

**STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**  
**J. D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY**  
**COLLECTION**

**OH 692/122**

Full transcript of an interview with

**GRAHAM WILTSHIRE**

on 13 May 2003

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

Access for research: Unrestricted

Right to photocopy: Copies may be made for research and study

Right to quote or publish: Publication only with written permission from the  
State Library

**NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT**

This transcript was donated to the State Library. It was not created by the J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection and does not necessarily conform to the Somerville Collection's policies for transcription.

Readers of this oral history transcript should bear in mind that it is a record of the spoken word and reflects the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The State Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the interview, nor for the views expressed therein. As with any historical source, these are for the reader to judge.

This transcript had not been proofread prior to donation to the State Library and has not yet been proofread since. Researchers are cautioned not to accept the spelling of proper names and unusual words and can expect to find typographical errors as well.

**OH 692/122 TAPE 1 - SIDE A**

**AUSTRALIAN WINE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.**

**Interview with Graham Wiltshire in Launceston on 13th May, 2003.**

**Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Graham, where and when were you born?**

**GW:** In Launceston, Rob, on 11th November, 1931.

**Armistice Day.**

**GW:** It was, yes.

**Very well timed.**

**GW:** I didn't know much about it at the time. *(Laughter)*

**Very well done.**

**Tell me a bit about your parents, Graham. Who were they?**

**GW:** Not in the wine industry.

**No.**

**GW:** Good Anglicans. Never had a drink in their life other than communion wine, and that's about it.

**So what was your father's occupation?**

**GW:** He was a painter and decorator with one of the local firms.

**So you grew up that way. You were educated, I see from your notes, in the State system.**

**GW:** Yes.

**So what was your occupation when you went through schooling?**

**GW:** I originally worked with a stock and station agent, and then graduated into a civil contracting business. That's where I stayed for the next twenty years.

**So when did you first come to grips with the wine industry, Graham?**

**GW:** I guess like most Australians, I decided in the early 50s at roundabout the age of nineteen that one should go overseas. Everyone did it. And so you picked up a P & O ship and went to the UK, and then you did the grand tour using your thumb as a means of transport.

**So what did you find in France?**

**GW:** It wasn't raining, unlike England. It was beautiful weather. It was not easy to travel around the area but it was easy to have good food and good wine, not having had a drink of wine ever in my life until I got to France. I enjoyed that very much. Something quite different. I worked in vineyards. In Provence and in Burgundy. Very short breaks, a week here and a week there during harvest.

**Could you speak French, Graham?**

**GW:** No. And they couldn't speak English either. Times were tough then in France, and in Europe generally.

**So is that the first time that you'd ever tasted wine, in that sojourn?**

**GW:** Only communion wine.

**Of course. (Laughter)**

**And did you like it immediately, or did you find that you just acquired the taste?**

**GW:** It was different. I had had some experience with beer obviously, you know playing sport. Beer was the necessary thing. There wasn't any beer in France. Not until we got to Switzerland did we find a beer. By then I was interested in wine. (Laughter)

**So too late.**

**GW:** Yes.

**Did you come to an appreciation of any style in those early days?**

**GW:** No.

**It was just a general -**

**GW:** It was just a drink.

**Now about what time did you become involved in the industry here, in Tasmania?**

**GW:** I think in the mid 60s. I had an interest in wine, and we were buying wine and having it with meals. We then started buying bulk wine from Brown Bros and (*couldn't decipher words*). From there we'd try other wines from South Australia, buying it in bulk which, as you can imagine, it wasn't particularly good wine. It was very, very cheap.

And from there—I don't really know what started it—we put a little vineyard in at a place called Underwood. That must've been in '60/65, something like that. Underwood is a little area close to Lilydale, and it was on top of quite a steep hill, and an old cherry farm. It was very small and we couldn't handle the native game. Wallabies would chew the vines down as soon as they -

**So they were very grateful to you for planting. (*Laughter*)**

**GW:** After a couple of years I joined forces with a friend, Michael Curtis, at a town called Legana and we put in a small vineyard there of a couple of hectares.

**Legana is—what side?**

**GW:** West Tamar. Just outside the boundaries of Launceston.

**Now you mention in your notes, too, that you came across Max Lake at about this time. How did that happen?**

**GW:** I didn't come across Max Lake, I came across his books. Once we established this vineyard we decided—civil engineering—we would make a trip over to the mainland and have a look around. So we sold our existing property, which was a very old house in an outer suburb. We got a good price from someone from the mainland, so we could afford to go away for a year or so. And we did. Bought a caravan and travelled from Victoria through the coast northwards, looking at vineyards in all the areas. For example, the Hunter, and then through Queensland, around the top. Did the West Australian vineyards. Back to South Australia, spent some time in South Australia, and finished up in the ACT and Victoria.

Max Lake came into this because I took with me the books that he'd written at that stage. I think *Hunter Winemakers* and *Wine and Scalpel*. In one of those books, I think it was *Wine and Scalpel*, he made a comment that Tasmania was too cold for growing grapes, therefore you can wipe it off. I said, 'This is ridiculous, we'll give it a go'. And so we established and got the vineyard going, and that's where it all came from.

**Now when you planted Legana, where did you source your stock from for that?**

**GW:** I looked for an area that was relatively cool and had been established for some time, so that the varieties had been used for the cooler climate. And I spoke with a man in Mount Gambier, David Moss, who was a viticulturist.

**He's still there.**

**GW:** Couldn't be, could he? He must be ninety. (*Laughter*)

**No, he's in his 80s.**

**GW:** Anyhow, he arranged with Eric Brand to—he actually collected the cuttings and sent them across to Tasmania for me.

**Oh, fantastic! So what varieties did you choose?**

**GW:** These were purely Cabernet. There was nothing else, other than Shiraz, which didn't interest me. (*Couldn't decipher word*) grown in South Australia as far as I know. And he sent them across—the clone that he recommended called 126 Cabernet Sauvignon. They were the only sure(?) plantings in Tasmania, and cuttings from those went to every other vineyard in Tasmania.

**So was that the first plantings of Cabernet here, was it?**

**GW:** No. The Frenchman, Miguet, had them. And Alcorso had them, but then I was not aware of either of those establishments then.

**Miguet, was he the chap on the island?**

**GW:** No. That was Bernacki.

**That's right, yes.**

**GW:** Miguet came in—all of Tasmania was hydro-electric developments. There was one at (*couldn't decipher word*) that was called the Trevallyn I think, and quite a large dam, quite a lot of interest. He was a civil engineer from Provence in France. When he'd finished his term here under contract, he liked the place, thought it looked like Provence, and established a small vineyard near Lilydale, and he called it Provence. And he managed to get vines in. We don't really know where they came from. Probably unofficially from France. Some came from the CSIRO. Bob (*sounds like, Man-are-ee*) can probably inform you about all that. Anyhow, he established quite a small vineyard of Cabernet and Grenache.

**So your first plantings at Legana were with this Cabernet. Is that right?**

**GW:** Yes.

**That was '66/67?**

**GW:** Yes.

**So where did Legana begin to go from there?**

**GW:** What happened is that we bottled a little bit I think in '71, a reasonable vintage, which we made in the laundry or something of our home in Launceston. The kids stomped it down, did all the right things to it. (*Laughs*) We made a few hundred bottles—'72 Cabernet—which we then sort of gave to friends, and may have even sold a bit.

What happened is that Bill Fesq—he was a merchant in Sydney, and also a friend of Colin Haselgrove from Reynella—had recently sold some interest in Reynella to one of the tobacco companies, I think it was. They were taken over—the vineyards. And they had some money to spend.

They tasted this wine after a Sydney/Hobart yacht race. They liked it, and they tracked me down while they were here. They came to Launceston and tasted the wine up this end, and they came down and looked at the vineyard. They showed an interest in doing something. Sometime later that year I think we agreed to form a partnership and look for some land, which we did. And we found some land, and that's where it developed. Legana, as I said, was quite small. It was producing interesting wines. The thing that they didn't realise, I didn't realise, and the media didn't realise, was that it's easy to grow good grapes from very young vines. Everything's in balance. And they can produce in the first year or two some absolutely brilliant wine, never to be seen again, unless they get the viticulture right. And unless you know what you're doing and have had twenty or thirty years of experience on the property, it's very, very hard to get them back into that balance that they had in their first two or three years of productive work.

The media, of course, picked up on these wines, too, because it was at a time when the only red wines we knew were the big, usually dirty, wines from South Australia, who were the ones producing them, and a bit from the Hunter, and these were completely different wine. They were fresher, they were less alcoholic, and because we didn't have 100 year old wineries, the wine stayed fairly clean because we didn't have any old wood and things to impact(?) it.



So the media ran with this, and we got so much publicity in Tasmania, and part of the national press, that everyone was looking for this new wave of Pinot. And really it was crap wine. It had some interesting things—the Cabernet—but it was green, and just capsicum-y. Everything now that we dislike in a Cabernet. It just wasn't ripe enough.

**Had you had some help in establishing the vineyard, or was it just you following your nose?**

**GW:** Very much following my nose, and it's a good nose to follow.

*(Laughter)*

I had help in this way: firstly, Di Ramsay, who had married a Tasmanian, James Ramsay. She came across as she'd heard that some donkey was messing around with the grapes down there, so she came to visit me. I didn't know her before that. She took an interest in this, and she went back and spoke with Father Sydney Hamilton, and he was interested, too. Of course I think she pushed him so hard. And he came across. He made a couple of visits across I think. He actually made one vintage. I think it was -

**Lady's voice:** '74.

**GW:** Was it '74? He brought some equipment across, and showed us all the modern techniques.

**This would've been about the time that Syd had sold Hamiltons?**

**GW:** Just started at Leconfield. I think Leconfield had just started being developed.

**Because I know when Hugh and his brother, Richard, were beginning at Willunga, Syd would spend a lot of time down there helping them. He was evidently a real whiz with technical things.**

**GW:** Spent more time in the winery, playing with machinery and things, yes. A fascinating fellow.

**How did he strike you when you first met him? He would've been well in his 70s then.**

**GW:** Yes. A very, very active man, and very fit. And interested in what he was doing. Interested in something new.

So he helped a lot, and then Di was still showing an interest, and I think she assisted with buying some equipment because we were pretty short of equipment and short of money. She sent over a Sydney Hamilton designed crusher, which was a brute of a thing. It'd take your fingers off.

*(Laughter)* It served for some years.

And then I got in touch—I forget how. I'd been to Wagga on a couple of trips. Met Tony Jordan. He was then I think starting a business called Oentec(?) with Croser, and Croser was also playing with the Piccadilly concept around *(couldn't decipher word)* time. But I think we engaged Tony to come across. I don't think he charged us for coming across. He went back, talked to Croser, and they took an interest in it because they were looking for new areas themselves. In the end they decided on Coonawarra—sharefarmers block. But he did spend also—at that time they were doing the yeast developments that they worked with in those days and they set us up on cultivating our own yeast, and playing around like that. They were very, very helpful. Couldn't speak too highly of them. And charged very little, if anything at all.

The next big move I think in between that was after the *(couldn't decipher word)* development. We then bought land at Pipers Brook, which turned out to be next door to Andrew Pirie's property. I think about 90 hectares we had. We planted twenty hectares there in '75. And in '76, our Cabernet from the Legana property, won a gold medal in the Melbourne Show. It was in the line up with equal points—Cape Mentelle in that year. So this hit the press, and so Tasmania got more mileage. Once again, this new wave of Cabernet style was very, very popular.

### **So what did you call that vineyard?**

**GW:** Initially we called it Legana, but by 1976 we put it under the Heemskerk brand. This was a name that Bill Fesq liked, being a shipping man and a mad yachting man -

**That's where I hear it from, too.**

**GW:** - because of the affinity with the sea.

**Yes.**

**GW:** And Jansz label, later on, came for the same reason.

**Graham, just stopping there for a minute, had you met others in the Tasmanian industry at that stage? I mean, I know it was very small but had you met anybody else?**

**GW:** Miguet. I remember going out there one day. The first time I ever met him was with my oldest son, Robert, and we spent a day out there. They were delightful people, and we did a bit of work, and they made lunch for us. He was quite ill at that stage with the early stage of cancer, I think. He showed us what he was doing, and showed us his wines, in the traditional southern French style. And of course, he had very poor English, depended entirely on his wife for that.

And then I got in touch sometime in the early 70s with Alcorso and suggested that we meet, and we talked about forming a Tasmanian industry organisation. The industry was ourself and Alcorso at that stage, and Andrew Pirie's brother, David, had just arrived in the area. So we formed a little organisation and we called it the Vineyards' Association of Tasmania, because we could see there was a lot of interest in vineyards, and we needed some organisation to get the Government on side. We couldn't get a licence, for example, to make wine, or to sell wine.

**In South Australia we call them producers licence.**

**GW:** Producers licence, yes. And to get that I think I wrote to people and asked if they'd write a letter to the Licensing Commission, who issue these licences, saying what a wonderful job we're doing. And people like Sydney Hamilton wrote something to that effect. And these, of course, helped us get a licence. We wouldn't have got it without it.

Miguet struggled for years without having a licence. I don't know what he did with his wine. I guess he drank it himself. It was just not accepted by the Government in those days.

**So alright, you met Claudio Alcorso and there was at least an organisation—an umbrella—under which you could lie. At Heemskerk, how did the development begin? This is—what?—the mid 70s, we're talking?**

**GW:** 1974, we bought the property and started developing it. David Pirie, with Andrew, had bought the adjoining property, which in the previous ten or fifteen years had been cleared, but it was all covered with (*couldn't decipher word*) rows of fallen timber, having been heavily forested country.

**Lady's voice:** Ferns.

**GW:** The regrowth, yes. And wallabies.

So he came to me and said, 'Look, we haven't got any suitable land, or any water, to grow our propagation material'. So I agreed with him that if he bought propagation material from me, sourced it as well, we would (*couldn't decipher word*) on to him. So we put a nursery in at the old Legana vineyard, and established a nursery, and then grew the propagation material, which was a mixture of Cabernet, Riesling and the old McWilliams clone of Chardonnay.

There was no Pinot at that stage. I don't think there was any available until a couple of years later when Colin Haselgrove came across to Reynella, 'We've got all this rubbish down here called Pinot Noir, which is no good for us. It won't grow in South Australia. Do you want any?' So I brought back this material. He wasn't sure of its source, but it was the Swiss clone of Pinot called Maria-feld(?). Reynella had it growing on the flats, which tended to become waterlogged every other year.

**Oh, yes, I know where they are.**

**GW:** It grew huge crops. Low colour and little flavour.

We put it in at Legana. I didn't put very much in, maybe 4 or 500 vines, and it grew very large crops and made very light wine. We tried some at Heemskerk later on and it didn't do much better. So obviously being the only Pinot in the State at that time, other people collected cuttings and took it to various parts. It's been spread right through Tasmania. It's produced quite good wines in the more southern regions.

**Did you try to source any other clones of Pinot at all?**

**GW:** Yes. I then started looking around for material, and finally got Allan Antcliff from the CSIRO Merbein to send me a selection. He sent me all the known clones, all the clones they'd collected in Australia. And I think there were seven or eight different clones, including the Tyrrell selection and the Hunter, and they became the (*couldn't decipher word*) collection at Heemskerk. Produced some interesting wines.

**Did you do trials on them at all, Graham?**

**GW:** I did with Patrick Ireland in the early 80s.

**So who was Patrick Ireland?**

**GW:** Patrick Ireland was a lecturer in those days at Roseworthy, and then went on to university.

**You were saying earlier that the media was becoming more and more interested in what you were doing. Did that continue through this period?**

**GW:** Tasmania has always had a very big slice of the wine media, mainly because people couldn't understand why grapes were growing down here, because they've always been used to warm climate grapes and couldn't understand them growing in a cooler area I think. And so a different style of grape. Tasmania is probably the forerunner of the new approach in (*couldn't decipher word*) grape growing. At one stage we were much bigger than the Yarra Valley—all those new areas. Much bigger than New Zealand in superior wine varieties. But of course we lost ground very, very

quickly. We had about four or five growers in the early 70s, and today it's 120-odd growers, but it's taken thirty years to develop it. There's always been a shortage of capital for this type of enterprise in Tasmania.

**So how did Heemskerk develop then with the shortage of capital?  
Was it a struggle?**

**GW:** It was a struggle. Nancy went without carpets. *(Laughter)*  
We agreed on a three way split between the Tasmanian organisation, Fesq and Haselgrove. Colin's son, Robert, came across as a winemaker for two or three years, but the lure of yachts dragged him away. *(Laughs)* So then I took over the reigns. Colin then wasn't well and was a bit concerned about putting more money in, understandably, because he was well into his 70s by then. So we then had to find new partners. So I opened up the Tasmanian side of it and brought in more sons. And this is where Di Ramsay and her husband, James, came in, and a friend of mine, Barry Larter. So we formed a three way partnership. That sort of provided cash. In those days \$50,000 would go a long way, where today it doesn't count at all.

We then sort of started getting cash flow from Heemskerk from about '83 onwards, which helped considerably but we still had, of course, to keep on feeding the operation.

**Of course.  
Did you build your own winery out there?**

**GW:** Yes. We started in 1984. In the meantime we still owned the Legana vineyard, which had a very small winery there. We had to transport the grapes from the Heemskerk property to Legana and we made our wine there.

**So was it very much a matter of learning as you go?**

**GW:** Very much so. It was real pioneering stuff. Really, even though I would make frequent trips to the mainland and talk to people on the mainland, the expertise had very little to do with cool climate viticulture.

Or cool climate winemaking, if it came to that. It was something completely different.

Jordan had a better appreciation than most people because he had the opportunity to see a lot of action in New Zealand at that stage, and good contacts with Richard Smart. And so he helped, especially on the winemaking side. But viticulture was almost an unknown thing in Australia for cool climate.

**Lady's voice:** Very isolated.

## **TAPE 1 - SIDE B**

**Graham, Nancy has just raised that really important issue for Tasmania of that sense of isolation. It obviously did affect you.**

**GW:** We were really working in a vacuum. Alcorso in Hobart was the only other source of information and he was learning himself on the old Italian method, different varieties. I doubt if he'd ever made wine or worked in vineyards in Italy. It was just a part of their culture. So he depended so much on the CSIRO for assistance, and anyone else he could bring in. It was also a learning curve for them. And also it was 200k away, and we didn't have email in those days. *(Laughter)*

And then Pirie came, and he came to Tasmania about '76 I think, having finished a PhD in Sydney. But once again, it was a learning curve for him. So even though we exchanged information there was no-one else to talk. That's why we formed what we called the Vineyards Association to try to get some educational means put together and people could exchange ideas. But once again, we were starved, not so much from winemaking but viticulture. And we were dealing with a completely different animal *(couldn't decipher word/s)*.

**Yes, I can understand that. And really there would've been no mainland experience either, other than the Jordans of the New Zealand (*couldn't decipher word/s*).**

**GW:** Yes.

**And Dick Smart was actually in New Zealand then, wasn't he?**

**GW:** That's right. He was sorting out the New Zealand industry. And they needed sorting out. (*Laughs*)

**It was a bit different. What was it? Montana in those days, wasn't it?**

**GW:** Yes.

**Now with that material that you brought in from the mainland earlier, the Cabernets and such like, did that prove its worth over time or was it becoming more difficult?**

**GW:** It was becoming difficult, especially in the region that we'd selected. At Pipers Brook it was in very deep, rich volcanic soils, and very close to Bass Strait, a direct line about 8k, and it was affected very badly by Spring winds—the Roaring 40s—which could affect set.

**Were they salt laden winds?**

**GW:** No. It was too far in to be affected by salt. Just the cooling breeze coming at critical times at roundabout bud burst, and then again in a cool year it would come again late November/early December during the flowering season. And Cabernet was very sensitive to these winds, as was Traminer. Riesling wasn't affected to the same extent, and Chardonnay was prepared to put up with it to a great extent. But Cabernet was very much a hit and miss thing.

The other thing that I didn't understand—I don't think we did. When I say we, I don't think (*couldn't decipher word*) understood it at that stage either—that the red soils were very vigorous, and they'd keep vines growing, and growing but not prepared to set fruit. They were having it too good. No lack of moisture, and just continually growing.



### **So you didn't need irrigation at all in these vineyards?**

**GW:** Pipers Brook, for example, has never been irrigated. We irrigated Heemskerk for establishment, but very rarely used it after establishment. It took me some twenty years to realise that it was a viticultural problem, not a vine problem, not the clones—how to manage it. And it's still a challenge in that rich country.

Later on we bought another property on the West Tamar, a larger property of some 50(?) hectares of vineyard now called Strathlynn, owned by Pipers Brook where the soil types are very different. We learnt a lot more about controlling vigour. The vigorous ones are the biggest problems in Tasmania in these long, mild Springs, not getting a hot period until probably January, or February even, to slow them down. So we've had to learn to manage that.

**Yes, you say here in your notes that you began to see the potential of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to a large degree, and you'd explained earlier that you managed to get access to some material. Did that begin to prove their worth?**

**GW:** Chardonnay, from Heemskerk's point of view, proved very good early in the piece even though it was probably the only clone available in those days, which was a selection from McWilliams in New South Wales. It performed down here quite well and made, I think, some of the better Chardonnays produced in Australia in those days. I know Croser was very keen to buy it, to look at it and compare it with the Adelaide (*sounds like, Hills type*) Chardonnays. And actually it sold more readily at higher prices than any of the Cabernets. We were selling Chardonnay wines at \$12 a bottle when the average Chardonnay price would've been \$6-\$7 a bottle. But of course with small quantities it's easy to get a better price. And our marketing organisation through the Fesq family in Sydney was—of course had an interest in making sure that it sold. (*Laughter*) All these things help. But Chardonnay did show that it was greatest potential of all.

1982 I think was our first vintage with Pinot Noir, which I thought was very good, and won some acclaim. I remember Bryce Rankine talking about it. The wine people didn't understand Pinot in Australia. They'd never had experience with it. Murray Tyrrell had experience, but really it wasn't a Pinot that they were growing, and what little was grown in South Australia were really dry reds. They had no Pinot characteristics. And we didn't see those sort of characteristics in any other State until the mid 80s, when there was some interest in Victoria in the cooler regions.

**Yes.**

**GW:** And then (*couldn't decipher words*) through the main channel obviously had a great interest in Pinot and saw quite a lot of buying (*couldn't decipher word*) contract.

**Did you begin to experiment down here with different clones because of the environmental issues you had? The cooler Springs etc.**

**GW:** We tried to source more clones. We relied heavily on Di Davidson from South Australia. She was with a consultant when she left Penfolds. Just source material, of course. She did. But, in hindsight, they were all the wrong clones. They were the only clones in Australia. We had sort of neglected the rest of the world and forgotten to look at France, or Burgundy, where clones that we're getting now have been available in Burgundy since 1971, and we've only been bringing them into Australia in recent years. Yalumba, I think, made the biggest move in this regard in bringing in clones in 1994. But they were clones from 1971.

**Yes, actually Peter Wall at Yalumba was bringing them in in the mid 70s but nobody knew about that, I don't think. But I don't think anybody else in Australia would've been aware of their existence.**

**GW:** Well, such a big lack of interest in Pinot, so it was only specialist people like Yalumba with their sparkling interests and (*couldn't decipher word*) to trial things, and setting up their own nursery, and with the ability and financial resources to experiment.

**Well, I just keep thinking how tough those years must've been for you despite the backing you had. I mean, it's totally unknown. You're pioneering something. It must've been an uphill battle at times.**

**GW:** I enjoyed it. *(Couldn't decipher words)* young. *(Laughter)*

**Yes, but you wouldn't have kept going without the enjoyment I guess.**

**GW:** No.

**And from what you're saying too, Graham, you found people in the wine industry very eager to help.**

**GW:** Oh, everyone. I've been involved with civil engineering and your competition were your enemies. In the wine industry, your competition were your friends, and they were generally very open and exchanged information(?) quite readily. And this was not only within Australia, but if you went to New Zealand or went to France, you were always welcomed, and there was always a reasonably free exchange of information. I'm not quite sure how honest the exchange was in France, but there was some information always given. *(Laughs)*

**What about sparkling? What led you to have a go at sparkling wine?**

**GW:** Well, I think a very simple transition. We were having trouble with acceptable yields, and quality, with Chardonnay and Pinot, and especially with Cabernet. We kept getting these green, herbaceous characters almost to a cabbage-y stage in a cool year, which were just undesirable. I'd resolved that Cabernet had to go but would keep it there while we were producing some cash flow to work on the Pinots and Chardonnays, and a selection of clones of them. And from that I thought that, well, we're going to get the occasional bad year in this area, we need to use that material for a different end use in those cooler years. And sparkling wine seemed to be the way to go.

There was not much sparkling wine grown in Australia in the mid 80s, so it did look as though it could've been a proposition. And so we looked at the opportunities and where to get information. Fesq had an agency from Roederer, the champagne house, and he wrote to them, and they said, 'Yes, we would be interested'. I think (*couldn't decipher word*) sent them some samples of some sparkling base that I'd played with, and they wrote back and said, 'Yes, this looks interesting'.

They were interested in the new world because at that stage they'd just bought some land in California in Anderson Valley and were doing some experimental work there. So they were interested in another area, much to the disgust of the older members of the family that Rousaud was adventurous and doing things like this.

**Rousaud was one of the younger bloods, wasn't he?**

**GW:** Yes, he was the son of one of the daughters who had inherited a fair share of the property.

They got to the stage where he was prepared to come across and have a look. We had assistance in convincing him, and also paying for his costs to come across from the State organisation called the Tasmanian Development Authority. This must've been in '85 probably. They brought him across and looked after him, and entertained him, and took him on tours of the vineyard, and he looked at the fruit at Heemskerk and other places, and the wines we were making. We talked with him and spent a lot of time with him. And then he went to Sydney and talked with Fesq. And then following that—all this took some years of course to do, didn't happen very quickly in these areas—we decided to form a joint venture. And I went to France and spent some time there, and they came over here and sent someone across, and so it evolved.

**Now, what did that culminate in—that joint venture? What label in particular?**

**GW:** Well, I think we started in 1987 with trials, and '88. And the '88 looked promising and we bottled it. The (*sounds like, bottled state*) hadn't

turned into a sparkling wine at that stage. I took samples, too, to France. And they said, 'No, it's not up to standard for our label. Better get rid of it'. So we sold it to Yalumba, I think. I'm not quite sure. We sold it to one of the South Australian people to use in one of their blends. The '89 vintage came through and they accepted that one. It was kept for two years on lees until we finished it, and launched it in '91. And it was a great success for Australia. Once again, because it was different.

**So that was the Jansz label?**

**GW:** Yes. It was different, and it didn't have any green herbaceous characters. It was fairly round, and a very different style from the broader, fruitier style produced in Australia. So people probably associated it more with a champagne style than an Australian sparkling.

**Now how did that partnership with the French develop, Graham?**

**GW:** I think it had gone quite well for (*couldn't decipher word/s*) early '91. They had a recruit out here, which was a young man, to take over as a winemaker at Roederer. I disagreed with him and a lot of his opinions, and there was a cultural difference. You couldn't speak openly to the French. You had to go in a very roundabout way to make a point. I've never been that patient. And so we disagreed, and in the end he said, 'We don't want you', so I left the company. Not particularly harmonious, mind you.

**No, no. We don't need to go into that.  
So what was your path after that, Graham?**

**GW:** When I recovered from the shock, I did a little bit of consulting work. A man in Tasmania, a Czechoslovakian—was a Czechoslovakian, Czech Republic now—by the name of Chromy was interested in wines. He'd just sold a large interest in his company, which was a meat processing works, and had a stack of money available, and was interested in wines. He's been interested in everything that's happened in Tasmania in the food line, whether it was cheese or wine or meat. A good Tasmanian citizen, very loyal to the State. He bought Heemskerk from Roederer because he could

see that it was going to go cheap. He wanted to get a ready-made vineyard. And he also bought the Roche(?) company, which was owned by a man called Rochaix(?)—Bernard Rochaix.

**Rochecombe.**

**GW:** Roche and myself, yes.

They got into financial trouble because of changes in the currency values, and also because he was trying to manage it by coming over two or three times a year. It fell apart. And then doing too many things, too quickly. It was badly managed, badly run down, and so the Bank took it over, and then Chromy bought that again at a reasonable price. He needed someone to run these things so I went in as a consultant, restructured the Rochecombe vineyard, and then he got excited about the whole business. Bought land on the west Tamar, towards Bass Strait, the northern end. About a 20 hectare block. We established that in 1994. And that's been a particularly good vineyard.

Chromy was having troubles with management of the vineyards, and with winemaking and administration, so he sold the Heemskerk vineyard and the Rochecombe vineyard to Pipers Brook, who were looking to increase their land holdings as they intended to go public. And there's a story there. So they were left with the Tamar Ridge brand at (*couldn't decipher word*), which has worked very well for them.

**You've maintained a continuing interest in Pinot Noir, from our discussions earlier.**

**GW:** I only have one interest now. It's Pinot Noir. (*Laughter*)

**Tell me about what that's eventuated into.**

**GW:** I think it all started because the growers in Tasmania were under pressure from the mainland companies, such as Yalumba and BRL Hardy and a couple of smaller ones, to sell fruit. They wanted Pinot and Chardonnay for sparkling wine. These companies were only interested in small parcels, but then most of the growers are small in Tasmania. The

companies buying it were not particularly interested in quality, they just wanted wines for experimenting and for blending, to have a look at the Tasmanian possibilities. So I think the Tasmanian growers went for yield and tried to make table wines from the same type of viticulture. And we were making dreadful, green, weedy, thin, miserable Pinots. A few of the better growers that weren't interested in contract growing realised this, so I got a team of them together to get our act together, otherwise we were going to be just another bulk grower. May as well grow potatoes as grow any grapes.

We got a little organisation together of about 1,000 or so of the better growers that I thought had the ability and the capacity and the financial resources to do something. There's little point in going in and growing Pinot unless you've got financial resources, like owning a yacht. You've got to have it, or you don't go into it.

We got this thing going, and it's developed quite well. We've been holding an annual conference, which is attracting quite a bit of interest throughout Australia, and we've got people internationally coming to it. And I think it's *(sounds like, dropped)*.

### **In the improvement here?**

**GW:** Yes. It's a matter of being in the right place at the right time. You get two or three good seasons and you get the credit for that. *(Laughs)* But they're taking a much greater interest in cropping levels, in clonal material. Most of the Pinot clones brought into Australia were brought in for the wrong reasons. They looked for big bunches, big berries, and something to grow 15/20 tonnes of grapes per hectare. And it's taken a long time to convince people that we've got to look at 5 tonnes of pea sized berries rather than 20 tonnes of plum sized berries to make Pinot. It's hard to convince people that there is an economic advantage in doing that. But all of a sudden Pinots have taken off in price. New Zealand, for example, where you can't buy a bottle of New Zealand wine under \$50, whereas Tasmanian wines were selling at \$16 to \$20. That's all they were

worth, quite honestly. But now they're getting up into the 40s and 50s, and selling readily.

**Graham, what would be the largest changes you've seen over the time you've been involved?**

**GW:** The industry? In Tasmania?

**Yes.**

**GW:** I think the most promising change is the interest now being taken by people such as BRL Hardy and Yalumba. Interestingly enough, there's been a recent change. The Chromy vineyard has been bought by a Tasmanian firm, Gunns, a public company. Their main revenue comes from destroying eucalyptus trees, but they've gone green and they've bought copious vineyards. They're very interested in doing something in this area, and I think they have the ability to do it well and have the resources to do it well. And they are very much dedicated to Tasmania. So that's the most important thing I think.

The acquisition of Pipers Brook by Kreglinger will, if they produce the right type of wines, put the name of Tasmania before a lot of people in Europe. That's their marketing area. And I believe they're quite good distributors. So these are encouraging. We needed greater volume of grapes produced for some of the bigger manufacturers. There will always be a lot of smaller producers in Tasmania, mainly because reasonable areas of suitable ground are not available in big areas. So they've got to find little micro climes, which can only be one, four, five, ten hectares, and concentrate on quality. And I think I can see that happening now. But quality, I've always said, is the key. There's no other way to go.

**So that's what always drove you, was it, Graham?**

**GW:** Yes.

**Were you after a specific taste or flavour, or was it really just as you go, as we said earlier?**



**GW:** Originally I wanted to emulate Champagne and Burgundy. I've realised in recent years that's not possible, but I want to make wine as good a quality but with own regional flavours. I think even within Tasmania, if they do it properly, the regional characters will come out. There will be differences between the Pipers Brook area and the west Tamar area and the (*couldn't decipher word*) areas. I think this is important. But if you're worried that you're going to taste the eucalyptus, that's fine. It will be something different. They can't produce eucalyptus flavoured wine in France. (*Laughter*)

**I know what you're saying. Yes, the micro climate is really where it's all at, isn't it? It's in the vineyard that it's going to happen.**

**GW:** Yes.

**Well, Graham, thank you very, very much for talking with me today. It's been a delight to learn more about the Tasmanian industry that you helped begin. So thank you very much.**

**GW:** It's interesting to note down what's happened in the last forty years.

**Thanks, Graham.**