

ULSTERMEN and NEW ZEALAND WINES

Despite popular belief, wine has had a long, torturous, and fascinating history in New Zealand.

Samuel Marsden, an Anglican missionary, made the first planting of grape vines at the Bay of Islands in 1819. Grapevines were a common sight in the early colonists' gardens, and by the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the first recorded New Zealand wine was already bottled.

The earliest known wine maker was a Scotsman, James Busby, appointed as the first British Resident in New Zealand. When the French explorer, Dumont d'Urville, visited Busby at Waitangi in 1840, he was given '*a light white wine, very sparkling and delicious to taste.*' French priests and peasants, Hawkes Bay pastoralists, Croatian gum-diggers and others preserved the flame ignited by Busby, throughout the 19th century. The assaults of oidium, a powdery mildew, the vine-destroying phylloxera aphid and prohibitionist zealots together ensured that the early dreams of a flourishing antipodean wine industry failed.

The 1920s and '30s saw gradual but unspectacular growth. The wine industry boomed during the Second World War when duties were imposed on imported wines. During the '50s and '60s expansion continued due to many legislative concessions including reductions in the maximum amounts of wine that could be sold by winemakers, approval for more retail outlets, and the licensing of restaurants to sell wine in 1960.

In recent decades, most Kiwi wine drinkers have developed a taste for dry white wines such as sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, pinot-gris and these now dominate the industry's output. 80% of New Zealand wine is white of which 62% is sauvignon blanc. The most popular red is pinot-noir. 70% of all New Zealand wine is now produced in the Marlborough region of the South Island, an area previously dominated by sheep grazing.

Two notable men from Northern Ireland have played a significant part in the development of the New Zealand wine industry: Ernie Hunter from Pomeroy and Alan Brady from Rathfriland while a third, John Buck, is of second-generation descent from a family that emigrated from Coleraine.

Ernie Hunter emigrated to New Zealand at the start of 'The Troubles' in 1972 and initially settled near Christchurch but in the late 1970' purchased former sheep grazing land on the Marlborough Downs to establish a vineyard which quickly achieved acclaim. In 1984 a Hunter's Sauvignon Blanc won the gold medal in the Sunday Times Wine Fair in London. Ernie was tragically killed in a motor accident 3 years later, but his wife Jane, already an accomplished viticulturist, immediately took over the business and propelled it to further successes.

Today Hunter's is the only Marlborough vineyard still run by the family that established it. Hunter's Wines can be purchased from Direct Wine Shipments, 5-7 Corporation Square, Belfast BT1 3GJ.



HUNTER'S
WINES
MARLBOROUGH
Jane Hunter



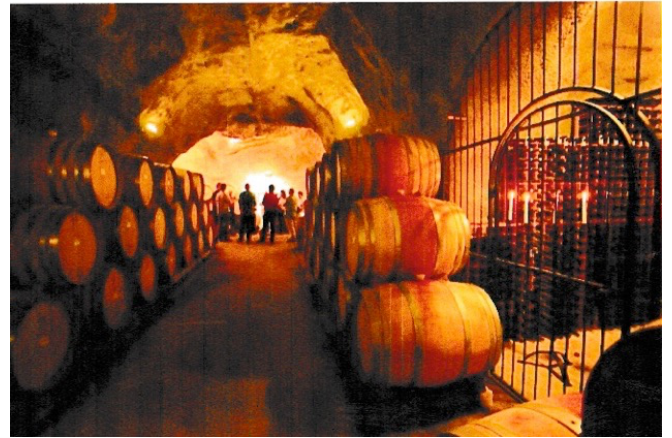
Alan Brady was brought up near Rathfriland in Co Down and trained initially as a journalist in Armagh before emigrating to New Zealand in 1959. He abandoned a successful career in New Zealand television and in the late 1980s planted some of the first grapevines in Central Otago to produce his first commercial vintage in 1987 using Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris grapes.

He had founded Gibbston Valley Wines and built New Zealand's largest underground wine cave and later also built Mount Edward Winery. In 2004 he developed Wild Irishman Wines as a retirement project.

Brady Wines can be purchased from The Sipster, 607 Shore Road, Whiteabbey, Co Antrim BT37 0ST.



Gibbston Valley Winery, planted in 1980 was previously used for sheep grazing



Alan Brady's underground wine cave

John Buck and his family run the Te Mata winery and vineyards at Havelock North at Hawke's Bay which has been in continuous operation since 1895 and is now highly regarded. Te Mata's flagship *Coleraine* wine, launched in 1982, is regarded by many as New Zealand's finest red wine. The winery was first established by Bernard Chambers in 1854 and remained in the family until 1910 when selling out to the Buck family in 1974. Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have all been planted at Te Mata since 1892 while Viognier Gamay Noir and Syrah were later introduced. In a typical year, Te Mata produces 30,000 cases of wine most of which is sold internationally.

Te Mata Wines can be ordered from Berry Bros & Rudd, 63 Pall Mall, St James's, London SW1Y 5HZ.



We hope this article has given you a thirst to sample some of New Zealand's finest exports!

Thanks to David Twigg, UNZT Director, for submitting this article.