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## **Vineyard Harvest Report for Great Britain – 2020**

### **Summary**

A warmer and drier than average spring led to an early bud-burst. Frost damage in mid-May was significant in some vineyards. Flowering took place in good conditions and a warmer than average August brought ripening on quickly. The harvest was one of the earliest of modern times with reduced yields, but exceptionally high natural sugar levels, and some growers picked Chardonnay and Pinot noir with over 14% potential alcohol. Both still and sparkling wines should be of excellent quality and a total harvest of over 10 m bottles is anticipated.

### **Weather conditions for the year**

After one of the wettest autumns and winters on record, the early part of 2020 turned out to be quite mild and dry and there was little in the way of ice and snow. A couple of Atlantic storms in early to mid-February, Ciara and Daniel, brought flooding to the north and west of the county, but apart from quite windy conditions, February ended wet but mild and the month was 0.8°C warmer than the 1981-2010 LTA<sup>1</sup>. The warm weather continued into March and as the country went into lockdown, the vines thought otherwise and decided to come out for a very early bud-burst. The first recorded incident of bud-burst on the WineGB 2020 Vineyard Survey<sup>2</sup> was Chardonnay at Wodetone Vineyard near Bridport Dorset on 22 March. This was extremely early, if not the earliest ever recorded. Bud-burst reached its peak between 6 and 18 April. The good weather continued throughout April and May, with 24°C being recorded on 12 May and 27°C on 23 May. Parts of Essex saw no rain for over thirty days. The average

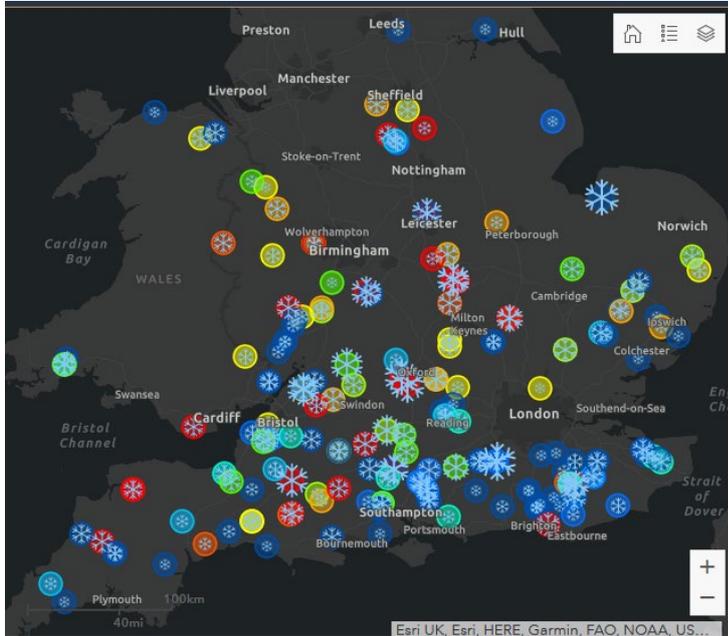
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<sup>1</sup> Long Term Average

<sup>2</sup> During 2020, WineGB hosted five 'vineyard surveys' covering bud-burst, frost, flowering, véraison and harvesting. Together, growers entered data on 1,075 separate events. They can be seen here: <https://mapmanltd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=17782655c48a469e8fd41a66d275a3e0>

temperature in April in the south of England was 10.9°C, which was 2.1°C above the LTA and with 257 hours of sunshine, it was the sunniest April since 1929.

### Spring frosts

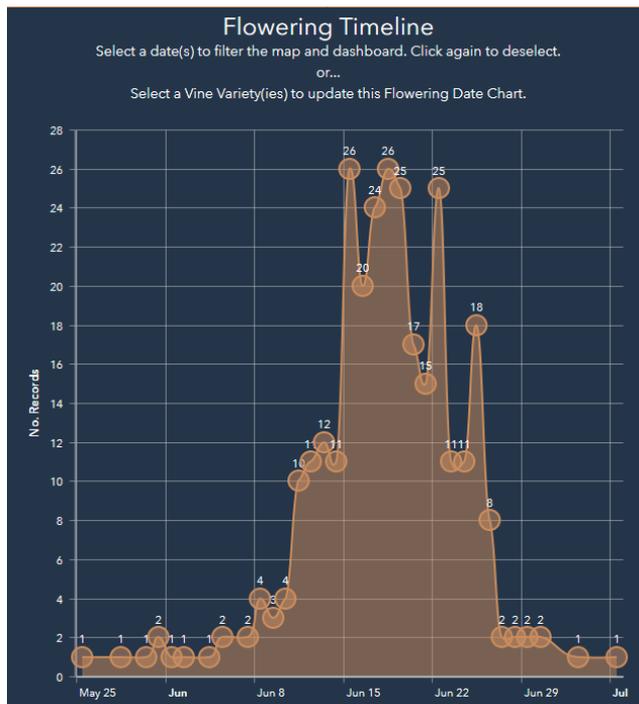


Inevitably the early Spring brought with it the danger of frosts and there were two separate frost periods which hit vineyards in 2020. Between the 1 and 15 April, vineyards in Kent and Surrey were hit with frosts that went down to around -2°C, although one vineyard recorded -4°C. The second, and more serious set of frost events, was between 11 and 15 May when producers across the whole of

Britain recorded 184 separate events with temperatures going down as low as -5.5°C, but most vineyards recording temperatures of -3.0°C or higher. Frost damage is always hard to assess with any accuracy at the time and most reports of (say) ‘fifty per cent damaged’ refer to the percentage of shoots visibly damaged or destroyed. Of the 184 reports for the mid-May events, around thirty-seven per cent said that they had suffered damage of fifty per cent or greater. Twenty-four growers said it had been a loss of 100%. At Breaky Bottom Vineyard, a vineyard in East Sussex only a few kilometres from the sea and usually completely untroubled by frost (and one I have known and visited often for over 45 years), the frost damage was the worst I have ever seen ever, anywhere.

### Flowering took place in good weather

May continued dry and warm with sunshine hours in the month totalling 626 against an LTA of 440. It was one of the driest Mays on record. There then followed some much-needed rain at the beginning of June, with cooler temperatures, but towards the middle of the month things warmed up again, reaching a peak temperature of 32.6°C between 23 and 25 June with one



very unusual ‘tropical night’<sup>3</sup> on 25 June. With the warm spring and early bud-burst, it was inevitable that flowering would start early, and the first recorded flowering was on 25 May, although this may have been an anomaly. The bulk of the flowering across all varieties started on 11 June and continued until 26 June. The peak was between 15 and 22 June with 178 out of 303 flowering events (fifty-nine percent) taking place during this eight-day period.

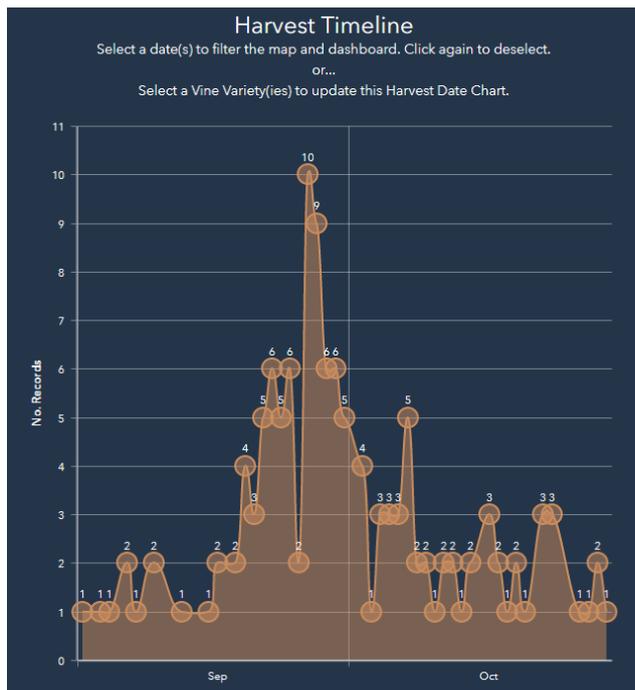
The summer continued quite changeable with wet and windy periods

(during Wimbledon fortnight which of course didn’t happen) but also very hot spells. Between the 30 July and 12 August, the whole of the UK experienced very warm conditions. The temperature at Heathrow reached 37.8°C on 31 July and between 8 and 12 August there was a run of six days with the temperature of 30°C and over (including three over 32°C) and five ‘tropical nights’ in a row, and unheard of occurrence. Night-time temperatures are of course just as important a component in ripening, as warmer nights permit photosynthesis to start earlier in the day and continue longer into the evening, thus increasing sugar production. However, August Bank Holiday reverted to the norm with a daytime temperature of only 18°C! As was to be expected, véraison started early with Bolney recording colour-change on Rondo on 13 July, with most vineyards following on and finished by mid-August.

### Harvest starts and finishes early

With the dryer than average spring and summer, plus the high temperatures in August, most vineyards were fast-tracking towards harvest. As usual, the first out with their buckets was Biddenden Vineyard who started harvesting Ortega on 1 September (not their earliest – that was 28 August 2018) and others soon followed. The harvest took place in largely dry conditions, a marked change from the rain-soaked 2019 affair, and many growers found their crops smaller and their grapes riper than they had expected. Henry Laithwaite at Harrow & Hope finished harvesting the last of his Chardonnay on 30 September which must be something

<sup>3</sup> A ‘tropical night’ is when the night-time temperature is 20°C or more.



of a record. Most vineyards finished picking by mid-October, around 2-3 weeks ahead of normal.

Almost all growers reported higher than average sugar levels, but yields lower than average. Bunch weights were lower than average, a result of the dry summer conditions in most regions and the earliness of the harvest. From very preliminary data, it would seem that yields were down compared to 2018 and 2019, due to the frost and the low bunch weights, but still above the 10-year average of 25.35

hl-ha. My estimate for the 2020 cropping area is 2,738-ha (up from 2,438-ha in 2019) and on the basis of the yields so far recorded, this equates to a total yield of 10.55 million x 75 cl bottles.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average
Sugar levels °OE	78.40	74.00	75.20	70.60	78.40	75.32
Potential alcohol %	9.80	9.30	9.35	8.80	9.80	9.41
Total acidity as tartaric g/l	11.81	10.36	11.00	11.30	10.00	10.89
Yield t-ha	4.54	5.03	8.44	4.85	4.30	5.43
Yield t-acre	1.84	2.04	3.42	1.96	1.74	2.20

Year	Total planted hectares	Total cropping hectares	Yield in hl-ha	No 75 cl bottles in m
2011	1,384	1,208	18.76	3.02
2012	1,438	1,297	5.98	1.03
2013	1,884	1,375	24.28	4.45
2014	1,840	1,506	31.50	6.32
2015	1,956	1,655	22.95	5.06
2016	2,077	1,612	19.30	4.15
2017	2,245	1,677	23.60	5.28
2018	2,889	2,138	45.97	13.11
2019	3,300	2,438	32.24	10.48
2020	3,500	2,738	28.90	10.55

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10 November 2020