

Vineyards past and present

Vines are known to have been cultivated in England from Roman times. Domesday Book, reporting in 1086, lists at least 40 vineyards in England, but the only one it records in Gloucestershire is at Stonehouse. Its area is given as two ‘arpenz’, thought to be about one and a half acres, or about 0.6 hectare.



Stonehouse Court area, map c1730, with annotations.
Courtesy of Stonehouse Court Hotel 2015.

The Domesday vineyard is likely to have lain west of the manor house, Stonehouse Court, where there was an enclosure called the Wine Yard Orchard. In medieval times land called Winyards may have extended west along the south-facing riverside slope towards Bond’s Mill. When the Stroudwater Canal opened in 1779, it obstructed the stream next to the Wine Yard Orchard. This was allowed to flood some of the land, probably to create a passing or turning bay, known as The Ocean, on the canal.

William of Malmesbury wrote in about 1125 that the wines from the Vale of Gloucester were of a comparable sweetness to those from France. Wine production is thought to have declined in England from the 13th century onwards, perhaps due to a changing climate, or to good supplies of French wines. The gentleman traveller Fynes Moryson wrote in the early 17th century that *‘in Glostershire, they made Wine of old, which no doubt many parts would yeeld at this day, but that the inhabitants forbear to plant Vines, aswell because they are served plentifully, and at a good rate with French wines, as for that the hilles most fit to beare Grapes, yeeld more commoditie by feeding of Sheepe and Cattell.’*



Woodchester Valley Vineyard, looking south from
Doverow Hill, summer 2016.



The vineyard in autumn sun. © Gerry Chance 2016

In 2013 vines returned to Stonehouse as part of the Woodchester Valley Vineyard group, which produces white, rosé and sparkling wines. The vines enjoy the same southerly aspect in the Frome Valley as the Domesday vineyard did, but this time on the slopes of Doverow Hill, and over an area of about 25 acres, or 10 hectares.

The Stonehouse vineyard is approaching maturity, and the group newsletter reported in 2016 that the yield from the Stonehouse site was looking *‘particularly bountiful’*.