



# THE WIRRA WIRRA Bell Ringers

OWN ANNUAL

*'If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand' St. Mark. Ch3, v.25*

## Dear Readers,

The contents of this Sermon pertain to the wine industry politics of the McLaren Vale region, so I apologise to all those residents of 'foreign parts' who may be forgiven for skipping these pages and going straight to the cartoons.

However, this subject touches all who do and will enjoy the contents of a bottle of wine made from within the McLaren Vale region. It's about the quality of wine from the region and how best to get the story and the contents of its bottles into the minds and mouths of the worlds multitudes. It's about maintaining an insurance policy for the region.

I speak about the amalgamation of the grape growers and winemakers into a body that has only one title - The McLaren Vale Wine Industry. This has been achieved in a few other regions of Australia, but not in ours. Sadly it's yet to be achieved at a national level.

To help make this amalgamation a reality, I feel moved to put some words to paper to assist the momentum that is within the region, and I wish to again publicly state my company's and my own whole hearted support for such a move.

Twenty years ago almost to the very month, this writer made six observations as he stood for the first time as Chairman of the McLaren Vale Winemakers Inc: -

1. We must continually improve the quality of our viticulture and winemaking within the region (Vital to plant quality white varietals to 20% of total vintage.)

2. We settle finally the name of the region - McLaren Vale or Southern Vales.

3. We open up the Winemakers Luncheon to the public.

4. The two flag-ship grape varieties with distinct character in Australia which should be used in our export P.R. should be Shiraz ('Grange' etc) and Semillon (Aged Hunter).

5. One third of our Association Annual funds should to go directly to generic promotion of the region.

6. The grape growers and winemakers form one association.

I wish to dwell upon this last utterance. My own efforts all those years ago fell largely on foul ground, and I have to say were rather pusillanimous in their

## All Hail!

*The 28th Bushing King of McLaren Vale  
Defender of the Vale Keeper of Shiraz  
King of the Chooks*



*Benjamin Riggs - Winemaker triumphant  
Celebrates with the fount of his fortunes  
Matchless Queen Annie and  
Wirra Wirra "Chook Block" shiraz.  
Wassail! Wassail! Wassail!*

attempt. At the time, the Government Prices Commissioner set the price of grapes in South Australia and only when Premier John Bannon allowed the Commissioner to have a holiday in 1983 that grape prices were freed up and placed on a supply-demand basis. In one stroke, John Bannon's move made a major contribution to the resurgence of viticulture in Australia.

One of the major concerns related to these two groups forming one alliance has been money. Both parties in the past have got up to all sorts of tricks to muddy these financial waters, causing a great deal of suspicion and mistrust.

The three chief annual money

considerations for the industry are: -  
1. Grape Prices. 2. The statutory levies paid to national industry organisations and 3. The memberships fees-levies etc. in support of regional associations.

As an exercise I have surveyed figures for the contributions paid by both groups over the last 20 years and tracked them against the price per tonne paid for shiraz in McLaren Vale and the retail price of a standard bottled wine, Penfolds Bin 389.

These figures make sorry reading and bear testimony to the in-balance in contribution and show how both groups have failed to improve, or even maintain, support for their very own industry. The industry's own insurance premiums have fallen way behind.

At the Adelaide Wine Show luncheon in 1985, Robert Hesketh, the then Chairman of the Wine and Brandy Corporation of Australia, suggested to the 400 present "that if the Wine Industry was ever to advance its expectations and build a more secure future in what was fast becoming a global industry, it needed to levy itself at the rate of \$20 per tonne per annum!" The room virtually froze in disbelief. An industry notable broke the silence on our table by saying .... "Well, he's got to go!" while a well known McLaren Vale winemaker observed .... "We wouldn't know what to do with the money!"

R.W.C.Hesketh was addressing his remarks to the whole Australian Wine Industry fifteen years ago. He was trying to jolt the industry into action. In the year 2000, we must with the utmost urgency spell out with absolute clarity our regions aims and aspirations asking, nay demanding, that all should contribute in a fair and equitable fashion towards our regions 'insurance policy'.

Never before has such a commitment and an alliance of all the industry in McLaren Vale been so needed. So when the region is presenting itself to its world markets in London, Sydney, New York or Tokyo, I would like to see the Winemaker, Grapegrower, Chef and Artist all displaying their wares under a united McLaren Vale banner. Likewise when the world comes to us. We are about to enter a new century

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so, whatever have been the past prejudices and misdemeanours, we would be stupid in the extreme, more than half witted and decidedly brainless if we didn't cut out all that old dead wood and prune to those young shoots that will bear the fruit of our regions future fame.

"Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that, if McLaren Vale and it's vineyards last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour" (Apologies to W.L.S.C.)

Should these great things come to pass, let the regions grapegrowers and winemakers shake hands across a row of vines at budburst, toast the vistas and vines of this treasured Vale, bury a shining, ceremonial hatchet permanently in an ancient stump, then wander together into that sunny spot, 'bright with sinuous rills' for the simplest of McLaren Vale 'Chop Picnics' amid a chorus of corks.

It is not too much to ask. And it will be good.

**R.G.Trott Esq., Caretaker**

*(A special tribute is due to Ben Riggs past Chairman of the McLaren Vale Winemakers and his team, who have so furthered this cause that it is hopefully close to a reality.)*

## Valmai's Story

Valmai Hankel, the fearless guardian of rare tomes and the fine collection of wine books at the Mortlock Library, is an inveterate explorer of the back roads and bush tracks of this vast continent in her well seasoned four wheel drive. The mild mannered librarian and wine scribe can be found rolling out her swag under the stars in wild and wonderful corners, always with a travelling cellar that adds to the magic of the campfire cuisine.

While travelling through the tropical, croc riddled floodplains of the Gulf Country, she came across a siding on the quaint Normanton to Croydon railway that bore a familiar name. Tragically her depleted collection of travelling vintages did not produce a Wirra Wirra wine to toast the occasion.

*(Next time Valmai, we'll supply the wine as soon as we work out what goes best with crocodile croquettes, goanna tail tartare and boney-ant gateau.) Ed.*



*Wirra Wirra far away  
Observed in thirst by our Valmai*

## Ask Not For Whom The Bell Tolls..



*P.Simpson Esq and party perversely reverse their hats in a failed attempt to preserve a vestige of dignity*

Early in July there gathered at the Cellars a roystering, ravenous rabble that turned out to be 100 loyal initiates of the South Australian chapter of Wirra Wirra's own Bell Ringers intent on dining. Amid the sleeping barrels, tables dressed in crisp linen, sparkling glassware and pristine cutlery glowed in the light of grand candelabra and the cellars' unique open fires. The Salopian Inn team prepared a super menu that included a warm salad of duck confit with fennel, watercress and tangelo as entrée, served with three

rieslings, Wirra Wirra's "Hand Picked" '99, Pike's '99 and a '97 Hugel. The main was loin of venison with sweet potato gratin, roasted shallots and bone marrow glaze complimented by the '89 and the '98 "R.S.W." Shiraz and a '95 Guigal Hermitage.

The Woodside Cheesewrights' tomme de chevre was matched with a pair of merlots,

the '97 Torres and Wirra Wirra's '98 Then followed indulgent puddings so sensual that they can't be described in a publication that may unwittingly fall into the hands of a dieter, and a final broadside of the Wirra Wirra stickies and fortifieds. Few BellRingers survived unscathed, as was their happy desire. Black tie and elegant evening dress can usually

disguise the internal dissolution of the most upright of citizens at such an event, but the addition of a Wirra Wirra Bucket Hat proved fatal as is obvious from the photo below. With remaining morsels of I.Q. drained away A.J.Parkinson of Pennys Hill vineyards is reduced to gibbering lechery, while even Adelaide's pulchritudinous adornment Amy Trott (Greg says she is a cousin, but then he would.) seems possessed by the hats dark forces and has hell fire in her eyes.



*A Trott and The Parky - Beudy and The Beast*

# Good Heavens! Where Are They All Coming From?

Recent reviews of tape from the security cameras have revealed a new crop of unrecorded staff hiding out at Wirra Wirra. From their collection of bizarre C.V.'s the place is turning into a therapeutic refuge for global wine pilgrims.



*Paul Harvey*

## Paul Harvey Cellar Door

With an Honours Psych degree he fled the grey furniture and flouros of the big city H.R. consultancy for the more interesting clinical symptoms of the wine industry. Even if the humans were beyond treatment there were some deeply troubled vines

that might respond. After 2 years at the relatively sane Normans at Clarendon he heard about the disturbing Wirra syndrome and arrived to investigate.

Heaven help anyone who enters cellar door with even the hint of a twitch. Marriage in December should shock him back to normality.

## Hamish Seabrook Cellar hand

Barossa boy finishing winemaking at the Waite. Has done a couple of vintages at Angle Vale, three at Barossa Vintners, then at Wattle Creek vineyards in California's

Sonoma and a couple more at Pelligrini vineyards in Long Island New York. He even survived a spell at St. Halletts without catching a single bad habit from B.B. McLean.



*Hamish Seabrook*



*Chris Miller*

## Chris Miller Production

Bootmaker by trade but skilled organiser by vocation and inclination, he was rescued from the maw of the corporate giant B.R.L. Also worked with computers. ( probably made old Amstrads into funky

platforms for cyber chics!) Single and articulate, he has brought an added sense of humour to the company at a time when it is least needed.



*Wayne Phillips & Rich Wellmore*



*Phil LeMessurier*

## Phil LeMessurier- Cellar Hand

Worked with Andrew Garrett for a while then recovered with a grand tour of Europe, South Africa and the Carribbean. Stopped for a vintage at Domaine Drouhin in Oregon (New World venture by the esteemed Burgundy house) then slipped through a wormhole into the parallel universe at Wirra Wirra.

## Wayne Phillips-Finniss Vineyard Supervisor

Served a ten year sentence in the chain gang at next door neighbour and Boardmember, the wicked grape slaver Paxton D. Wayne jumped the fence and landed deep in it again. Once waterskiied competitively in the same team as another vineyard stalwart Kevin Hammat, but now has a Harley. The kamikaze code is alive and well out there between those disciplined rows.

## Rich Wellmore - Vineyard Hand

Another imported Enzedder rugby fan (Is that a tautology?) but still an all round good guy who claims to have left the Gold Coast for a southern winery to help with his wife's drinking problem. (She has probably got a more discerning palate than his!) His problems are the Charles Sturt Uni. Viticulture course, and the nappy routines of an expected family addition in January.



Wirra Wirra Vineyards

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# Flagons For Singing, Flinging, Measuring, Treasuring-Reviving The Relic

Some explanations are needed on the subject of the venerable flagon. As you may know we have managed a special bottling of The Original Blend in barrel flagons ever since the recreation of this wine as a tribute to the first Church Block that Greg Trott put into glass in 1972. The grenache - shiraz blend Church Block was a bulk wine sold round restaurants in the popular container at the time, the 1/2 gallon round, corkable, flagon. It was ribbed for strength with a reinforced neck to take the cork and was known as the Barrel flagon.

It was a popular container for bulk table wines from probably the turn of the century till the mid seventies. Fortified wines such as ports and sherries used a metal screw cap instead of, and sometimes as well as, the cork. Some companies had

proprietary flagons stamped with their name but they faded in the face of the bag-in-the-box and went out of production. They were reusable and were routinely recycled, but it has been quite a struggle to find enough of these relics in recent years to meet our quirky needs. We have taken to attaching a neck label to these marvels to alert fans to their archaeological value and to encourage their return to us for

revivication.

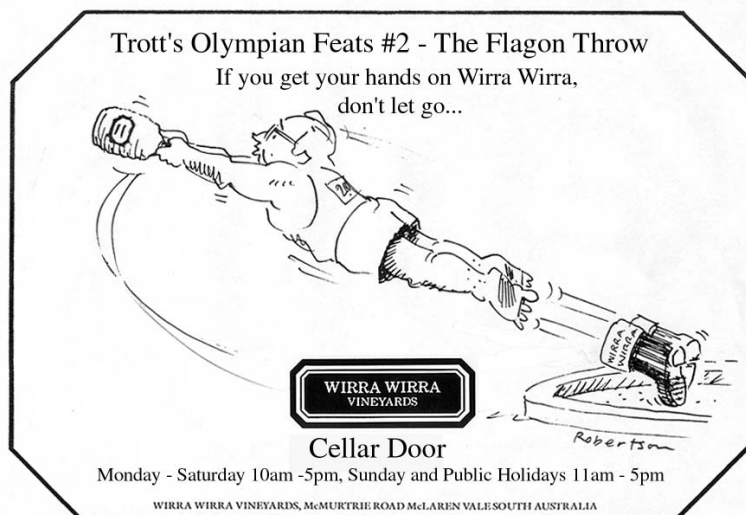
Ken Maxwell once found a double ended flagon that was used to top up casks but is unsure of its age..

There is also a phrase, that entered local parlance sometime in the sixties, which used "a flagons throw" as a whimsical measure of distance. E.g. "Oh! He lives quite close, only a flagons throw or so from here."

The term was defined technically as

'the distance an energetic drunk could throw an empty flagon'. (see cartoon of the Olympic Champ)

We are attempting to research the history of this charismatic container but the archives and libraries seem to have few details, so if there are any old retainers from the wine or glass industries that can help us with their recollections please contact the winery. Appropriate rewards and stimuli for the memory will be negotiated.



## Beam Down The Church Block Scotty,....and Hurry!

The frequent flyer miles are starting to add up again, and the USA is becoming more familiar to us all the time. Back in June, Ben Riggs and I visited America on separate occasions to spread the Wirra Wirra gospel to our newly anointed state based distributors. I ventured to San Francisco and the North East, while Ben left a trail down the West Coast and in Texas. For two weeks in October I have been visiting the South East with Wilson Daniels' regional manager Wayne Raborn. Together we have presented the brand to our new distributors in Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, Miami, New Orleans, Birmingham Alabaaaama and Atlanta. I can attest that Southern hospitality is everything it's cracked up to be, and grits taste good when prepared properly. However, I do "tork fo-knee" according to the locals due to my "Or-stray-lien haxe-sent".

Spending long periods away from home can be very tiring, but there are a surprising amount of things in the USA to remind you of Australia. Outback Steak House is one of the largest and most successful restaurant chains in the country, and you hear their "ocker" advertising on the radio & TV a lot. The "Crocodile Hunter" is

incredibly popular on TV, and people are always asking me to impersonate him. (Saying "Gday cobba, how's it going? Got time to wrestle a croc and throw him on the barbie?" usually keeps them happy). More importantly, the Olympics have created great awareness of home, and Australia as a destination has become more and more popular. This very positive exposure has also helped with the awareness of Australian wines, which are being readily embraced by the American public. Let us hope that this continues with vigor.

There have also been some developments closer to home. For desperate Wirra Wirra dependants and recent converts residing in Singapore, the deprivation you have been suffering is over. Our wines are being distributed by "The Cellar Door" which aside from being a specialist importer, is also an excellent new retail outlet on Bukit Timar Road. The enthusiastic team of wine lovers will be sure to look after you well, should you drop by for a flute of The Cousins, a tippie of Scrubby Rise or a Riedel of Church Block.

Yours in transit.  
*The Intrepid Hesketh J.*

## Importers of Wirra Wirra

**USA: Wilson Daniels Ltd**

Tel: 707-963.9661

Email: info@wilsondaniels.com

**Singapore: The Cellar Door**

Tel: 65 464 990

Email: info@e-cellar-door.com

**Hong Kong: Kedington Wines**

Tel: 852 2898 9323

Email: kedwines@netvigator.com

**UK: Western Wines**

Tel: 01746 789 411

Email: info@westernwines.com

**Germany: Mikes Place**

Tel: 0511 329 999

Email: info@mikesplace.de

**Switzerland: Martel**

Tel: 071 226 9400

Email: buehler@martel.ch

**Holland: Residence Winjen**

Tel: 31 174 270500

Email: info@residence-winjen.nl

**New Zealand: Vintage Wines & Spirits**

Tel: 64 9529 5228

Email: vintage@pl.net

**Tonga: Mermaid Restaurant**

Tel: 70227 Email: n/a

# The Diaspora Delivers - From An Alpine Arcadia

One of the most far flung vineyards in the Wirra Wirra stable is perched in the snow swept alpine fastness of Victoria where Jim and Ruth Baxendale have been tending some of the exquisite sauvignon blanc that has graced our latest blends. It's a good story. Jim is the son of Alec and Ruth Baxendale who live in the house next to the winery built by its founder R.S.Wigley. He grew up with Trotts as neighbours but left McLaren Vale to pursue a viticultural career in 1968 before Greg and Roger bought the ruins next door and began the Wirra Wirra rebirth

In fact it wasn't these past associations that secured this fruit for W2 but the eagle eye of Tony Jordan who remembered it being on offer from his time with Domaine Chandon.

Jim managed vines in Mudgee, then for Wynns at Coonawarra before going to Tahbilk. By this stage he and Ruth had decided that a reliable Coonawarra type climate plus a more romantic landscape of mountains, streams and forests only a few hours drive from the city was the target in a quest for their own dream vineyard. A detailed search through central and north east Victoria over three years in the mid eighties led them to 40 ha on the Whitlands plateau, high up (600 meters approx.) in the mountains to the west of the King Valley between Mansfield and Benalla.

Mt. Buffalo and Mt Buller are visible in the snowfields of the Victorian alps to the east and south. With these breathtaking views it's a wonder they managed to get 18 ha planted to pinot

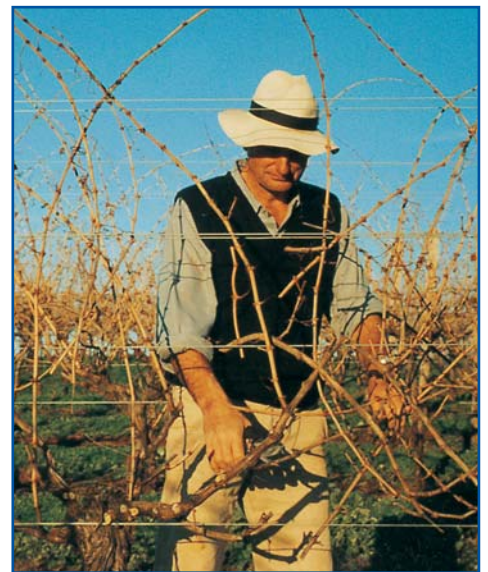


*Baxendale's cool - climate vineyards*

noir and chardonnay for sparkling base as well as cabernet sauvignon and the aforementioned sauvignon blanc. Rich volcanic soils, reliable 42 inch rainfall and a heat summation similar to Coonawarra and Bordeaux show great potential for intense cool climate varietal characters. The close planted vines are hand pruned and carefully manicured to avoid mildews and rots but there are two problems that McLaren vale vigneron don't have to face. The first is the dreaded phylloxera. As the vineyard is in an infested zone, this requires the Baxendales to undertake stringent quarantine routines. Trips to S.A. are by plane or in a new car, housed at their home in Milawa 50 km away, that has never been to the infected zone. The fruit for Wirra Wirra is processed in a new facility at Whitlands and then sent as stabilised juice. The second is snow, with a fall of over 6 inches in May this year just after the cabernet was picked, and with leaves still on the vine. (Trott

has visions of St Bernards bearing casks of port to revive frozen pickers)

The dream continues for these hardy vine-herds with further plantings mainly to pinot noir, visions of a mansion of many tall windows



*Jim Baxendale  
Dressing The Wires*

(double glazed!!!), and decorative plantings of Kingsblood tulips and Papa Meilland roses. An Australian arcadia.

(p.s. Ben Riggs is wondering how to surreptitiously snaffle some of the prized pinot for a bit of Burgundian conjuring but thinks he will have to pick from a helicopter to avoid getting the louse on his trotters and leaving tell tale bootprints in the snow.)



*The Sauvignon Blanc soaking up the mountain panorama*

**WIRRA WIRRA  
VINEYARDS**

# Putting On The Purple, Picking Up The Prizes

Its been a great few months at Wirra Wirra leading up to the crowning of Ben Riggs as Bushing King to the acclaim of nearly 700 wine industry stalwarts gathered for the occasion. McLaren Vale's wine Bushing Festival celebrates the Elizabethan custom of hanging a 'bush' over the doorway to show that a new vintage was available. Since 1973 McLaren Vale has chosen a King by the equivalent of a feat of arms, in this case the winemaker who creates the best wine judged at the regions' wine show. This accolade could not have been given to one more deserving and worthy than Ben, who has been a passionate advocate of McLaren Vale since he arrived at Wirra Wirra in 1988. His winemaking experience encompasses France, Italy, Greece and the United States as one of Australia's renowned 'flying winemakers', and he has helped stimulate the drive for quality that has propelled the region into the limelight in recent years. As Wine Show Chairman and as Vice President and President of the Winemakers Association, he has taken leading roles in the regions wine industry continuously since 1992 and has just

stepped down as President. As well as his international consulting many local wineries draw on his expertise. McLaren Vale will get two royal ambassadors for the price of one as Ben's wife and Queen, Annie, is also a great promoter of the region and its foods with her mother Heather Newland at the Market 190 café in the main street, and with the Salopian's Pip Forrester in a range of unique produce and garnishes including dukkah, kasundi, and olive oil. (Ben and Annie look fantastic in their classy robes and crowns, but are under some pressure to suitably outfit their young 'princes' Baxter and Austin, and the Queen Mother has put in for a new hat and handbag, but Jessie, the official winery dog, refuses to be even nominally confused with a Corgie and is maintaining an aloof republicanism.)

Wirra Wirra does not compete feverishly on the wine show circuit, preferring to match their house styles to consumer tastes rather than the sometimes cloistered consensus of the judging panels. However success has draped several cordons of bleu on wines from King Ben's sure hand in recent jousts that we enter to keep the

lance sharpened.

"The Angelus" from the superb vintage of 1998 has won the Melbourne Street Trophy for the Best Consumer Class Cabernet Sauvignon in this years Adelaide Show, the J.B. McMahon Trophy for non-regional dry red at the McLaren Vale Show and was chosen in Philip White's Adelaide "Advertiser Top 100".

The 2000 Sauvignon Blanc, with some of the Baxendale fruit referred to elsewhere, won the Consumer choice in its class in the Hyatt "Wine Of The Year" Awards and also made The Advertiser Top 100.

The 'Fine Old Tawny' popped into the New Zealand Liqueurland Top 100 and of course the 1998 "Chook Block" shiraz blitzed the McLaren Vale Show this year.

STOP PRESS: We've just heard that the '98 "The Angelus" and the '97 Vineyard Series "Allawah" Grenache have made James Halliday's prestigious "The Australian" Top 100

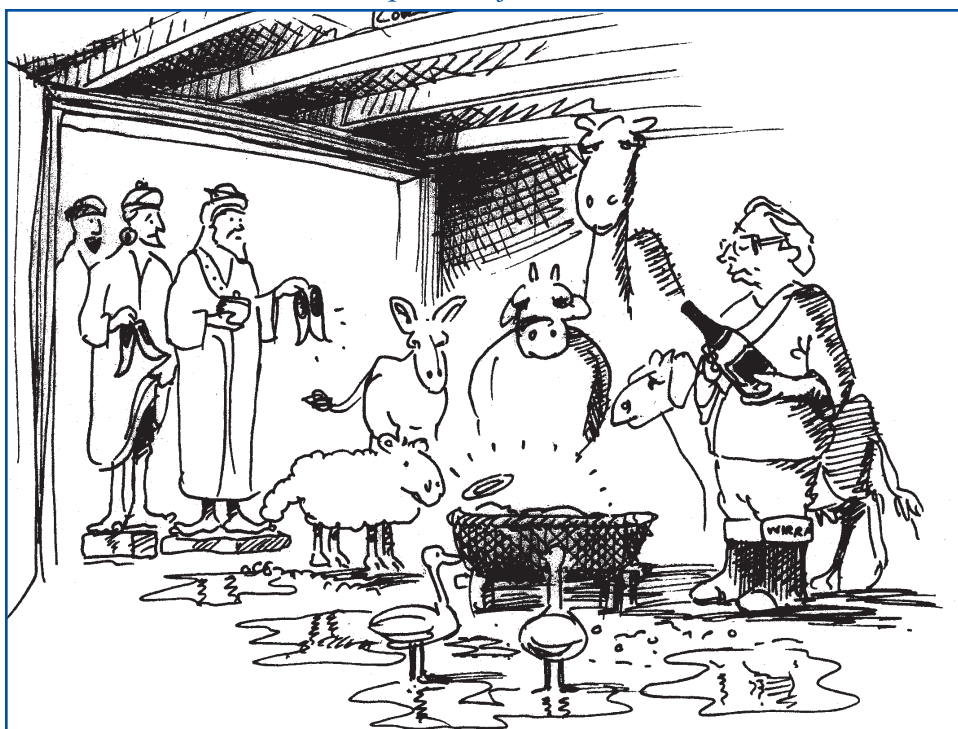


## Quintessential Wirra Wirra - The 1998 "Chook Block" Shiraz - The Kingmaker wine

The triumph for Ben Riggs has caused great delight in the Wirra Wirra tribe, who all share his glory, but no smile is bigger than Trotts. Greg's philosophy for the Vineyard Series wines, where outstanding fruit from specific vineyard patches is set aside for possible limited release, has achieved its goal of encouraging exemplary winemaking and potentially great wine. Its even more piquant when the patch of shiraz that produced this beauty has an unmistakable Trott touch. Some years ago the last 160 vines of a 4 acre patch of shiraz were planted in 8 rows on an area where Gregs broiler chicken sheds had stood from his Chook Farmer days. The rows were planted north-south unlike the rest, because of the awkward space and slope between buildings. This meant that this patch has to be handpicked and in the fantastic '98 vintage this was a few days later than the rest.

Little things but they make such a difference, and the rest is up to the palate, paws and persistence of talented winemakers. When Riggs dons the purple and looks at McLaren Vale and its Shiraz he could imitate Caesar and say "Veni, Vindemi, Vici"...I came, I vintaged, I conquered!

*There are incandescent moments in life when you may find yourself in the heartwarming company of beings who, although possessed of exquisite taste and sense of occasion, may be unboustrained and somewhat sloppy drinkers. Wise men bring their most treasured gifts to such a party, even wiser men wear impervious footwear!*



*May all things be gentle and joyful with you this christmas.  
From the tribe of wise, winsome, wascally and woyal winewrights at Wirra Wirra*