



THE CONGELLA NURSERY BLOCK

Below is a list of grape varieties planted in the 1860's by Henry Best and his family in the Nursery Block. Originally sourced from early growers Trouette and Blampied at St. Peters Vineyard Great Western and possibly from the Geelong Region, the Vines were planted at random throughout the block. Within the collection, believed to be the most extensive pre-phylloxera planting in Australia and possibly the world, there still remains some unidentified varieties.

Excerpts: from "Our Vineyards " The Ararat Advertiser 7th June 1870.

"Mr Best is of the opinion, and his determination is to produce nothing but wines of the very best description; with this view he has spared no expense in procuring vines of the choicest description. In his grounds may be found almost every known variety, and if by chance he should hear of some particular one which is not already among his collection, he leaves no stone unturned until he has procured it."

By 1870 Henry Best had some 48,000 vines and made separate wine from each variety. By the 1890's Hermitage (Shiraz), Millers Burgundy (Pinot Meunier) and Malbeck (Dolcetto) were considered among the best varieties for this area.

Today the vines are hand-picked, first the white varieties then the red varieties although wine is not produced every year, as it depends entirely on the season. The wines, abundant in fruit character, stand alone as a definitive style expressing the Nursery Block's individual components.

Red Varieties

Tinta Amarella
Aubun
Grec Rose
Carignan
Dolcetto
Shiraz
Cabernet Sauvignon
Cinsaut
Morocain Noir
Mataro
Gamay
Pinot Noir
Olvette Noir
Pinot Meunier
Fer

White Varieties

Furmint
Palomino
Sauvignonasse
Chasselas
Muscadelle
Dourado
Ondenc
Troyen
Gueuche
Gouais
Calitor Blanc
Chenin Blanc
Gordo
Piquepoul
Bourboulenc
Sauvignon Blanc
Frankenthal
Riesling

Eight varieties remain un-identified, with no genetic or historical links found, despite thorough research and genetic testing.

BEST'S WINES TIMELINE

- 1866** – Henry Best purchases 30 hectares (73 acres) of creek-frontage land called Concongella.
- 1868** – Henry plants first vines along Concongella Creek.
- 1869** – Best's stables and cellar begin being built over a period of six years to become a working winery.
- 1893** – William Thomson (born in Scotland) purchases Lorimers Vineyard and winery at Rhymney (13km south of Henry Best); name it St Andrews.
- 1900** – William Thomson sells St Andrews to his son Frederick Pinchon. William returns to Melbourne to life as a temperance caterer.
- 1907** – Best's Great Western trademark is registered (number 5067) – one of Australia's earliest wine company trademarks.
- 1908** – Frederick (Eric) Hamill Thomson is born.
- 1911** – William (Bill) Hamill Thomson is born.
- 1913** – Henry Best dies age 81 and is buried in Great Western cemetery.
- 1920** – After Henry Best's death, son Charles sells business to Frederick P Thomson for £10,000. St Andrews and Concongella are now in the hands of the Thomson family.
- 1924** – William Thomson dies.
- 1925** – Best's Great Western Wines is incorporated.
- 1927** – The Great Depression sees the sale of St Andrews Vineyard.
- 1929** – Bank forecloses on Concongella
- 1930** – Thomson family purchases a vineyard at Swan Hill called Misery Farm – renaming it St Andrews in memory of the first vineyard.
- 1931** – Bank hands back the keys to the Concongella vineyard to the Thomson Family.
- 1938** – Eric Vivian (Viv) Hamill Thomson is born, fourth generation Thomson.
- 1949** – Frederick P Thomson dies on a holiday in Hong Kong.
- 1961** – Viv Thomson joins his family for his first vintage.
- 1964** – Benjamin Hamill Thomson is born, fifth Thomson generation.
- 1966** – Hamish 'Bart' Thomson is born, second son to Viv & Chris. [Bart's Block](#) shiraz planted the same year.
- 1967** – Viv Thomson produces first single varietal Pinot Meunier from the original plantings
- 1968** – Yvette Brady (nee Thomson) born, Yvette is the third sibling and only daughter to Viv & Chris.
- 1970** – Marcus 'Sparky' Thomson born, third son and fourth child to Viv & Chris. [Sparky's Block](#) Shiraz planted.
- 1974** – The original stables are relocated to become the new cellar door.
- 1975** – Viv Thomson appoints Trevor Mast as first external winemaker at Best's.
- 1988** – Simon Clayfield appointed winemaker at Best's.
- 1993** – 1992 vintage of flagship Thomson Family Shiraz is released to commemorate 100 years since Thomson family settled in Great Western.
- 1996** – A property close to the original St Andrews homestead at Rhymney is purchased.
- 1997** – Michael Unwin appointed winemaker at Best's.
- 2000** – Hamish Seabrook appointed winemaker at Best's.
- 2005** – Adam Wadewitz appointed winemaker at Best's.
- 2005** – Langton's classifies Best's Thomson Family Shiraz as 'Outstanding' and Best's Great Western Bin 0 Shiraz as 'Distinguished.'
- 2008** – Viv Thomson hands over the reins of the company to son Ben.
- 2011** – Justin Purser is appointed winemaker at Best's.
- 2012** – Best's Wines 2011 Bin 1 Shiraz wins Jimmy Watson Memorial Trophy at Royal Melbourne Wine Show.
- 2013** – Best's Wines 2011 Bin 1 Shiraz wins Fine Wine Partners Trophy for Australia's Wine of the Year at Royal Sydney Wine Show.
- 2016** – Best's Wines 2014 Thomson Family Shiraz named James Halliday's Wine of the Year in the 2017 Wine Companion.
- 2016** – Best's celebrates 150 years having been established in 1866
- 2017** – The Concongella Vineyard at Great Western succumbs to a once in a decade frost event, meaning we were unable to produce our premium wines in 2018.
- 2018** – Langton's classifies Best's Thomson Family Shiraz as 'Exceptional' and Best's Great Western Bin 0 Shiraz as 'Outstanding.'
- 2019** – Best's Wines purchase Sugarloaf Creek, a significant addition to the Best's portfolio, ensuring protection against frost and increasing water security into the future.
- 2020** – Best's Wines wins Best Value Winery of the Year in James Halliday's 2021 Wine Companion
- 2020** – Best's Wines celebrates 100 years of custodian ship by the Thomson Family
- 2021** – Best's Wines wins the inaugural Old Vineyard of the Year award from the Young Gun of Wine awards.