



Winery History

The Wirra Wirra Cellars were originally built by Robert Strangways Wigley. One of McLaren Vale's all time characters, he began building at the turn of the century using the Dr. A.C. Kelly plans of a split-level design that his friend Alec Johnston has used to build his Pirramimma winery. "Wirra Wirra" is an aboriginal name meaning "amongst the gums".

Born in 1864, Bob Wigley studied Law and Architecture and managed to play cricket for South Australia. His wild pranks as a young man had already made him somewhat of an embarrassment to his family. Feats of horsemanship in the hallowed precincts of the Adelaide Town Hall, towing a pie cart down King William street to the consternation of its patrons and owners were a foretaste of his later behavior. So, in 1893 he was prudently sent to rusticate in McLaren Vale. He planted the vineyard in 1894 and made his first wine with Alec Johnston in 1897. By 1901 he was the owner of one of the best wineries and vineyards in the district with 100 acres under vines and 15 acres under currants.

By a Special Correspondent - 'The Register', Adelaide, Australia 1903.

"Mr. Thomas Hardy says of all those he ever had under him, no town man worked harder than Mr. Bob Wigley who was at Bankside for 18 months learning winemaking. At the end of this time he took up 240 acres of land at McLaren Vale, and today it is one of the best properties in the district. There are 100 acres under vines, and the currant vineyard of 15 acres is perhaps the best in the State. This year it returned 10 1/2 tons of dried fruit. Viewed from the wine cellars this vineyard at the time I was there presented a solid level area of green. It was wonderfully restful to tired eyes. Mr. Wigley made 17,000 gallons of wine this vintage, and he has 47,000 gallons in stock. He has succeeded in producing wonderfully fine full-bodied Burgundy, especially suited for the export trade. The cellar is splendidly built, and is fitted with all the modern appliances. Water for cooling purposes is conserved in a 10,000 gallon tank, which stands under a thatched roof. The water is pumped up into a small tank at the top of the cellar, run through the coils by means of gravitation, and then taken back to the big tank. There are seven fermenting tanks, of a capacity of 1,000 gallons each. There are tramways and turntables for the carriages used in connection with the press. All the casks in the cellar are of oak, and everything is up-to-date.

One of the picturesque features of the estate is the quaint-looking pug cottage, with its thatch roof, which was built over 50 years ago. It stands under the shadow of a noble-looking gum tree, and is one of the few remaining dwellings of the fast demising pioneers. Mr. Wigley believes in hard work, but on Saturday afternoons his old love, cricket - he was a South Australian eleven - returns to him, and he plays the game for all it is worth."

Bob Wigley died in 1924 having contributed much to the life of the district and having made many fine wines which in the main found their way to England, having been shipped by Burgoynes of London. After 1936 the original 240 acres were sold by his family and eventually the cellars with only 7 acres left fell into disuse.

It was not until late 1969 that the winery, by then virtually a derelict building, and the surrounding 7 acres of land was bought from Vern Sparrow, son of Wigley's foreman Jack Sparrow, by cousins Greg and Roger Trott and re-established. Roger Trott, an accountant, has a property at McLaren Flat, 'Moray Park', and Greg's vineyard, 'Bethany', was just across the road from Wirra Wirra, while Scrubby Rise, part of the original Wirra Wirra, is immediately in front of the cellars. Before they bought the old, ruined winery, Greg spent five years with Southern Vales Co-operative looking after growers' interests and in his own words, "had become familiar with the rudiments of winemaking".

Like many of the McLaren Vale winemakers, these men were helped by their friendly rivals, a feature of the district. Good use was made of Oenological Services of McLaren Vale, a winemaking advisory and laboratory service led by Peter Klose and started by David Hardy, Alex Johnston and Colin Kay.

In a gesture worthy of the wonderful Wigley, the two cousins Trott spent a frantic five weeks gathering equipment from all over the state. Then, armed with an ancient wooden Bagshaw crusher, a pump and an old French press, they made their first wine in the open air amidst the ruins.



Following the first vintage, Greg with the help of Ron Mason (a stone mason) and an enthusiastic band of friends spent the next five years rebuilding the cellars using his own design based on an original photograph.

For walls and floors, ironstone and slate were quarried and bricks taken from the century old demolished cottages were used. Huge Oregon beams and flooring from the historic Pirie Street Methodist Church in Adelaide were used to make a mezzanine floor. Jarrah railway sleepers from the abandoned Adelaide - Willunga line form the lintels, mantelpieces and the original tasting room bar.

Now the building has a handsome facade of gracefully arched windows which now houses 2 Barrel Halls which run the entire width of the building, accessed via a large foyer with four open fireplaces. At one end of the foyer is a heavily beamed private tasting room. The storage hall is regularly for private dinners and charity functions. In 2005 the most recent phase of the wineries development was completed. This saw the opening of the more expansive Cellar Door which now greets increasing numbers of visitors each year and new offices to house the tribe. This expansion was a proud moment for Greg as he contemplated the success and growth of his vision.

Richard Gregory "Greg" Trott passed away on March 5, 2005 at the age of 70 years after a long and noble battle with cancer. The Angelus Bell rung to announce his passing as grapes were arriving during vintage.

A visitor to Wirra Wirra will get a touch of Greg Trott's philosophy which is built around the pleasant things of life: good surroundings, great food, stimulating conversation, marvelous music, and of course a bottle of wine!