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## **Harvest Report for Great Britain – 2021**

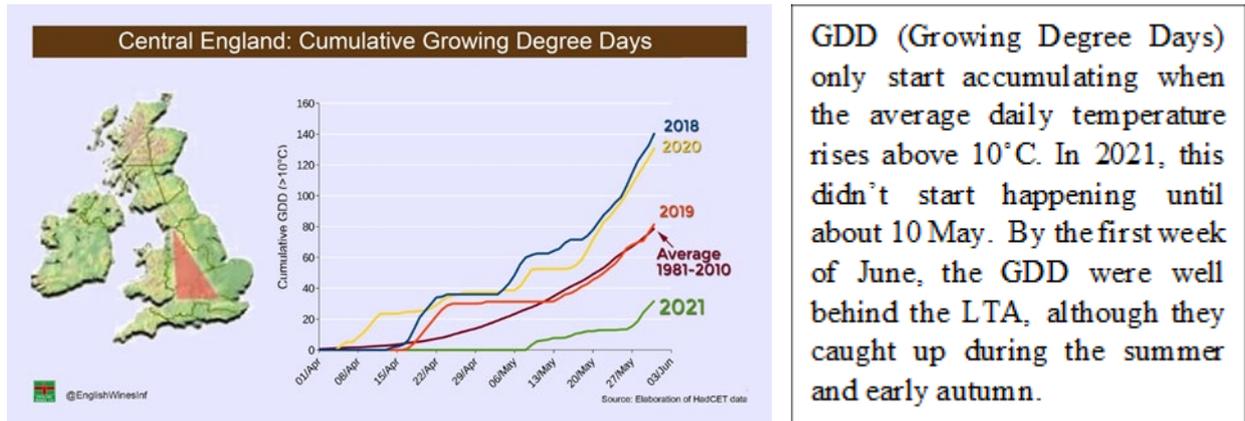
### **Summary**

2021 will be remembered by many producers as a year with a late start, indifferent summer, and a problematic growing season. For some, this resulted in high levels of disease leading to poor, even very poor yields, with some vineyards choosing not to pick at all. For others, and much to their surprise, the late flowering coincided with good weather, leading in some cases to above average yields. In order to hold onto their crops, excellent canopy management (especially de-leafing) was required, plus effective and timely spraying. These measures helped keep disease, most noticeably Downy Mildew, under control, and growers were able to harvest clean fruit. Whilst sugar levels were only very slightly down on average, acid levels were significantly higher than average, suggesting a good year for long-aged sparkling wines, and less good for quick-drinking still wines.

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

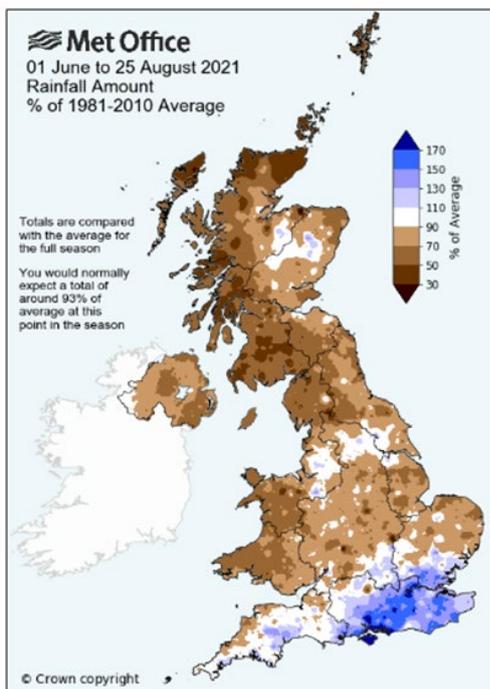
2021 started off with storm Christoph (in January) and then storm Darcy (in February) bringing snow and rain and floods to several parts of Britain. On 11 February the temperature fell to -23°C in Braemar in Scotland, not a record, but pretty cold, the coldest since 1955. Towards the end of the month, things had warmed up and on 24 February the thermometer hit 18.4°C in Suffolk as warm air blew in from north Africa. Rainfall in February as a whole was well above average with many parts of the eastern half of Britain having 170 per cent of the LTA (1981-2010 Long Term Average). The March weather was pretty average, at least until the end of the month when on the last day the temperature at Kew Gardens reached 24.5°C, the highest March temperature for 54 years. This warm weather stirred the vines into action, and things started moving. However, no sooner had April got going when it turned cold again with -9°C recorded on 7 April and much of the month was cold and dry which delayed bud-burst. The Met Office reported that it was the third coldest April since their records began (in 1884) with the minimum temperature in the south of England a full 3°C below the LTA. With all this cold weather, the vines were held back, and despite terrible reports of frost damaged vines in France and other parts of Europe, many vineyards in Britain (but not all) escaped frost damage as their vines had

barely burst their buds. Some growers reported losses of 10-15 per cent from frost, but in the main, losses were light.



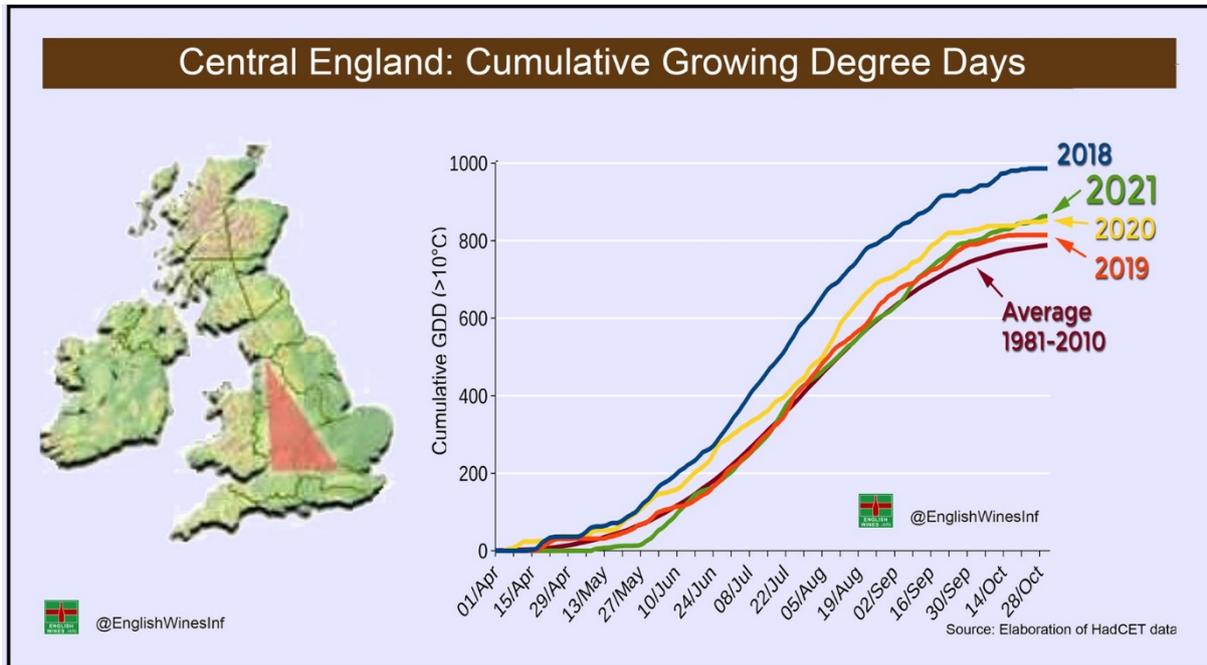
May was nothing to write home about, cold to start with, wet in the middle (with some growers reporting hail) but there was then a sustained hot spell from the very end of May and right through the first three weeks of June. Flowering started in some vineyards on 23/24 June, almost a full month after flowering started in 2020. The three weeks of flowering that followed were very mixed with the early part quite cool, wet and windy, but as Wimbledon progressed, the weather warmed up, culminating with the Met Office issuing its first ever ‘Amber Extreme Heat Warning’ on 19 July and on 20 July the temperature reached 32.7°C.

After this very hot spell, when growers had been lulled into a false sense of security, there then followed what can only be described as the summer from hell. When it wasn't raining it was cool, and when it was raining, it warmed up! Much of the coolness was down to northerly



winds, not often experienced in the summer in Britain. The constant on-off rain and heat were perfect for mildew of both types and many growers were spraying weekly to try and control disease. August was generally cool with intermittent bouts of rain and the vines were very slow to progress. *Véraison*, that harbinger of the harvest, didn't show its face until the first ten days of September and although the temperature improved, with a few days of 30°C, even then, it was slow, with some reds struggling to fully colour up at all. Many growers despaired of picking anything ripe, given the lateness of the season. According to the Met Office, ‘Summer

2021' was 'around 1°C' warmer than the LTA, but with 50 per cent more rain in the south and south-east of England, many parts were barely above the LTA. The April-October GDD at around 870 were actually not far off those of 2020 and above the LTA of just under 800. The GDD data is for Central England.<sup>1</sup> Growers in the more favoured parts of Essex and Kent reported GDDs of 960-1,000.



As August ended and September got under way, the vines decided to buck their ideas up, and despite the weather, started to ripen. October was a little better than the rest of the summer, although it continued with alternate wet and dry spells, giving us some 18°C nights in the middle of the month, just to help the *Botrytis* along. Picking started with some early varieties around 25 September, almost a month later than in 2020, and finished at the end of the second week in November. This was not the latest ever harvest date, that slot is taken by the even worse 2012 harvest, but still pretty late. Many growers decided that 'safety-first' were the watchwords for harvest 2021, and just got on with the job, picking everything as fast and furious as they could lest the rot set in.

Very surprisingly, despite the late spring with its frosts, despite the patchy flowering weather, despite the lousy summer and late *véraison*, despite the indifferent October, in many vineyards, crops have been relatively successful. Several vineyards have reported yields of the 2019 level (2<sup>nd</sup> highest of recent times), with fruit clean and ripe. Acids are high, perfect for sparkling, but not so good for the still wine brigade. Mind you, it wasn't all sweetness and light

<sup>1</sup> GDD charts courtesy of Tony Eva @englishwines.inf

and many growers struggled (and in some cases totally failed) to keep their crops clean and their harvests will be small or even non-existent. 2021 was a very testing year for organic and biodynamic growers with their limited arsenal of plant protection products, and whilst some made it, others didn't.

Data collected from 75 separate vineyards with 231 different plots (each plot with one variety) and covering 360-ha of cropping vineyards showed an average yield of 5.24 tonnes-ha (2.12 tonnes-acre) with sugar levels at 8.75 per cent potential alcohol and total acids of 11.84 g/l (as tartaric). Appendix 1 shows that for most varieties, potential alcohol levels were down by around 0.50 per cent and acids up by varying amounts. Later ripening varieties such as Chardonnay had acids at almost 15 g/l, compared to a 2016-20 average of 12 g/l, a significant difference. Pinot noir and Meunier acids were both up by around 1 g/l. However, these figures are from a relatively small, self-selected number of producers, and do not contain data from many of the less successful vineyards. This makes them less reliable than I would like.

<b>No. of 75 cl bottles of wine produced per year in Britain</b>		
<b>Years</b>	<b>Ha in production</b>	<b>Million bottles per year</b>
2005-2009	779	2.19
2010-2014	1,296	3.78
2015-2017	1,648	4.83
2018-2020	2,318	10.80
2021	2,700	8.10
2025	3,750	15.20
<b>2021-25 figures are an industry estimate</b>		
<b>Source: 2005-20 WS branch of the Food Standards Agency</b>		

Taking an educated guess at what these figures mean in overall terms, they would suggest a national average for 2021 of around 22.50 hl-ha, which is just below the 10-year national average of 25.24 hl-ha.<sup>2</sup>

Based upon an estimated 2,700-ha<sup>3</sup> of cropping vineyards, this would result in a national yield of 60,750 hl or 8.10 million x 75 cl bottles, very similar to 2020 results, despite the increased cropping area. For the future, with the already planted vineyard area at an estimated 3,750-ha (and more being planted each year), the potential for production is considerable, & something current growers and producers, plus especially new entrants to the industry, need to consider when making plans for the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Wine Standards official yield figures.

<sup>3</sup> The overall size of Britain's vineyards is not known with any precision as Wine Standards has declined to share the information they hold on plantings with the industry.

## Appendix I

Variety	2016-20	2021	2016-20	2021.00	2016-20	2021
	Tonnes per hectare		Potential alcohol %		Total acidity g/l tartaric	
Bacchus	4.48	5.91	9.15	8.72	9.00	9.42
Chardonnay	6.38	4.75	9.00	8.3	12.00	14.98
Dornfelder	4.77	N/A	8.50	N/A	8.55	N/A
Madeleine x Angevine 7672	5.92	5.05	9.30	8.96	9.50	8.75
Meunier	6.50	4.66	9.00	8.58	12.00	12.87
Ortega	5.22	3.75	9.75	N/A	7.60	N/A
Pinot Gris	3.34	4.82	9.65	N/A	10.20	N/A
Pinot Noir	5.17	5.70	9.30	8.73	11.80	12.83
Pinot Noir Précoce	4.18	5.34	9.50	9.92	8.10	8.42
Regent	6.15	6.25	9.30	9.11	7.90	9.64
Reichensteiner	7.74	N/A	9.35	N/A	8.90	N/A
Rondo	5.09	6.09	8.70	8.96	9.90	10.24
Seyval Blanc	5.52	7.39	8.20	8.02	11.00	11.22
Solaris	1.68	4.39	9.80	10.41	8.50	8.12
Other varieties	3.43	N/A	9.00	N/A	10.20	N/A
<b>Note: Data for less planted varieties should be treated with caution as sample numbers are small.</b>						
Source: S. P. Skelton Ltd. Online survey, Nov 2021						