VICTORIA’S HISTORIC WINERIES: A RESOURCE FOR TOURISM?

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Introduction
The last ten years have seen a dramatic expansion in the acreage under vine in southern Victoria and important wine related investments on behalf of French and other interests. While the bulk of the productive capacity of the Australian wine industry remains South Australian based, particularly in the hot irrigated districts along the Murray River, it is of great interest that it is now to the cooler districts of southern Victoria that the industry is turning for the production of high quality table wines with international appeal. The industry is also aware of its appeal to tourists. This has already been extensively developed in South Australia in the Barossa Valley and in New South Wales in the Hunter Valley. Likewise in Victoria, a visit to a viticultural region such as the Yarra Valley or North-East Victoria is considered a necessary component of any more extended sojourn.

Inevitably, twentieth century entrepreneurs have sought to make use of the wine industry’s history and heritage of remnant material structures, and will continue to do so. Regrettably, some of this is being undertaken with scant attention to appropriate heritage concerns. The knowledge that this is a fruitful field for tourism development would seem to be a basis for the joint involvement of agencies concerned with heritage and tourism development. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate a basis for this in the Victorian context and to outline some outstanding heritage concerns.

Victoria’s nineteenth century wine industry
From humble beginnings in the 1840s Victoria came to possess by the end of the nineteenth century the largest acreage under vine of all the colonies of the Australasian group. Land under vines reached a peak in Victoria in 1894-95 of 30 307 acres. Admittedly, this involved a dramatic increase in a very short period of time and was confined mainly to the northeast of the colony. Nevertheless, Victoria, along with New South Wales and South Australia, was among the three big grapegrowing colonies in the Australasian group. The same three States remain the leading producers today.

As well as having at one stage the largest acreage under vine of any Australasian colony Victoria could also claim the largest and most sophisticated market for wine of all kinds in its major metropolitan centre of Melbourne. But by the time of the First World War Victoria’s wine industry was in tatters with only a small group of producers still active. An extensive industry had been wiped out. In the cooler southern districts where substantial plantings were undertaken in the nineteenth century no commercial vineyards remained by 1950. But in recent times there has been a revival. From around a dozen producers in 1967 there are now in excess of 130. This is still a far cry from what existed last century both in the number of producers and the acreage under vine.

In the nineteenth century Victoria’s wine industry grew in fits and starts on a region by region basis. A very tentative beginning was made in the 1840s in the agricultural hinterlands of the major urban centres of Melbourne and Geelong. Of interest in this period was the encouragement of Swiss agriculturists following initiatives sponsored by Superintendent La Trobe whose wife, Sophie, was Swiss. Swiss and German settlers were responsible for the early development of vineyards in the Yarra Valley and notably in the Geelong district.

In his short 1942 essay on the history of viticulture in Victoria, Francois de Castella referred to the vine making a three pronged attack on what became colonial Victoria. This involved the upper valley of the Yarra, ‘suburban Melbourne’ and Geelong. A trend emerged early. This was the extension of viticulture into the hinterlands of the early urban communities; orchards, grape and vegetable growing are, after all, typical hinterland functions.

In this early period there was very little wine made. A good deal of the produce of early vigneron was eaten as fresh fruit. The goldrush period, which saw excessive demand for all fresh consumables, only exacerbated this trend. The acreage of land under vines in Victoria actually fell from just over 173 acres registered in 1851-52 to just over 107 acres in 1852-53. Grapegrowing in this early pre-gold rush period was the preserve of smallholders and enthusiasts, and notably, in the case of the Geelong district, by immigrants of Swiss and German origin. Later, Swiss, German and even French communities were to extend themselves in the metropolitan, Upper Yarra, Sunbury, Bendigo, Great Western and north-eastern areas of the colony.

The gold rushes gave the wine industry a flying second start. Gold brought labour and capital to hitherto undeveloped territory, encouraging in inland
Victoria the development of towns with markets for a wide variety of goods, services and consumables. Gardeners, orchardists and vinegrowers (including those already established at Albury and Geelong) were among those who profited. Gold was also a source of capital for those who wanted to start farms and businesses, and with the decline of the alluvial fields, labour became more readily available. And so it was that viticulture and winemaking as typical hinterland functions accompanied the development of the gold towns. Winemaking was among their early manufacturing achievements, and notably so at Rutherglen, Beechworth, Castlemaine, Yackandandah, Stawell, Great Western and Bendigo.

These vineyards were not just the passive reflection of economic and demographic factors. They were also hard-won creations, the direct result of the strongly held aspirations of the gold generation immigrants, many of whom had only left home and taken up mining with a view to achieving self-sufficiency and a life on the land. The agrarian ideal was the other side of the gold rush coin, its largely urban achievements notwithstanding. And it was no accident that the progressive exhaustion of the great alluvial fields towards the end of the 1850s saw political moves to 'unlock the lands' and a great advance in vine plantings in Victoria.3

The early 1860s were the take-off years for viticulture in Victoria, and it is from this time that most wine oriented vineyards and viticultural districts begin their activity in earnest. The only district which could boast any degree of maturity was the already established Geelong district. There is a sense in which this activity follows the development of the Victorian economy, with a lull in development in the 1870s and another strong burst of growth in the 1880s, followed by an abrupt decline in the 1890s.

Major surviving wineries in southern and central Victoria that date from this early period include Craiglee and Goonawarra at Sunbury, Yeringberg near Lillydale and Chateau Tahbilk near Nagambie, although some complexes were progressively developed over the course of the century. Chateau Tahbilk is a good example of this, most of the fabric of which (including the famous tower) is from a later period. Tahbilk is of particular interest for its unique development as a company enterprise, the first and perhaps the most remarkable of many speculative vineyard and winery ventures in Victorian history.4

It was perhaps no accident that the wine industry derived its first great push forward at a time when Australia was overwhelmingly an immigrant society. The planting of the seeds of viticulture and winemaking was very much a case of old world traits transplanted. Enthusiasm for viticulture and wine in the nineteenth century derived substantial impetus from cosmopolitan, and in some cases direct continental European, experience. By the same token we should not underestimate the influence of those of the dominant Anglo-Saxon community who, for one reason or another, were attracted to the industry. The wine business was then, as now, a pastime for rich and educated men but it was also honest toil carried on by the humble sons and daughters of the soil. Viticulture also claims a part of the Australian smallholder tradition which has so influenced our national experience. This is the image of the battler on the land which encompassed the early ticket-of-leave men and free immigrants, the selectors of the late nineteenth century the soldier settlers of the twentieth century, and perhaps also, the hobby farmers of the modern era.

The 1870s saw a relative decline in the fortunes of wine with a waning of the earliest established region, Geelong. The failure of Geelong to continue to grow as a viticultural area in this period points to the artificial nature of the industry, and the slender appeal wine had for a new nation whose cultural antecedents were more Anglo-Saxon and Celtic than continental European, and whose tastes predominantly favoured spirits, beer and richer fortified styles of wine.4 This preference dismayed many connoisseurs and immigrants from Europe who recognised the unique and highly favourable attributes Victoria possessed for the cultivation of the vine and the making of outstanding wine. Under such conditions winemaking in Victoria, and especially southern Victoria, was always something of a gamble in commercial terms.

It is interesting to compare and contrast the experiences of the different communities in the various regions. German and Swiss holdings in the Geelong district were typically small and often leasehold (a fact which was to tell against them brutally when, following the discovery of phylloxera, their vineyards were forcibly uprooted). A handful of wealthy Swiss in the Yarra Valley ambitiously planted large estates (and suffered accordingly). The most notable of these were St Hubert's, Yering and Yeringberg.5 The Yarra Valley also spawned a host of smaller estates, many of them established by former vineyard workers at the larger enterprises. Elsewhere, at Bendigo and Great Western, the Germans and French did not seek immediately to overextend themselves, although comparatively large vineyards of upwards of 50 acres came to be established here. This district was fortunate among Victorian wine regions to experience a second generation developer. This was Hans Irvine, a wealthy entrepreneur and mining speculator who created Australia's first commercially successful Champagne-style of any quality. His heyday dates from the 1890s. He sold to the South Australian wine magnate Benno Seppelt in 1918.6 Great Western is still familiar as a leading Australian viticultural area.
The Bendigo district provides an interesting illustration of the general forces at work. By 1859 total plantings were about 39 acres with little wine made. Two years later this had more than doubled to 120 acres and Bendigo was the fourth largest vinegrowing region in the colony after Geelong, metropolitan Melbourne and the Murray districts. By 1869 Bendigo could boast 489 acres under vine – a dramatic increase. Growth stabilised in the ensuing decade and by 1880 the area under vine comprised 534 acres with most of the plantings in the nearby shires of Strathfieldsaye, Marong and Huntly around and along the Axe and Emu Creeks. By 1891 the Bendigo district comprised some 972 acres under vine and an estimated annual production of around 88,000 gallons of wine. This was an impressive advance considering that very few Bendigo vineyard holdings exceeded 30 acres of vines and none approached the larger Yarra Valley or Rutherglen district monsters, a number of which grew to exceed 200 acres (Fig. 1). Bendigo was also the centre of the table fruit industry prior to the development of Mildura and other Murray Valley regions.

The hot-house development of the Victorian industry is best understood by examining the Rutherglen area. From about 1880 it aspired to the mantle of Australia’s premier grapegrowing and wine producing region and has been all the more distinguished for its export orientation. In the early 1880s the acreage under vines in County Bogong (which includes Rutherglen) almost quadrupled from 1,405 acres in 1880 to 4,869 in 1884. In 1885 The Shire of Rutherglen alone had almost a third of Victoria’s 9,042 acres of vines. In addition to this the district experienced another boom in plantings in the late 1880s and again in the 1890s as a direct consequence of the bonus system, which between 1890 and 1894, saw some 12,000 acres of unwanted vines planted, mostly in the North-East.

The North-East was interesting from other points of view. Following increased tariffs on wine introduced in Victoria in 1879 the region slowly began to increase its hold on the Victorian trade. It is from this period that we see the great expanse of vineyards and winery building activity in the north-east, much of it makeshift and inconsequential but some of it extensive and grand. The development of large vineyards and wineries was a remarkable feature of the Rutherglen story. These holdings altogether transcended those of the smallholder tradition and even those larger holdings of the 1860s and 1870s. Rutherglen district vineyards and wineries utilised the cost-efficient resources of Chinese labour and mechanisation (Fig 2). The leading lights of the industry – Morris, Graham and Smith – were rich and powerful men. As purchasers of grapes and dispensers of spirit for fortification they had the smaller growers in their power.

Morris, in particular, was a leading light of the export trade, ‘selling’ Rutherglen and its wine at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and inspiring such men as the English merchant, P.B. Burgoyne, to pursue Australian wine in earnest. This trade came to specialise in not the light elegant wines of the southern district but a rich, heavy red wine which could be blended with lighter European material for the English vin ordinaire market.

This trade continued virtually uninterrupted until the 1950s and was mainly responsible for the construction of a small number of large commercial wineries in North-East Victoria and in South Australia.
Victorian wineries

There would appear to be a strong pragmatic element in the design of nineteenth century Australian wineries, as indeed we know there was in viticultural and winemaking practices. These buildings were, nevertheless, designed and built on certain principles. These principles are elaborated to a greater or lesser degree by the leading 'how-to-do-it' authorities of the day, first generation wine men such as Sir William Macarthur or Alexander C. Kelly, a New South Welshman and a South Australian respectively, but both of them widely read in Victoria. Kelly makes the obvious point:

The cellar, or rather fermenting house in which the first fermentation is to be carried on, ought to be a large airy building in a cool situation; the foot of a hill having a southerly aspect is, of course, the best in warm districts.

The walls may be constructed of timber, stone, or cob, as is most convenient; and if the ground slopes, the floor must be cut down to the lowest level, where the chief entrance is.

Macarthur, who was clearly proud of his winery at Camden in New South Wales, offers his readers a detailed description of how such a structure might be designed, revealing how building form and winemaking processes go hand in hand. Interestingly, he also indicates how the building might be constructed in stages, allowing only for immediate vintage needs in the first stage. Most nineteenth century wineries were designed so as to exploit gravity, and thereby avoid the labour and energy intensive need to pump must and wine from one vessel to another. This design aspect is dealt with in a variety of ways, some of them now scarcely recognisable in surrounding structures with the removal of ancillary or internal structures and technology.

One may expect that Victorian winemakers drew on these ideas as it suited them, expanding or redeveloping their winery buildings as the need arose. At Tahbilk 'new cellars' were constructed in 1875. In the Rutherglen area in particular, winery buildings reflect the great periods of expansion. At All Saints (Fig 3) the Smiths completely enveloped an earlier structure and in 1883 G.F. Morris revealed his ambition by constructing the largest combined winery and 'cellars' in the Australasian colonies. Of course, many vigneron did not make wine, preferring instead to sell to large makers or to small merchants such as J.K. Kahland whose extraordinary 'wine manufactory' with its underground cellars still exists under an ordinary suburban house in King Street, Bendigo.
The large central wineries of the Rutherglen area developed their own 'modern' mass-production forms of fermentation technology consisting of many large wax-lined open concrete vats equipped in some cases with automatic 'header-board' systems. These grand winery and cellar complexes such as existed at 'Fairfield', 'Mt Prior', 'Mt Ophir', 'Netherby' and 'All Saints' are scarcely to be compared with those of smallholders in southern Victoria and elsewhere. They do not even properly compare with a relatively large winery of the 1870s, such as Chateau Tahbilk. Perhaps the most remarkable of all was 'Mt Ophir' established in the early 1890s by the English wine merchant, P.B. Burgoyne, who greatly admired the red wine of the Rutherglen district and aspired to become a dominant force in the export trade. Such wineries had more in common with the large wineries which proliferated a little later in South Australia (developed incidentally to cater for much the same trade) than with earlier generations of Victorian wineries. Much more work is required in this area.13

The decline of the Victorian industry

Unfortunately for Victoria the progress of its wine industry was checked about the turn of the century. The appearance of the dreaded vine louse Phyloxera Vastatrix is often ascribed as the reason for the decline. But phyloxera was only one of a number of factors in the decline of the Victorian industry, and by no means even the most important. Many Victorian viticultural areas were never visited by the pest and remain phyloxera free today. Great Western and the Yarra Valley are examples of this. In any case, there has long been a remedy for phyloxera which attacks the natural roots of the European vine. This is reconstitution on to American phyloxera-resistant rootstocks. Had it not been for the roots of the American vine the vineyards of France would not have survived, nor those of Rutherglen.

Many of Victoria's vineyards were destroyed in the name of phyloxera, not by it, as a consequence of an eradicationist policy developed by the Victorian government in consultation with South Australia and New South Wales. In this respect we may cite those first generation vineyards of the Geelong and Bendigo districts.

But there are other factors which explain the decline of the Victorian industry. These include the expansion of Melbourne in the 1880s (subdivision swallowing many metropolitan vineyards), the progressive ageing and departure of the gold generation vigneron, an increasing consumer preference for hot area and fortified styles (which militated against the table wine producing cool areas in and south of the Great Dividing Range), the vociferous temperance movement of those years, an
ill-conceived and executed attempt by the Victorian government to boost the industry in the 1890s with the provision of subsidies for vineyard development, and, of course, the collapse of the Victorian economy in those years. The removal with Federation in 1901 of Victoria's tariff barriers also opened up the Victorian market to the then better positioned South Australian wine industry. All these factors contributed to the rapid decline of the wine industry in Victoria.

The decline and neglect which followed did not, however, result in the eradication of all material traces. In some respects this may be regarded as an advantage as benign neglect has left us with a record of a range of establishments dating from various phases of Victoria's viticultural heritage. It is important, however, that this will not be allowed to continue if this is to be retained.

**Conserving Victoria's historic wineries**

Here we embark on the public policy theme of this paper. Incredibly, no comprehensive area conservation studies have been sponsored in any of the other major Victorian viticultural regions which are known to have significant heritage assets pertinent to this interesting phase of Victoria's economic and social history, their continuation and in some cases revival of wine industry and tourism activity notwithstanding. I should mention them: the Shire of Barrabool (which admittedly has been offered National Estate money to undertake a study), Great Western, the Bendigo vineyard area shires of Strathfieldsaye, Marong and Henty, the Shire of Bulla (which includes Sunbury), where there is now much urban expansion, and the Shire of Lilydale. There are others in this category. Sadly the revival of the fortunes of the Victorian wine industry and the very considerable appeal the industry has for the development of tourism does not seem to have encouraged a practical interest in the analysis and conservation of the industry's heritage, government policy notwithstanding.

Let us try to get a little closer to nuts and bolts issues. What are the significant conservation questions with which we should deal. I have already suggested, by implication, the need for studies of key areas. Secondly, and perhaps pertinent to the assessment of individual buildings and sites, I would like to suggest that different phases of development of the Victorian industry have left us with not just one type of Victorian vineyard and/ or winery complex but several.

The small stone wineries of the Barrabool hills, or those of the Bendigo district, were as different from a massive Rutherglen district winery such as All Saints as can be imagined, and they are not to be judged on the same comparative scale. Their proper analysis will tell us different things. The one type should be just as much a priority for conservation initiatives as the other. But All Saints, with its massive and pretentious castellated red brick winery, demands our attention. Its destruction would cause an outcry. But we have lost hundreds of not so well known, and scarcely at all understood, smaller structures without a murmur of concern being raised.

We also need to think of the various elements of a vineyard and winery property. In some cases the vineyard may well be as historic as any buildings, or more so. At Chateau Tahbilk there are still some of the original Shiraz vines planted in the 1860s. These are among the oldest vines in the world. At Best's Great Western vineyard there is a nursery vineyard dating from the nineteenth century which never fails to astonish visiting experts but a proper ampelographical analysis of this rare vineyard and its extensive variety of different cultivars and clones has never been undertaken. Given the widespread destruction of European vinestock owing to phylloxera last century there it would seem pertinent to undertake this on scientific grounds alone. Both vineyards I have mentioned are scarcely valuable in economic terms and maintained only by the good graces of their respective owners.

Thirdly, there are difficult questions relating to technology and winemaking processes. Should these affect questions of significance? When a winery goes out of production it becomes part of a movable feast. Barrels, crushers and their like are auctioned off and find their way to other wineries. And so it is that most Victorian winery buildings we come across are shells, which is not to say that the form and fixtures of these buildings cannot tell you a great deal. But to the untrained eye they might not even appear to be wineries. Often it is barrels and a press which constitute the image of a winery in the popular imagination, not the building. Should historic winery buildings be devalued on this account? Winery technology can, of course, be replaced.

Wineries that have had a continuous experience of winemaking activity have usually been modified in one drastic way or another to incorporate new technology or winemaking processes. Seppelt's at Great Western (formerly Irvine's and before that Joseph Best's) has gone through at least four different winemaking regimes which have all left their mark. Should we examine and value these or rule such a site out of consideration on the grounds that it lacks integrity?

Even if the old winemaking technology survives it is likely to be in storage or lying idle, or better still in a museum. The wine industry is proud of its heritage but it is doubtful if today's consumers would accept wines made by traditional methods.
This is certainly true of white wines. This has rendered a great deal of old technology redundant. This perhaps should not bother us as much as the fact that much old technology can still be found floating about which has not been properly identified or understood, let alone properly displayed.

Then we come to the buildings themselves. Victorian wineries are, in the main, vernacular buildings. No doubt they have their antecedents. It would be interesting in this respect to know more about the early German and Swiss structures of the Barrabool Hills. Then there is the question of materials. Some Victorian winery structures are in wood (such as the magnificent Yeringberg winery in the Yarra Valley), some are made of stone (such as the former Hercynia winery near Bendigo), and others of brick (such as All Saints and Fairfield at Rutherford). Some have cellars, others do not. In the case of G.F. Morris’ extensive above-ground ‘cellars’ at Fairfield double brick walls were intended to guard against excessively high summer temperatures. These and other special features of these buildings demand analysis if proper management programs are to be developed by bodies such as the Historic Buildings Council and the owners themselves.

**Conservation and tourism**

The Victorian government’s *Tourism Strategy* (1984) identifies a role for the State government in providing, among other things, an administrative and coordinating focus for the tourism sector, and including as one might expect a range of marketing and liaison functions. Importantly, the government, when it formulated the policy in 1984, also saw that it had a role to ‘identify and enhance those attractions which have the potential to generate greater visitor numbers’.

The strategy focuses on Victoria’s competitive strengths including its heritage. In the section titled ‘putting assets to work’ it cites various features which constitute a competitive advantage for the State. Among other attractions we are told that Victoria has ‘more man-made heritage than any other State’ and ‘nine commercial wine districts spread throughout the State, providing one of the world’s finest ranges of quality wines’.

The strategy does not dwell overly on heritage concerns but it does state that ‘protecting and conserving the unique and irreplaceable features of the Victorian Environment’ is one of the aims of the government in implementing its tourism strategy. These are welcome sentiments in such a context.

Regrettably, there has been little in the way of really effective coordinated action between the different arms of government devoted to heritage conservation and tourism development in Victoria, despite often quite obvious complementary concerns. One might have considered the wine industry a fruitful terrain in this regard.

The principal agency for the implementation of the government’s tourism strategy is the Victorian Tourism Commission (VTC). This body has had its origins in the strong private sector orientation of the tourism industry and in the past the Commission has seen itself primarily as a marketing and strongly pro-private enterprise organisation. Following considerable political controversy, the VTC has been reorganised, brought under more direct ministerial control and formal links with other government agencies at a senior level established.

Perhaps a now reorganised Ministry of Conservation and Environment and a new Minister, Steve Crabb, will signal a further change. The fact that the new Minister takes on Conservation in addition to the existing responsibilities as Minister for Tourism, may provide a basis for new initiatives.

Despite the near annihilation of the nineteenth century Victorian wine industry a rich legacy remains in terms of historic records, technology and remnant buildings and other structures. Given the re-emergence in recent years of wine industry activity, both productive and tourism related, it would seem appropriate to develop initiatives to reinterpret, conserve and present that heritage. There are some positive signs in this respect. There have also been some failures. It may be regarded that the Victorian government’s decision to abandon the Banana Alley complex in Flinders Street Melbourne – which was to include headquarters for the Victorian wine industry and a museum – was a setback. We may also view the apparent incapacity to merge heritage conservation and tourism development initiatives in this field in a similar light.

On the museum front there is some hope. The Museum of Victoria which already has an extensive wine industry related collection of medals, memorabilia and technology – has purchased the Irvine collection formerly held at Banana Alley and is considering a permanent wine industry component in its Southbank development. Conceivably, this would act as an interpretation centre for tourists who would then be encouraged to visit viticultural areas and industry related heritage assets.

The other positive aspect is that some important assets are already in good hands. The Purbrick family of Chateau Tahbilk are an example. As stewards of Tahbilk for over 60 years they have achieved much in conservation and tourism development terms on their own. Chateau Tahbilk to my mind is one of the most remarkable nineteenth century vineyard and winery complexes to be seen anywhere in the world. It is remarkable for its story (which is astonishing), for the
complement of buildings it still possesses, for the
collection of artifacts it houses (some still used to
make wine) and for its wines and vineyards. Tahbilk
even has what maybe regarded as its own historic
grape, the rare marsanne variety, which it alone has
kept alive in this country. What's more, this place is
annually visited by tens of thousands of people.

Contrast this with a similar property of probably
equal significance, Day's Mill. It is an historic flour
mill not far away from Chateau Tahbilk and also on
the Goulburn river in central Victoria. A few years
ago heritage professionals persuaded the Victorian
government to purchase this historic flour mill
complete with its remarkable complement of tech-
nology and records. Admittedly, there have been
endless summer camps analysing the records and
documenting the structure but Day's Mill faces an
uncertain future. It is not open to the public in any
sense which matters. This in the long term may
threaten its survival. Some blame for this state of
affairs must be ascribed to the character of State
government heritage management. We may perhaps
be justly accused of having been too inclined to lock
up our treasures for fear of having them corrupted as
class tourist developments. What needs to happen
with Day's Mill now is a proper development program
which will see it developed as a resource for tourism.
Equally, many assets still in private hands could do
with some professional heritage involvement.

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