

Pioneer Vignerons:

John REYNELL: (1809-1873)

John Reynell, grazier and pioneer winemaker, was born at Ilfracombe, Devon, England, on 9th February 1809, the son of Henry Reynell and his wife Lydia (nee Fagg). His father died in 1823, aged 46, leaving the family in difficult circumstances. At the age of sixteen John went to Egypt to work in a counting house owned by his cousin Charles Joyce, returned to England in 1828 and then spent some time involved in the wheat trade in America and Europe. He worked again in Alexandria for Messrs. Joyce, Thurburn & Co. before emigrating to South Australia.

He and his younger brother Samuel arrived in Adelaide on the *Surrey* in October 1838. On 31st January 1839 he married Mary Anne Lucas, whom he had met on the voyage from England. It was, according to a descendant, a marriage based on 'a very firm foundation of true friendship'. They went to live at Hurtle Vale, probably on the property that Mary's father had bought in March 1839. The land that was to become Reynella Farm was bought in July 1840 and John Reynell grew wheat and potatoes, and grazed sheep and cattle on it.

In 1841 he planted his first vines, using cuttings imported from Tasmania. He made his first small batch of wine in 1843 but in the same year was declared bankrupt when his pastoral pursuits failed during the economic recession. He 'lost £4,000 of capital, five years of time, and had my health much subverted'. He was treated leniently by his creditors and received a loan of £250 as a lease over part of Reynella Farm from his brother Henry in Calcutta. In 1844 Reynell planted half an acre of vines with cuttings from George Anstey's vineyard at Highercombe. This was followed with about four acres planted with Shiraz and Grenache vines from William Macarthur of Camden, New South Wales, and in 1847 ten acres with cuttings from E.J. Peake's Clarendon Vineyard. It is generally believed that the Old Cave cellar was dug at this time.

John Reynell's notebooks contain a good record of his winemaking over the years. During the 1850s vintages averaged about 450-500 gallons, depending on the season. The grape varieties he was growing included Malbec, Gouais, Verdelho, Constantia, Rousillon, Pedro Ximines and Cabernet. By 1866 he was producing 2,500 gallons of wine each vintage.

In 1852, like many others, Reynell went to the Victorian goldfields and had some success, finding 64 ounces of gold. In 1854 he sold 40 acres of land for the township of Reynella and this improved his financial circumstances. He was a foundation member of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of South Australia, served as President of the Adelaide Vignerons' Club and was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1850.

In the 1850s John Reynell began exporting wines to Victoria, England and New Zealand. He found that shipping wine to England in hogsheads was a risky affair as often it did not arrive in a sound condition. Things improved, however, and by 1867 he was selling wine to two Adelaide wine merchants, W.P. Auld & Co. and a former employee, Thomas Hardy (q.v.).

The Reynells had three children, Lucy, Lydia and Walter. Lucy married pastoralist Ross Thompson Reid and Lydia lived with Walter, caring for his family after his wife died. Walter worked extensively on pastoral properties in the far north and was later Managing Director of Elder Smith & Co., retiring in 1910 to manage the wine business, Walter Reynell & Sons Ltd.

Mary Reynell died at Reynella Farm on 18th November 1867 and John Reynell, writing to his son, spoke of 'nearly thirty years of companionship and friendship'. Reynell remained actively involved in marketing his wines and travelled extensively in that capacity over the next four years. He died at Reynella Farm on 15th June 1873.

Source

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

adelaide.sa.gov.au website

Prepared March 2018 by Kevin Gogler and Barry Philp