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**OH 692/158**

Full transcript of an interview with

**REG TOLLEY**

on 21 November 2001

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

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**OH 692/158 TAPE 1 - SIDE A**

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

**Interview with Reg Tolley on 21st November, 2001.**

**Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Reg, at the beginning, please, could you give me a bit of your own background? Where and when were you born?**

**RT:** I was born in Adelaide, 1927, which makes me seventy-three, going on for seventy-four.

I went to St Peter's College. Left in 1945 at Leaving level. I left the middle of the year because I was sick of school, and I started with my father at Tolleys that year—the mid year—in June. And I worked at Hope Valley from '45 until 1995 when we sold the property.

**Tell me a little about your parents, please, Reg. Who were they?**

**RT:** Well, my father was Len—Leonard James Tolley. He had a brother, Reg—Reg Tolley—whom I was named after. And a sister, Yvonne Tolley, who married a gentleman in Victoria who was Chairman of the Melbourne Stock Exchange—Oswald Bowden. Aunty Yvonne died, I suppose, ten or fifteen years ago.

**So she would've been the last of that generation?**

**RT:** She was the last of that generation, yes. My father died reasonably early for now. He died at the age of sixty-seven in 1964. He actually went to the First World War and was gassed and suffered bronchitis and asthma and emphysema. I think that, in the end, was one of the main causes of his death. He also smoked, which didn't help.

**Didn't help.**

**RT:** No.

**And your mother, Reg?**

**RT:** Well, her maiden name was Ann Lester—Annie Lester. And my second name is Reginald Lester, so I was named after my mother's maiden name.

Her father was manager of Parliament House—manager and caterer. And she was born on North Terrace. There was a flat on top of the old Parliament House, on the western side. That's where she was brought up, and that's where my father met her. And they were married shortly after the First World War. About 1918, I think it was. As I said he did go to First World War but he was rather young. He put his age up from seventeen. He joined up, went to Duntroon, where he did an officers' training course. He wasn't permanent Army or anything like that. He did a three month officers' training course there and then went to France. He was wounded not long after he came back to Australia when the War ended. He was away for nearly twelve months.

**What's the background to the Tolley's involvement in wine, Reg?**

**RT:** Well, that's quite an interesting one.

Albion James Tolley was the first of the Tolleys that I know of who came to Australia, and that was in 1853. He arrived, and he was actually a merchant. He imported, amongst other things, I'm told, iron bedsteads into South Australia. (*Laughs*) Anyway, he was also quite interested in wine and some ten years later, in 1863 I think it was, he started a wine and spirit merchant's business in Currie Street.

I might mention, he had eleven children. Five daughters and six sons. And of the six sons, four of them became involved in the wine industry, and two of them were lawyers—solicitors.

Two of them started a company. When James started his wine and spirit merchant business (Albion James) his son came in with him—his eldest son, Albion Everard—and it traded as Tolley & Sons. And sometime later in 1877, another brother came into it, Frank Osborne. And that's where they

got A E & F Tolley—Albion Everard and Frank Osborne Tolley. They were wine and spirit merchants in Currie Street.

**So that's two of the sons of the original Albion?**

**RT:** Two sons, yes.

The other two were Douglas Austral and Ernest Alfred. They started Tolley Scott & Tolley. Now that's the four boys that actually came into the industry.

Then one of the Tolleys that started Tolley Scott & Tolley also started a company that was called Douglas A Tolley Pty Ltd, which is the company that I started with in 1945.

**So your father was a son of Douglas A Tolley? Is that correct**

**RT:** That's correct, yes.

And my great grandfather, Albion James, was the one that came to Australia in 1853.

**Now if he was into wine and spirits, then I suppose at the time it was mainly imported product?**

**RT:** Yes, it was. Mainly imported. In fact, I think it was all imported. It was only in the latter years, probably in the 20's, that they started representing some companies from Australia. They also handled TST brandy. They were agents for Johnnie Walker whisky, and lots of other imported spirit lines. And they also were agents at one stage for Wynns wine. And they even were agents for Douglas A Tolley wines for a while, too.

**How long did that firm keep going for?**

**RT:** Well, that was wound up in the early 1990's. There came a stage in the wine and spirit business where most of the big companies took over their own distribution. There were no decent agencies available. So they closed the doors.

My son-in-law, Sam, actually is a Tolley. He married my daughter. They are cousins—fourth cousins. Sam was Managing Director and Chairman of A E & F Tolleys when they decided to close.

**And Sam's now on Hackney Road, isn't he?**

**RT:** He's now Chief Executive Officer of the Wine & Brandy Corporation -

**That's correct, yes.**

**RT:** - where he's been for about four or five years.

**Well, talking about family still, Reg. So your parents, Len and Ann—tell me about your siblings.**

**RT:** My children?

**No, your brothers and sisters—your siblings. And then your children.**

**RT:** Well, I had no sisters. There was just the three of us—Peter, David and Reg. Brother Peter started his life in the industry. He worked for Tolley, Scott & Tolley, and he was there up until Tolley, Scott & Tolley were sold. That was in 1959. And then he came and worked at Tolleys at Hope Valley. So he came up while I was there. And also brother David. He started at Tolley Hope Valley when he got out of the Navy in 1945. So David and I started at Hope Valley at the same time, and brother Peter came up there in 1959.

**And your children then, Reg?**

**RT:** Well, I've got two daughters and a son. I married my first wife—San Penfold Hyland—in 1950 and we had three children—Kym (the eldest), Alexandra and Rebecca. San and I were divorced in the late 60's, I think it was, and I remarried my current wife, Elizabeth, and we've been married for thirty years.

Of my three children, Kym started his life in the wine industry working for Penfolds. When he left school he didn't quite know what he wanted to do and like all good fathers I suggested he become involved in the wine

industry and went to Roseworthy. So we sent him to Roseworthy, and was there for about half a term and left because he didn't like it. He found that his education at that stage wasn't good enough to handle physics and chem and maths. So he took a year off and he went to Victoria and spent twelve months snow skiing. He became quite good at that and ended up as an instructor in snow skiing.

Then he came back to Adelaide and thought maybe he'd like to start in the industry, and his uncle, Jeffrey Hyland, gave him a job at Penfolds. And during his time with Penfolds he decided that he would like to further his education so that he could go to Roseworthy. So he did Leaving chemistry, physics, maths, which he passed. And then Penfolds said, 'Would you like to go back to Roseworthy', which he did. He went through Roseworthy and later returned to Penfolds. While he was with Penfolds he did a degree in business management. And back late in 1980 he left Penfolds, after seventeen years, and started his own business with his two sisters. They bought a block of land down at Coonawarra—400 acres.

### **A good time to buy in at Coonawarra.**

**RT:** A good time to buy in at Coonawarra. He paid \$2,000 an acre for the land. And he was very fortunate that he was able to buy 400 acres in one block, which was just off the main drag. And the first year they planted, I think, 180 acres. They're now up to 250 acres, and they've still got 150 acres to go, which they're planting slowly.

And three years ago they built a winery. They process at the moment about five or six hundred tons for themselves. And they do a little bit of contract crushing, too, I believe. So he's got a very nice set-up there. And I would say that 30% of his business would be Australian and 70% would be export. He exports to the UK and to America, and a little bit into Europe. And to Switzerland, funnily enough. That's quite a good market for him. So he's done quite well, considering that when he started he wasn't sure what he wanted to do and wasn't really happy with the wine industry.

**Well, Reg, could we go back to your early memories, of Hope Valley in particular, that would extend beyond your working there. What are some of your early memories of the winery?**

**RT:** We used to live at Hope Valley. When my father was married they bought a block of land opposite one of the vineyards and built a house. I was born in 1927 and spent about four years living at Hope Valley. And then my grandfather moved to Glenelg and their house became available so my father sold his house at Hope Valley—well, he didn't sell it. One of the vineyard workers moved in as manager. And we moved to Adelaide in Portrush Road, Toorak Gardens. So I had very little memory of Hope Valley at that stage, but during my earlier years after that I did go to Hope Valley with Dad quite often. Not a great deal that I can really remember other than that we used to go up there every year for Guy Fawkes night and let off all the crackers and make the mess there rather than at home. You know, to me, it used to look quite a big operation but when you're small everything looks big. In those days it wasn't very big. It probably processed two or three hundred tons of grapes, and most of the wines that were made then by Douglas A and my father were exported to the UK.

**In bulk?**

**RT:** Mainly in bulk, but also he did market a wine in 1909, which was a blend of Coonawarra and Hope Valley.

**1909?**

**RT:** 1909. The label is up there.

**Yes, I know that label.**

**RT:** That was the label that we reproduced that label for our centenary in 1992, and it was actually a blend of Coonawarra and Hope Valley wine.

**Do you happen to know who he was purchasing the Coonawarra wine from?**

**RT:** Yes. Redman.

**I was going to say that they would've been the only one left by 1909.**

**RT:** Well, in those days, I understand, they just couldn't give Coonawarra wine away.

**That's correct.**

**RT:** And so my grandfather very kindly said, 'Look, send it up to Hope Valley. I'll see if I can blend it out, and we'll see what we can do with it'. They used to send their hogsheads down to Redmans, and after vintage they'd transport the wine back to Hope Valley where my grandfather would blend it, and mature it, and bottle it. And that was the label that they bottled it under.

**Great label.**

**RT:** Yes, interesting label. So, you know, Coonawarra's gone a long way since those days. I'm not quite sure when they stopped purchasing but I think it was roundabout the 1940's.

**So that's about the time Tony Nelson bought in down there.**

**RT:** That's right, yes.

I remember when I first started at Hope Valley the foreman showed me where they used to store some of the Coonawarra wines prior to blending. Yes, Tony Nelson probably bought the place in the mid 40's, or early 40's perhaps.

**Look, I can't remember the date. It was around that time, and he bought out that Treasure Chest series after that.**

**RT:** Six different labels.

**Wytt designed them—Wytt Morro.**

**RT:** That's right.

**It was a remarkable run. I've not tasted them. Valmai Hankel said that they're quite extraordinary still.**

**RT:** Tony Nelson's a very competent winemaker.

**Reg, coming back to 1945 when you begin at Hope Valley, what was in the winery at that point?**

**RT:** It was all pretty basic then. I know the first year I started, in 1945, my father had just installed the first hydraulic press. But we still had the hand press. We had a two ton hand press and a hydraulic press. In fact, the only equipment we had in those days was a crusher, a hand press, a hydraulic press and a continuous press. That's all the plant we had, plus one hand pump and one Whitehill force pump. And that's basically all the equipment we had, plus open fermenting tanks.

**So was it on a gravity design?**

**RT:** No, no. It was still done by pump. But in the early days, you're right, the wine was gravitated. The crusher was set up on top of the winery roof, and they used to elevate the grapes into the crusher up the top, then it would gravitate down into the fermenting tanks. But that wasn't in place when I went up there.

**Did the trucks or drays bring in the grapes to a crusher at ground level?**

**RT:** At ground level. The crushers were set down in a bit of a pit. And when I first started most of the grapes that were processed were brought in, mainly, by horse. All our fruit that we picked was brought in by horse and trolley, and most of the growers also brought in their fruit in horse and trolley—horse and dray.

And we had one bloke called Reg Wright, who was pretty up-market and pretty modern who had a T-model Ford, and he used to bring in about half a ton on the back of his T-model Ford utility.

**And what variety of grapes were they bringing in? Anything and everything?**

**RT:** No. In those days it was probably mainly Grenache, Pedro, Doradillos, Mataro, and a few Shiraz.

**And nearly all local? Tea tree Gully? Hope Valley?**

**RT:** Tea Tree Gully and Hope Valley, yes, mainly. We used to buy a little bit down off the OG Road. There used to be vineyards down there and we used to buy a little bit from there.

I think I said earlier that in those days we crushed 200 tons. It might've been a little bit more than that. Probably 300 ton. We probably grew a couple of hundred tons ourselves and we used to buy in 100 ton.

I can remember the first job—or one of the first vintage jobs—I had. I had to stand next to the crusher and hold the horses. Because the horses [would get excited]—obviously when you started the crusher up the noise would really upset them. So we'd bring in the horses without a load, and I'd stand there and they'd start the crusher and get the must pump going, and after a while the horses would calm down. They'd get used to it. So my job then, when they came in with a load, was holding the horse, or the horses, so that they wouldn't scare off and bolt, or whatever.

One of the biggest loads that we used to get in was from a bloke called Lokan. They had a lot of land in the Modbury/Tea Tree Gully area. They were chaff merchants. They used to grow chaff, grain. They had vineyards, and they had a carrying business—[still using] horses. And the biggest load used to come in from Lokan, and they brought four or five tons in one load, which was huge in those days. I think they had six horses, and a lead horse. And Lokan used to come in and, boy!, it was quite a job to get that five ton up to the crusher with the six or seven horses. Once they got them up there we used to block the wheels and lock them. My job again was standing in the front, calming the horses down. *(Laughs)* After the first day or two, they would come in with no trouble at all. So that was my first job at vintage time—holding the horses.

**Reg, from the crusher, where did the juice go?**

**RT:** Well, we had a pump; a must pump, which was made by Whitehills. Most winemaking equipment in Australia in those days was made by Whitehill in Adelaide. And it used to be pumped from the crusher into open fermenting tanks on ground level.

**So concrete tanks?**

**RT:** Concrete.

**Wax lined?**

**RT:** Waxed concrete tanks. They used to hold six tons. It was pumped into there, and then we headed them down. We pumped the juice off, put heads on and blocked them down.

**With timber heads?**

**RT:** Timber heads. Timber heads sealed with paraffin wax. The tanks had built-in arms and we used to block the heads under these arms. Then you'd have a chimney down the side so you could get the hose down the bottom for pumping them out. All our reds in those days were all headed down. And mainly for Port. In those days I reckon 90% would be fortified wine. Of that 90%, I'd say, 80% of that was Port.

**Mainly Tawnys?**

**RT:** Mainly Tawny. Tawnys and Rubys. And then the other 10% of the 90 was dry sherry.

**So was that Doradillo and Pedro?**

**RT:** Yes, Doradillo and Pedro. When I started there I introduced another line called sweet sherry. So in those days, when I first started, we made Port, dry white, which we used to then fortify for dry sherry. And we made a small amount of dry red, out of Mataro, Grenache and a little bit of Shiraz. And that was all sold in bulk.

**Flagon or barrel?**

**RT:** No, that was sold in bulk in hogsheads. It was big wine. And we used to sell most of that to Leo Buring in Sydney. He would come over at the end of vintage and go through the few reds that we had. In those days, they were only in small parcels. In thousand gallon lots, or five hundred gallon lots. He'd come over and go through them, and he took most of them.

**Tell me a bit about him, Reg, while we're with him.**

**RT:** Well, I must admit that I can't really tell you a great deal about Leo because he didn't come to the winery while I was there. It was only in the earlier years that we were selling to him. Not long after I came there we sold to Wynns.

**In Melbourne?**

**RT:** In Melbourne—Sammy Wynn. I can tell you a bit about Sammy.  
*(Laughs)*

**I'd love that.**

**RT:** I'll tell you who used to visit for Burings—it was Reg Shipster. Do you remember him?

**Yes. Well, I know the name. McLaren Vale names.**

**RT:** No, he was up the Barossa.

**Originally the family came from McLaren Vale.**

**RT:** He was at Burings place, Chateau Leonay.

**Where John Vickery is now—Richmond Grove.**

**RT:** Richmond Grove.

**Chateau Leonay.**

**RT:** Chateau Leonay. Reg Shipster used to come to Hope Valley, and he used to go through the wines, appraise them and we used to send them up to Chateau Leonay. So most of the reds used to go there.

And then Sammy Wynn came along once and said, 'We're looking for wine. We only want wine you don't need yourself. You know, stuff that you reckon's not worth selling. That's the sort of stuff I want'. You know, anything that's cheap.

All our wine was quite drinkable, but Sammy always said that he only wanted cheap stuff. Even if it was suspect, he'd take it. And I know one of the reasons why he would take such 'suspect' wine, they used to make a lot of Vermouth. The wine that was suspect, we'll say, would go to dry Vermouth and sweet Vermouth.

Wynns only used to take other wines—dry white wine—which they used to take to Melbourne for flagoning and marketing. And in the end we used to sell big, big quantities to Wynn.

Sammy Wynn used to come over with David Wynn and they'd go through all the wines. And I can always remember—David Wynn wasn't that old at that stage and hadn't been in the industry that long. And I can remember Sammy would come in and go through the wine, and if David Wynn would make a comment he'd say, 'You speak when you're spoken to'. You know, in other words, David wasn't allowed to say anything while Sammy was looking at the wine.

And we dealt with the Wynn family for many, many years and they were very good customers of ours in the end.

I can remember a bloke called Frank Sheppard, who used to work for Penfolds and then went to work with Wynns when they bought their Romalo Cellars. (The Sheppard family were tanker people. Sheppard tankers.) He was a maintenance man for Penfolds, and then when Sammy bought Romalo and built a winery there he eventually got Frank Sheppard to come and work for him, and he did the maintenance.

Frank then decided that as Sammy was taking a lot of wine into Melbourne from Adelaide that he should do it in bulk. Frank Sheppard actually built

the first wine tanker that I had seen in South Australia. Huge, long thing that used to carry, in those days, quite a lot. Probably 3,000 gallons. That was a lot in those days. *(Laughs)*

Frank Sheppard ended up just driving the tanker backwards and forwards from Melbourne. From there he left Wynns and started up his own tanker business.

## **TAPE 1 - SIDE B**

**So, Reg, Frank Sheppard then began his own transport business.**

**RT:** He started his own transport business because in those days one tanker wasn't enough to meet Wynn's need. So Frank went out on his own, and he had an understanding, or contract, with Wynns that he would do all their carting, which he did. I think Frank ended up with something like sixty units—or seventy units—in the end, which he sold out some ten years ago, or more, to United Transport. United Transport got out of the bulk wine business and Booths took it over.

**So United got out and Booths took over the business.  
Is Frank Sheppard still going?**

**RT:** Yes, he is. Lives at Clare. He bought some land up there and planted some vines. He's a great bloke—Frank. I knew him very well.

**So Sam Wynn was a bit of a character really.**

**RT:** Oh, well, he was.

**He was fairly diminutive, wasn't he?**

**RT:** Tiny bloke. Very small, yes.

**Whereas David, from memory, was not. He was tall.**

**RT:** He's as tall as you. So I don't know how that happened. Actually both David and his brother were quite tall. Oh, no, Sammy was a character but he ruled his family and he ruled his business with a rod of iron.

**So who did the blending? Did Sam do the blending?**

**RT:** He used to do the blending in Melbourne. Yes, he did, as far as I know. He had the restaurant in Melbourne. It was Florentino. Anyway, that's where he started his career in the industry, through having a restaurant. He introduced wine into his restaurant, and then he introduced carafes. He decided that he'd better buy his own wine. That's when we used to supply him with a few casks of wine, as did other people, until he built it up to such a stage and extent that he sold wine in flagons. Later he got into bottles, and then into premiums. He bought Modbury—Modbury Estate. It's called the suburb of Wynn Vale now. He bought a big parcel of land over there; about four or five hundred acres. It was called Surrey Farm. One of the reasons that he bought land over there was because he knew that we had vineyards at Modbury/Tea Tree Gully, and some of the wines that we used to supply he liked. So he thought, 'Well, I'll see if I can plant some vines out in that area'. Which he did. Five hundred acres of them.

**And Reg, that area wouldn't have been irrigated, would it?**

**RT:** He put a huge dam in, so some of it was irrigated.

**What about your vineyards?**

**RT:** No, they weren't irrigated. No, none of our vineyards at Modbury/Tea Tree Gully were irrigated. But when Sam started he actually built this huge dam and irrigated quite a lot of his vineyard. The only irrigation that we did in the Modbury/Tea Tree Gully area was at Hope Valley, and we put down a bore in probably the mid 50's, and irrigated about forty acres.

**So Reg, mid 50's was not long after Wynns would've purchased land down at Coonawarra, too, and bought the old Riddoch estate area.**

**RT:** I'm not sure exactly what year that was. They bought it from Tony Nelson.

**Chateau Comaum, Nelson called it, didn't he?**

**RT:** I didn't know that. But I knew Tony Nelson quite well. He actually was brought to Australia by Hamilton.

**Yes, so he was. Ewell vineyards.**

**RT:** He worked at Hamiltons at Glenelg—Ewell, Glenelg—for sometime and then he bought Woodley Wines up in Glen Osmond. Colonel Fulton owned Woodley Wines in those days, an old retired Army man, and that's where Tony started his own business in the wine industry. And he did very well, especially with his Woodley's Est. Can you remember that one?

**Yes. I've seen the label.**

**RT:** He advertised, that he sold over a million bottles a year of that, which was big business in those days.

**That would've been bigger than Barossa Pearl.**

**RT:** It would've been. Made from, I think, Gordos and Sultanas.

**Yes, I believe so.**

**RT:** For what it was, it wasn't too bad. He made his money out of that.

**Reg, just thinking back, this was the foundations of people beginning to drink table wines in Australia, other than fortifieds.**

**RT:** Oh, yes, I reckon the first people that really introduced good table wine to Australia was Hamilton's Ewell. I reckon they were the first. And that was, you know, in the mid to late 30's that Hamilton's Ewell were producing this quite pleasant, sweetish Moselle style wine. So I reckon

that Hamiltons were one of the first. Then for sure, Wynns and Buring, and Tony Nelson probably. But Hamilton's Ewell was one of the first companies—the only company I know—that actually cooled their must and cold fermented their white wine.

**In the 30's?**

**RT:** In the mid 30's. And they had these brine lines and used to pump the must from the crusher, through the brine lines, and then drop it into these big, wooden closed vats, which held roundabout 3,000 gallons.

**So that's just like the wooden tanks basically?**

**RT:** No, they were closed.

**So they were the large vats?**

**RT:** Large vats, yes. And they had them on the side. Not standing up.

**On the side.**

**RT:** With a big manhole in them. This is making their Moselle. They used to chill it down, which was unheard of in those days, and then place it into these big wooden vats. Then they would drain the juice off, cold. Then they'd start the fermentation. If it got hot they'd put it through the brine line again. They were one of the very early pioneers of controlled fermentation. And the bloke who was behind that was Syd Hamilton. He was a brilliant bloke. Engineer and good winemaker.

**Now they had a winemaker for many years called Maurice Ou, who I think is still alive.**

**RT:** He's still alive. I remember Maurice well. He was brought out by Syd to help him. But Syd not only designed a lot of the equipment, he made it himself. He had an engineering shop and he made his own crusher. In fact, they were the first ones I know of who actually bulk handled their grapes. In other words, they would get fruit down from the river in tip-trucks—five and six ton trucks—and they actually had a hopper they used

to drop it into, and then they used to then use the hopper to feed the crusher. So that was, to my knowledge, one of the first bulk handling wineries in Australia.

**So Syd Hamilton tended to think logistically, by the sounds, and had practical engineering skills.**

**RT:** He was a practical engineer, and also a good winemaker. When he got out of Hamiltons he started off down at Coonawarra.

**Tell me what you know about the Hamiltons.**

**RT:** There were four brothers. There was Eric, Syd, Bert and Ian. Now Ian was a doctor—Dr Ian Hamilton. A very good surgeon. And there was Syd, who was the practical engineer who designed and thought up all these ideas. Bert was actually a winemaker working in with him in the winery. And then there was Eric, who was the business brain. He was pretty smart was Eric. And he developed markets in Canada. They used to sell huge volumes of wine into Canada back in the 40's. Eric was a character. There's no doubt about that.

**So that's the Hamilton clan. But they, in fact, were bringing table wine in at a very early stage.**

**RT:** My word, they were. I'd say that Hamiltons, and probably Leo Buring, were the very early ones. Even before Wynn.

**Actually I was just thinking, too. Rudi Kronberger was around at Yalumba at that time.**

**RT:** Yes.

**And he was making some pretty good Rieslings in that era, too. So there were a number of people.**

**RT:** Syd had three children, two girls and a boy, but none of them became involved in the industry. Bert had about five children, I think. One of them is at Coonawarra.

**Richard?**

**RT:** No. What's the one at McLaren Vale?

**Richard and Hugh are at McLaren Vale.**

**RT:** Well, Richard is the one that's got the winery at Coonawarra. He's Bert's son. Ian Hamilton had three children—two girls and a boy. The boy is a doctor now—Michael Hamilton.

The Hamiltons certainly were one of the early people to pioneer the table wine business.

**Reg was Tolleys at Hope Valley a pretty stable operation through the 40's? Were things not changing a lot, or were you bringing in new techniques?**

**RT:** Things didn't change at Hope Valley much between 1945 and 1970. We got bigger. We put more fermenting tanks in and put another crusher in—but they were the same style crusher. And the same style must pumps. And the same style pumps. We brought a bit of automation into it, with screw presses and things like that. It probably wasn't until the early 80's that we decided that we had to improve our quality, and that's when we got Bryce Rankine in to give us some assistance. We built a new white wine cellar with refrigeration, cold fermentation and closed fermentation. We put in new crushers and we started to make much better wine.

**So at the time was Bryce pretty much the authority?**

**RT:** Oh, yes. My word, he was. He did a lot for Tolleys and he did a lot for the industry.

**So was he at the Institute still at that stage?**

**RT:** Yes, at the Wine Research Institute. That's where he started.

**That was before his Roseworthy era.**

**RT:** I think he started before the Wine Research Institute began and was working for The Waite, I think.

**My memory's not too good on that.**

**RT:** I'm not too sure. Anyway, from there to Roseworthy to Wine Research. And when he was at Wine Research, that's when he came to Hope Valley and gave us a lot of very good advice.

**By this stage Tolleys had also put in new vineyards, hadn't they?**

**RT:** When I started there were about 120 acres at Hope Valley. Mainly at Hope Valley. And then when we sold the company we had 600 acres. So we did extend it quite a lot.

At one stage we had up to 400 acres at Modbury, Tea Tree Gully and Hope Valley. Then the State Government took over a lot of that land, unfortunately. And we bought land—more land—in the Barossa. We already had 60 acres of vineyard in the Barossa. We extended our vineyards in the Barossa and ended up with roundabout 250 acres there. We extended into the Riverland in 1960. We ended up with 250 acres there.

**Was that at Qualco?**

**RT:** Qualco. And then in the latter years, in 1988 and '89, we bought 120 acres down at Padthaway. At that stage most of the land at Hope Valley had been either taken over by the State Government or we'd sold some of it, and we only retained 15 acres around the winery, which was sold when we sold the businesses. And now it's all housing.

**Was that pretty traumatic for Tolleys with the Government coming in and enforcing that purchase?**

**RT:** Oh, it was dreadful. Yes, we tried to fight it. Well, we couldn't. They said, 'We want the land'.

The first parcel they bought from us, they gave us only \$2,000 an acre. And at the latter end, when they reckoned that the land values were going up, we got \$8,000 an acre. I mean, pitiful.

**This is all developed vineyard?**

**RT:** Oh, yes. And then we leased them back from them for about five years because they didn't need the land at that stage. They were just holding it for further development for housing. So we leased it back for a few years, and with the money that we got for that land, we bought more land in the Barossa and land at Qualco. That's where we got the money from for vineyard development. That was the strong part of Tolleys. We were self-sufficient, mainly, from our own vineyards.

**Was it very much a family operation, Reg?**

**RT:** Very much. [There were the three of us, brothers] Peter, David and Reg, who were joint managing directors. And Peter was the Chairman of the company. Peter had very bad health actually. He wasn't able to put a great deal of time in. He put a lot of thought and work in but, physically, he wasn't very well. David used to look after all our vineyard development, and I used to look after the winery—the wine side. Then when brother Peter got out of the business because of health reasons, I became the Chairman. About five years after that, he died.

**So your role was primarily supervising winemaking?**

**RT:** That was my role.

**And David, I know, was viticulture.**

**RT:** I mean, you couldn't survive in the wine industry without a degree in winemaking and business management and that sort of thing. A lot of people did start from the ground up as I did. I must admit that I put my hand to most things in the winery. As I said earlier, from holding the horses at the crusher to being a vintner cellar hand for years in the vintage cellar. I was helping in the vintage cellar. My father in those days used to

make the blends up— the Port blends and the sherry blend. I took over from that, and I did all the blending.

We diversified a bit into table wines. Then we diversified into bottling our own wines in the early 60's. And that's when we produced our label, which we called Tolley Pedare—from Peter, David and Reg. Our company was then operating as Douglas A Tolley Pty Ltd, makers of Tolleys Pedare wine, and Hope Valley wine.

But in the latter years AE & F Tolley closed their doors and we changed the name from Douglas A Tolley Pty Ltd to Tolley Wine Pty Ltd. That was back in the 90's I suppose—early 90's.

**Now was there a discernible change in the 60's, Reg, towards drinking more table wine?**

**RT:** Hell, yes. Even in the 60's, too. Although I don't think the big push was until the 80's really.

**Post '85/6 maybe.**

**RT:** I can assure you there are a lots of ups and downs in the industry. During the fifty years that I was involved—and it was fifty, I started '45 and finished in '95—there were lots of ups and downs. You know, in a lot of cases it was just survival, of turning enough wine over to pay the wages and pay the salaries. There was very little profit. In fact, lots of times there was no profit but there was always enough for the family to live reasonably comfortably. In other words, we had enough to pay ourselves a reasonable salary, but that was about as far as it went.

**I think it was Tom Angove once said to me that he saw four great cycles in his life.**

**RT:** I was going to say about the same number. About every ten years I reckon there's been one. But in the last six years/seven years I've never known the industry as buoyant.

**It does appear to be Australia wide, too. It's not just a phenomena for one State. It's all across.**

**RT:** It's just amazing. In fact, friends of mine, five or six years ago, could see a lot of grapes being planted and came to me and said, 'Look, we thought we might get into the grape industry. Looks pretty good'. I said, 'Keep out of it, boy'. *(Laughter)* I said, 'It might look good at the moment but it has lots of ups and downs'. Well, I was wrong. It's been up the last six or seven years, and will stay up for a few more years, too. There'll be some burnt fingers in the industry, for sure. But I'm sure, over the years, the wine industry will continue to prosper.

**Just thinking about those troughs and the rises, Reg, what would be some of the critical events that you've seen?**

**RT:** I think one of the worst moments was with the brandy excise. Now those days, whenever there was a surplus of grapes it was put into brandy, because brandy in those days had a preferential treatment with duty. And that's why you could buy a bottle of brandy for probably £5, or \$5, and a bottle of Scotch was probably 15. But then there was preferential treatment for brandy. So we were able to push the brandy business ahead, and that was a good outlet for surplus grapes from the wine industry. As soon as they took the preferential treatment off, brandy sales dropped overnight by about half. Then it was difficult for the wine industry to place the surplus grapes. They just had to turn it into wine. They didn't distil it.

**Was this in the 80's, Reg?**

**RT:** I reckon it'd be in the 80's.

So that was quite a significant knock for the wine industry.

**The 80's also had the vine-pull I suppose.**

**RT:** Yes, and the vine-pull.

**Which, in hindsight, was extraordinary.**

**RT:** Well, it was really, a great pity. But there again, there were growers that were pruning their vines, and producing the grapes, and leaving them

on the vines. You can only do that for a certain amount of time. In the end they didn't prune them. And the government said, 'Well, pull them out and we'll pay you'.

**Reg, was there much government interference over the years? We've talked about the excise for the brandy.**

**RT:** There was excise on fortified wine, as you know. On the spirit, not on the grapes. Not on the wine. There was never any excise, or tax as such, on wine until they introduced sales tax. The only tax was excise, which was on the added spirit. That's why every fortified tank at Hope Valley and throughout the industry, had a lock on it. You couldn't make a move without an excise officer. He'd unlock the tank, and you'd do the transfer, and he'd record it, and any lees or any sediment—distillation—was taken out and would be recorded. And they'd keep the spirit factor going in the wine. And then when you wanted to sell it you paid the duty on the added spirit and it was all yours. But it was only the introduction of sales tax on wine that's really stirred things up a bit. When it was brought in it was going to be 10%, which it was, but didn't stay 10% for long either. Now it's—what?—about 39%. So that had some affect on the industry as well. Certainly affected cash flow I think.

**You mentioned before that the 90's was fairly tight—the early 90's. Is that one of the factors that led you towards looking at the buy-out of the business favourably?**

**RT:** No, I didn't. No way, no. I'd never considered selling the business, and it wasn't until '95 that we were approached.

**That was Mildara Blass.**

**RT:** Mildara Blass. Ray King. The early 90's were tough, but from '92 onwards the business was getting bigger and better every year. We'd developed export markets. No, things were looking good.

**But I suppose, Reg, in a family company, one of the problems is the dilution factor over the years with different members owning small parcels. Would that be the difficulty?**

**RT:** Yeah, well, it was, but not small parcels. When the company was sold I still owned, in round figures, 33% of the business. My brother, David, owned 33% of the business, and my brother, Peter, who had died but through his three children had 33% of the business. So they had 11 or 12% each. So it wasn't lots of small shareholders really. It was only really, at the end, David, myself and Peter's three children. But when we were approached by Mildara Blass I certainly wasn't interested in selling the company. I could see that the future was looking pretty bright. Any rate, it was put to the shareholders and, regrettably, they decided that they wanted to sell. So although I had 33-1/3% of the business, two-thirds want to sell, and well, you sell. That's why we sold, which was a sad day in my life, having worked there for fifty years and seen the business grow from two or three hundred tons to 4,000 tons. It was a great sorrow to me really. But that's how it goes.

Tolley, Scott & Tolley was sold out as far back as 1960. And that's when my brother, Peter, came and worked for us at Hope Valley—when TST was sold.

**Now was it Tolley, Scott & Tolley where Wolf Blass went to work for a while?**

**RT:** Yes, he did. DCL—Distillers Corporation—owned TST in those days, and he was employed by DCL as winemaker in the Barossa. His duties were to improve the product. Tollana used to make a bit of wine in those days. His brief was to build them a new winery, which he did, and under the contract that he had with TST (or with DCL) he could make some of his own wine, which he did. And that was the start of Wolf Blass.

**Indeed it was.**

**RT:** He had a little tin shed out at his winery. What's it called?

**Bilyara.**

**RT:** I remember when he put his first double garage up there. And insulated it to store some wood. So that's history now, isn't it?

**Yeah.**

**OH 692/158 TAPE 2 - SIDE A**

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

**Interview with Reg Tolley on 21st November, 2001.**

**Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Reg, we were just talking about some characters then. You've got some stories, too, that relate to the early years at the winery.**

**RT:** Yes, that's true. When I started in '45, as I mentioned, the Tea Tree Gully area was very, very small. I would say there were probably no more than a few hundred people who lived in the whole area. And in those days there was a bloke up at the Council Chambers called Vic Bone. He was the Clerk of the Council. He sent out all the rate notices, and he ran the place. And he ran the weights and measures in the area. So he used to come to Hope Valley every year with his little utility with weights on the back to do the weights and measures for us—that is to check the scales, check the weighbridge, check the platform scale.

Vic was a lovely bloke, but he also liked Tolleys Port and Tolleys sherry. So Vic always used to arrive roundabout eleven o'clock because he knew that was about the time we'd probably offer him a drink.

So Vic would come in and sit down, and you'd say, 'Feel like a drink, Vic, before you get out and check the scales?' 'Oh, yeah, it's eleven o'clock. Yeah, we could have a drink now'.

An hour later, Vic was probably having his second or third Port, he'd look at his watch, 'Oh, I'd better go for lunch'. So Vic would go home for lunch and be back about two o'clock. I'd say to Vic, 'Do you feel like a Port after

your lunch?' 'Oh, yeah, not a bad idea'. So Vic would come up into the tasting room and we'd have another Port or two, and roundabout three or four o'clock he'd look at his watch, 'It's time to knock off'. I'd say, 'What about the scales?' 'Oh', he said, 'they looked alright when I walked past them'. (*Laughter*)

In all the years that he came to check them, I don't think he ever put a weight on the scales. So that was one of the funny bits and it just goes to show how small the area was in those days. I'm not saying that we were diddling our customers because the scales were quite in order.

**It was a predominantly rural area though, wasn't it?**

**RT:** Oh, yes. There were people in Hope Valley/Modbury/Tea Tree Gully that went to town once a year. And the nearest shop in that area was at North Walkerville or Paradise. There was a little shop there—general store—and that's where my mother used to buy her groceries. When I first started in '45, I used to have to go to either North Walkerville or Campbelltown to buy a sandwich for lunch.

**That's a long trip too.**

**RT:** A lot of roads around the area weren't even sealed.

And also another interesting one. We used to deal with a company in the UK called Burgoyne's. Now Burgoyne's used to buy big quantities of Australian wine in those days and put it into barrels and send it to the UK, and I'm not really sure what they did with it when they got it there, but they used to buy a lot.

There used to be a bloke called Walter Pym. His job was to come to Australia and buy wine for Burgoyne's, which he did. I can always recall one visit of Mr Pym to Hope Valley where we hadn't got all our current vintage wines into the condition where they were suitable for tasting. In those days they used to buy mainly dry white wine. But we did have one tank of the current vintage that we had cleaned up, and it was in pretty good nick, and was quite a nice wine.

So because Walter always liked to look at several samples—he liked a selection—we produced six bottles of the same wine. And we poured them for Walter Pym. And he went through them [and said things like] ‘Yes, yes, not bad. Oh, that’s a nice one. I’ll just go through it again’. Eventually he picked out one wine as his choice [and he had not realised that they] were all the same. *(Laughter)* That’s another interesting little thing. Even in those days, when I first started there, the loo we had out the back was into a bucket. No septic tanks.

Another interesting one: I think I mentioned Lokan Bros used to bring in grapes for us, and they also were the local carriers. When we used to send wine to Tasmania, or sometimes even to Melbourne or Sydney, or for export, Lokans used to do our carrying for us. It was all horses in those days. He used to load up—I think it was twelve hogsheads, which was about four ton—and he had his team of horses. Old Lokan loved his Port, too. We used to load him up of a morning—it was a day’s work for him—he used to take it down to the Port, used to unload it there, and he used to go to one of the local pubs in the Port and drink there until about four o’clock. Get full as a bull, get on the top of his dray and his horses used to take him home—asleep.

### **Incredible, isn’t it?**

**RT:** They went [from the Port] past Yatala, and took him home.

Another thing. We used to have an excise officer who was a hell of a nice bloke. There was not a great deal for an excise officer to do. They used to unlock in the morning and lock up at night, and that was virtually all they did. So to one particular bloke we gave our cash book and he used to look after cellar door sales for us. And he used to bring over his ironing and do the ironing in his office. It was quite interesting.

### **Reg, when did cellar door sales take off at Hope Valley? Was it always there?**

**RT:** No. I reckon it was about the mid 60’s to 70’s. And in those days we were very busy. We had a very good cellar.

**Was it in bulk containers? Or what did you sell?**

**RT:** Flagons, bottles or bulk containers. Plastic 20 litre containers. Bag-in-the-box 20 litres. Flagons. We had a huge business there for a while. Then everyone else got into cellar door sales, although right up until the end we had good cellar door sales but not quite as great as they were in those days—in the early 70's.

**We've been talking quite a bit, Reg, about some of the characters of the industry. Did you find as a family who were very involved in the industry that there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between different people? Did you share ideas?**

**RT:** Yes, my word, we did. Yes, we did. If Penfolds, for example, bought a new press from France, or wherever, they would invite the industry to come and have a look at it. A lot of ideas were shared in those days.

**I know in the Barossa, people like Colin Gramp and Rudi Kronberger would exchange notes on those early cold pressure fermentation set-ups they got.**

**RT:** There was a lot of that in those days.

**So in, say, the 50's, 60's and 70's, it was still predominantly the same families who had been in it for years?**

**RT:** It was definitely family businesses. The Penfolds, and the Seppelts, and the Gramps, and the Hamiltons, and the Tolleys, and the Angoves. The old school. And regrettably there's only a few left. Angove and Yalumba.

**And that doesn't look like changing.**

**RT:** No. Good bloke in Robert. Well, that's the only way you can survive—for one side of the family to buy the other out. I looked at that with our company when Mildara Blass made the offer. I did the sums and I thought of what sort of money I would have to borrow to buy the others out and in those days I was in my late 60's—I thought 'No. I'm not going to get

involved with borrowing big 'bickies' at my age, thank you very much'. So I decided to go with it, and that's all you could do.

**Well, thanks for talking to me today, Reg. It's been a delight to hear some of these stories.**