



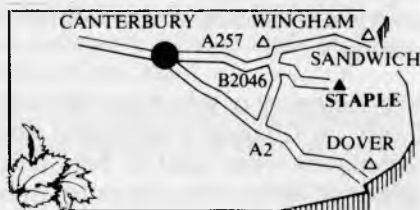
WINE AND WATERWORKS

STAPLE VINEYARD

On the last Saturday in September, having learnt something of the intricacies of Stour Valley viticulture, fifty members and guests became wine tasters for half-an-hour at the Staple Vineyard. Five types of its produce were rolled appreciatively around fifty palates and fifty noses concentrated on the bouquet, passing expert judgement on the relative merits of each. Yes, the apple wine made from local Coxes and Bramleys was clean and fruity, the Müller Thurgaus and Reichensteiner had that extra something, but the Huxelrebe was the most satisfying and full-bodied . . . or was it really a matter of individual taste? A few untutored heretic even preferred the full-strength Elderflower Cordial produced in Surrey! Whatever the verdict the visitors were happy to proceed along the corridor past the bulging vats to the retail department, bearing away their purchases in triumph to the coach, in which could later be heard the tell-tale chink of bottles as the driver negotiated some minor road irregularity or tight bend.

On the tour of the vineyard with farmer and manager, Bill Ash, we had learnt how the deep loam soils of North East Kent, with its maritime climate and relative freedom from late spring frosts, can be suitable for the cultivation of a number of German white grapes as long as alder windbreaks are grown around the fields. The last two hot, sunny summers have been an added bonus to which the valuable 1989 Huxelrebe vintage bears ample testimony with its 13% alcohol content.

Throughout September random sampling and crush testing goes on to reveal the fall in acidity which occurs during the last two or three weeks prior to harvesting. Then at the appropriate time, fifteen to twenty pickers from the local villages set to work with their bine snips on the seven acres of vines and the fruit is quickly delivered to the German press





in the winery. (This crushes the grapes mechanically at very high pressure and it is regretted that no generous offers of human trampling can be entertained even if electricity costs do rise.) Fermentation, lasting ten days, should be rapid and this is followed by five months maturation before bottling can take place.

Quality is regulated by the English Vineyard Association which, on the result of tests and records, licenses the grower to use its gold seal label and logo. Annual re-application is necessary and all English wines must be marketed as table wines. English yields are rising and growers naturally hope that European Community rules will not in future consign a proportion to the wine lake which must be used for alcohol distillation. Quite apart from pleasing the discerning European palate English wine contributes to the UK Exchequer with the duty paid as bottles are taken from the bonded winery warehouse.

Lively interest was also shown in all aspects of wine growing, from the high and low culture systems (methods of training the plants) to the bird scaring devices, of which early morning gun practice by the owner proved to be the most effective (although the electric banger was quite sufficient to startle the human visitors!). Light green netting has apparently proved invaluable in the vineyard next to an orchard from where thrushes and blackbirds are wont to emerge with the express aim of widening their traditional fruit diet. The vines themselves are fortunately long-lived but when replacement is necessary new virus-free stock is bought in from abroad.

82 WINGHAM WELL: THE "EIGHT BELLS".

Our second stop was for a generous and tasty Ploughman's Lunch at the "Eight Bells" at Wingham and the most intrepid of the party were then ready for the perilous descent by ladder (firmly held by Sheila Cope) into the cool, vaulted chalk chamber thirty feet below. Its origin is still in doubt, but its discovery was definitely made when the former pig-styes were removed and the foundations for the present extension laid. Hunger and curiosity thus satisfied we filed back into the coach for the short drive to our next stopping point.

WINGHAM PUMPING STATION.

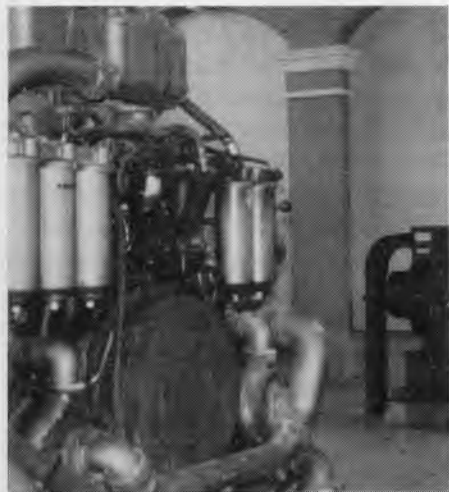
Only two types of the local product were available for tasting at Southern Water's Wingham Pumping Station — raw and treated — and it is doubtful if even the real connoisseur could tell the difference — so pure is the supply from the North Downs chalk aquifer that only two parts of chlorine per million are necessary.

The three Wingham wells are over one hundred feet deep and are each fed by an adit or tunnel system extending for two miles in each direction. Carried by bulk main to the Fleetereservoir their water provides approximately one third of the daily requirements of the 120,000 population of Thanet, whilst small distribution mains supply local low-lying villages by gravity and the higher ones at present by pumping. When two new reservoirs under construction near Aylesham are complete these villages will receive a gravity supply, the water having been pumped up by night with off-peak electricity. Eighteen other wells and boreholes, together with the River Stour in the spring and early summer, provide the rest of the water for the East Kent supply area.

It is between September and March that most rainwater percolates down into the chalk to be retained there by the underlying Gault Clay, and from April to August most surface water is used by plants or evaporates. Since demand can increase rapidly in a hot, dry spell in summer from an average of 53.5 megalitres (1 megalitre = 500,000 litres) to over 80 megalitres — due mainly to the use of farm irrigation systems and garden sprinklers — it is fortunate that in normal years there is sufficient rain to replenish the underground supplies during the winter.

Electric power has now made obsolete the earlier steam engines in the fine Edwardian Pumping Station with its high roof and stained glass windows and the modern computer-controlled equipment is housed in a functional red-brick building at the rear of the complex. Here a fascinating array of dials records vital information such as the water level in each well and mains source flow and pressure. Emergency generators are available if, for any reason, the local electricity supply were to be interrupted.

It is reassuring to know how careful the company's precautions are to ensure the purity of the water. All reservoirs are covered to prevent pollution and vital equipment is vandalproof. Aluminium sulphate is needed only for River Stour water in the 'floc'



The 'business end' of one of the pumps at the Wingham Pumping Station

tank of the Surface Treatment Works and an official is always present when delivery is taken. More than 10,000 samples are taken annually at various points in the supply system and at customers' houses, and all have to meet UK and EEC standards. If ever a slight smell of chlorine or TCP is noticeable it is likely to be due to the small quantity of chlorine reacting with tap washers and certainly not to carelessness on the part of water engineers. Nevertheless customers should not hesitate to ring their water company if they are concerned at any time so that additional checks can be made.

We were indebted to Area Manager Jerry Noble and one of his engineers for conducting our two groups around the works, providing so much information and answering our barrage of questions so willingly.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY TEA ROOMS, SANDWICH

It was raining by the time the coach reached Sandwich where at the Sixteenth Century Tea Rooms we were served with a delicious cream tea of home-made cakes and scones. Animated conversation meanwhile testified to the success of the whole trip and on the coach afterwards Ken Berry led a resounding vote of thanks to Lin Clackett for arranging such an imaginative day's programme so efficiently.

MAY JONES

THE 'NEW' NEWSLETTER

Many appreciative comments have been made about the 'new' Newsletter with its A5 size and typeset pages. Although a few regrets have been expressed for the cheerfully amateur Mark I version the overwhelming preference of members is for the new format.

Sybil Standing wrote 'The tea is just as good but we have exchanged our Oxfam mug for Crown Derby'.

As mentioned in the Editorial of No. 8 we owe the professional appearance of the present Newsletter to Adams Printers and especially to Mr. A. F. (Budge) Adams.

Please continue to give us your opinions, verbally or in writing, on the Newsletter (and on the activities of the Society). And why not make a contribution?

EDITOR