

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FACT FILE

MARY PENFOLD

(1820-1896)

Co-Founder and First Manager of Penfold Wines

1820	Born in London
1835	Married Christopher Rawson Penfold
1840	Daughter Georgina born
1844	Emigrated to South Australia bringing vine cuttings from France
1860	Penfold Wines flourished
1870	Christopher died
1872	Mary took over the up-bringing of granddaughter Inez
1881	Penfold & Co produced one third of South Australia's wine
1884	Retired aged 64 years
1892	Inez died and Mary moved to Melbourne
1896	Mary Penfold died

Mary Penfold, only child of medical practitioner Dr Thomas Holt and his wife, grew up with all the advantages of a middle class upbringing, including a good education. When she was only fifteen Mary married 24 year old Dr Christopher Rawson Penfold, a struggling medical practitioner who had borrowed money from his brother Tom to set up a house and surgery in Brighton, England. The brothers had a falling out over the loan, and Christopher decided to seek respite, fame and fortune in Adelaide, South Australia.

They arrived on 18 June 1844, with their four year old daughter Georgina, a companion Ellen Timbrell, their valuable furniture and china, and vine cuttings from the Rhone region in France. With wine making in mind, Christopher bought the 500 acre Magill estate in the foothills of the Mount Lofty Ranges, four miles from Adelaide--the house was called Grange Cottage. The *South Australian Register* of 8 August, 1844 reported the arrival of Dr Penfold in the colony adding *he is the fortunate purchaser of the delightfully situated and truly valuable estate of Makgill, at the sum of £1200* (over the years the spelling has changed from Makgill to Magill).

Christopher, having to pay for Magill and clear his debt back in England, worked long hours setting up his practice. His surgery was in the dining room, and he made house calls on horseback. He was also involved in community projects. Meanwhile, capable Mary supervised the running of the house, the garden and the farm and the vineyard; educated her daughter; assisted with her husband's practice; set up the winery, made the wine (a special interest of hers) and managed the business!

At first, Mary made port and sherries for their own use and to prescribe for patients, but she soon discovered that clarets and Rieslings sold better.

By the end of 1860's Penfold's Wines had become a flourishing and prestigious business as Mary sold wine in Adelaide, won prizes at local shows, and began marketing the wines in Melbourne. Here Georgina met and married public servant Thomas Hyland who became the Victorian sales agent. Mary fought against the high tariff barriers between South Australia and Victoria that prevented the business from expanding even more.

In 1870 when Christopher died, Thomas Hyland wrote to Mary expressing solicitude for a helpless widow. He was somewhat surprised to learn that Mary, although bereaved and stricken, was adamant that she would not sell the property. Thomas had not realized that Mary was an astute businesswoman and talented vigneron who had managed the property all those years. Thomas and his mother-in-law became partners, with Mary managing the Penfolds Grange Estate vineyards, and Thomas and Georgina selling the wines in Melbourne.

In 1872 Georgina and Thomas sent their delicate daughter Inez to live with Mary in the clear country air at Magill. Inez remained with her grandmother, becoming her close companion, until her death at 20. Mary collected the stories and poems that Inez wrote and had them published in a book titled *In Sunshine and Shadow*. During this period Thomas changed his name to Hyland-Penfold.

In 1874 a journalist from the Adelaide Register, after a visit to the winery wrote: *Mrs Penfold makes four varieties of wine, sweet and dry red and sweet and dry white. Grapes of all kinds are used and the uniformity which is so great a consideration is secured by blending the wines when they are two or three years old. This is done under Mrs Penfold's personal supervision, not in conformity with any fixed and definite rule but entirely according to her judgment and taste. Mrs Penfold is aiming to get such a stock that she need not sell any which is under four years of age. There are now in the cellars about 20,000 gallons of wine of that age ready for market but the total stock is close upon 90,000 gallons.*

By 1881, when cellar manager Joseph Gillard also became a partner, Penfold's was producing over 486,422 litres of stored wine, one third of South Australia's total, and was exporting wines to New Zealand. Mary continued to experiment with different varieties and to adopt new technologies, and with Phylloxera root rot fungus devastating Europe, she optimistically bought seven large oak casks each of which would hold 22,700 litres of wine!

When she was 68 Mary retired from the winery, handing over the management of the vineyards to Joseph Gillard, who did not retire from the position until 1902, when the reins passed on to Mary's grandson Herbert Leslie Hyland-Penfold.

In 1892 Mary moved to Melbourne to live with Georgina. She died in January 1896 and was buried in St George's Cemetery, Magill with her husband. None of her obituaries mentioned her contribution to the Australian wine industry. The family continued to run the successful business for many years, and Mary's legacy is still fulfilling the company slogan she and her husband created: *1844 to evermore*.

Dr Christopher Penfold has been named as 'the first scientific vigneron of Australia'. It is a shame that Mary does not receive a great deal more credit, as it was she who managed the vineyard and blended the grapes into wine.

Sources

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Pike, D (ed) *Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol 5 1851-1890* Melbourne University Press 1974

www.nicks.com.au/penfoldgrange.penfold_story_1.html

*Held in JSNWL

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