

Pioneer Vignerons:

Christopher Rawson PENFOLD: (1811-1870) and Mary PENFOLD: (1816-1895)

The Penfold wine company had its origins at Magill in 1844. The vineyard was started by Dr. Christopher Penfold but the real growth of the business was due to the efforts of his wife Mary. Christopher tended his patients and Mary tended the vines.

Christopher Rawson Penfold was born at Steyning, Sussex, England, on 2nd August 1811, the son of Reverend John Penfold and his wife Charlotte Jane (nee Brooks). He trained at St. Bartholomew's Hospital and practised at Brighton from 1838 until 1844. On 26th May 1835 he married Mary Holt and they had one daughter, Georgina, born in 1843.

The Penfolds arrived in South Australia on the *Taglioni* in June 1844 and four weeks later purchased William Ferguson's 'Makgill Farm' of 442 acres for £1,200. The Penfolds moved into the existing stone cottage, which became known as 'The Grange' and subsequently gave its name to their vineyard and, in the 1950s, to a dry red wine which was destined to become one of Australia's most famous wines.

Like a great deal of wine industry history, the story of the planting of the vineyard is enveloped in legends — stories of vines brought out from Europe and Dr. Penfold's belief in the medicinal benefits of wine. They may be quite true, but they cannot be supported by any written records. However, we do know that the first Penfold vines were planted in September 1845, probably using cuttings obtained locally. South Australia had a developing wine industry by the mid-1840s and cuttings were readily available from local nurseries and vinegrowers. The vines were planted and tended by Mary Penfold and the family's domestic servant Ellen Timbrell. The East Torrens District Council rates assessment for the Penfold property in 1856 states that it comprised '293½ acres, stone house 5 rooms, 2½ acres of garden'. The latter would have included the vineyard.

Dr. Penfold established a medical practice at Magill and was active in local government, serving as the first Chairman of the Burnside District Council in 1856-57. The family attended St. George's Church at Magill. Dr. Penfold was in poor health for some years prior to his death at 'The Grange' on 25th March 1870. He was buried in St. George's churchyard. He was well-respected in the community and on the day of his funeral flags were flown at half-mast and commercial premises closed their doors as a mark of respect.

Following Christopher Penfold's death, the wine business operated as M. Penfold & Company, The Grange Vineyards, Magill. Georgina's husband, Thomas Francis Hyland, became involved in the business after their marriage in 1862 and later managed its wine sales in the eastern colonies. The Grange Vineyards was managed from 1869 to 1905 by Joseph Gillard Jr., whose family owned Sylvania Vineyards at Norwood and Clarendon Vineyard. By 1879 Penfolds had 60 acres of vineyards and had built substantial wine cellars. In 1881 Joseph Gillard became a one-third owner of the Penfold company. Mary Penfold retired in 1884 and Gillard in 1905.

Mary Penfold lived to see Penfolds become one of Australia's largest winemakers, winning many awards for its wines both in Australia and overseas. She died on 3rd December 1895 at her daughter's home in Melbourne and was buried in St. George's churchyard next to her husband. The Penfolds' cottage is preserved as part of the Magill vineyard and can be visited on tours of the winery.

Source

John Healey; *S.A.'s Greats – The Men and Women of the North Terrace Plaques*, Historical Society of South Australia Incorporated; 2001

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Prepared March 2018 by Kevin Gogler and Barry Philp