

Hambleton, the winery that invented English wine

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Hambleton, founded in 1952 by a retired general, was England's first modern commercial vineyard. Built on the same chalk as Champagne, it now produces award winning traditional method sparkling wines and has become a wine tourism destination, offering tastings, tours, and a curated shop experience that draws visitors from across the country each year.

In Hambleton, in a corner of Hampshire, in 1952 retired general Sir Guy Salisbury-Jones did something everyone considered madness: he planted a vineyard in England. Having returned after years of service in France, where he had fallen in love with French wine, **he had decided to attempt the impossible, making serious wine in a country where everyone said it was too cold.**

It was the first commercial vineyard of modern era England. The starting point of an industry that today counts over a thousand wineries, four thousand hectares of vineyards across British territory, and an estimated value of over one billion pounds.

Seventy years after that act of madness, beneath the same chalk layer that nourishes the vineyards of Champagne, and which runs right under the Channel, Hambledon produces traditional method sparkling wines that win in blind tastings against the great French houses. **Their wines have won gold medals at the Decanter World Wine Awards, at the International Wine & Spirit Competition, and have beaten renowned Champagnes in direct comparisons organized by magazines such as Decanter and Financial Times.**

The general, the chalk and the gamble

The story of Hambledon begins with a man who had seen the world. Sir Guy Salisbury-Jones had fought in the First World War, had served as a diplomat in France, and had returned to the English countryside carrying with him a conviction that at the time sounded ridiculous: **if the French could make great wines just a few hundred kilometers to the south, perhaps the English could try it too.**

There was one element that the general had seen and that others had not: the chalk. **Beneath the undulating surface of Hampshire runs the same geological layer of Kimmeridgian chalk that supports the great vineyards of Champagne, just across the Channel.** It is a geological detail, but it is the key to the entire story of modern English sparkling wine.

From experiment to a billion pound industry

For decades Hambledon remained an isolated case. Then, slowly, other producers followed. In the seventies and eighties

experimentation spread. But it is since the two thousands that something truly significant happened: **climate change has made southern England a wine growing region comparable, in average temperature, to the Champagne of fifty years ago.**

The result is there for all to see. **Today the English wine industry counts over a thousand active wineries, four thousand hectares of vineyards in production, and a value that exceeds one billion pounds.**

The wine tourism you don't expect

But the most interesting story of Hambledon today, perhaps, is no longer only about wine, it is about tourism. **Thousands of visitors a year arrive among the hills of Hampshire to discover how English traditional method is made.** A flow that ten years ago was unimaginable and that today represents an important part of the winery's business model.

The visit is structured as a complete journey. Not only vineyard and cellar: there is the in house restaurant with signature cuisine, there is the more informal Courtyard for having a glass under the portico, there are rooms for private events and weddings, there are WSET certified courses for those who want to become a taster, corporate events, **and a Wine Club with dedicated meetings for members.**

The Cellar Door Shop deserves a chapter of its own. It is literally the door of the cellar, but it functions as a boutique. Besides bottles, there is a notable range of merchandise: from personalized gift sets, to Discovery Packs designed to introduce the company style, to wine accessories, to corporate gifts. All rendered with the brand's clean graphic identity, white, gold, black, which explicitly signals its premium positioning. **Merchandise sales have grown year on year, a sign that the visitor no longer arrives just to taste a glass but to take home a piece of the experience.**

The four wine tasting flight of choice

The heart of the experience for those who arrive without booking a full tour is the four wine Tasting Flight. **At a cost of £22.50 one can access the winery's tasting room and choose four sparkling wines from Hambledon's production.** Visitors can settle comfortably in the indoor room or in the outdoor Courtyard and dedicate as much time as they want to tasting, without hurry, without guides, without commercial pressure.

It is a clever formula because it captures the visitor who does not want to commit to a structured two hour tour but still wants an experience worthy of the place. An hour spent tasting four traditional method wines, looking at the chalk vineyards through the cellar's windows, with the possibility of buying the preferred bottles directly in the adjacent Cellar Door Shop: **this is exactly the type of formula that Italian wineries could copy, and which instead they often refuse, believing that quality wine necessarily requires a guide who talks.**

Key points

1. **Founded in 1952**, Hambledon became England's first modern commercial vineyard against all expectations.
2. **Kimmeridgian chalk beneath Hampshire matches Champagne's soil**, enabling world class English sparkling wine.
3. **Blind tastings have seen Hambledon's wines beat established Champagne houses** in international competitions.
4. **Wine tourism now drives significant revenue through tours**, tastings, events, and premium merchandise sales.
5. **The £22.50 tasting flight** offers visitors four wines without guides, pressure, or time limits.

