

# The Advertiser

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## DYNASTIES OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Famed for its wines and St Agnes Brandy, Angove Family Winemakers is now under the stewardship of a fifth generation, descendants of a Cornish medical man who first produced his tippie as a tonic for patients. Chief **business** writer CAMERON ENGLAND meets patriarch John Angove and the young blood on his team.

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AS far as **wine** regions go, Tea Tree Gully doesn't naturally spring to mind when you think of fine South Australian reds.

But unlikely as it seems these days – with the area trapped between the foothills and a swathe of suburbia – Angove Family Winemakers grew some of the best grapes in the state there, back before the march of progress swallowed the **company's** land.

In fact some grapes grown in the area were incorporated into the earliest vintages of Penfolds Grange Hermitage.

Those familiar with the north-eastern suburbs will remember how, not so long ago, the white tower of the Angove's winery and distillery on North East Rd signalled the impending transition from the plains to the Adelaide Hills.

The heritage-listed tower still stands, but the vineyards which surrounded it were wiped out effectively by the stroke of a pen in 1974. The State Government rezoned the area from agricultural to residential and compulsorily acquired the vineyards three generations of the Angove family had developed.

Current family patriarch John Angove said the decision was "devastating" for his father, Tom.

But it is the mark of a family **business**, currently under the stewardship of its fifth generation, that it can adapt, stay relevant and survive the vicissitudes of government policy, fickle consumer taste and the challenge of being both a **business** and part of a family.

Angove Family Winemakers is possibly better known to many South Australians simply as Angove's – the name was changed in 2007 – and is known for its wines, for the famous St Agnes Brandy and for Stones Green Ginger **Wine**, which it brews under licence from Stone's of London.

The Angove story began in Tea Tree Gully in 1886, when Cornish-born Dr William Thomas Angove and his family settled there and soon established a small vineyard.

As seems to be a common theme for South Australia's historic beverage makers, Dr Angove first produced his product as a tonic for his patients.

By 1892, he had 10 acres (4ha) in production, and planted another 20 acres the following year with varieties such as cabernet and malbec.

In 1904-05 Dr Angove established his own winery, where he crushed his own grapes, plus those from his good friend and neighbour Henry Hall's Warboys Vineyard – named for a small village in the east of England.

The earliest records of Angove's wines are of the 1895 riesling and white madeira. Dr Angove entered his wines for judging at the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society Show the following year, where they won a highly commended citation.

In 1897, the first **wine** – a claret – was released under the St Agnes label and an iconic SA **brand** was born.

The Tea Tree Gully distillery was established in 1908 and the **company** expanded rapidly, leasing vineyards, including some owned by St Peter's College.

Angove & Sons was also the first **company** to establish a winery and distillery on the River Murray in SA, at Renmark – still the headquarters of the **company** – in 1910.

Among the milestones for Angove were the release of St Agnes Brandy in 1934 and the establishment of export arm Dominion Wines in 1929.

"In 1956-57 (Angove) was the third largest **wine** shipper from Australia and in 1957-58 ranked second to the Emu **Wine Company**," the **company**'s history, A Journey in **Wine**, says.

The **company** bought 809ha of land near Renmark in 1962 – its first substantial landholding in the region. It still has substantial landholdings and its main winery and distillery in the Riverland. An old painting of the original Brightlands cellars at Tea Tree Gully watches over the boardroom where John, daughter Victoria, 37, and son Richard, 35, now make decisions as **board** members.

John was working in the **business** by the time the SA Land Commission compulsorily acquired the Angove vineyards on Tolley Rd, Modbury.

Father Tom told one of his staff at the time, "we're finished down here". John said there was never any "recognised pressure" from his father to be part of the **business**. "The **company**'s come through a very fine line of succession with only one member in all four generations up to me actually taking on the running of the **company**," he said.

"I really didn't have any great feel for it." John studied science at university but thought he "might as well find out what the family **business** is all about before I say, 'I'm not interested'." He also studied **business**, which he enjoyed a lot, but it was a trip to Europe with his father to meet some of the overseas customers that tipped the scales.

John stayed in Europe for another 18 months, working in the Australian **Wine** Centre in London, before returning to join the **business** full-time in 1972. He took over as managing director in 1983 – a role he still holds.

While the **business** had always been run by a male, family lore has it that John's elder daughter, Victoria, told her father she would be running the **business** once she grew up.

"As it's evolved, both Victoria and Richard are very happily committed to the **business**," John says.

Victoria adds: "But we both got here in very different ways. I was very obsessed with it from an early age, once mum and dad banned me from politics, but Richard got here in a very different way." Richard says he wanted to be a snow-ski instructor "but soon found out that wasn't very sustainable".

"I was lucky enough to work vintage in the winery and got a taste for winemaking, then went back to university and did postgraduate winemaking." Richard then worked vintages in the Hunter Valley, Tasmania, and around the world, including Napa Valley.

He came back to Angove's when Victoria went on maternity leave in 2009. Richard now runs the McLaren Vale operation of the **business** and is involved with winemaking and marketing. Victoria has an eye for **business** and works in sales, marketing and finance.

A third sibling, Sophie, has steered away from the **wine business**, thinking that two in the **company** is plenty. She works in diet research and is currently undertaking a PhD.

Angove Family Winemakers has changed considerably since it last processed fruit at its Tea Tree Gully Winery.

The old favourites, such as St Agnes Brandy, are still going strong but the **company** now has a new cellar door in McLaren Vale on a vineyard it bought in 2008, named after Henry Hall's Warboys vineyard in Tea Tree Gully.

The **company** has add-ed a premium range to its product offering, led by the Flagship Medhyk Shiraz from McLaren Vale. In a nod to the **company**'s roots, Medhyk is Cornish for "doctor".

The **company** also has a micro-winery at its Renmark site, where it can produce small batches of high-quality product, some of which is **sold** only at the cellar door.

The family, in its current setting, appears to have a complementary set of skills.

Victoria says she "really enjoy(s) **business**" and "adores **wine**", but is not interested in being hands on with the winemaking. "Behind us we have an amazing team of hardworking, dedicated and committed people who actually make it all happen." She first began in sales at Angove, followed by a job at the International **Wine** and Spirit Challenge in London.

On her return to Angove, she focused on sales and marketing and export market development, broadening the **company**'s exports into areas like **China** and South-East Asia.

Richard has degrees in management and winemaking. He now predominantly works on sales and marketing, and has judged in **wine** shows, such as the Adelaide and Victorian **wine** shows.

"To come into the other side of the **business**, to sales and marketing, and how you get your product into the market is really interesting," he says.

Richard came back at the right time, as Victoria went on maternity leave and the **company** started to plan then build its new cellar door at McLaren Vale, opening in 2011. "We've been quite amazed and delighted at how well we've been received down here, there's a lovely sense of community," Victoria says.

"Every generation brings change and renewal to a **business**. What we were 50 years ago is so different to what we are today." The siblings clearly get along well, although Richard jokes they did a conflict-management course to help them work together.

John, who was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia in 2011 for his services to the **wine** industry, the arts and his charity work, is managing director, dividing his time between Renmark and McLaren Vale, were access to his grandchildren is a fringe benefit.

The family seems fairly confident there will be some involvement from the sixth generation.

While it's too early to have them out pruning the organic vines, which make up the Warboys vineyard, Victoria says her daughter, Emily, is already showing a keen interest. And, when they are travelling for work, Victoria says it is comforting for the children to know that they're also being kept **company** by "Uncle Richie" or "Papa John".

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