2021 saw the first Old Vine Conference, and leading wine writer Jancis Robinson MW made her international Old Vine Registry official in 2023. Gusbourne's vines may not feature yet, but perhaps it's only a matter of time until they do. For now, new vineyards are in the pipeline, and who knows what the team will know, and these vines will produce, with another 20 years under their belt. ♦

JON POLLARD, GUSBOURNE'S  
HEAD VINEYARD MANAGER



## OLD-VINE WINES TO TRY

Explore the world of old-vine wine with Sophie Thorpe's top recommendations

- ♦ Grenache, Mourvèdre or Shiraz from the Barossa and McLaren Vale — including those of Hewitson, such as the iconic Old Garden Mourvèdre.
- ♦ Parts of California, particularly Lodi, are home to some special old vineyards, such as those from Bedrock Wine Co.
- ♦ Southern Chile, especially Itata and the Maule, is a haven for old vines, particularly Païs and Cinsault. Look out for wines from De Martino.
- ♦ The Swartland is the mecca for old vines in South Africa — try Sadie Family Wine's Old Vine Series for some of the most iconic examples.
- ♦ Within Europe, the Languedoc-Roussillon and the Rhône has some treasured parcels of bush vines: try Beaucastel or Domaine Gauby.

# A STILL MOMENT



Writer and author Henry Jeffreys loves English wine — but not just the sparkling. Here, he argues that it's high time England's still reds, whites and rosés had their time in the spotlight.

Gillian Pearkes is all but forgotten today, but her 1981 book *Vinegrowing in Britain* was remarkably prescient. While everyone else was looking to Germany for inspiration, she saw that France and specifically Champagne and Chablis could be a model for viticulture in England.

As well as writing on the subject, she planted her own vineyard at Yearlstone in Devon, acted as mentor to Bob Lindo at Camel Valley and encouraged Stuart and Sandy Moss at Nyetimber: "Find the right site and you will grow Chardonnay in England," she told them.

Sadly, Pearkes died in 1993 and never got to see Chardonnay and Pinot Noir becoming the most planted grapes in England. It turns out she was right about the Champagne model: and now I think England's Chablis moment has arrived.

The country has been producing high-quality still Chardonnays for just over ten years with wines like Gusbourne's Chardonnay Guinevere. But, whereas English sparkling wine took off quickly with the success of first Nyetimber and then Ridgeview, still Chardonnay has proved a slower burn.

The challenge is acidity. Chris Foss who founded the wine school at Plumpton College in Sussex told me about trying to make Chardonnay in the 1980s. It had a tooth-worrying acidity of 25g per litre, about double that of Champagne.

The sparkling wine process, the action of sugar, yeast, time and bubbles, softens the acidity, but with a still wine there's nowhere to hide.

RIGHT, HEAD WINEMAKER MARY BRIDGES,  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAM WALTON

Everything must be geared up to getting maximum ripeness. This starts in the vineyard: there are different strains of Chardonnay. Some clones are better for sparkling wine, some for still — and they need to be planted in the right place. At Gusbourne, they use Burgundy clones for still wines planted in clay soils which hold the heat. The vineyard team limits how many grapes the vines produce so that all its energy goes into ripening the fruit as fully as possible.

You can see why many producers don't bother: you can get a higher yield from sparkling wine grapes and charge more for the resulting wine. But although English Chardonnay has been slow to take off, momentum is building.

According to Laura Rhys, Master Sommelier, and Head of Wine Communication at Gusbourne, the best counties are Kent and Essex where the warm dry climate enables growers to let the grapes linger longer on the vine to let the sugar build and acidity drop.

When I met with Gusbourne's winemaker Mary Bridges earlier this year, the latest still wines were tasting ripe and harmonious with none of the jagged acidity that sometimes plague English Chardonnays. A lot of thought goes into making such seemingly effortless wines, however, as Rhys explains: "We ferment our still Chardonnay juice in (mostly old) oak barrels and puncheons, which helps to soften the acidity, but leaving the wine on lees for a time after fermentation also helps to build more weight and a creamy texture in the palate, too."

Gusbourne's Chardonnays have proved a particular hit with restaurants. According to Rhys: "Sommeliers get really excited about wines, which allow them to introduce new regions to their guests." They are particularly good with seafood, just like Chablis. But if you can resist them now, I can vouch that they only get better with time in the bottle.

Everything that applies to making Chardonnay goes double for Pinot Noir. Winemakers want



the colour from the skin, which must be fully ripe — or they risk extracting harsh green tannins from it. Rhys explains: "It can be tricky to get the ripeness levels and style of fruit needed to make a serious still Pinot Noir. Even with warmer summers over the last decade or so — and with the really special site we have in Kent — we still need to be really careful with site selection and in monitoring fruit to make sure we get the best fruit for our still wines."

Laura thinks reds are likely to remain a minority pursuit. But with rosé, the potential is huge. Until recently, pinks were seen as a bit of a joke, often a repository for grapes that weren't up to snuff. But the success of Provence has shown that people are prepared to pay good money for top-notch wines providing the packaging is up to it. Wines such as Gusbourne English Rosé show how suitable Kent is for rosé in a "fruit forward, yet delicate, style," as Rhys puts it.

It's going down a storm with customers. We're going to see a lot more still Chardonnay and Rosé coming out of England in the next five years. And if you think the wines are impressive now, don't forget that the best is yet to come. ♦



## HENRY'S PICK OF THE CELLAR

Five stand-out still wines to enjoy this year.

### GUSBOURNE PINOT NOIR 2022

Spicy and opulent in the nose, there's a big waft of strawberries here. Take a sip and it's fresh, fragrant and perfectly ripe. This would be magnificent with duck.

£40 at [gusbourne.com](https://gusbourne.com)



## HENRY'S PICK OF THE CELLAR

### OPPOSITE

#### **Gusbourne Chardonnay Guinevere 2021**

Three years after vintage, Gusbourne's classic Guinevere is really getting into its stride. There's green apples, zingy limes and a tangy saline quality with subtle shades of oak providing a creamy texture.

£40 at [gusbourne.com](https://gusbourne.com)

### THIS PAGE

#### **Gusbourne Wild Ferment Chardonnay 2022**

This is a special cuvée fermented with wild yeasts. What knocked me out about this wine is the sheer intensity of it. It's ripe and fresh with a creamy round texture and hazelnuts on the finish. Great now — but this could be absolutely sensational in five years' time.

£35 at [gusbourne.com](https://gusbourne.com)





THIS PAGE

**Gusbourne Pinot Meunier Single Vineyard Mill Hill East 2022**

Pinot Meunier, the third Champagne grape, does extraordinary things in England as this wine demonstrates. With its vivid raspberry and orange peel fruit, I don't think I've tasted a more hands-in-the-air joyful wine this year.

£35 at [gusbourne.com](https://gusbourne.com)

OPPOSITE

**Gusbourne English Rosé 2023**

This shows why English rosé is so exciting at the moment. It's made entirely from Pinot Noir grown in the Cherry Garden vineyard and brings to mind strawberries, oranges and, yes, red cherries with a delightfully round texture.

£25 at [gusbourne.com](https://gusbourne.com)



# THE ANCIENT PACT

Merlin Sheldrake, author of the best-selling *Entangled Life*, reveals the mysterious role fungi plays in the vineyard — and how it might just shape the future of wine.

In 2023, Jon Pollard, Gusbourne's hugely experienced Vineyard Manager, decided to call time on under-vine cultivation. Chopping up the soil to prevent weed growth, was — he felt — limiting the vigour of the vines and damaging the abundant soil life.

This move isn't without controversy, but Merlin Sheldrake — biologist, author and expert in fungi — thinks it makes perfect sense.

Here, we speak with Merlin about why fungi, especially those in the soil, are the forgotten heroes of food and farming. In Merlin's view, the secret to making — and selling — wine in a sustainable way might just lie in this forgotten kingdom.



MERLIN SHELDRAKE, AUTHOR OF  
*ENTANGLED LIFE* AND FUNGI CHAMPION

## WHY SHOULD WINE LOVERS CARE ABOUT FUNGI?

At the most fundamental level, your glass of wine is only possible because of fungi.

### GO ON...

All land plants have fungi to thank for their existence. It was only with the help of fungi that, about 500 million years ago, the ancestors of land plants were able to move from freshwater and onto the land.

These fungi supplied plants with crucial nutrients; helped them resist drought and helped them forage for what they needed in the complex labyrinths of the soil. All plants depend on this long association with mycorrhizal fungi — and vines are no exception.

### SO, FUNGI MADE VINES POSSIBLE. ANYTHING ELSE?

Then there's soils. Soils are the outcome of fungal activity: different kinds of mycorrhizal fungi; decomposing fungi; fungi that transform organic matter from one state to another. Soil is the result of degradation of organic material. And in this process, fungi release nutrients and provide soil structure; fungi provide highways for bacteria to navigate the soil as well.

## AND WHAT ABOUT ABOVE GROUND?

There's the yeast of course. As humans, we've been using this particular fungi for fermentation for thousands of years. It is thanks to yeasts that we have the bread and the beer for which humans gave up their nomadic lifestyles and settled as farmers. We need yeast to turn fruit sugars into alcohol; fermentation starts when you add yeast to a sugary liquid; without oxygen, the yeast converts sugar into alcohol and releases carbon dioxide.

Aside from that essential fungi, we have those fungi that live on, and in, the vines to help with their natural defences.

### THAT'S THE BIG PICTURE. BUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN A BIT MORE DETAIL?

Let's narrow in on one vine. At any moment in time, it'll be working with its mycorrhizal communities. These fungi grow in and around the roots to supply the vine with crucial nutrients and help them to interact with the soil.

The ancient pact between plants and mycorrhizal fungi is that plants supply the fungi with carbon. (Carbon is in energy-containing compounds, like sugars and fats. Plants are making those compounds in photosynthesis where they are eating carbon dioxide and light and transforming these into energy-containing

carbon compounds.) So, plants push these energy-containing carbon compounds down into their roots. They exchange, or trade, carbon with the fungi, getting phosphorus, nitrogen and mineral nutrients in return. Fungi are ingenious soil scavengers: they are deft rangers in the wilderness of the soil — they're far better able than plant roots to tease out nutrients. So, that's the essential deal. That's the core of the relationship.

### RIGHT. SO PLOUGHING SOIL AND CHOPPING UP THESE NETWORKS OF FUNGI. THAT SOUNDS LIKE A NO-NO...

Much of modern agriculture has evolved without considering the life in the soil — whether that's mechanisation or huge inputs of chemical fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides and so on. The soil was thought of as a kind of place where nutrients hung out, but not as a place filled with life that was vital for plants to thrive.

Ploughing breaks up fungal networks; the soil structure and the fungi in the soil are in a very heterogeneous environment. You're making a lot of work for the soil organisms when you disturb the soil. Every time you plough, the soil has to reset.

We have good reason to believe that reducing disturbance to the soil will have a beneficial effect on the plants and their fungal associates.

### COULD FUNGI IMPACT A WINE'S FLAVOUR? COULD THEY PLAY A PART IN TERROIR?

Potentially, yes. In general terms, the fungi are stationed at the key entry point of nutrients and soil chemistry into the vine. It's only through fungal activity that plants are able to acquire certain compounds from the soil. So, in principle, fungi will be vital to any expression of soil chemistry and soil characteristics in the plant.

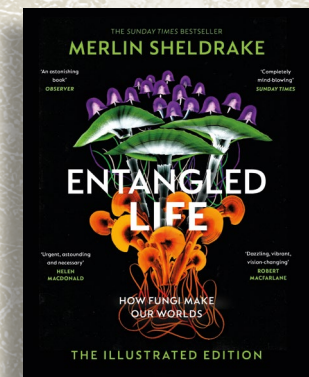
They'll be mediating that interaction between the plant and the soil. In practice, this hasn't been well studied: the expression of different mycorrhizal communities on the flavour profiles of wine is a subject of great interest. In principle, we would expect the fungi to have an impact on the flavour of a wine.

If you have healthy, flourishing vineyards, with viticulture that's really working to promote the health of the soil, then I'd expect you to find that the fungi communities varied according to soil type, grape variety and root stock. They could potentially have a unique signature to each vineyard site.

### SO, FUNGI FEED THE VINES, POTENTIALLY INFLUENCE THE FLAVOUR OF FRUIT AND MAKE FERMENTATION POSSIBLE. WHERE ELSE CAN THEY HELP?

Packaging would be a really good area to think about. The idea that fungi can be used to build things as well as break them down is starting to catch on — we're already seeing fungi being used for building materials, furniture and packaging.

You can grow fungi with different appetites: with some research it would be possible to find a way to use the skins and stalks — the leftover materials from winemaking — as a feed for them. Then, in turn, you can use the fungal material produced from this for packaging, like wine box inserts which hold bottles in place. That's totally possible. There's lots of potential here to explore. ♦



For a more in-depth, and wide-ranging, exploration of the fascinating kingdom of fungi, Merlin's book *Entangled Life* (Vintage) is out now. His film, *Web of Life*, is in IMAX cinemas now.



# ESCAPE TO WINE COUNTRY

**When you visit Gusbourne's vineyards, why not stay a while? Boutique hotel The Gallivant — just a stone's throw from our estate — is designed as a place to rest, relax and enjoy life's greatest pleasures. Allie Mount finds out more.**

City life: I love it, but sometimes you need a change of pace. So, in search of a re-charge, my husband and I booked a stay at The Gallivant in Camber. Only 90 minutes' drive from London, it's within easy reach, yet feels worlds away. A perfect escape.

Tucked away behind rolling sand dunes, The Gallivant's low-profile blends seamlessly into its seaside environs. Aside from the cool bluster of the spring wind, you could be in Cape Cod or the Hamptons — and this impression of chic, seaside luxury endures once you step through the doors for the warmest of welcomes.

As you might expect from a boutique hotel of this calibre, each of The Gallivant's rooms has its own design personality. For us, the Garden Room — with French doors opening onto a private deck — was the perfect choice (especially as our chocolate Labrador Lily was also joining us overnight). Every detail of the room was as stylish as it was thoughtful, from the scent of Bamford products to the warm, dark-oak floors, gorgeous fabrics and chic beach décor. Tempting though it was to retreat into the calm and comfort of our little sanctuary and go no further, we couldn't wait to explore the rest of the spaces.

The Gallivant's interiors are a *Grand Design* dream — it's open plan, yet cleverly zoned to create inviting, individually curated spaces. The warm ambience flows throughout, mingling amongst the guests wherever you decide to settle.

It's not just the design of the spaces that helped us feel at ease alongside our fellow guests: The Gallivant also has a signature tradition of English Wine at Five. The idea is to encourage everyone to gather to share a glass of something special — a convivial moment and a celebration of the

incredible wines which are grown and made on the hotel's doorstep.

Founder Harry Cragoe has long been an advocate of English wine: he's built the largest list of English wines of any venue, including a note of "miles from the hotel" for each producer. So, at 5pm, while Lily gently snoozed by the fireside, we enjoyed a taste of Simpsons' Gravel Castle Chardonnay and relaxed into our evening. We took advantage of the nostalgic array of wooden board games ranged around the sitting room for a lively round or two of 'Shut the Box'.

A surprise treat was the Oyster Happy Hour, which was paired with a flight of Gusbourne wines — Brut Reserve 2020, Rosé 2019 and Blanc de Blancs 2018. The wines were the perfect accompaniment to the fresh local shellfish.

Later that evening, we joined other guests in the restaurant for dinner, prepared by The Gallivant's talented chef Nico. The food was exceptional — from the beef crackers (a must try) to the lobster cocktail and sumptuous skate wing, roasted over open fire. The vegetable sides are not to be missed either. Chef Nico gives vegetables an equally starring role. Hispi cabbage with miso and preserved lemon was a real winner.

The food ethos — with sustainability at its heart — made our meal all the more enjoyable: 90% of the ingredients used in the kitchen come from the British Isles.

Our evening was blissfully relaxed and unhurried; there's no pressure of table-turning

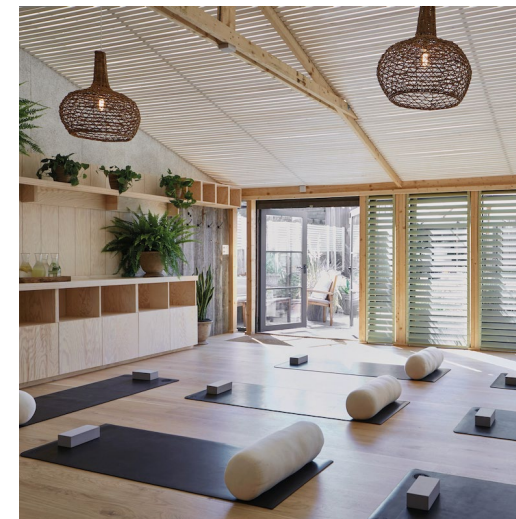


here. Kerry, who leads the front of house team, took exceptionally good care of us, and we left late in the evening feeling happy and delightfully full.

We woke ready to be eased into the morning with a yoga session, led by Katie, and held in the airy barn. With the expanse of Camber Sands on the doorstep, there's also the option for a morning run or walk along the beach. Either way, you'll feel like you've earned the delicious, energising breakfast.

There's no need to be too virtuous though — Mimosas and lazy brunch options (Aberdeen Angus steak with seaweed fries anyone?) are every bit as appealing. After all, it's not every day you get to enjoy this kind of escape. At last, we were ready to check out, relaxed and refreshed. We were excited to venture out into wine country, safe in the knowledge that with so much to explore on the doorstep, we had the perfect reason to return.

**To find out more about wine breaks at The Gallivant, go to [thegallivant.co.uk](http://thegallivant.co.uk)**



# ENJOYING GUSBOURNE OUT IN THE WILD

Whether you'd like a tour and tasting at our vineyards, or simply want to enjoy your bottle of Gusbourne out in the Kentish countryside, here are our top recommendations.



## THE GALLIVANT X GUSBOURNE

The Gallivant is one of Kent's most stylish settings for a glass of Gusbourne — but, more than that, it's a true gateway into discovering English wine. The hotel's extensive wine list and "English Wine at Five" moment is just the beginning. Guests can book an exclusive English Wine Experience at Gusbourne — this comprises a privately hosted visit to the vineyards, a delicious lunch and tastings of rare wines which aren't usually available to the general public. At the end of your visit, make sure to stop in at the Cellar Door shop to pick up a bottle or two to accompany your Kent adventures.

[thegallivant.co.uk/gusbourne](http://thegallivant.co.uk/gusbourne)



## THE SNACK SHACK, DUNGENESS

**WHAT TO BRING:**  
**GUSBOURNE BLANC DE BLANCS 2019**

An unassuming shipping container perched on the edge of a shingle beach should be enough to catch the eye of any foodie worth their salt. And this destination Snack Shack will not disappoint. Open seasonally, when weather allows and when the fishing boats have come in, here you can source a fish-lovers feast. From June to October — if time and tide are in your favour — you can buy succulent lobster rolls, scallop flatbread or crab that's as fresh as it comes. The catch of the day is reliably pristine and delicious. You can also BYOB, so arrive with Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs and glasses; then settle yourself on one of the benches and indulge in the best seafood money can buy.

[dungenesssnackshack.com](http://dungenesssnackshack.com)



## CANTERBURY COBBLE FROM THE GOODS SHED, CANTERBURY

**WHAT TO BRING:**  
**GUSBOURNE BLANC DE NOIRS 2019**

If you're under your own steam then pick up a picnic to go alongside your bottle of Gusbourne. The Goods Shed is a foodie gem with all the pleasures of a farmers' market but set against the architectural splendour of a listed Victorian railway shed. Inside, you'll enjoy the mouth-watering anticipation of selecting your own picnic goodies. We love thick wedges of Canterbury Cobble, an umami-rich, sweet, nutty, semi-soft, brine-washed cow's milk cheese or the decadently rich, oozingly good Bowyer's from Cheesemakers of Canterbury. You'll also find delicious Kentish fruit to munch alongside and lovingly made sourdough from Dockers. All that's left to do is find your picnic spot.

[thegoodshed.co.uk](http://thegoodshed.co.uk)



## MAGGIE'S COD AND CHIPS, OLD HASTINGS

**WHAT TO BRING:**  
**GUSBOURNE BRUT RESERVE 2020**

A chilled glass of Gusbourne Brut Reserve enjoyed with piping hot fish and chips has to be one of the best food-and-wine pairings known to man — even better when savoured with views of the crashing waves and a saline tang in the air. Head down to the shingle shorefront of Hastings Old Town. Here, set amongst the picturesque silhouettes of the historic three-story net sheds and beached fishing boats, you'll find Maggie's — AKA the best fish and chips in Hastings. Be warned, on a sunny day there'll be a queue, so call ahead (01424 430205). Order the cod and chips — you can expect light, crisp batter; pearlescent, flaky white fish and fluffy flavoursome chips. The fresh acidity of the wine cuts through the richness of the batter like a squeeze of lemon juice. Delicious.

[maggiesfishandchips.co.uk](http://maggiesfishandchips.co.uk)

# ONE HUNDRED MILES

A journey between two terroirs  
by Emily Miles



“ There’s a lost pilgrims’ trail, The Old Way to Canterbury, which used to connect the two sites. ”

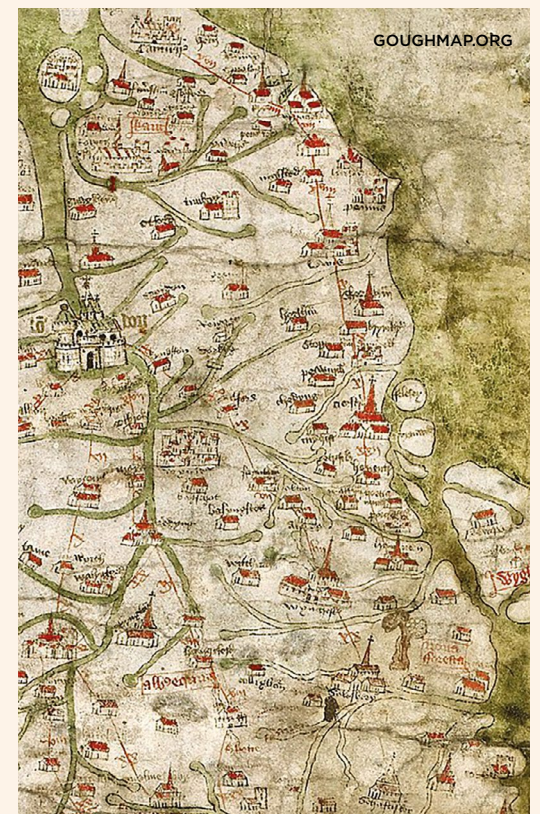
One hundred miles is a tantalising distance. On foot, it’s far enough to feel like an adventure, but not beyond the realms of possibility.

Ever since I discovered that Gusbourne’s vineyards in Sussex and in Kent are separated by 100 miles, I couldn’t quite shake the idea of a journey between the two terroirs. From chalk to clay.

There’s a lost pilgrims’ trail, The Old Way to Canterbury, which used to connect the two sites. In medieval times, the route was important enough to feature on the Gough map — one of the oldest-known maps of Britain: you can still make out the trail, inked in red across the vellum.

And, although The Old Way doesn’t exist today, there’s enough long-distance footpath which runs along its route to make my vineyard-to-vineyard plan possible.

Following in the echoes of long-gone footsteps, tracing pathways etched deep into the memory of the land — there’s a romance to it which I couldn’t resist.



Of course, romance — and vellum maps from the 14th century — will only get you so far.

Enter, stage left, my great friend Georgie: adventurer and “anything’s possible” kind of person. Oxygen to the flames of opportunity. I sent her a WhatsApp.

“I’m so up for this,” came her instant reply.

To show we were taking the challenge seriously, we met up to open a bottle of wine and tap coordinates into Ordnance Survey’s website. Filled with the self-belief that comes from a comfy armchair and nice Pinot Noir, it didn’t seem too ambitious to crunch the 100 miles into a long midsummer weekend.

And so, obscenely early one June morning we pulled into Gusbourne’s farmyard near Chichester. Adam Foden, our vineyard manager in West Sussex, was also up with the lark and on hand to show us where to stash the car. He bid us a cheerful, if slightly bemused, hello and farewell.

The route stretched out before us, out through the vineyards and up onto the chalk grassland of the South Downs Way. Thin, high cloud held the promise of a bright summer sky to come; the wind was sharp, and our mood was electric.

Underfoot, the grass was close-cropped, dense and springy as we made our way up to the top of Bignor Hill. There’s a lovely legend that a dragon has its den up here, not far from the Roman villa — but, these days, you’re more likely to spot stargazers than mythical beasts: it’s one of the National Park’s dark sky sites.

Two hundred metres above sea level: the panoramic views draw your eye in every



direction. The chalk ridge of the South Downs Way is a vast spine arching through the bulk and curve of the hills which fall away to the sides. You don’t need a geologist to tell you that the land here is something special. The scar-bright path which cuts a swathe through the grassland feels as ancient as the ridge itself; a causeway used through history. It’s the self-same chalk seam that dips down from this towering ridge under the channel to rise again in Champagne.

We press on. I should mention we’re running where we can; gathering time when the going is easy and refuelling on the hoof. I suspect any pilgrims who walked this way didn’t need to be back at work on Monday morning.

The path takes us by Wiston Estate, one of our neighbouring producers who make wonderful sparkling English wine. It’s mid-morning and there are plenty of visitors seeking out fresh air — perhaps followed by a well-deserved wine tasting. As we refill water bottles at the nearby Washington stand-pipe, I reflect that this is a route to be repeated, but with a less onerous daily mileage.

Our next stretch took us towards Lewes. Close your eyes and picture the South Downs and it’s our view you’re imagining: mile after mile of picture-perfect Eric Ravilious rolling countryside. Drifts of May blossom like fallen snow; cow parsley in nodding waves behind the shelter of trees and hedges; fields rippling with grass and pinpricks of yellow wort and hawkbit.

We edge on south of Plumpton — home to the UK’s viticultural elite, the next generation of winemakers. As the hours drift on, and the light



“ At a stroke, we’d exchanged the heights of the downland for the marshy expanse of the Levels. ”

began to shift towards evening, we made our way down from the Downs to our overnight stop. Tired legs. Tired feet. Elated minds.

Bed was a shepherd’s hut. It was bliss. Our happiness increased exponentially by the urgent need to rest. The fresh breakfast ingredients left for us felt like an act of true generosity, the bed like perfect kindness. And on the discovery that there was a sauna in an old stable — I kid you not — it felt like we’d begun to hallucinate with happiness. Should you ever find yourself wanting a rural escape, with thought woven into every thread, I cannot recommend “Joe’s Place” more highly. You’ll find him on Airbnb.

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I told you this was to be a journey of two terroirs. So far, we’d revelled in the sweep and drama of the South Downs — but let’s skip our way forward, through the cool sweet air of morning, and on to the chocolate box village of Alfriston. On, on, until — somewhere north of Eastbourne — we leave the chalk hills behind us.

This time, we’re swapping the footsteps of the pilgrims for the tread of a conquering army. The



1066 route. We pick up the trail near Pevensey — where, history’s best guess tells us — William Duke of Normandy began his provocative march north-east to Battle hoping to topple King Harold.

At a stroke, we’d exchanged the heights of the downland for the marshy expanse of the Levels. Any hope I’d had that this would make for easier travelling was dashed by the fact that dried-out clay and cattle-stomped marsh was ankle-breakingly hard to traverse.

The scenery had a different kind of magnificence. The views were long and low — horizon stretching — punctuated by castles and cattle, deep woodland and the occasional sculpture by local artist Keith Pettit.

Past the impressive vista of Herstmonceux castle, we crossed Boreham Hill road and the first oast house of our travels appeared. It felt like we were closing in on Kentish countryside at last.

We navigated our way from castle to castle, until we wound our way through the bucolic meadow which, on 10th October 1066, was reputedly the last stand of 10,000 men. It was an incongruous thought; hard to reconcile with the drifts of long grasses, dappled light and butterflies.

On the top of the hill, stonework swathed in the warm glow of sunshine, we saw the proud façade of Battle Abbey; it was built here as an act of penitence and praise by William the Conqueror almost 1,000 years ago. Reaching it felt like a huge landmark in our journey.

Battle itself is worth taking a morning to explore; but we bypassed the abbey ruins, the quaint antique shops and the gunpowder museum and pressed on.

The final leg of our journey was awash with low-land features; windmills and oast houses. Just south of Winchelsea, we stumbled upon Charles Palmer vineyards and cellar door; a reminder that we were traversing the heart of English wine country.

On reaching Winchelsea — an aching historic, idyllic town, with a handful of inviting shops — we stopped to guzzle sun-ripe strawberries and lemonade. It was a scene torn from the pages of an Enid Blyton novel. It's only once you venture through the town's stern archway that you can see how the centuries have altered this part of the world. This was once a crucially important coastal defence — part of the Cinque Ports network — which spanned the old coast of England.

The route took us on to Camber Castle, its concentric stone towers fanned like petals around the keep. Untouched and deserted, it had the sense of being washed up here, left by time and tide. We drifted around it along with the seabirds before striking out for Rye, the next stop on our journey — and the last before we headed north to Appledore.

Another of the Cinque Ports, Rye is a picture postcard of cobbled streets and Instagram-worthy old-world houses. Galleries, boutiques and tempting restaurants nestle side by side — all demanding a return visit for a closer look. We

stopped in at the excellent Rye Deli for doorstep sandwiches to fuel the final furlong.

In part, we'd be walking the Saxon Shore Way — another long-distance path which had lured me in with its fascinating past. Over its almost 130 miles, it traces England's old coastline, far inland of Romney Marsh, giving a unique insight into how — and why — the soils around Gusbourne's Kent vineyards are so special.

For now, though, we were on the banks of the Royal Military Canal — a 28-mile navigation built as defence against the threat of invasion during the Napoleonic Wars. The heat (along with 90-something miles) had sapped some of the spring from our step. I'd taken to singing rather manically. On another day, this would have been cheerful, easy walking without need for concentration or navigation.

After the longest miles of the walk, it was time to strike north — away from the canal and the far-reaching Romney Marsh and up towards the Appledore escarpment. From this level, you really feel the climb up, and the sense that once, this incline formed cliffs that demarcated land and sea. Layer upon layer of Tunbridge Wells sand and Wealden clays lie under our feet.

We pass through Appledore, past the church where the John de Goosebourne family crest still hangs — I nod in the direction of this Gusbourne artefact — but the end of our route is calling. When, at last, the vineyards appear I can't quite believe it. We hop over a style and into Mill Hill East. This, I imagine, is how London marathon runners feel when they hit The Mall.

Only, there were no gold medals waiting for us. There was something far better. A sun deck filled with relaxed visitors. An array of sparkling wines to taste. And a seriously epic journey to raise a glass to. A toast to friendship and adventure and something intangible — but exhilarating — achieved. From Sussex to Kent, chalk to clay: one hundred memory-filled miles. ♦

You can find out more about the paths connecting our vineyards here: [nationaltrail.co.uk](http://nationaltrail.co.uk); [visit1066country.com](http://visit1066country.com)



# WORKING SUSTAINABLY: TODAY AND FOR THE VINTAGES TO COME

IMAGE CREDIT WILD AT HEART



We're proud to be a founder member of Sustainable Wines of Great Britain.



Our winery energy comes from 99% renewable sources.



We used 72% less water at harvest 2023 compared with harvest 2022.



In spring 2024, we planted 16 varieties of cover crop to improve vineyard biodiversity.



Our vineyards are alive with different species: we count more than 30 different plants on the vineyard floor.



Our biodegradable natural corks sequester carbon dioxide.



We've reduced winery bottling waste to zero.



We provide wildflower forage for two sets of bee hives in our Kent vineyards.



We released our first-ever charity wine bottling in 2023.



At The Nest, we source the majority of our produce locally, working with nine local producers and suppliers in our kitchens.



We maintain 9.2 hectares of ancient woodland.

At Gusbourne, we work as sustainably as possible — today, and for the vintages to come. We're building a business for the long term, founded on our deep-held respect for nature.

We planted our first vines in 2004, and we've been working in a low-intervention way ever since.

But, in the vineyard and beyond, we're always looking for ways to do things better.

We know there's more to do and, as we improve the ways we work, we'll share updates on our progress.

**Scan to read a more in-depth report on sustainability.**



# TOUR, TASTE AND DINE WITH US

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