



EDITION #24

160TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

APRIL 2026



BEST'S CELEBRATES 160 YEARS

IT'S NOT EASY TO PUT INTO WORDS WHAT IT means to be the custodian of a winery like Best's for 160 years — the weight of responsibility, but also the quiet pride of survival. This place in Great Western has always been my home; I've never known anything else but to watch my family care for these vineyards and promote our wines. The industry has changed so much — it's not the handful of wineries in Victoria that existed when my dad and Grandpa took over. It's tough, particularly at the moment, and a reminder that we're not invincible. But I have the same determination as those who have gone before me: to continue to make great wines, to tend to the vines, which are among the most significant in the world, and to stay across what those drinking our wines love, to make sure that Best's remains relevant well into the future.

Best's remains part of the fabric of Australian wine, with only two families ever at the helm. Our tiny region of Great Western may be small, but we've done some incredible things: known for our medium-bodied, perfumed Shiraz, innovating with straight varietals like Pinot Meunier and pushing the boundaries of sparkling wine, both white and sparkling red. I am humbled and grateful for what my family and team have achieved —

in the winery, the vineyards, selling our wine or working behind the scenes. But it's the people who continue to drink and sell our wines, in retail and in restaurants around the world, who are often the true heroes. Every glass poured carries 160 years of stories with it.

So, as we celebrate Best's Great Western's 160th year, I want to pause and thank you all for your ongoing support. Wine lovers like yourselves, many who have been wine club members for decades, who continue to buy wine from my family business, make this all worthwhile.

In this special edition of our Congongella Chronicle, we'll share some stories about the early years of Best's, dating from 1866 until my dad Viv took charge in the late 1960s. We'll continue to share more of these best-kept secrets on our website and via social media throughout the year. We hope you enjoy reading the stories as much as we've loved taking a trip down memory lane. Thank you again for being part of our 160-year-old story.

Ben Thomson, 5th Generation, Managing Director

THE THOMSON FAMILY'S GREAT WESTERN CONNECTION

THE THOMSON FAMILY may have taken custodianship of Best's in 1920, but their history in the region dates to 1893, when William Thomson purchased the 340-acre Lorimer's Vineyard, renaming it St Andrews, not far from Great Western in Rhymney. He set about transforming it into a productive orchard and winery before selling the property to his 16-year-old son Frederick Pinchon in 1900. Frederick went on to expand the vineyard further and

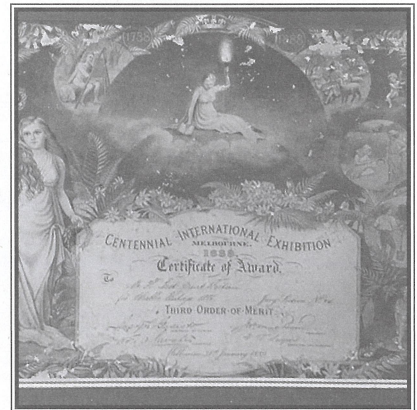
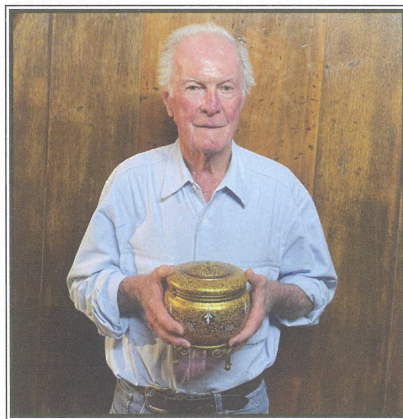
acquired the adjoining Fairview Vineyard. William returned to Melbourne, where he re-established himself as a caterer and a baker.



1888 MELBOURNE GREAT EXHIBITION

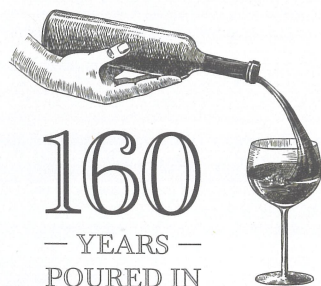
IN 1888, WILLIAM THOMSON travelled to Melbourne's Great Centennial Exhibition as a Temperance caterer. It was no small event — staged to mark a century of European settlement, it drew over two million visitors across six months, more than twice Melbourne's entire population at the time. It was there that William may have first crossed paths with exhibitor Henry Best, whose 1885 Great Western Chablis earned a Third Order of Merit, the certificate still proudly hanging in our Cellar Door today.

There's a beautiful footnote to William's time at the Exhibition: a Victorian Moser Czech ruby glass powder jar, gifted to him by the organisers in recognition of his contribution, has recently been passed down to Viv Thomson and the family by a cousin. This small but treasured piece of history ties the two families together from the very beginning.



DID YOU KNOW?

Emily Grace Hamill, who married Frederick Thomson in 1906, was instrumental in the success of the Thomson family and enabled the family to purchase the Concongella vineyard from Henry Best in 1920. The couple moved into the homestead on the property and went on to have seven children.



Best's wine isn't just made from 160-year-old vines. It's poured into 160 years of Australian life — into celebrations, farewells, first dinners, last suppers and long lunches. Every bottle that has ever left Great Western has been poured into a moment that mattered to someone.

Have you got a Best's story to share? Perhaps a visit to the cellar door, a milestone memory or the place where you first discovered Best's. We'd love to hear it. Email us info@bestswines.com with your story.

VINTAGE 2026 UPDATE



While we take a step back in time, the team are very much living in the present, flat out in the vineyards and winery bringing in the 2026 vintage. It's been a later harvest than usual, off the back of a relatively cool season with the occasional heat spike, but that's delivered some beautiful concentration of flavour. And unlike much of Australia, we've been spared the torrential rain, with just enough to keep the fruit and vineyards looking superb. By the time you read this, we'll hopefully be well into picking Shiraz, with Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir already in the winery.

Follow the team on Facebook and Instagram for all the behind-the-scenes action.

TRIPLE TROPHY HAUL



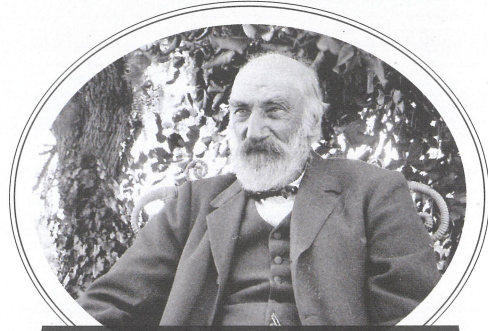
2025 Great Western Riesling

Our 2025 Great Western Riesling is a showstopper, picking up three trophies at the Canberra International Riesling Challenge, including the coveted top award. The wine won:

- 🏆 Best Wine of the 2025 Challenge – Canberra International Riesling Challenge Perpetual Trophy
- 🏆 Best Australian Riesling – Hotel Realm Perpetual Trophy
- 🏆 Best Dry Riesling – Jim Murphy AM Perpetual Trophy

This particular vintage also scored 97 points from Halliday Wine Companion. One to add to your collection.

Our History MEET THE BESTS



HENRY BEST
1832 - 1913

Born in Scotland in 1832 to David and Betsy, Henry Best arrived in Australia with his family two years later. After settling in Great Western in 1857 with his brother Joseph, he ran a butchering business with local partner Joseph Watson until 1864, before turning to wine and founding Best's in 1866. Two years on, he planted the first vines along the Concongella Creek. He married Jessie Abercrombie in Stawell in 1872, and together they raised seven children on the property.



CHARLES BEST
1878 - 1961

The third child of Henry and Jessie, Charles was born in 1878 and took charge of Best's following his father's death in 1913. A quietly capable man, he had studied chemistry, mineralogy and photography at Stawell Technical Collegewhile also maintaining other business interests. He and his wife, Fanny lived at Best's Concongella property before Best's was sold to Frederick Thomson in 1920 for £10,000. He later moved to Ararat, working as a stock and station agent.



— THE NURSERY BLOCK —

ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST SIGNIFICANT VINEYARDS

IN 1866, HENRY BEST bought 73 acres alongside the Congella Creek with a dream of making something special. He planted his rows north-south in the French tradition and was gloriously unselective about varieties — putting anything he could get his hands on into the ground. The names he gave them reflect both their origins and their character: Mixed Trouette, Black St Peters, Bad Bearer, Rough Leaf, Grand Turk and Greenarch. It's believed that by 1870, Henry Best had some 48,000 vines and made

separate wine from each variety.

Henry did have one firm conviction, though. He had a distinct dislike for spirit-laden dessert wine, preferring table wine over the heavily fortified sweet styles that were popular at the time.

The result is the Nursery Block: 39 different varieties, some of which remain unidentified to this day, and among the oldest pre-phyloxera vines in the world. Today, the vines are hand-picked by variety, whites first, then reds.

"Mr Best is of the opinion, and his determination is to produce nothing but wines of the very best description; with this view he has spared no expense in procuring vines of the choicest description. In his grounds may be found almost every known variety, and if by chance he should hear of some particular one which is not already among his collection, he leaves no stone unturned until he has procured it." Excerpt from Our Vineyards – The Ararat Advertiser, 7 June 1870.

ERIC THOMSON TAKES CHARGE AT CONGELLA

Born Frederick Hamill Thomson (pictured middle) in 1908 but known as Eric, he worked alongside his brother Bill to keep the family properties in the region running — Eric at the helm at Lake Boga, Bill at Congella. Their father Frederick made regular trips by train from Melbourne to check in. In 1944, the brothers swapped, with Eric, his wife Mary and young son Viv moving

to Congella in Great Western. Viv joined the family for his first vintage in 1961.



OUR OLD VINE COLLECTION



2020 THOMSON FAMILY SHIRAZ

Made since 1992, produced from 15 rows of our 1868 shiraz plantings, only released in the best years. Classified by Langton's as "First Classified" one of Australia's finest wines.



2023 DOLCETTO

Henry Best chose to plant 25% of the original plantings to dolcetto. Originally named "Malbeck", these vines now predate those vines in Italy.



2024 OLD VINE PINOT MEUNIER (SOLD OUT)

Made from the original 1868 plantings of Pinot Meunier, this is an iconic wine.



2023 CONGELLA BLANC

Handpicked, this wine contains all 18 white varieties that are planted in the Nursery Block.



2023 NURSERY BLOCK DRY RED

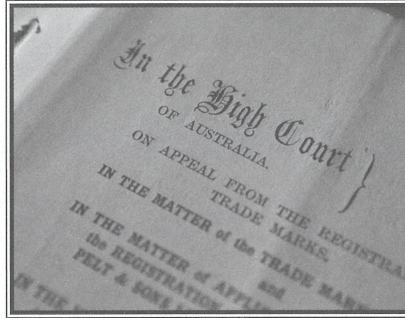
A field blend of 21 red varieties, handpicked from our 1868 Congella vineyard plantings.

THE BATTLE FOR GREAT WESTERN

WHEN FREDERICK Thomson purchased Charles Best's business, he also acquired the name Best's Great Western Wine. But on 8 December 1923, B. Seppelt and Sons lodged a trademark application for sole use of the name "Great Western" across all their products — a bold move, given that Benno Seppelt had only purchased his vineyard from Hans Irvine in 1918.

When the registrar approved Seppelt's application on 30 January 1924, the threat to Frederick's business was real. Together with spirit merchant James Richardson, he challenged the decision in the Victorian Supreme Court and lost. Undeterred, Frederick rallied local

vignerons and associated businesses and took the fight to the High Court, engaging Owen Dixon QC, later to become Chief Justice, to lead their case.



After a three-day hearing, the High Court unanimously overturned the decision. Seppelt could not claim sole use of the name Great Western. One Justice, Mr Higgins, noted it would be as absurd as forbidding a

grower in Champagne from calling his wine Champagne.

The legal battle was won, but relations between the two neighbours remained cool for years. Seppelt also initially opposed a bid by the region's winemakers to have Great Western registered as an official wine sub-region — though they later withdrew their objection. This would have prevented recognition of Great Western as a region on the Australian wine map.

Today, relations are more collaborative. Both businesses play an important role in Great Western, which is another great reason to stop and discover the history when you're travelling in Western Victoria.



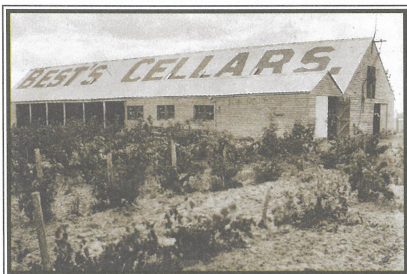
DID YOU KNOW?

In 1907, Best's Great Western was registered as a trademark (number 5067) making it one of Australia's earliest trademarks.



A SIGN OF THE TIMES

LOOK UP AS YOU ARRIVE at Best's and you'll spot the name Best's Cellars painted on the roof. It was put there in 1919, when local businesses were asked to paint rooftop signs to help pilots navigate the first England-to-Australia air race. Prime Minister Billy Hughes had offered £10,000 to



the first Australian crew to complete the flight, and Best's answered the call. Painter William Lewis cycled eight miles from Stawell in the

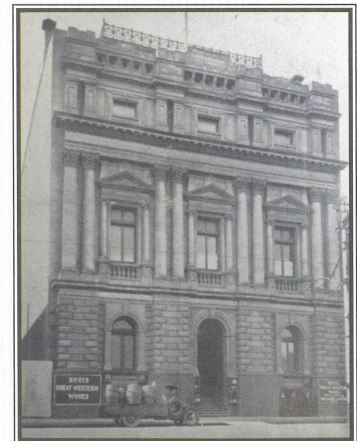


summer heat with his 12-year-old son Hugh, ladder between them, to get the job done.

A decade later the sign served its purpose again, guiding pilots along the Melbourne to Nhill leg of the 1929 East-West Air Race; at the time the longest air race in history. Seventeen teams left Sydney; fourteen made it to Perth. The Best's rooftop sign has remained a beacon, clear and crisp ever since.



You may be surprised to learn that in 1926, Frederick Thomson had a small cellar in Flinders and Swanston Street in Melbourne.



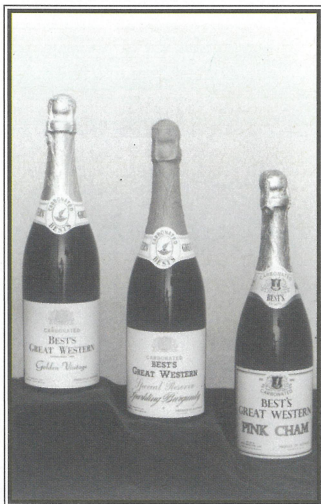
THE GREAT DEPRESSION: BEST'S TAKEN BY THE BANK

DESPITE FREDERICK THOMSON'S best endeavours, the dire economic conditions of the Great Depression hit hard. The federal government's decision to reduce the export bounty on wine, a lifeline for many producers, only made things harder, and the investment brought in through incorporation wasn't enough to turn things around. The bank foreclosed on Concongella in 1929.

The Thomson family moved on, purchasing a vineyard at Swan Hill they named St Andrews after the original property. But the bank, it turned out, couldn't find a buyer. With no prospect of a sale, the receiver was left with little choice but try to make money from the property by making and selling wine — something a bank had no interest in doing. Frederick was offered the chance to buy it back, and in 1931 he did. After just two years away, Concongella returned to the hands of the Thomson family.

— PIONEERING INNOVATION: SPARKLING SUCCESS —

RIC THOMSON WAS A QUIETLY determined man, having watched the Great Depression nearly cost the family everything. He had noticed that when offered a glass of vineyard wine on warm



days, visitors would often add a splash of soda water or lemonade. Seeing an opportunity, he took a cask of dry red wine to a soft drink maker in Callawadda, a small town not far from Stawell, and together they bottled a light, aerated wine he called Claretta. It proved popular, and with it came a

simple but powerful idea: wine didn't need to be expensive just because it sparkled. Best's Great Western Claretta was born in 1939.

From there, the range grew - Golden Vintage, Pink Cham, Special Reserve Sparkling Burgundy

and the famous Baby Bubbles - all carbonated, affordable and widely loved right through to the 1960s. The idea of visiting a winery to taste wines may seem unremarkable today, but in the late 1950s, wine tourism was virtually unheard of. This inventive sparkling range, alongside the Hocks and Clarets being produced at the time, kept Best's firmly on the radar of wine lovers across Australia.



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