Wine fraud in the UK?

14 Jun 2010 by Jancis Robinson

Even before we published the recent MW dissertation on counterfeit wine and before Mike Steinberger's long expose of yet more likely fraud in the US wine market was published on Slate.com, Dr John Whiteman sent me the following:

I write to bring to your attention an increasing level of wine fraud in the United Kingdom. This is especially prevalent among restaurants serving supposedly fine wines. A wine shop in Tunbridge Wells (now closed: no surprise) was clearly selling wine that simply did not fit the description.

More recently, I think I have detected wine fraud in a restaurant chain which serves fine wines at £50 a bottle. However, if you try the Vallet Frères, Beaune Premier Cru 2005, you cannot help concluding that it is identical to the Gevrey Chambertin that they serve, and I mean identical. I love and collect fine wine, but object to being ripped off by slack and callous food labelling that is plainly deceptive.

What can we do about this increasing phenomenon?

Is there a testing centre where one can take suspect bottles?

Unfortunately, there is no easy, inexpensive way to check the precise geographical provenance of a wine on the basis of lab analysis - although if you are right, presumably these two wines would have identical analyses, which would provide strong evidence for your claim. I suppose you could contact a local Trading Standards Officer?

The current framework within which France's Appellation Contrôlée system operates is designed to ensure that all French AC wine has the required accompanying paperwork, but of course its efficacy depends on efficient inspection by the Services de la Répression des Fraudes.

I wonder whether any others have had similar experiences?