

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

**OH 692/27**

Full transcript of an interview with

**DOUG CRITTENDEN**

on 26 November 2001

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

**OH 692/27**

**DOUG CRITTENDEN**

**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 692/27 TAPE 1 - SIDE A**

**NATIONAL WINE CENTRE, WOLF BLASS FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.**

**Interview with Mr Doug Crittenden, Hawthorn, Melbourne, on 26th November, 2001.**

**Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Doug, could we begin with some of the personal formalities? Could you tell me where and when you were born, please?**

**DC:** I was born in Melbourne in 1923. I did not have a great deal of education because my mother divorced my father in the early 30's, and that was quite a dramatic time. Of course, my mother couldn't really afford to send me to any major school, and I went to the local State school and then to a technical college. When I turned fourteen, she wasn't getting any extra money and it was pretty tough times. We were just getting through the depression and it was really on then. She had to send me out to work. That was in 1938.

**At fifteen?**

**DC:** Fifteen.

**What was her name, Doug?**

**DC:** Her name was Ralphene Crittenden. And the reason she was called Ralphene Crittenden was that her father was killed in a mining accident in Maldon the same year, or just before, she was born, and his name was Ralph James. She was a James, of course. And they decided to call her Ralphene after her father who died about a fortnight before she was born. I started off as an electrical fitter and served my apprenticeship through the War, working in a place called Williams & Benwell in South Melbourne. The name of their switchgear was called W & B switchgear. The company doesn't exist today, but they made automatic and manual switchgear.

I tried a couple of times to get out but I was in a protected industry. I was actually doing Navy work at the time.

**So you were manpowered, good and proper.**

**DC:** I tried. I had my sister in the AWAS and my brother was overseas in the Army, and all my cousins and everybody else was in it except me. I tried a couple of times. I thought I could beat it and get into the Navy but there was no way. You had to produce your identity card, and immediately they saw you were in a protected industry [that was that]. When war was over, I was desperate to get away and I went to Sydney to try and catch a ship. Manpower wouldn't release me from the job even when the war had finished because they still controlled most of the industries. I had to get a letter from my father, who was in business, to say that he was in ill health and that he needed me in the business.

**Could you just tell me a little bit about your father at this point?**

**DC:** My father was one of the leading grocers and provision merchants in Melbourne. There were only three major groceries places. There was the Mutual Store, and there were a couple of other grocers. I can't recall their names now. I remember one was Franz in the city. But in the suburbs there were no big grocers. My father was renowned. He used to mature his own cheese, package and blend his own tea, and his self raising flour. A lot of the things were packaged under the Crittenden label. But he was mainly in groceries.

In 1932, '33 I think it was—he got the little shop in Malvern Road, Toorak, which was licensed. He only rented it because he had a few customers that wanted to get a bottle of whisky, or a bottle of brandy, or something like that. Or a bottle of wine. And he came from a Methodist family and there would've been a lot of objection from his customers in those days if he sold liquor. So he more or less kept it separate. It was a one-man and a boy, and probably a girl, operation that he had.

**What was his Christian name, Doug?**

**DC:** Oscar Crittenden. He was O.R. Crittenden—Oscar Rupert Crittenden. Actually he had a terrible handle. Oscar Rupert George was his full name. *(Laughs)* But he was known as O.R. Crittenden—Oscar Rupert. He was renowned for getting things that other people didn't have. He would have all sorts of exotic tins of things brought out from England, and he'd buy them from the importers. He'd have a range of caviars for example. It was a gourmet food shop of its day. All service, of course. There was no self-service in those days.

**Did you grow up knowing the place intimately?**

**DC:** Yes, I did. But I didn't want to work for my father. My father wasn't very popular with me because of the way he treated my mother, and I only saw a bit of my father from time to time. The main thing I felt was that I didn't want to ever be a grocer.

After I got out of Williams & Benwell, I went to Sydney to try and get a ship to go overseas. All my mates are coming home, everybody had been everywhere and I hadn't been anywhere. I'd been stuck at home. But most of the ships were still controlled by the Navy, and I spent nearly six months in Sydney.

I worked for a company, still doing the same work there—electrical fitting—and then I got sick of that. My mother spoke to me, and she said, 'Why don't you come back and have a go at the grocery business. Your brother's started in it'. My brother had been demobbed from the Army. 'Why don't you give it a go? You could always leave it and go overseas if it does not work out'.

**What was your brother's name, Doug?**

**DC:** Jack—Jack Crittenden.

My mother talked me into coming back and giving it a go.

My father gave me a very tough time. He knew I'd only been brought up in the engineering business, or as a factory worker as he called it. 'You're only a factory worker. You wouldn't know anything about groceries'. And

for the first three or four months, I was down in this little liquor shop, boiling up water and lighting up the old copper at the back and washing bottles for him, because we used to get a few secondhand wine bottles back in those days, and you couldn't buy bottles. You couldn't get any bottles. It didn't matter what shape they were, whether they were beer bottles—any shape of bottle—you'd put something in them and push a cork in and you could sell it because wine was desperately short in those days.

**This is mainly fortified product?**

**DC:** Mainly fortified. There was practically no table wine sold. Well, you just couldn't sell much table wine in those days.

**And Doug, you were aged about eighteen at the time?**

**DC:** No, I'm speaking about after the War. I would have been about twenty-three.

So he had me washing bottles, and I nearly tossed it in a couple of times. And there was a man in charge of the shop. My father wasn't there, although he used to let me come into the shop occasionally. Eventually I graduated to putting the tube in my mouth and putting a bit of wine into the bottles and knocking a cork in.

I suppose I did graduate a little bit from that work to to the point where he let me come into the shop occasionally, but he'd never say, 'How are you going?', 'Is everything alright?' He had a manager in the shop.

But I graduated, and that's at the stage where I decided that I rather liked the wine industry. I thought I'd go away and see what it was all about—overseas. I had some letters of introduction from a number of companies, and I packed my bag and said to my mother, 'What would you say if I packed my bags and spent every penny I have and went overseas?' She said, 'Well, I think it would be marvellous'.

I sold the car—it was a second-hand car—which my father then helped me pay for. And I paid £60 Australian for a five week voyage, and I got off the

ship at Marseilles with a haversack on my back, and I had already joined in Australia the Youth Hostels Association.

**By the way, what brand was your car, Doug? What model?**

**DC:** Oh, the car. My first car was an Amilcar, which was a French car.

**Oh! Oh! Worth a fortune!**

**DC:** Oh, yes, but that collapsed. I think it was an Austin. An Austin A40, I think it was, that he helped me buy.

**And cars were worth significant sums at that point, weren't they?**

**DC:** Oh, yes. The interesting side was that you could get an American Buick for about £500 but you had to pay about £750 for an English car. Like an A40, or something like that.

Anyhow, this was all much to my father's disgust, because he had told me earlier that, 'If you want to learn more about the business, stand behind the counter and greet the customers, and then you'll know what you want to buy for the customers'.

I went overseas, and I was away for nearly fifteen months. I called on all these places, got a wonderful reception, and met some very interesting people. I did a course—I studied at Dienhard's. They let me take a course on German wine. And in Bordeaux I did a course. I went down to Spain.

**Dienhard. So you did a course there?**

**DC:** I did a course there. And then in London, I did a course at the London County Council's school on wine and spirit retailing.

I came back determined to show my father that I wouldn't let him down. Course, I was only home for twelve months or so, and he was pretty sick. But I managed to do one or two things that impressed him. But he died in '54. And that little shop there where I was working—it was still only about a three-man store—is the one that grew to eventually have 100 on the staff.

Soon after he died we converted one of the shops. He virtually left the business to some of his long-standing staff, and equal parts to my sister and my brother and myself. The staff got older and retired. One of the directors was Max Parsons, who started as a boy at the age of sixteen. And I worked beside Max. He was much older than I was, about ten years older. He and I worked side by side for nearly forty years, and we were the ones that virtually built up the Malvern Road shop. My brother was looking after the food side and I looked after the liquor side. We finished up with seven liquor stores. The main one, as I said, had 100 in it. [After many alterations and rebuilding the Malvern Rd shop grew to 100 on the staff]

I worked out when I came back from overseas that the majority of the wines were controlled by price. You could not cut the price on anything. It was all controlled by associations, and if you were caught cutting the price, you would have your licence cancelled, or your beer stopped, or something like that.

**So when you say associations, do you mean wholesalers effectively?**

**DC:** Wholesalers controlled it—and margins were set [by them]. I think I've got a little bit of paper somewhere, where the Wine & Brandy Association had decided the price rise of fortified wine—that all fortified wine would rise by sixpence.

**So it was effectively a cartel?**

**DC:** Oh, yes.

**And I think, from memory, this was true in every Australian capital city at the time. But Melbourne, particularly, was renowned for the strength of the breweries who were part of the cartel.**

**DC:** Oh, yes, the main cartel. Don't tell me about the cartel of brewery. I was a Vice President of the retail liquor merchants—it was called the licensed grocers in those days. And we wanted a penny extra on the margin of beer. A penny! We didn't think we were getting a good enough

margin. The Brewery had put up its price but still wanted it sold at the old [retail] price. And the Chairman of the brewery then, or the big chief, was Reg Fogarty. Of course, a few of our customers were directors of the brewery and they knew that I'd put the price up.

Reg Fogarty rang me one day—and of course I was young—and he rang me, and he said, 'What's this, Crit, about you charging that extra penny on beer? If you continue to do that I won't supply you with beer'. I said, being young in business in those days, 'Well, Mr Fogarty, you won't mind if I put in a little bit of Richmond if you don't supply me with beer, will you?' And, of course, that was like holding a red rag to a bull. He said, 'You put in one bottle of Richmond beer into your store and you'll never get another bottle of beer from me again'. That's an absolute fact.

Actually there's a book written there on the history on the Carlton United Brewery, and it's in that book—the actual words that I said.

Anyhow, we didn't win. We had hotels on our side trying to get it, and they all gave in, and I had to eventually cave in. Couple of weeks went by and I wasn't getting any beer from the brewery. I did put in Richmond.

### **And was beer the big seller of the time?**

**DC:** Oh, well, if you didn't have beer [you lost out]. You were rationed with beer in those days.

### **Of course.**

**DC:** And of course, I wasn't getting any beer so I rang the sales manager, which was George Dally at the time, and I said, 'George, I'm not getting any beer'. 'Oh', he said, 'we've got strict instructions from up top that you are not to get any beer because you put Richmond in'. So I said, 'Well, I'm coming straight in to see Mr Fogarty'.

So I got in the car and I went straight in and saw Mr Fogarty. He kept me waiting. When I got in there [I found] that George must've told him I was coming in. Well, he kept me waiting outside his office for nearly an hour.

And I eventually walked in and I asked him could I have some beer. He said, 'No, you put in Richmond'.

And I had to promise never to misbehave again, never to put in any more Richmond, and then he'd let me have some beer.

And the same in those days, if you cut the price on anything you were up against—you know, you'd be told. It's like the cartel of newsagents.

Nobody else was allowed to do anything.

**So, Doug, the wine market, the fortifieds and all those, were also controlled by the same people.**

**DC:** Yes, but this is one of the reasons why we started to bottle our own products. Because we could control the price of what we sold it for. We had an enormous market for fortified. Every week, although we didn't have the storage space for it, I'd have two hogsheads come down from Angoves. Two hogsheads, they were sixty-odd gallons, which was called AL dry flor. Their code name for it was AL dry flor.

I used to get RG Muscat, which used to come from Renmark Growers, and I'd get two hogsheads of that. I'd get two hogsheads of their RG Dry. And then they used to mix up a blend. So there wouldn't be a week go by that there would be a truck come down from the Riverland with at least six hogsheads of sherry on—just coming down to us. This is when we were at the height of our business. And some weeks more than that. So you can average that. Well, six hogsheads—thirty-six—360. Say, 400 gallons of sherry every week, which would make you two hundred-odd dozen. But some of that would go into flagons. We never got into casks. Ours were mainly flagons and bottles. But when you've got seven stores, it is no trouble to get rid of that every week.

**So this was all bottled on premises?**

**DC:** All bottled on premises, yes. We had, sometimes, three people on the bottling line. When I was on one of my later trips overseas I bought a nice filler—six head filler. And then I bought some hand corkers. I bought them in Germany - 2 hand corkers for bottling table wine.

**Fantastic!**

**DC:** I had three [people]—well, always two every week, and the bottling line never used to stop five days a week, bottling something. But you see, we were importing gin from London and bottling it. Scotch whisky, rum, brandy [the same]. You name it, we had them all under our label.

**So Scotch whisky by the barrel as well?**

**DC:** Scotch whisky used to come in by barrel. We used to bring in gin—overproof gin—and break it down. The Scotch used to come in, over proof Scotch, and we'd break it down.

**And this was all governed by customs and excise?**

**DC:** No, no. We used to pay duty when we cleared the barrels from bond. Duty and sales tax on the packaging, and everything was out of bond immediately it came to our place.

**So effectively, in one sense, you defeated the cartel.**

**DC:** Well, this was one reason we developed so big in table wine—I worked out in the very early stages that if you sold sherry, they were going to buy a bottle, or they were going to buy a flagon. But they could put the cork in that and put it in the cupboard. Everything showed the same margin. Didn't matter what you sold. And I worked out that when you sell a bottle of table wine against a bottle of sherry, they open it and it's all gone. But sherry wouldn't go all in the one meal. And if they liked table wine they'd buy a dozen, whereas with sherry, they'd only buy a bottle as they wanted it at the time.

**Doug, is this in the 50's that we're talking about?**

**DC:** Yes, it would be in the 50's.

**And mid 50's, you've got the phenomena of Barossa Pearl coming in as well.**

**DC:** Yes, well, in the 50's I can remember Keith Gramp—I knew anybody in the trade in those days because we were quite big customers. Keith Gramp was running the Melbourne office [for Orlando].

**Correct.**

**DC:** And I knew Keith. He was in the Melbourne Beefsteak and Burgundy. The Melbourne Beefsteak and Burgundy was one of the very early ones, and there was Bruce Beasley(?) from Thomas Hardys. There was Keith Gramp from Orlando. There was Ron Fox from McWilliams. [I'm not sure] who it was from Penfolds in those days? But we had most of the major trade in the Beefsteak and Burgundy Club.

**Would it've been Ian Hickenbotham? No, that was later.**

**DC:** He was later. They're all on the original foundation of the Beefsteak and Burgundy Club. And I was the first retailer in—or the only retailer in it. So I was pretty close to most of them.

Anyhow Keith, one day, brought over a bottle of Barossa Riesling 1953, the first of their batch.

**Pressure fermentation.**

**DC:** Yes, pressure fermentation. And it was selling then for five shillings. And I was so impressed with this wine after Keith brought over a bottle, and he said, 'Look, we're going to release this in a few weeks. I want to see what you think of it'. And I tasted it and I said, 'Keith, this is very close to German style Riesling'. We'd never seen anything like it in Australia. I said, 'Is there any chance that I could pre-sell some of this before you release it to see how much I can sell'.

And I made up a brochure, wrote out how it was tasting and what I thought—it was one of the finest Rieslings I'd ever seen and tasted in Australia. And it was—[I offered it to people to] buy a half dozen or a dozen. And we sent this circular out to all our customers. And sight unseen, and before they'd even seen a bottle, or before they'd even seen a

label of it, I sold two hundred dozen. It was unheard of. Orlando could not believe it. I got the first release.

Well, after that, it was rationed to the trade. Because the first lot of '53 was so much in demand. But I got it before anybody else because I asked before they released it so that I could just circulate the customers. And of course, I was able to deliver it when everybody else was just getting it. -

**That's a fabulous story, Doug.**

**DC:** Well, if you get an opportunity to get back and see Keith, just say, 'Did you take over the first bottle to Doug?', and get him to tell you the story. Because they could not believe that I could sell so much when nobody else had seen it.

**As a wine, though, it must've been so startling from what had been before.**

**DC:** Oh, it was totally different from anything else we'd ever seen. So that was the reason why I concentrated on table wine, because any commercial wine from any of the other major [suppliers] all showed the same margin. But in my own bottlings I could control the price. I started to tell you that I used to go South Australia about six times a year.

**TAPE 1 - SIDE B**

**Doug, you were telling me about the release of the Barossa Riesling and the pre-sale.**

**DC:** Yes, well, I suppose it wasn't only the Barossa Riesling. Going to South Australia, I'd know what was coming up in the trade. I would keep on eye on what—I remember one particular time. I used to regularly go up

to Burnside. There was the Magill winery and next door they had another one—John Davoren was connected.

**Romalo?**

**DC:** No, Romalo was the sparkling wine place.

**There was Romalo, then Stonyfell.**

**DC:** Well, I used to go to Stonyfell, too. And I used to go to Romalo because they used to do my sparkling wine for me.

**Was that Norm Walker?**

**DC:** Yes, Norm Walker. Our sparkling wine was called Philippe Champagne. Course, in those days you were allowed to call it champagne. But then we had another one done by Kaiser Stuhl which we used to call San Michelle. This one was bottled from the tank method. We just called that sparkling wine.

**Was it Woodleys that you were thinking of?**

**DC:** No. I'm trying to think about John Davoren. Penfolds had two sites. I'm trying to think of the name.

**Auldana.**

**DC:** Auldana. Yes. And I used to go there, and he [Davoren] used to keep a lot of their bulk wine there.

**Correct, yes.**

**DC:** John Davoren used to make up the blends for a lot of their bulk wine. And I remember one particular time they made up a blend for their 707. It was the late 60's/early 70's and it was going to be the 707 Cabernet Sauvignon. I think I've still got an odd bottle of it. I could check on that actual vintage of that. But I know they hadn't marketed their 707 at that particular stage.

I got them to bottle me up a couple of hundred dozen, and I wasn't allowed to call it Penfolds. I just called it from the Barossa Valley, or from Kalimna, because some of the material came from Kalimna. We sold it at nine and sixpence and it was a very expensive table wine to sell for nine and sixpence in those days.

There was another time when I was there, they'd just made up their blend of 389. I asked them could I have some of their Penfolds stamped labels, which I printed on it, but they insisted that I wasn't allowed to call it 389. So I labelled it 983—the 389 backwards. And I got them to put it in some lovely French half bottles that they weren't using, and I was very short of half bottles. I think they did me five hundred dozen of these little half bottles of this 389 in those days.

You know if you weren't on the spot, or you weren't over there, you weren't able to get these things.

On a Monday morning I used to catch the seven o'clock from Melbourne, or seven thirty I think it was then, and I'd pick up a hire car at Adelaide airport. And I'd go down to McLaren Vale first—I'd call at Reynella on the way, then go down. We were always regularly buying in those days from Cud Kay, his bulk Shiraz.

### **Some of the Grenache?**

**DC:** Shiraz Grenache. And we used to call that McLaren Vale Shiraz. We used to get about six hogsheads over at a time. I'd call to see Cud to see if he had anything special, and taste from some of his casks, to see if he had anything special that he would let me have that was a little better in quality. Might be a small run, just a couple of hogsheads that we could run off as a special, or something like that.

I'd call on d'Arry Osborn. Anyhow I'd do McLaren Vale.

Then on the Tuesday I'd always do Adelaide and surrounding districts. I'd go down to Hardys at Mile End. In the very early stages, it was Roger Warren who was there. And then Dick Heath took over from Roger Warren. They were the first to make me up a blend for a Rosé, and I

looked at several samples. And he made my first Rosé. And they would regularly make my Rosé for me to my style, which was a dry Rosé. Any Rosé on the market then was sweet and had a hopeless market.

**Was this about the time Mateus came out—from Portugal?**

**DC:** Oh, no. That was totally different again—that had a little spritz.

**Yes, that's correct.**

**DC:** That's why that was so popular: it was something different. They liked the fancy bottle. And it was a bit sweet. Mine was dry, but not spritz.

I'd go up to Stonyfell. Henry Martin would be there. And we used to buy a bit of Port or I used to get a bit of red wine from him. Then over to Auldana. And that would be all done on the Tuesday.

On the Wednesday I'd go up the Barossa. I'd do Barossa and the Clare district on Wednesday and Thursday, and then I'd have to catch the plane home on the Thursday night because I had to be back for Friday and Saturday. They were the two busiest days of the week. So four days a week [in South Australia] and I used to get pissed out of my mind over there sometimes.

I'd call on Peter Lehmann and, of course, you'd get caught up there, and he was at Saltram at the time. He was one of my big suppliers.

But then there was a stage when I was going over there that red was very much in demand. There was tremendous demand for all kinds of red.

There was a desperate shortage of red and people were hoarding it and putting it under their beds. They thought that they were all going to make a fortune out of it. And the wineries were expanding with more tanks and more barrels, but when I'd go there for more red wine they'd say, 'Oh, we haven't got anything to sell you today'. They all held it back. They all thought they were going to make a fortune. There was a desperate shortage.

**Would this've been '71 to '74? Around that period?**

**DC:** Yes. Round about that period. Well, I remember at one particular stage I bought some red wine that was made from Frontignac and something else. I mean, you'd take anything that you could get that you could sell.

But what happened was that it collapsed like a pack of cards. There was a crash on the stock exchange. And people had it under their beds. They had it everywhere, and they thought that they could sell it and they'd make money. Course, nobody bought any red for quite some time. And then they were going to have the vine-pull because there was too many vines. So I mean it just went up like that and then crashed down like that. Somebody will tell you the actual date of when that crash of red wine they couldn't sell.

**Tom Angove has said to me that he has seen four hills and valleys in his lifetime.**

**DC:** Well, I couldn't get any red. Some of them looked after me. Cud Kay looked after me.

**He was a great man, wasn't he, Doug?**

**DC:** Yes. Oh, Peter [Lehmann] used to let me have some, too. You'd get [wine] from your regulars but I was always looking for that extra. I was amazed that—when going to Clare one day, I called in to see Brother Hanlon. This is before John May [was at Sevenhill]. And I got very pally with John Hanlon and he used to come over for the football and I'd entertain him. And, of course, I'm not a very religious person, I'm not even a Catholic, but it used to amaze everybody that I was agent for Sevenhill.

**Sevenhills.**

**DC:** - Sevenhills. *(Laughs)*

And, of course, I was agent for Cyril Henschke. I used to go down and buy bulk from Cyril, too. And we used to label it under Henschke. I'll show you

the book of labels in a moment, and I think there's some there under Henschke.

At McLaren Vale a lot of these places weren't bottling much wine. There was very little market for table wine. And I remember Ryecroft. And I used to see the old man down there. Ingoldby. And John, his son, was there, but the old man was the big one to decide who was going to get wine and where the wine was going to. In the early stage he was selling it to the Emu Wine Company.

**Exactly.**

**DC:** And a lot of the companies used to just store red wine and hope that somebody'd come along and buy their bulk. Sometimes the wine would be there in the wood for three years or more.

Occasionally I used to drive over. I knew some of the winemakers were keen to see some of the wines that I'd bottled, and I used to take over some of them. I've still got check samples of some of the wines of the 50's, and they're opening up very well today. You know in those days, there was no small wood—no nothing. People often ask me today, 'Do you think the wines of today are going to last that length of time?' I mean, I've got wine forty and fifty year old wines that we bottled. Not quite fifty. Wines that were bottled roundabout that time anyhow.

**Were they in those huge oak vats, Doug?**

**DC:** Yes. And most of those big oak vats were all lined with tartrate.

**Yes, they were.**

**DC:** The wine wouldn't come in contact with the wood.

**That was the worst job in the world, by the way. I had to do that.**

**DC:** Taking the tartrate out?

**No. Having to go inside and clean it all out and get it all ready for the next batch.**

**DC:** That's when you were trying to clean it back to the wood. But a lot of those old barrels were lined with tartrate so that the wine never touched any wood. Well, a lot of them weren't even made of oak.

**Doug, so you were saying that you really got to know so many people in the industry in South Australia on a personal level.**

**DC:** Well, I never used to miss a Barossa Festival. It was one of the highlights. [Also I was inducted and made an associate baron of the Barossa, Peter Lehmann organised a fun day with the Premier Don Dunstan and made, and dubbed me, the order of the steel. I just loved the Barossa and the people]. And I knew—one of the disappointing features of life today as you get—I'm in my 78th year—is that I thought that when I retired I'd be able to go over there. I knew the families when they were growing up, and most of those families are in the wine industry today, and some of them have now got children. It's a little bit like John Vickery—Leo Buring, now Richmond Grove. You knew them right from when they were boys. I was going over there when he was at Leo Buring and I thought, won't it be nice to go over there when I'm older and see a bit. But the whole scene has changed. I go over there these days and nobody knows me, except for a few like Peter and Wolfy, and a few others when you wander around. But it's not the same as it used to be.

**Can we move back to the retail side, Doug?**

**DC:** I think the biggest seller that we ever had was our Seven Oaks Riesling. Len [Evans] used to call it 'seven pokes'. (*Laughter*) And he used to say to me, 'How's that seven pokes going of yours?' But that started off in a very small way. Coming back from South Australia I called in to see Colin Preece at Great Western. I used to buy a bit of red wine from him. Actually when he used to make up his Moyston blend, it was only a very small amount. Might be fifty dozen or a hundred dozen because there was very little table wine sold. I'm speaking about the 50s. And he'd probably make up a blend with one of the winemakers—Bill Seppelt, or somebody, would come over and they'd make up their blend for their next Moyston. Probably it'd be so much from this big cask, so much

from that big cask and so much from that, and they'd put their blend together. And then whatever was left over they used to sell off as bulk. And I was buying, year after year, all the bits that were left—everything that was left over, I'd buy it in bulk. I don't know whether I used to take it all but I think I started off with a couple of hundred gallons, and then it gradually grew to where I had a tanker coming down, because it was always such good material. And we used to call it Cardinal Claret. And it was always known as that because I wasn't allowed to name it after Colin Preece.

I used to buy sherry from their fortified place in Rutherglen, and I used to call it Woodroffe Sherry because the winemaker there was Woodroffe. I can't remember his Christian name. But we used to call it Woodroffe Sherry. And when they found out I put Woodroffe's name on the label, Seppelts approached me. I knew Kingsley Batten who was managing the Melbourne office, and he said, 'You know they want you stop using that name Woodroffe. They heard that you're using it'. I said, 'I'm going to use Colin Preece's [name] next'. He said, 'Don't you dare. They won't supply you with any more wine if you do'. *(Laughs)*

But on one occasion I was coming back from South Australia and I called in to see Colin [Preece]. I used to go down there and stay at the house with him at Great Western, and go to the Ararat wine and food society with him. And Judy, my wife, would come down with me sometimes.

But I called in one time, and he said, 'Come and taste some juice that I've just got from this year's vintage, from this new-fangled press that they've sent me and made me use. It's called a Willmes press'. See, he always had the hydraulic press—one of those old basket presses there, because they never used to handle much. And they had a Willmes press there for the first time.

And he showed me some juice, and he said, 'Which juice do you like best out of those? Which wine do you like best out of those?' 'Oh', I said, 'that's fantastic. That's still very good but I like this the best'. He said,

'Well, that's going down to our vinegar factory in Collins Street'. Did you know that Seppelts had a vinegar factory in Collins Street?

**I didn't know it was in Collins Street. I knew they had a vinegar factory.**

**DC:** They used to bottle fortified wine there, and used to make their vinegar. And it was near the old Federal Hotel—between King and Spencer—and it was quite a big area in which they used to make their vinegar. And Kingsley Batten had just taken over as manager of the Melbourne branch from one of the Seppelt family.

Anyhow, he [Colin Preece] said that it was going to be made into vinegar. I said, 'Oh, gosh, could I buy that?' He said, 'Yes, you can buy it. We'll get more for it as wine than being made into vinegar'.

So it was sent down as a tanker to their vinegar factory because I couldn't handle a tanker in those days. And they had no facilities for hand corking [Riesling] bottles, because they were too high. They only had one for the push in corks. They would be all hand done in those days because they were only doing fortified and they were only doing vinegar.

Anyhow, I think it was about five hundred gallons—two hundred and fifty dozen. With the result that they didn't have a corking machine. So I sent in my corking machine and it was all hand corked. No sterile bottling, in a vinegar factory, and it was a great wine. I kept some for years just to see how it went on.

**This is the Seven Oaks?**

**DC:** It was the start of the Seven Oaks Riesling.

Seven Oaks Riesling was made by different companies. Stanley Wine Company had it for many years. Orlando had it for a couple of years. Kaiser Stuhl had it for a few years. Leo Burings did it a few years.

How it used to work is that whoever got the contract one year, I'd ask them, 'If you did it again, would it be at the same price as you charged me for the wine last year?' They say, 'No, it would have to be -'—and that's where I'd get my basic price from. They would know what they did last

year, so they'd give me a price that was a price for the wine bottled, I supply the label, packaged, stored, delivered 1,000 cases to Melbourne a time. Once I got that price I'd give that same price to every winery that would be interested in doing the contract. So it was not a competition on price, it was always a competition on who could give me the best quality wine for that price. And if I was happy with the wine of the previous year, they would get the first choice of whether they were going to do it the next year.

I'd get all of these samples. They'd come to Malvern Road, Toorak, and I'd line them up, and I would look at them so that I wouldn't know where they'd come from. And they'd set up a line up of all these wines that I'd arranged to come over. Then the staff, who had a reasonably good palates, would look at them and they would pick out which one they liked. Then I had two or three customers whose palates I'd rely on and see which one they liked. And the one that won out, would be the next Seven Oaks. So it used to jump from company to company—depending on who would give me the best value. And that was Seven Oaks Riesling.

And it was always just inside the front door [of the shop], a great big tub of it. So it was the first thing they [the customers] were greeted with—a great big tub of Seven Oaks Riesling.

**And you were bottling about 1,000 cases a year?**

**DC:** A thousand cases! The last year that I did the deal it was 20,000 gallons/10,000 dozen of one wine. Ten thousand dozen. So it grew from a small amount to quite a large amount.

**What would be the largest changes over time you saw in retailing wine, Doug?**

**DC:** I always thought that I would be in retailing for all my life. I wasn't a willing seller. We were a family company with outside directors. We had people not working in the company who wanted their money out. My brother had retired, more or less, from the company. And of course, he was in the food side. And he had an offer from Myers. The pressure was

going to be on sooner or later from other sources as well. Although my sister and I were the major shareholders—there was my brother-in-law and I; for he was looking after my sister's interest, and he was a director in the company—you could see the writing on the wall. It was the saddest day of my life to see it sold because I loved the work, I enjoyed it, and I thought that I'd be working there [for ever]. My son, Brett, was in the business and he was virtually my right-hand then. And, of course, even when Myers started to first run it, he was king pin there. They were looking for the young blood. I was getting a bit old, they thought. But the first thing they did was shut down all my bottling. Mainly because they didn't want to be responsible for health and that sort of thing.

**So what year would this be, Doug?**

**DC:** 1983, they shut that down. They made many mistakes [in my opinion]. They shut down our computer because they had a big monster computer of their own. They cut out our own credit cards, and of course there was fringe benefits in those days. So we lost all those accounts because they said that everybody on your credit card can go over to a Myer card.

But soon after that—Coles took them over. I was a director and worked for Myers for three years, and it nearly broke my heart to see what they did to the company. I wasn't a director at the beginning, and then they made me a director because I was going to leave because I couldn't bear it. I thought I might have some say in it when made a director but it didn't make any difference. So in 1983 I gave it away, and Brett went on running the company. But at that particular stage Coles had taken it. But there was a limitation in Victoria in the Act that nobody was allowed to own more than so many licences. It has all changed now. There was a limit to the number of licences they were allowed to have. And when Coles took over Myers, they had too many licences and Myers had to dispose. So they split our place up and some, or most, of the shops were sold off.

**Doug, thanks for finishing off the story at that sad point. It has been a privilege to listen to all that you achieved and to learn more about the wine industry through your eyes.**