

# DECEMBER 17, 2017 Insight



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# THE LAST LETTER

One of Australia's worst air disasters is approaching its 80th anniversary, and now an even more poignant story behind the tragedy that shocked South Australia's wine community has been revealed on the label of a newly released Barossa red. Report P62-63



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## SPECIAL REPORT

TONY LOVE  
NATIONAL WINE WRITER

**T**UESDAY, October 25, 193 .  
It began like any normal day at Adelaide's elite private school, St Peter's College.

The boarders had dressed in their old-world, British-style uniforms – staid and stuffy shirt, collar, tie, and jacket, breakfasted and set off to morning classes.

Colin Gramp, 11, in his second-last year of secondary studies, had been suffering from a cold, his eyes watering also from spring hay fever. He'd been having a few problems with his schoolwork, too, his English lessons requiring extra concentration while he was easily passing maths, chemistry, physics and bookkeeping.

Like most mornings, the then rarely heard sound of an aircraft in the skies over the college distracted Colin from his books. What Colin didn't know at the time was his father, Hugo, was on the Australian National Airways DC2 twin-engine plane, on the way to Melbourne after departing Parafield Airport.

What was about to unfold would have a devastating effect on not only his own family, but those of all 11 on board.

After lessons finished as usual, just before 4pm, the boarders rushed to their common room for a cup of tea or cold drink and a few biscuits, and to listen to the 4pm radio news – like they did every day.

But the news he heard that afternoon was worse than any other in Colin's memory. The same Douglas DC2 he'd heard that morning, named *Kyeema*, had crashed into the side of Mt Dandenong outside Melbourne, killing all passengers and crew.

The news report named his father as one of the 14 passengers, along with winemaking colleagues Tom Hardy Hardy's Wines and Sidney Hill Smith Yalumba and Hill Smith Wines, as well as federal MP Charles Hawker, several barristers and a honeymooning couple.

"I was completely shocked," Colin recalls. "But I didn't want to be seen crying in front of the other boys, so I went out to the back of the school house and sat down on the pavement and had a good cry."

It didn't take long for the news to spread and soon Colin heard the military-like steps of house master John Hill. "I can remember his words vividly," Colin says "Gramp my dear boy – how tragic."

Hill took the emotional young Gramp to the master's schoolground residence where his wife made a cup of tea and offered him a biscuit.

Hill consoled him "Now Gramp, it's your duty and an honour for you to look after your mother."

Colin, Orlando's wine maestro, fights back tears as he remembers this deeply affecting moment in his life, almost 80 years ago. "Sorry." He takes a deep breath. "That occasion is still very vivid in my mind."

It's a tragic tale that has been reprinted with the company's recent release of the St Hugo 2013 The Last Letter Barossa Cabernet Sauvignon which hints at a deeply personal link to an event that devastated the Gramp family and two other wine dynasties.

As usual at the school, the mail came to the common room late in the afternoon, and that day an envelope was handed to him, addressed to Master Colin Gramp, St Peter's College.

He recognised the writing immediately, but having already learned of his father's fate, didn't open it straight away, instead letting Mr and Mrs Hill read it first.

The letter had been written at the Gramp home and winery at Rowland Flat the previous evening. In it, his father expressed concern over a spring cold Colin had been suffering, and re-

## THE LAST LETTER

# I went out to the back of the school... and had a good cry



**M MORI** : Colin Gramp, as a student at St Peter's College, and reading the letter from his father, Hugo. Pictures: DRAGAN RADOCAJ, Gramparchives



## SO, HOW GOOD IS THIS 'LAST LETTER' CAB SAV?

### St Hugo 2013 The Last Letter Barossa Cabernet Sauvignon ( 5 )

Every year the St Hugo brand, which sits under the overall Pernod Ricard umbrella of wine labels, releases a wine within its Legacy Series paying homage to its powerhouse pioneer, Hugo Gramp.

This particular wine has a more than usual emotional tie to the Gramp family story, referring to the last letter Hugo wrote to son Colin, now 80, himself a legend in the Gramp and Orlando dynasty.

The letter and the story surrounding it are

key historic elements in the Gramp, Orlando and St Hugo saga. The wine is an ongoing legacy, and means the world to Colin. "I'm very chuffed that it honours my father's life."

The limited edition cabernet sauvignon is a rich, robust yet pure expression of Barossa cabernet sauvignon sourced from Rowland Flat, Greenock and Williamstown districts.

The wine is dark fruited with familiar varietal herbal notes, flesh and earthy tannins in the palate structure that promotes a long and slow exit with a savoury, mineral and salivating finish.

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ported he'd phoned the college at 9pm but his son couldn't be found. The moment for a last conversation had been lost forever.

There were plans, too, for a family get-together, and Hugo said he'd written to Mr Hill asking that Colin be given leave that weekend to travel back to the Barossa.

That gathering would now become a sad reunion. The letter also outlined Hugo's plans for the day "I am going to Canberra with Mr Hill Smith and Mr Hardy. We are travelling by aeroplane leaving Parafield at 10.40 in the morning and arrive at Melbourne about 1.45 and then take another plane to Canberra and due there about 4pm.

"We have to see the Government about excise duty on wine and bounty on wine exported.

"We will return by plane to Melbourne on Wednesday afternoon and take the train from Melbourne on Wednesday night and return to Adelaide on Thursday morning."

Hugo signed off the letter "With

best love from your loving Dad." The planned trip, however, didn't even make it to first base.

The DC2 lifted off from Parafield at 10.55am, took its usual flight path over Adelaide heading to Essendon Airport, due to arrive at 1.45pm. The plane's crew had reported its position twice to Essendon radio operators who, about 1.30pm, reported thick cloud at 1500 feet extending to 4000 feet in the Melbourne area.

Communication was then interrupted by another aircraft transmission, before the *Kyeema* requested a barometer reading. Essendon Airport then told the approaching DC2 to keep its transmitter on – the plane acknowledged the call but didn't do as instructed.

It was the last time anything was received at Essendon Airport from the Adelaide flight but, soon after, two forest workers on Mt Dandenong, 32km to the east, heard the whine of a plane becoming louder, eventually turning to the deafening roar of its engines and propellers.



A DAD'S  
FINAL WORDS  
TO HIS SON

Rowland Flat,  
Oct 24, 1938

Dear Colin,  
We received your welcome letter this morning and we were pleased to hear from you.

I am sorry to learn that your cold is still troubling your eyes. I rang this evening at nine o'clock but they could not find you. I left a message that you should see the doctor if your eyes were still bad.

Tomorrow morning, Tuesday, I am going to Canberra with Mr Hill Smith and Mr Hardy. We are travelling by aeroplane, leaving Parafield at 10.40 in the morning (to) arrive at Melbourne about 1.45. (We will) then take another plane to Canberra and due there about 4pm.

We have to see the Government about excise duty on wine and bounty on wine exported. We will return by plane to Melbourne on Wednesday afternoon and take the train from Melb. on Wednesday night and return to Adelaide on Thursday morning.

I have written a letter to Mr Hill tonight asking for weekend leave. Enid will be bringing 2 girls with her. I will probably be in Adelaide on Friday afternoon and I will let you know if you can come along with me.

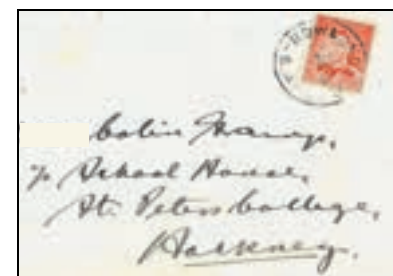
Haeses are celebrating their silver wedding in Lyndoch Hall on Saturday night. On Sunday the Dimboola (Victoria) band will visit our cellars and, in the afternoon, there is Sunday School exams.

I am sorry to state that the waterhen chicks have all died. We nursed them and kept them inside every night. Mum is very disappointed.

Mr Richard Schulz died on Saturday night and the funeral was this afternoon.

I hope you are writing essays whenever you have time to help you along with English.

Mum may ring you at 8 o'clock tomorrow, Tuesday night. I hope you will be able to shake off your cold soon. With best love from your loving Dad.



TORN APART: Colin Gramp with his father, Hugo (also on the cover page), in the late 1920s. Inset, the scene after the *Kyeema* crashed into Mt Dandenong.



What happened next became known in Australian aviation history as the *Kyeema* airline disaster, the DC2 slamming into the side of Mt Dandenong, its tail and wing sections sheared off by trees and the metal of its remaining fuselage smashing to pieces in a tremendous explosion and then bursting into flames. The 14 passengers and four crew had no chance.

**S**UBSEQUENT investigations found that the crew had failed to accurately log their time and speed between allocated reporting points on their approach to Melbourne, resulting in a grave navigational error concerning the aircraft's position when it encountered the cloud cover.

The plane travelled an extra 30km, crashing into Mt Dandenong at much the same time as it was expected to break through the cloud over Essendon and land.

An inquiry recommended immediate action to set up a chain of efficient radio ranges to give accurate and in-

stantaneous navigational information to aircraft crews.

A flight-check system also was created – both later developing into Australia's air traffic control program.

When Colin Gramp looks back to that tumultuous moment, he feels he was robbed of the chance to continue his valued relationship with his father.

"The saddest part for me was not only losing him but realising what I had looked forward to in working under him to gain his wisdom was denied," Colin says.

His upbringing had been steeped in the culture and Barossa family tradition of food and wine; as a boy even aged 12 being allowed to have a tiny taste of a white wine, the Rhine rieslings of the day, to go with lunch or dinner.

Lunch would often be a cold salad, chicken or sliced roast beef. Dinner was a hot meal, often grilled Kassler pork chops with sauerkraut.

"Dad would add water or soda water and, of course, as every year went by we got a little more. But we

learned to appreciate wine with food." Colin recalls when he was about 15 his father showed him two German rieslings in the family's private tasting cellar and said that one day he hoped they could make a wine like those.

It was a moment when father revealed their joint future to his devoted son.

Hugo's death, followed soon by World War II when Colin served as an air force gunner over Europe, interrupted that dream for a decade.

After studying agriculture and wine science at Roseworthy, working the vintages at Orlando from 1941-43, and a fortuitous return journey from the war via the US's west coast wine regions, the Gramp name soon returned to its respected place in the Barossa and Australian wine business roll of honour.

Colin and two other wine industry colleagues had wangled their return from Europe via California's Napa and Sonoma wine districts where they saw some fine rieslings.

More importantly to Colin was the

utilisation of stainless steel tanks and cold fermentation. It was a revelation, prompting him to later persuade the Orlando board to build a new crushing facility and, by 1952, install refrigeration and order two cold-pressure fermenter tanks from Germany.

Yalumba also embraced the new technology but Orlando had the only export licence at the time; the new Orlando tanks were ready for the 1953 vintage making Gramp's team the first to use them.

The rieslings were an instant success, winning awards in Sydney and Melbourne two years running before scoring the champion wine at the 1955 Royal Adelaide Show.

The proof was there for all to see – the quality of Australian white wine had leapt forever to new heights.

What Penfolds hero Max Schubert was doing at Magill Estate with red wine and what would become the legend of Grange Hermitage, Colin Gramp was doing with white wine, though with much less fanfare.

Those new-fangled tanks also went

on to greater fame when he turned them over as well to the processing of a sparkling white wine which eventually became Barossa Pearl, one of the biggest ever success stories in Australian popular wine culture.

The success of Australian table wines after those heady days is one of Colin's greatest legacies in his professional life, he proudly recalls.

"I was lucky to be the one to do that with white wines," he says.

"I often wonder what my dad would be thinking, and whether I've achieved what he had hoped."

Colin is never too far away from those memories. His homely little Tanunda digs has boxes of wine taking up corners, among them the St Hugo Last Letter Cabernet Sauvignon. And even at 96 he still has a nightly tippie.

"I have to have my glass when I'm cooking – it's usually a riesling, although in winter I love a stout as well," he says.

"And if there's still some in the bottle, I top up my glass before I sit down to eat."