A dab hand coaxed life from the vines

David Leonard Tolley
Viticulturist
Born: July 21, 1923; Adelaide
Died: September 12, 2005; Adelaide

David Tolley was a well-known figure in the South Australian wine industry. He was a grandson of the founder of Douglas A. Tolley (later Tolley Pedare Wines), vignerons, of Hope Valley.

Douglas Tolley and his descendants have been involved in the wine and spirit industry for more than 140 years.

David Tolley’s great-grandfather, Albion James Tolley, started a wine and spirit business in Currie St, city, in 1862.

David’s grandfather, Douglas Tolley, with brother Ernest Alfred Tolley in association with London distiller Thomas Scott, established T.S.T (Tolley, Scott & Tolley) in 1888. TST became well known for its “hospital” brandy. Douglas Tolley, in his own right, started his own vineyard and winery at Hope Valley in 1892.

Following on from Douglas was Len Tolley (David’s father) who ran the business until his death in 1965, when David and his two brothers, Peter and Reg, ran the family business (the acronym Pedare derived from Peter, David and Reg). David’s son Jonathan was marketing manager of the business for 21 years.

Educated at St Peter’s College, David left school and served in the RAN during World War II. While waiting for his “call-up”, he worked with Holden’s on the production line, making parts for the Wirraway fighter plane, and then worked at Freeman Motors. He eventually enlisted in the RAN in 1942 and joined the cargo ship Yunnan, which was converted into a munition ship to supply to the U.S. 7th Fleet and the Australian navy.

David participated in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

He also spent time in dry dock at Port Adelaide repairing warships and later served on the destroyer HMAS Quiberon.

David started work at Douglas A. Tolley at its Hope Valley vineyards in 1945.

He worked for the family company for more than 50 years.

He was a self-taught viticulturist. Vines were his speciality – he was “hands-on”.

His knowledge and advice was most respected and sought after.

He was very modest about his achievements and oversaw the Tolley South Australian vineyards at Hope Valley, the Barossa, the Riverland (near Waikerie) and Padthaway.

David had a “feeling” for the soil and the vines he nurtured; in particular, his forte was the gewurztraminer grape.

He was one of the first in Australia to introduce, propagate and grow this variety.

The Tolley Pedare gewurztraminer, planted in the mid-1970s from two buds, eventually became 6ha of premium-quality vineyards of this variety and produced many award-winning wines in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the vineyard experts at Mildara Blass (now Foster’s) who purchased Tolley Wines in 1995, the vineyards were the “jewels in the crown” in the purchase. This was a credit to David, who in his own modest and meticulous way was responsible for these fine vineyards.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and sons Tim, Andrew and Jonathan.

Compiled by Tim, Andrew and Jonathan Tolley.