Champagne passed off as British!

23 May 2012 by Jancis Robinson

I heard twice, now three times, from award-winning Cornish winemaker Bob Lindo of Camel Valley today. His first despatch was to trumpet the fact that his son Sam had just won a Double Gold, six Silvers and a total of 21 awards at this year's International Wine Challenge, International Wine and Spirit Competition and the Decanter World Wine Awards, as well as producing a second daughter last Saturday.

In the second email is news of a campaign for truth in advertising that is particularly pertinent in this run-up to our Queen's Jubilee next weekend and the London Olympics:

I wrote the following to Theresa May [the British Home Secretary] who popped in while on holiday and picked up some wine:

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the photos following your visit.

I had to insist on the 'Best of British' sign being removed from the Lanson display stand in the duty free shop at Gatwick airport last night. They removed the sign after I refused to leave until they did.

This is clearly an attempt to con visitors for the Olympics and the Jubilee into taking home a 'British' souvenir. We have a lot of red tape to deal with within the UK wine industry, often involving the tiniest of irrelevant detail, but we get on with it. Meanwhile, this outrageous attempt to pass off an inferior champagne (it came 89th in a recent blind tasting, behind 85 English sparkling wines and three other sparkling wines) as British, is left to happen by those same regulatory bodies that police us with such efficiency.

I wrote to you because I think this matter is urgent and I have copied in our association members, DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency. I don't believe that wrapping a French wine in the Union Jack is remotely acceptable.

Kind regards,

Bob Lindo

And here's a more formal complaint that was lodged earlier today:

Lanson UK Ltd
Lanson International
Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne

Sirs

We have today filed a complaint with UK Wine Standards and UK Trading Standards Department as follows:

On behalf of English Wine Producers I wish to formally and most strongly state our objections to a promotion being carry by Champagne Lanson and purveyors thereof, in which they are very clearly passing off and purporting to be 'Best of British'.

I would insist that this is a breach of both Wine Regulations and Trading Standards. As both of these fall either within you Wine Standards Branch or the Department to whom you are responsible, I would ask you to forward this complaint to Trading Standards and also to take action thereupon as soon as possible within the WSB.

Below is an email and photograph from Bob Lindo of this happening at the airport. You will see that you are likely to get a similar complaint from UKVA.

Michael Roberts

Chairman, English Wine Producers

By 2pm today Bob Lindo was able to send a third email:

Update: I'm told that Lanson have agreed to ensure 'Best of British' signs will be removed, but we've told them that that is not enough. After years of crucifying even Elderflower 'Champagne' producers, for them now to do this is hypocritical to say the least.

Pommery is even worse. A Union Jack with the single word 'pop' on the front - drink aware?