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Full transcript of an interview with

BILL CHAMBERS

on 9 April 2003

by Rob Linn

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OH 692/40

BILL CHAMBERS

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OH 692/40 TAPE 1 - SIDE A

AUSTRALIAN WINE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

Interview with Bill Chambers at Rutherglen on 9th April, 2003.

Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Bill, where and when were you born?

BC: 5th June, 1933.

In Rutherglen?

BC: Yes.

And who were your parents, Bill?

BC: Arthur William Chambers and Peggy Alison Todd. My father was born in Rutherglen—I assume he was. He was born here in this house, or in Rutherglen. I'm not too sure. My mother came from Melbourne.

And had your father always been in the wine industry himself?

BC: Well, yes. He always thought he was a farmer rather than a winemaker but, yes, he's been in the wine industry for a long while.

And the winery itself, does that go back a number of generations in your family?

BC: Yes, I think I'm the fifth.

So as you grew up, Bill, were you surrounded with things wine?

BC: No. My father's house was about two or three miles from here on the banks of the Murray. There was a big lagoon, which was called a lake, and I lived there. I used to come up to the cellars—it was called the cellars—to see my grandfather on the way back to school, and he'd give me two bob, which was nice of him.

So in your memory this would've been your grandfather's house?

BC: Yes.

Now what were the cellars like for a young fellow in those days? What were your earliest memories?

BC: I guess some casks. An iron shed with some casks. A verandah. My grandfather used to sit on a cask in the front.

Did you have wine on the table at home?

BC: Not often, no. Probably when we entertained we'd have wine. My father would have sherry and ice before a meal. I think probably wine was only when we entertained really.

That's table wine and fortified?

BC: Table wine, yes. He used to have a lot of sherry. He'd drink sherry and ice.

And Bill, you were saying just a few minutes ago that you were educated here and Melbourne. Is that right?

BC: Yes. Mostly Melbourne. I was in the middle of first when I went down to Melbourne, so I was in my seventh year when I was sent down, at the beginning of the Second World War.

And how did you end up coming back into the winery?

BC: Dick Buller went to Roseworthy and got out in '47, and my father saw that Dick was able to get his wines cleaned up and saleable very quickly, and he thought it was a good idea to send one of his sons. He said, 'How about you go?' I was a bit keen on the Navy at that stage. But however a friend of mine said, 'Oh, you're mad to give up this place. Go for it'. So I went to Roseworthy after I left school in fifth form, it would be called now. I did fifth form at Scotch and then went to Roseworthy in my seventeenth year I suppose. I was sixteen when I went to Roseworthy.

So 1949 you went?

BC: 1950. I left school at the end of '49 and started Roseworthy at the beginning of '50, which was February or March. March, I think. The first years worked for a month by themselves to get the place going while the other students went on holidays.

Did you have to do an agriculture course first?

BC: Did two years agriculture and then two years oenology.

Tell me a bit about the oenology course, Bill, if you can remember.

BC: We had lectures in the morning. It was unlike the agriculture course, which was alternate days. We worked alternate days for our board. Hence the fees seemed to be very small. We didn't have to pay board. And so three days one week and two days the next week we'd have lectures, with periodic weekend work. When I became an oenology student we had lectures every morning and spent the afternoon in the lab. Somebody like myself who was all fingers and thumbs with burettes and pipettes—I was never able to weigh things at school because there was always a queue of three or four to a balance. When I had a balance to myself, eventually I learnt to do things.

Now was Rex Kuchel -

BC: Yes, Rex Kuchel was there.

- (couldn't decipher word) a course?

BC: Yes. He was very good. I found him very good. He took Principles and Practice of Winemaking, and he was pretty good. He had a set of typed notes and we just went through it. Sammy Twartz was the chemistry lecturer, and he was very good. And we had Graham Chappell, who was microbiology. I think that's about it. He also did a bit of organic chemistry in second year.

I'm just trying to think, Bill—your year. Who were the people that would've been around your era?

BC: Bob Hardy and Bob Guy were the year before. In my particular year there was Karl Seppelt, myself and Jim Jenkins. Jim died a few weeks ago. Karl Seppelt's still going pretty well. He became boss of Seppelts for a while—a managing director. He was very keen on vineyards, even then.

He was, indeed.

BC: And keen on pulling the old vines out at Seppeltsfield and trying to make the place economic, which was a bit of heresy. But however, he did it eventually. He also probably was responsible for Seppelts going to *(couldn't decipher word)* and Padthaway—those places. They were pioneers really down there.

They were.

BC: He didn't actually get the course. He hated organic chemistry and didn't bother, so he didn't actually pass. He'd be one of the shining lights that came out of Roseworthy I think. They really started in the same year as I did at the ag course, but they did three years agriculture. John Vickery was in the same year. And Harry Tulloch. I can't think of the rest of the people the year behind me. We only had three in our year, two in the year before me—six was a full year.

So in other words, you had a fair bit of time to do things on your own, too.

BC: Yes.

And Bill, after that training, did you come straight back here to Rosewood way?

BC: No. I did a vintage at Seppelts at Rutherglen and a vintage at Lindemans at Corowa, when I could come home. Then I was going to do a vintage at Mildara at Mildura but, anyway, Bernie Knappstein who was winemaker at Stanley Wine Company died and they wanted a student, so I got the job. I left Roseworthy and became winemaker at Stanley, and I stopped there for three or four years. I left in '58, anyway.

What was Stanley Wine Company like when you went there?

BC: It was pretty good. I was very lucky. I had a very, very good foreman, Pat Connors. I think he did all the work. I think Bernie couldn't have done very much. He delegated. So Pat knew what went on, so I more or less followed what Pat had done. A few things like early rackings, and I put sulphur dioxide into the wines and that sort of thing, but I more or less followed the way that they had been doing it beforehand. I suppose I modified things eventually but I can't remember. They had open fermenting tanks—slate. The only cooling was—as in much of the wine industry as well—water. I think Orlando had just got those -

M..... Schmidt.

BC: You know, pressure fermenters, they call them. I think Colin Gramp probably needs a big tick to his name for bringing those out and more or less revolutionising white wine making in Australia.

Smiths at Yalumba had refrigeration, and Hamiltons had refrigeration.

Yes.

BC: But apart from that, I don't think anybody else had refrigeration. The wine industry was getting over the war. Didn't have a lot of money, so didn't have a lot of money to spend on equipment. But Orlando did. It was great.

Rudi Kronberger had got the same equipment from Yalumba about the same time but hadn't set it up, whereas Colin got ahead a bit.

BC: Rudi was smart, but Barossa Riesling was just so far ahead of Carte D'Or. When they started to make it, it was just, as I said, revolutionary. Just recently I saw a '43 Carte D'Or at Watsons, and I'd forgotten how different they were until I saw it. It was fairly toasty. It was almost like a Semillon. It was quite old, naturally. '43 is a fair while ago.

I had some four years ago. It was quite flinty almost.

BC: Yes, but it was toasty, and you don't get toasty Rieslings now.

No.

BC: That's because it spent a year in wood.

Yes, exactly.

BC: Orlando just changed things dramatically.

And of course, old Leo Buring started off with free sulphur. When we went through Roseworthy we didn't ever worry much about free sulphur, but he brought the concept in. Old Leo talked about it, and then Vickery got onto it and used it.

This is at Chateau Leonay? Reg Shipster was there, wasn't he?

BC: Yes. Shipster and Shipton.

That's right.

BC: I think Ray Shipton's still around. He was selling corks last time I saw him. He may've retired, but he was selling corks for Amaron(?) I think. Their names were fairly similar. Yes, Shipster was at Leonay and Shipton was up in Sydney at Redfern.

So is Shipton a Sydney-ite, is he?

BC: Well, that's where he was. No, he went to Roseworthy. I'm not too sure where he came from. He went back to Adelaide, so I'm assuming he's a South Australian.

So Bill, you went to Stanley at a time when I think a lot of their wine was sold in bulk to people like Lindemans, wasn't it?

BC: No. Lindemans weren't on the list. Hardys.

Yes, Hardys.

BC: Hardys were, and Doug Seabrook. They were the only ones. Seabrooks came along and bought a bit, and Roger Warren would come up

with Ken Hardy. They'd have a dinner and a feed and look at the wines and take samples back and then tell us what they wanted.

So it was pretty much walking into a winery that had an established way of doing things and your task was just to keep things on track. Would that be fair?

BC: I think so. That's what I did, anyway. It was fairly difficult for a student straight out of Roseworthy to change. You've got to see what people do, and Stanley still had a pretty fair reputation of making pretty good wines when I went there. Also they had a few money problems too, like the rest of the wine industry.

Lindemans came in when I was there. We used to sell wine here from St Leonards to Lindemans. I went up with Alec Knappstein and we went to Lindemans, because that was one of the ones that I knew. And I knew Ray Kidd. I did a vintage with Ray Kidd down here, you see. I didn't realise then but Lindemans were expanding. Their Hunter wines—well, they didn't make enough anyway to expand with their Hunters, so they were looking for another spot and they got honed on Clare for a while. Then Ray would get the big Clare wines and fine the guts out of them with gelatine and make them nice and soft like the Hunters. *(Laughter)*

So what caused you to leave there in '58?

BC: I didn't ever intend to stop there. I did hope to go to Germany actually—there were a few scholarships around—but, anyway, I didn't. My grandfather died in '56, I think, and in late '57 or early '58 my father was diagnosed with cancer, so I came home to try and make something out of this if possible. It was pretty run-down—an old vineyard. It seems strange now but there was a choice of either becoming a farmer and getting rid of the vines, or else continuing with the vines and trying with the wine. As I was trained as a winemaker I thought that I'd continue with the wine, although the hope looked forlorn. We had a vineyard that was planted in 1907. Anyway, the vineyard yields were fairly low but we've seemed to come through with it.

So how many acres in the vineyard itself?

BC: The vineyard in those days, my father had about thirty acres down at Lakeside(?), and my grandfather had about fifty-eight/sixty acres. Something like that.

And it was a smorgasbord of varieties?

BC: Yes. Shiraz. What was the other variety? (*Sounds like, Baxter's Sherry*). Apparently the vine at Chiltern is Baxter's Sherry. Fairly big white grape.

And we called them Port varieties. Supposed to be a mixture of (*sounds like, Bastardo, Al-ver-ello*) and Touriga(?). Grenache, Muscat, Tokay (now Muscadelle), Rhine Riesling and (*sounds like, Dew-ay*).

Don't know that one.

BC: Well, that was next to the Rhine Riesling. It was just there. The vineyard was replanted in 1907, I gather. Well, that one, and the one around the cellar, and the one across the road that is no longer a vineyard, was 1917.

Shiraz and Blue Imperial. That would be about most of them.

And was the winery at that stage, Bill, mainly geared towards making fortifieds?

BC: Chambers were involved in St Leonards, and St Leonards had been bought by a number of people at one stage, and they ended up with three people being involved—Chambers, Hermann, who was Taylor Ferguson. Frank Hermann became the heir apparent, but Taylor Ferguson sold Lindemans wines in Melbourne. (*Sounds like, Had a*) big business. And Oscar Seppelt was the other one. Oscar got out and sold half his share to Hermann and half—so they were just equal. Eventually Frank had to sell St Leonards to get some money in his family. He wasn't making any money. But in order to keep St Leonards going, pretty well all our wine was made

down there for a number of years to keep the casks, and Rosewood was more or less left. When it was sold in 1960 I think, something like that -

Rosewood was?

BC: No, St Leonards. My father wanted to keep it going but it was sold to a fellow at (*couldn't decipher word*) across the river at Corowa. He was very keen because it was a beautiful spot at the end of the river. Bit of forest there, and he ran a few cattle there, and that sort of thing. Actually Eliza Brown was here today and she said that she'd never heard of him. I said, 'You wouldn't. He died before you were born'. (*Laughs*) But Eliza is sort of the publicity lady now with (*couldn't decipher word/s*).

Oh, that's right. That's his eldest daughter, isn't it?

BC: Yes. She doesn't know a lot about the place. I suppose I should've been more expansive. I could tell her a little bit more about it. So we came back here, and I had a few wooden tubs. That was how they made their wine. We had Sid McMahan here, who had been the cellarman for a long while. Apparently he reckoned that they were partners with Seabrooks years ago. It must've been in the 20's or 30's that he took up a block in Western Australia, and he didn't do any good and he finally walked off it. He came here and ran the place. I think he was at school with my father. He was going to be a patrol officer in New Guinea and Dad said, 'Oh, don't be silly'. He came here and ran the winery. He had a good palate. He was brought up, as pretty well most people were before Roseworthy, just in the apprenticeship system. You worked with winemakers and you worked with people and got an idea what wines tasted like, and you learnt how to make wine by observing what people did, and reading an odd book or two. So he made the wine the year before I got here and made a pretty good fist of it—at St Leonards. He knew how to set the place up at Rosewood. How to get the old wooden presses going and get the wooden tubs filled up with water and get them going again.

We didn't make a very big vintage. I think we only made about 5,000 gallons the first year. That was enough because we only had a hand pump.

No electricity of course.

BC: We had electricity but we only had a hand pump. We had no dough. As I said, it was touch and go whether we (*sounds like, stopped this winery*). Most of the casks were empty. We had some that had wine in them but we had to get a cooper in to fix them up, and put reeds(?) in the casks because they'd been empty for—'59 was the first vintage, so probably 1960. They had some lees in them—sweet lees—and of course the dry reds had been washed out. Anyway, I just wondered whether we'd ever get all the casks full with the little bit of vineyard I had. It was difficult.

My father reckoned that a friend of his in the Army had told him, 'Never give up the vineyards. There's money in wine'. This is an English friend that said that. And having had a look around the area here, the Campbells had kept going. They did quite well out of it. They found it fairly tough to sell. Mr Buller had done pretty well out of wine. And Morris'. They were all people that we knew pretty well. I think that Mick didn't think we'd make it. He reckoned that we'd fall by the wayside. Anyway, we did. So you never know.

What did you concentrate on, Bill?

BC: Making wine. We had to make a dry white out of Riesling. There's not much else you can do with it. We had some Doradillo. I forgot about the Doradillo. We had some Doradillo also in there. We made sweet wine out of the Tokay. You know, fortified sweets, and fortified out of the Muscat. They always made a bit of Port, so we made some Port and dry red. Sweet red and dry red. Fortified sweet red and dry red. That was about it.

The only cooling we had to start off with was just the town water, so it was almost none. We borrowed some coolers from Dick Buller and put them

into the wooden tubs. Then after that, John Brown had a coil in a tin tub, which was about six feet in diameter, and he filled that up with ice and pumped wine through it. So I bought that from him, and then got some ice from the butter factory, and that's how we cooled it down. Well, that was better than the town water. We just evolved slowly but surely. And then Colin Campbell came back and bought a couple of fridges. And I thought that that was a great idea—old redundant milk fridges. So I got on to a couple of those and we used the cold water for pumping around then. The butter factory eventually gave up being a butter factory so there wasn't any ice. That's more or less how it started.

How did you get a market for that, Bill?

BC: Well, Doug Seabrook came and bought a little bit from me. We had a jar trade. Demijohns they call them. They used to go out from the Rutherglen station. We sold sherry. We didn't make sherry. We had some old dry white—'47 I think—and that was a pretty good sherry. Not flor, just aged and very soft, unlike South Australia where the wines were very acid. Well, they seemed to be. They probably got a bug in them, looking back. They went lactic. The dry whites (*sounds like, at Stanley*) were very, very hard, whereas the dry whites at Rutherglen were very soft as they aged. And they were nice. Like Oloroso's really. The Oloroso's from Spain, they're pretty smart when they get a bit of age on them. We bought sherry from Burgoynes to start off with. In my day it came from Lindemans and then All Saints. I got some flor and started to make flor sherry.

Do you still do that?

BC: Yes.

That's a real art, isn't it?

BC: Yes, it's a pity. We know how to make flor sherry now and nobody wants to drink it. Or very few people want to drink it.

I think it should come back, Bill.

BC: Well, I think it's a nice drink. I like it.

I seem to have had this conversation with Morgan Yeatman not long ago. (Laughs)

BC: That's right.

And the fortifieds sold pretty well. Before I came over here I'd been an associate judge at Adelaide, where they called them stewards, and I very fortunately got on the—they called them associate judges in Melbourne. I got a guernsey in the same category. It must've been 1960. They gave me three years of it, and then in 1964 Bryce Rankine said, 'You've got opinions. You're good enough. You might as well become a judge'. So I became a judge at Melbourne. And that helped. You know, the great expert, and all that sort of stuff. And also I met people. I met some interesting people.

So even in those days the networking was very useful?

BC: I don't know whether it was useful for selling wine. You had to try and make the best you could.

Was there freedom in that sort of advice coming through? Do you know what I mean? With people giving -

BC: You could talk to the winemakers and they'd tell you. See, the family companies didn't have any secrets. Windy Hill Smith, you know, they didn't have any. You could ask their winemakers and they'd tell you what they were doing. It was good.

Rudi Kronberger didn't ever talk very much, so I really didn't talk to him very much, but I judged with him. They were very, very kind to me, looking back on it. John Fornachon, Jack Kilgour, Les Eckert, Johnnie Stanford. Johnnie Stanford pitchforked in as a judge when I was in Adelaide. He was supposed to be a steward, and one of the judges couldn't turn up so he was made a judge. He was arguing with Roy Smith that

perhaps a Riesling ought to get the hot price(?) and not a Semillon—
(*Laughter*)—which was interesting.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

So Bill, that judging work really helped to get you to know people that you could ask questions of and just generally learn with?

BC: Keep up with it. We're very lucky here that in Rutherglen we had Seppelts and we had Lindemans. They eventually had young enthusiastic winemakers, such as Colin Glaetzer and Philip Laffer. They're a couple of the early ones. Philip Shaw was over there at Corowa. So we had all this pool of expertise coming into the area. And Ray Kidd was boss of Lindemans. He was winemaker here. So we had all these pretty smart people that knew about wine. Rutherglen, we were well aware, was well behind the eight ball. We hadn't spent any money on equipment. We were talking earlier on about Colin Gramp. Once Colin had got stainless steel going they were making so much better wine. Cleaner and better. Getting it into bottle earlier. Whereas we were still plodding along probably fifty years out of date. Once the new winemaking came in we had to be pretty smart to keep up with it.

Was there a turning point in Rutherglen where you can say that this is when we really started to take off?

BC: Rutherglen's always been noted for it's fortifieds and wherever I go, overseas or in different States in Australia, the main things they want to have a look at our Tokays and Muscats. They look at our whites and say, 'Oh, yes, they're nice. Come on, let's have a look at your Muscat and Tokay'. (*Laughs*)

Morris' had a big sale to Penfolds I think when I came back. They sold quite a lot of wine to Penfolds. They had a lot of Muscat. It wasn't selling

terribly well, but anyway Pennies wanted it for some reason. So we're probably still riding on our fortifieds still. I think, yes, new wood and all this sort of thing is pretty essential now. It's probably fashion but it's a hallmark of quality. If you put a bit of good new wood into your wine and have a bit of fruit, and lifting it—well, for a long while we couldn't afford to do it.

Course not.

BC: I think we're probably at that stage now. I'm buying a bit of French oak. Not a lot, only about ten barriques a year, whereas Bailey Karados(?), when he first went into it, bought thirty or forty a year. But he had to charge a fair bit for his wine.

This is down the Yarra, is it?

BC: Yes. Bailey sort of went in, and he'd be one of the first ones that really made a go of it. Guilder(?) Pury had a little vineyard there, but Bailey was the one that—Guilder Pury still there at Yerringberg.

I know him but I just don't know how you spell it.

BC: He's a little block. Very smart. Very knowledgeable bloke.

So this is all part of this experimentation going on here.

BC: Yes. Well, Bailey bought (*sounds like, Wood-ners*). I don't know how you can do it, Bailey. But anyway he bought it and reckoned he needed it. Certainly the results have showed out on his reds. He's acclaimed. Not so much in Australia, but certainly in America. They think he's wonderful, and his wines are great.

Bill, you've talked about a lot of the families around here—the Morris' and the Bullers and these people you obviously knew from an early age. Did you have some type of loose liaison that began to build together at any point?

BC: Well, I'm a cousin of the Morris', and Dick Buller was a bit like an elder brother. He just lived up the road from me. Mr Buller, Dick's father, was very friendly with our family.

So Mick Morris is a cousin of yours?

BC: Yes. Mick's mother was my father's sister.

So there's that sort of strength of belonging.

BC: Yes. And old George Smith, George's father was—the Smiths seem to have been President of the Rutherglen Vine Growers, or whatever they called it, for years. George's grandfather was also in the same category. Old George used to have a dinner every now and then and he'd produce some wonderful wines. There were two brothers, George and Dave. Dave ran the sales bit in Melbourne and George ran All Saints up here. And George would, you know, produce Chateau Margaux. I remember him asking us out for a feed when we came back from Roseworthy at one stage and he took us over to his house. Mrs Smith cooked a terrific feed for us, and George put on one of these—he was a very fussy old coot. He said, 'You've got to have a dry wine with this', and he produced a wine. I said, 'Mr Smith, thank you, this is magnificent'. It was a great German wine. I've forgotten what it was but it was pretty smart. 'Oh', he said, 'the bloody thing's sweet. That's no good. (*Sounds like, That can go*) with the fish'. He fiddled around and the only thing he had in the fridge was a Lindemans sparkling wine that he reckoned was dry. Anyway, we socked down his wine.

George couldn't see too well without his specs, and I'm at the stage now that I understand. (*Laughs*) He thought his brother had put very dry on the wine but instead his brother had put very dear. (*Laughter*)

He used to have fads. He got fads on sherry, and then he got fads on Port where he bought Port from overseas and compared it with his Port, and we'd all drink the stuff. It was very educational, and wonderful. (*Laughs*)

Especially if he was doing it.

BC: Well, he was paying for it. *(Laughs)* It was great.

I've had others tell me, Bill, that the first Rutherglen Wine Festival became quite a focus for the community here. Would that be true?

BC: That was George that started that off, I think.

'67-ish.

BC: Yes. They were talking of having a Back to Rutherglen and I think George—did George tell you this?

I've actually heard it from two or three people.

BC: George really started it. George said, 'Well, why don't we have a wine festival?' So that's what happened. I didn't know how we'd go. You had Morris', and at least they had a salesman selling bottle wine around the area. Then you had All Saints. And of course you had Seppelts and Lindemans. It seemed to go pretty well. It was our first go at it, and the committee put a lot of time into it.

The big problem was, thinking back on it, that you needed to pour the wines for people, as we're doing now. We don't let them help themselves now. It was pretty hot in March and there was a tendency for people to go around the wineries and get a skin-full of wine. Then they'd have a terrible thirst up and go and drink beer at the pubs to slake their thirst. So you had all these drunks around the pubs. Where else can you sit with your feet in the gutter and drink beer all the weekend? *(Laughs)* This was one fellow's idea. It was in March, so it was pretty warm. People could come up in their shorts and sweat shirts and camp outside. It didn't matter. You also had people that were interested. A lot of family groups came up. And it was fairly simple. It wasn't terribly expensive. So it was a hit really. Much more of a hit than we thought that it was going to be.

I'm just wondering after talking to a number of people whether that was one of the things that really began people to focus back here again, and say that this is a very important place.

BC: Well, you had people like old Jimmy Watson in Melbourne. He sold All Saints wines and had a kind spot for Rutherglen. Seabrooks had a kind spot for Rutherglen, and looked after us. They had their ups and downs a little bit but they helped us pretty well. And a lot of people in Melbourne still were getting our demijohns of wine—from the whole area. I know that when it came around to getting bottles, I didn't think I'd be able to afford to them, but anyway we did eventually get a few. You had to do that. As I said, we were selling mostly wine in bulk, and then we had to buy bottles. That was the big thing, to have the money to buy it.

(Tape restarted)

Bill, you were just talking about not having enough money to buy the bottles.

BC: Well, we turned up again and had enough money to buy the bottles, and put wine in bottles, and things seemed to progress. The cellar eventually filled up with wine. Then I had to buy some stainless steel. My mother came into the place and got the wine out, and talked to people, while I was out pruning or away from the place. It's sort of a bit disjointed but, anyway, everything seemed to come together eventually.

You said that your mother had a certain way at cellar door, that somebody ordered some wine -

BC: Well, she was brought up in a true Presbyterian tradition. *(Laughs)* Somebody was ordering a fair bit of wine in bulk, and one time she said, 'I won't send you any wine this time because I think you're drinking too much'. The customer kept the letter and treasured it. *(Laughter)*

Over time though, Bill, what were probably the most significant changes you saw at the winery?

BC: I think it just happened slowly, but surely. As money came in, a couple of sheds went up. First of all, I started planting grapes. That had to happen first. Well, we were lucky. In the 60's and 70's and 80's and 90's, we were on an expanding market, which was wonderful. I think

perhaps we're not now. I think perhaps there's going to be a bit of contraction, and that's going to be very painful I think for some in the industry. Yes, the last thirty years have been pretty good to us. And the same thing happened with the business. Slowly, but surely, we planted more grapes and we were able to sell the wine. We developed a pretty good cellar door trade. When my first wife died in '86—she got cancer and died—then Wendy turned up and we got married in '89. Wendy's pretty smart. She's made a lot of changes down there.

So it's been an evolution rather than -

BC: It's just evolved slowly, but surely.

We started to export slowly. Ross Duke(?) brought a bloke up from New York—Chatterton. They got up here about ten o'clock at night in a little sports car and he explained that he wanted something peculiarly Australian to sell—Tim Knappstein's Rieslings and Croser's Rieslings and the Hunter Semillons and all this sort of thing. And Ross Duke had told him about the Muscats and Tokays from Rutherglen.

Anyway, I showed him my wares and he liked the old ones. I explained to him that I didn't have a lot of the old ones, so therefore the price was not negotiable. But anyway, next morning Ross Duke rang back and said to get quite a few dozen of these old ones at half the price that I'd mentioned. And I said, 'Oh, no, I thought that I'd explained that I didn't have a lot of it'.

Anyway, he took a little bit of it, and it was pretty good because I didn't pay anything. So we sent it over to Croser and somebody paid for the cost of analysing it and all this sort of thing. And away it went.

And then Robert Parker saw it, and liked them, and wrote it up and said that they were very good. He's got a very flowery language. Decadent and hedonistic, and all this sort of thing. (*Laughs*) And that's probably the value of export from my angle, that if you send something overseas and somebody says that it's good, well, it's got to be good. The whole wine industry knew that Rutherglen made pretty good Tokays and Muscats but

when somebody from overseas—not English, but somebody from America—says it, it's even better. So that's helped pretty well.

Has that marketing side helped you here domestically as well? The export market side?

BC: Oh, yes. We had to put the price up of the old wines tremendously, a supply and demand thing. I was always worried that they'd get too young, so we jacked the price up to try and stop sales. And then you get a certain kudos when they're so bloody expensive. *(Laughs)* It's amazing, isn't it? Up market—that sort of thing.

There's a theory that goes with this, Bill, which I won't bother to explain now. *(Laughter)*

BC: We've got the old stuff at such a price that most people say, 'Oh, no, I think I'll leave it this time'. But every now and again somebody buys a odd bottle. We need probably ten years to try and get the stocks going again. I've never had a lot of it. Tokay's not too bad, but the Muscat, we're having difficulty keeping that up. So we just leave them. Every now and again, probably once in ten years, we make a pretty good wine so we've got to try and put some of that down and leave it for a while. It just takes a long while.

If possible.

BC: Well, they're not accountant's wines—fortified. Like Galway Pipe, that was not an accountant's wine, but it made a great name for itself in Australia.

Has it been sad for you to see the demise on the wider market of the fortifieds?

BC: Oh, no. I hope we can keep our head up. That's the main thing. The Barossa Valley had some wonderful fortifieds and they've been getting rid of them, but I think it's because the companies that have taken over these places don't realise how really good they are. They're still there,

some of them. But they've been selling very cheaply—some of them. They're starting to wake up now, but Seppelts got rid of quite a lot of their very good old stuff. Orlando had some very good fortifieds. I don't know whether the corporations understand—they were world class. Rutherglen had the reputation but the Barossa had some great fortifieds. I hope it still has because companies like Seppelts, Orlando, Yalumba and Hardys had some terrific old wines.

I think you'll find that Hardys have still got them. I'm not sure about the others.

BC: Seppelts certainly off-loaded a lot of wonderful stuff.

They did.

So just looking back for a minute, Bill. If you were asked to say what are some of the significant changes in the industry that you witnessed, what would it boil down to? Public taste or equipment or -

BC: I think probably technology. First of all, I think you've got to go back to the training, so Roseworthy's got to take a lot of credit for producing trained winemakers. We were talking about Colin Gramp earlier on. The wine industry, the family winemakers, had their eye on quality, and they probably wanted to keep the place going but the idea of keeping quality was very good, and I think that's helped.

Things have changed. The advent of cooling, stainless steel, filters, being able to get our wines into bottle very quickly. Most of Australia's pretty hot and so the sooner you can get your wine into bottle the longer it will last. All these things have helped.

Oh, CO₂ inert gases. All these things have helped. Naturally, because of our relatively warm climate, we make wines with great fruit. If you can get them into bottle quickly they last pretty well.

I think we've done better in the whites than the reds. We're still going in the reds. Grange Hermitage probably set the standard. Well, putting wood into wine. It was considered a fault years and years ago. And buying new oak. I think probably we're going a little bit overboard on it. You can sell

wines with a bit of wood in them, and also wines that just rely on their natural fruit. I think with the reds, we haven't controlled the malolactic fermentation as much as we'd like to. Everybody talks as though it's the malolactic fermentation, but once again with filtration—and cleaning. Being able to sterilise things as we can with stainless steel. We're getting good but I think, myself, that we've got a bit further to go in the reds. We've produced great young reds. Every now and then we produce a cracker that lasts for a long while.

So Bill, personally, have you found it a—I don't want to say good career, but has it been something that's been an enjoyable passion for you in a way?

BC: I think I've been lucky. As I said, I've come in on an expanding market. When I came into the wine industry in the middle 50's they were getting over the war. Port had suddenly fallen into disarray. *(Laughs)* They could sell it after the war, and then suddenly in the early 50's you couldn't sell it. There was a lot of sweet red. Dry red hadn't taken off, but it was just starting to take off. And whites, you had Ben Ean Moselle, and you had Woodleys Est. All these wines that the wine industry looked down on a bit but, by gee, they sold a lot of wine.

I was going to say, they were big sellers.

BC: They sold a lot of wine. Then Leo Buring withgold. Funny little bottle with great candles. They all brought people on to wine, and they were pretty good wines. Every now and then some of them blew up. *(Laughter)* But they were great.

So really from the moment you stepped in the door at Roseworthy, Bill, was almost to the year the time that Australians love of wine began to move.

BC: Yes, it increased and increased. Then you've had fellows like Rudi *(sounds like, Kay-man)* that were pushing the Hunter. And then Len Evans came along and brought this winemaker business. Years ago nobody knew who the winemakers were. You talked about Hardys but they never talked

about winemakers. And the great winemakers, the public didn't know about them.

No.

BC: It's changed quite dramatically. Probably Brian Croser's had a bit to do with it all. He came along and was able to make wine. He worked for a big company and still made wine for Croser and sold it. *(Laughs)* So that spread to quite a lot of people. Up until then people were company men. They worked for the family that they were with and they put everything into it. Roger Warren and Dick Heath for Hardys. And Rudi Kronberger, even though he didn't like Windy very much. *(Laughs)*

I think Rudi got on quite well with Windy.

BC: Rudi got on very well, yes. Oh, Peter Lehmann, he started off there.

He did.

BC: Fresh faced bloke with Yalumba.

And then to Saltrams.

BC: Yes.

There must be a lot of characters you've met, Bill, over the years.

BC: You didn't know they were characters. I suppose Jack Kilgour had to be one of them. *(Laughs)* Did you meet him?

No.

BC: Jack's dead now. Jack was a funny man.

He was at Auldana or Stonyfell, was it?

BC: Stonyfell. Is *(sounds like, 'Skip')* Darwin still around?

Brian?

BC: Yes.

No, Brian died.

BC: Yes, they're going. A few of them are around. You know, you're talking about the Penfolds guy who hid his light under a bushel.

Ray Beckwith.

BC: Yes.