Shaw + Smith invest in Tasmania

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With mainstream Australian wine regions having been beset by drought and fire, the cooler island conditions of Tasmania to the south have taken on increasing allure - not least because of the quality of fizz and Pinot Noir now emerging from its lush green slopes.

Brown Bros of Victoria recently acquired Tasmania's substantial Tamar Ridge operation, while Robert Hill Smith of Yalumba and his family, owners of Jansz sparkling wine, bought the Dalrymple Vineyard, with the intention of making top-quality still Pinot Noir.

Leading Adelaide Hills producers Shaw + Smith have just formally announced their acquisition of one of Tasmania's most celebrated vineyards. Tolpuddle Vineyard in the Coal River Valley was established by Dr Tony Jordan, Gary Crittenden and the Casimaty family back in 1988. Planted exclusively to equal amounts of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, it extends over 20 ha on a gentle, well-sited slope 20 minutes outside Hobart (handy for commuters from Adelaide).

In 2006 the vineyard won the Royal Agricultural Society of Tasmania's inaugural Tasmanian Vineyard of the Year Award. Grapes from the vineyard are currently under contract to supply such labels as Eileen Hardy Chardonnay, Heemskerk and Domaine Chandon. Cousins Martin Shaw (left above) and Michael Hill Smith MW who run Shaw + Smith expect to continue to supply these obligations but are particularly excited about the potential for making their own single-vineyard Pinot Noir and Chardonnay here from the 2012 vintage, to be released in 2013.

Fine. complex Chardonnays already abound in Australia but really fine, complex Pinot Noir is more difficult to find - though becoming less so, especially in Mornington Peninsula and other cooler corners of Victoria to the north of Tasmania. See, for example, New World Pinot Noir - some of the best, Landmark - Pinot Noir and Mornington Peninsula's delicate Pinots.

These Tasmanian wines will be made in Tasmania and be sold alongside Shaw + Smith's own Adelaide Hills Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, presumably under the memorable name Tolpuddle.

The Tolpuddle Vineyard was named after the Tolpuddle Martyrs, who were transported to Tasmania from England in the mid 1830s for the crime of setting up an agricultural union. Their leader George Loveless lived and worked on the property. Lots for a good marketeer to work on here, surely.

'We did a road trip from the north of Tasmania to the south and quite simply this vineyard was the most impressive we saw', said Michael Hill Smith. 'We could not be more excited about the potential for truly great wine to come from this place.'

This is all extremely good news for Tasmania. I am looking forward very much to visiting this beautiful island again at the end of next January when I will be speaking at the 8th International Cool Climate Symposium.