

BEN HOWKINS (*co-founder and director*)

Born in 1942, Ben Howkins was educated at Rugby School, and Amherst College, Massachusetts. Upon his return to the UK, he started a winter sports travel business and in June 1961 joined Brown & Pank, the wine division of the Watney Mann Brewery in Northampton. In 1963, Ben became the youngest person to be awarded the Vintners Scholarship, given annually by the Vintners Company to enable the winner to spend six months amongst Europe's vineyards meeting the leading owners and winemakers. For the next five years, Ben used this acquired wine knowledge to pioneer wine sales in the Midlands and in London.

When Grand Metropolitan absorbed Watney Mann in 1968, Ben was one of the first Brown & Pank employees to be transferred to International Distillers & Vintners (IDV). During the next two years, he was brand manager for Gilbeys Gin and Piat Wines, and group product manager for Brown Gore & Welch's agencies, Bols, Bouchard Père & Fils, and Croft.



By 1970, Ben had passed both Part I and Part II of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust's exams with distinction and was awarded the Williams & Humbert Sherry Scholarship. He was then invited to join IDV's oldest company, the port producers Croft & Co founded in 1678, as export sales manager. He joined the board of Croft in 1972 as export sales director, introducing their products to the American and Far East markets, while continuing to grow European sales. In 1978, Ben became export marketing director of both the sherry and port operations, the year of the company's 300th anniversary.

During this time, Ben lectured on port at the Wine & Spirit Education Trust and wrote many wine articles for trade journals as well as consumer press. His widely acclaimed book on port "Rich, Rare & Red" was published by Heinemann in 1980. It was subsequently reissued in paperback by Christopher Helm.

That same year, IDV appointed Ben managing director of Morgan Furze Ltd., the preeminent London wine merchants. Five years later, Ben was named a director of W&A Gilbey and was invited to join the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin in Burgundy, France, and Confraria do Vinho do Porto in Portugal. He joined the Livery of the Vintners' Company in 1986, and became a member of the Royal Household Wine Committee in 1987.

In 1989, Ben joined the independent port producers Taylor Fladgate & Yeatman, severing his 21-year stint with IDV. He also became chairman of the Wine Promotion Board in 1990 and launched the National Wine Week concept during his chairmanship. Ben also became a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the International Journal of Wine Marketing, an honorary member of the Academy of Wine Service and was appointed to the Council of the Wine Guild of the United Kingdom, whose founder is Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.

Ben was responsible for launching the Wine Cellars and Wine Shop at Lord Rothschild's brilliantly restored, last-surviving Rothschild House at Waddesdon. The wine program has since grown in renown each year.

In 1993, Ben joined forces with Hugh Johnson, the world's most published wine author, and Peter Vinding-Diers, a Danish-born Bordeaux winemaker, to found Royal Tokaji — the first non-Hungarian company to invest in the region. Royal Tokaji is a founding member of the Tokaji Renaissance, dedicated to re-establishing Tokaji aszú as one of the world's greatest wines.

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