

- Our Heritage -



Circa 1930s. A bird's eye view of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards original vineyard first planted by Richard Hamilton in 1838 near Glenelg, South Australia.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S 'FIRST FAMILY' of WINE IS BORN

The story of South Australia's 'first family' of wine begins in 1835, prior to the proclamation of the colony on 29 December 1836, with 18 year old seaman Richard Hamilton Jnr. aboard the brigantine *Duke of York*. The ship, carrying settlers to the fledgling colony of South Australia, met up with *HMS Buffalo*, sailing to South Australia via Buenos Aires.

Returning to England excited by the potential of South Australia, Richard somehow convinced his 45 year old father of the merits of uprooting his family to the other side of the world. In 1837 Richard Hamilton Snr took out Land Order 449 in London for the Province of South Australia and along with wife Anne and eight of their nine children, arrived in Adelaide on the *Katherine Stewart Forbes* on 7 October 1837. At the time there were 176 people in the colony, mainly government officials including the first surveyor Colonel William Light.

The outlook in the new colony must have appeared very bright. What else could have caused a well established man who ran a large tailoring business in the main commercial road, Margate Street, in the Ancient Port of Dover; as well as an orchard at an old Roman vineyard settlement called Ewell, some 8 miles outside Dover; to sell everything, leaving behind an extended family, and positions as both a Freeman of the Port and hereditary Alderman of Dover. He also left behind various siblings including his brother John, a solicitor practising in Dover, to sail to the Antipodes and to start over at the average mortality age for men. Richard must have had in mind the opportunities which the new colony would represent to his nine children rather than his personal fortune.



Circa 1960. The Bridgewater Mill used as a Whisky and Brandy Store by Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards in the 60s and 70s until the sale of the company to Mildara in 1979. Now a restaurant and sparkling wine cellar owned by Petaluma Winery.

*T*here is something of an irony or minor family tragedy demonstrated when *The Advertiser* newspaper reported the centenary of the establishment of the winery on 10 June 1937 under the header “Winery with Unique History - 100th Birthday of Hamilton's Vineyards - Land Bought in Reign of William IV”.

“An interesting feature of the transaction is that he sold 50 acres of land on Long Island, New York, now worth a fabulous sum to buy a comparatively small block of land for farming purposes near Glenelg.”

On the voyage out, Richard purchased another land order for the land which is now occupied by Calvary hospital in North Adelaide from noted early colonist Robert Gouger. The family later built an early house on this site.

Their first ‘home’ was a camp on the River Torrens banks at the place known as Pinky Flat, adjacent to what was to become Adelaide Oval, while they waited there for their land grant to be surveyed. But when members of the local Aboriginal people, the Kuarna, burnt it down, the family moved to the land they’d secured on the banks of the Sturt River, in the Marion district near Glenelg, 13 kilometres south.

While establishing their farm, Richard wrote asking a friend in South Africa to send vines to plant as “the health of the family requires a little wine.” In winter 1838 as the Pedro Ximenez, Shiraz and Grenache vines were planted and thrived in the deep alluvial soil and Mediterranean climate, the seed of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards heritage took root.

Richard was also instrumental in establishing a new Church of England church near Glenelg on the Adelaide Plains which was named after St Mary's Church in Dover at which the family worshipped since arriving in Dover from Scotland in the later part of the 1700s. The family had come south of the border to Dover due to the involvement of Richard's father, Sir John Hamilton a captain in the Royal Navy, captaining a supply vessel in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.





Circa 1930. Loading barrels of wine for export in the 1930s at the original Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards winery near Glenelg, South Australia.

MAKING SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S *first* COMMERCIAL WINE

In 1841 Richard made South Australia's first commercial wine, selling it to nearby farmers and towns. Their business gradually expanded with sales being affected "door to door" by horse and cart. It was not until the early 1960s that the last Clydesdales were retired from service at Hamilton's. By this time they were used largely for promotional purposes.

Eldest son Henry having completed his schooling in England arrived and spent two years on a sheep station near Burra. Henry may well have been the only person in the colony able to speak and write fluent Latin and ancient Greek having undertaken a strictly classical education at the Bluecoat School in London where all discussion and all subjects including mathematics and the sciences occurred and were taught in classical languages. Certainly, the correspondence of Henry's which the family has today is highly literate.

In 1854 the family purchased surrounding land and Henry set to work planting two acres of vines, naming the vineyard Ewell after the Roman settlement. Some of these vines bore fruit until 1980. Some vines remain tended today in what are now the grounds of a retirement village named after the family.

Here with hard work and good management, (duly acknowledged by winning the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Angus Award for agricultural farms in 1890 and 1891) Henry ran his mixed 140 acre farm, 40 acres of vineyards and built his wine cellars naming them Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards.

Outliving her husband by 34 years Anne, died in 1886 aged 97. In accordance with Richard's Will the original property was divided equally amongst the nine children. Henry, Anne and two of their children are buried with many other early settlers in what is now a state heritage listed graveyard at St Mary's.

Richard Hamilton's sixth lineal descendant Mark Hamilton, born in 1952, and his family renewed the leases and had the graves restored and re-dedicated in 2004.



Circa 1880s. The original Hamilton Ewell Vineyards, Glenelg, South Australia at vintage time.

FAMILY INITIATIVE AND INNOVATIONS MAKE AUSTRALIA'S *biggest selling* WINE

*A*fter Anne's death, Henry and his son Frank set about buying the land back from the other members of the family.

Under the management of Frank Hamilton, until his death in 1911, the vineyard expanded to 156 acres and the family began making a "Chablis" dry white wine made from Pedro. Business must have been good as records in the family's possession show that Frank made £11,000 pounds in the year of his death which would have been enough to purchase a sheep station at the time.

Successive generations effected substantial additions to the winery to meet expanding wine sales. Hamilton's commenced augmenting its own grape production purchasing grapes from local growers in the 1880s. Production and sales grew constantly.

In 1928 Frank's second son, Sydney, blended Pedro with Verdelho to produce Hamilton's Ewell Moselle, a semi sweet white which became Australia's biggest selling wine. This product was to reach a peak of 350,000 cases and remain Australia's largest selling wine for some decades until overtaken by Lindeman's Ben Ean Moselle in the early 1970s. Hamilton's Ewell Moselle was so well known that it caused the leading Australian wine writer of the 1960s and 1970s to comment that:

"If you were not weaned on it, then you were probably conceived on it."

This was just the beginning of the Hamilton initiative and innovation before and after World War II. Grapes were picked early to retain some natural acidity and fermented in closed wooden vats rather than open concrete tanks.

The family's reputation for fine wines was developed in conjunction with winemakers Sydney Hamilton, Russian émigré John A. Speck, and Frenchman Maurice Ou. A temperature-controlled cellar was built in 1929, boosting the quality of the white wines, by allowing temperature controlled fermentation in Australia for the first time. This followed a visit by Sydney Hamilton to South Africa where this technology was in development.



Circa 1952. Maurice Ou, a Frenchman and senior winemaker of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards 1946-1979, in front of what was the largest wooden vat in the Southern Hemisphere (234, 000 litres).

SOME CONTRIBUTORS TO THE *family's* SUCCESS

*T*he story of John Speck mirrored many characters who worked virtually full working lives with the Hamilton family. John was to work as a senior winemaker for more than 40 years after “walking” into Ewell one day having just disembarked from a merchant seaman at Port Adelaide. He left Russia as a white Russian due to the Russian Revolution in 1917. He previously trained and worked as a winemaker in Russia. John Speck was the grandfather of Mrs Tammie Fraser, wife of former Prime Minister of Australia Mr Malcolm Fraser (1975-1983).

Maurice Ou emigrated from France in the immediate aftermath of WWII as a Montpellier trained oenologist to work for the family as the senior winemaker from 1945 until retiring upon the sale of the business in 1979. Maurice said that he was too “old” to learn to work for a new “Master”. Maurice was to make Hamilton's expert in the production of Sauterne, which enabled Hamiltons to win many international awards against the leading French sauterne houses. Many are still drinking well today. Maurice did gain a nickname as “So2 Ou” due to a conservative tendency to ensure that Hamilton's table wines would not oxidise on his watch by adding arguably (over) generous levels of So2. Too much sulphur dioxide leaves a rotten egg gas smell and flavour so that it was quite a perennial debate.

“Old Ern”, as he was known, worked for the family for more than 50 years until he was in his late 90s; longevity which he ascribed to drinking a glass of Hamilton's Royal Reserve Port every day. Old Ern was to star in numerous media stories and wine books over decades peddling his theory about the medicinal value of a glass of port (Hamilton's of course) a day. Old Ern also wrung the neck of many a duck for several generations of the family from the large duck run he maintained on “Mr Eric's” property.





A 1930s birds eye view of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards original vineyards first planted by Richard Hamilton in 1838 near Glenelg, South Australia.

*F*rank Hamilton's widow Violet Hamilton (nee Ayliffe), known as the Mater to everyone, was to live to the age of 90, dying in 1965, having outlived her husband Frank by some 54 years. She in fact "ran" the business with Executor Trustees Company Limited from 1911 until 1929 as joint executor and trustee of the estate of Frank Hamilton, with her elder son, 22 year old Frank (Eric) Hamilton, acting as "Manager" upon his return from war, while the family decided what to do. This stewardship finished when the family decided to incorporate the company Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards Limited to own and run the business in 1929.

The Mater lived in Henry Hamilton's old house, built by him in 1845, immediately adjacent to the main cellars. She lived in an austere Scottish fashion manner watching the comings and goings of the business and her family; always with morning tea and an ear at the ready. If one wanted to know something or test the lay of the land in the family then the Mater was the first stop.

Legend has it that she could tell you the passing state of the business based upon her 80 years experience as an observer and participant in the business based upon her assessment of the number of loads of wine leaving the winery.

The Mater, who would not allow the family to connect running water to her house for many years, used to walk 2 miles to catch a tram to Glenelg every day to do her shopping refusing to learn to drive or to have a car or a driver. There are stories in the family of Eric Hamilton, her eldest son, going into the company's Adelaide office in his Rolls Royce, waving to his mother walking to Glenelg, as he passed by. In later life the Mater would "dismiss" the poor souls engaged by Eric and Sydney during the various failed attempts to provide household help for her.





A range of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards immensely popular, award winning wines.

THE WORLD *discovers* AND LOVES HAMILTON EWELL'S VINEYARDS WINES

Under the stewardship of managing director Eric Hamilton from effectively 1919, the winery further flourished becoming one of the biggest exporters of Australian wine. Eric was a pioneer in wine exporting, spending half the year overseas promoting the family's, as well as other Australian wines, even shipping his Rolls Royce with him on occasions to drive around Canada and the UK.

Eric, chairman and managing director from 1919 until his death in 1968 was a consummate business man who over nearly 50 years built the company to the point where it was the sixth largest winery in Australia producing over one million cases of wines and spirits per annum and exporting about 50 per cent of its production. Only Hamilton's, Penfolds and a company called Emu Wine Company could boast a substantial export business.

Eric and often his wife Mrs Doreen Hamilton (nee Chambers), until her premature death from a cerebral haemorrhage in 1958, maintained a house in Kensington



*Doreen Hamilton
(nee Chambers)*

in London where Eric would generally spend six months of the year selling Hamilton's wine products to agents and distributors. One of Eric's skills was an ability to employ excellent senior staff and effectively delegate to them, permitting him to be on the "road".

In marrying Doreen, Eric married the girl next door. Doreen was a descendant of noted early settler John Chambers who had financed the McDougall & Stuart expedition which left his home Carclew in North Adelaide in 1858 to cross the continent.

The town of Katherine in the Northern Territory was named after Doreen's great aunt, Katherine Chambers by these explorers in honour of their benefactors.



Frank (Eric) Hamilton flying (rear seat) with his father-in-law James Chambers in his Puss Moth aeroplane. Eric and Syd Hamilton were members of the South Australian Aero Club and they used to regularly fly with people like Kingsford Smith, MacRobertson Miller and Amy Johnson.

This was an example of a marriage between early wine and brewing interests as the Chambers family had an interest in Chambers & Blade which was later to be known as South Australian Brewing Company. Later on, members of the Tolley and Penfolds wine families were to marry.

It was because of his involvement in WWI that Eric, having been gassed at the front at Gallipoli and Flanders, and repatriated to London three times, realised the potential of the cost competitiveness of Australian wine in that market in competition to the French and Portuguese. At the time of the turn of the century and the First World War the family were still in contact with relatives in England, Scotland and America and travelled intermittently to the mother country.

Eric's next eldest brother, Sydney Hamilton also spend some years going around the world as a merchant seaman as a young man at the time of the first war, although too young to enlist, until he too, walked back into Ewell one day in 1919 having disembarked from a merchant steamer at Port Adelaide.



Frank (Eric) Hamilton

Both Eric and Sydney were early adopters of new technology. Both learnt to fly in the immediate aftermath of WWI owning gypsy moths which they would fly around Glenelg after long lunches on Sunday afternoons. There is what was a famous photo of Eric's plane sitting upside down on Glenelg Beach having stalled at very low speed during a fly over of the beach which made its way into the newspaper of the day. Often Eric would fly Doreen to Melbourne in his plane.

The Hamilton boys were very well known in the district as a consequence of their flying activities at the very beginning of aviation.



Circa 1880s. The original Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards, Glenelg, South Australia at vintage time.

Sydney Hamilton loved developing new methods and equipment for use in winemaking to the point where the company would often build its own winemaking plant. This was to be the source of friction on occasions between Eric as the business manager and Sydney as the more artistic winemaker type when Eric would come home from six months overseas to find that Sydney had made some unbudgeted investment in new winemaking plant which required immediate payment.

Eric's competent stewardship of the family's fortunes was nearly cut dramatically short in 1938 when he and the head of the Tolley wine family, Mr Len Tolley, who must both have been thirsty, were having a drink together in the morning in the bar at Adelaide Airport and fortuitously missed a plane to Essendon airport in Melbourne. The heads of a number of the largest wine companies were going with several Federal politicians including Mr Charles Hawker MP to lobby the Federal government against tax impositions on the wine industry. All aboard the plane were to die in what was a major civil aviation disaster known as the Kyeema air crash. Eric must have instigated the drinking session as he was credited with saving his close friends' life.



Robert Hamilton (leading car in photo) competing in the 1948 Australian Grand Prix in South Australia.

THE 1960S AND 1970S BOOM IN *domestic* WINE CONSUMPTION

*T*he mid to late 1960s saw the rapid expansion of the industry due to the advent of larger scale production of cheaper table wine; the maturing of the Australian palate; the decline of spirit and fortified wine sales and the start of the public's acceptance of red wine.

Volumes of wine sales went up and the Federal Government imposed a tax on Brandy and a wine excise impost on wine companies. International companies began taking over Australian companies to gain a share of the expanding wine market. Wine companies expanded but with the expansion and long inventory holding requirement came the need for more working capital in what was (and remains) a capital intensive industry.

Hamilton's domestic sales expanded dramatically during this period with excellent growth in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. At Hamilton's this coincided with the death of Mr Eric in 1967 from throat cancer at age 70 leading to his son Mr Robert Hamilton becoming the new chairman and managing director.



Robert Hamilton

Robert Hamilton who was the general manager based at Head Office, had managed the Melbourne branch of the company from 1951 to 1956 after WWII. Robert had previously also had an involvement in car racing from 1947 until 1952 including driving in a number of Australian Grand Prix, finishing third in 1948. Robert and his father Eric obviously shared the thrill of risk and adventure.

Urban expansion saw the compulsory acquisition of land eat away at much of the company's urban vineyards during the 1960s and 1970s. (Today there is just one small section of vineyard still alive).

So during the late 1950s, 1960s and in the 1970s the family expanded its vineyards and wineries to other regions including the Eden Valley as well as the southern Riverland (Nildottie), and Sunraysia (Wood Wood and Nyah) in Victoria by a mix of buying existing wineries and vineyards and building and planting others.



Mark Hamilton, proprietor of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards and descendant of the founder Richard Hamilton, standing alongside the remaining vine, which is over 150 years old, in front of the original house at Ewell Vineyards, Morphett Road, Adelaide.

SALE OF HAMILTON'S EWELL VINEYARDS PTY LTD “lock, stock & barrel” IN 1979

In 1979 a young Mark Hamilton's hopes to take over the family reigns, and to be the sixth generation to run the family winery, were crushed when Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards was sold to Mildara Wines Limited, a publically listed company (more recently part of Fosters Wine Group incorporating Penfolds and Wolf Blass).

By the mid 1970s the wine industry was changing with the advent of red wine as a rapidly expanding part of the market. This required a new of strategy at Hamilton's and substantial changes to plant, vineyards and facilities followed.

The sale occurred due to differences of opinion between the shareholders as to the future of the business due in turn to an inherent conflict in the “asset rich-cash poor” wine sector between the need for re-investment, and patient capital, and the wish of shareholders for more immediate returns.





Circa 1930s. Filling 65 gallon (300 litre) hogsheads with wine in the original Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards winery near Glenelg, South Australia.

RESURRECTING THE *family* HERITAGE

*F*ortuitously one of the old company's wineries and vineyards returned to the family fold when Mark's father Robert purchased the Eden Valley winery and vineyard back from Mildara in 1982.

Determined to revive his interest in the wine industry, Mark, bought the Eden Valley operations from his father in 1993, naming it Stonegarden. He set about regaining the Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards tradename and trademarks in 1991; and together with his wife Deborah, began buying premium mature vineyards in the Barossa Valley, Eden Valley and in the Southern Riverland from 1991 to 1994.

In 1996, after an extensive search, Mark located an excellent vineyard site with Terra Rossa soils and over the period 1999 to 2000 established a wonderful 200 acre vineyard named Limestone Quarry Vineyard near Naracoorte in the south east of South Australia

Proudly Mark, Deborah and their family continue to uphold and grow the fine reputation and long traditions of South Australia's 'first family' and the oldest South Australian winery - Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards.

