

ANNO



1898

OAK VALLEY ESTATE

ANTHONY RAWBONE-VILJOEN





“Nature never
allows a vacuum.”

Dr Antonie Viljoen



The Oak Valley Story
1898-2014

Anthony Rawbone-Viljoen

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Sir Antonie Viljoen

The 1786 hectare Oak Valley Estate has been in the Rawbone-Viljoen family since December 1898 when the property was purchased by the founder, Sir Antonie Viljoen.

Born in 1858 and raised on Middelplaas farm in the nearby Caledon district, Antonie Viljoen was one of a family of 10 children. His mother decided that one of her children was to be properly educated, and Antonie was the chosen candidate due to a combination of his character and academic skills. After completing his schooling at the South African College in Cape Town, Antonie was sent to Edinburgh University in Scotland to study medicine, as there was a serious shortage of doctors in the Cape at that time.

Antonie managed to obtain his medical degree in 3 years, although the normal length of study was 4 years at that time. One of his fellow graduates was Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes fame, who subsequently visited South Africa and wrote a book entitled "The Great Boer War" after serving as a medical doctor in Bloemfontein in 1900.

During his vacations, Antonie travelled widely on the continent where he came across modern farming innovations that were to stand him in good stead during his later years as the owner of Oak Valley.

After the completion of his studies in 1881 followed by an internship at Barts Hospital in London, Dr Antonie returned to South Africa and in 1882 took up the post of District Surgeon of Caledon, serving the rural community of his upbringing.

There he was introduced to the young Maggie Beyers, his future wife, whom he met for the first time when she was studying at a small, but exclusive school in the town of Caledon. A very pretty, refined and gentle young lady, Maggie and Dr Antonie were married in 1887. She later bore him three children, all of whom were girls, May, Hannah and Oakleine, the "laatlammetjie" born in 1902 who was named, somewhat unusually, after his beloved Oak Valley.



Sir Antonie Viljoen

CHAPTER 1

After 7 years of medical practice in Caledon, Dr Antonie and his young family took the major decision to move to the Transvaal, where gold had recently been discovered in 1886. Dr Antonie was offered the position of District Surgeon of Krugersdorp, where, due to the booming local economy fuelled by the gold rush, opportunities were far greater than in the Cape and on top of this, medical skills were in short supply.

As a civil servant Dr Antonie became acquainted with President Paul Kruger and his second daughter, Hannah, carried the Christian names of Johannah Jakob-mina Krugerina, the latter in honour of the President of the Boer Republic.

Dr Antonie supplemented his limited state salary with a flourishing private practice, including a position as medical consultant to the mining magnate Sir J.B. Robinson and his Randfontein Estates gold mining company. He also invested in property in and around Krugersdorp in the early years of the development of the Witwatersrand mining hub. It was this expanded wealth that would later enable him to purchase the Oak Valley property as well as the neighbouring farm, Glen Norman.

A turning point in Dr Antonie's life was to prove to be the Jameson Raid, where

famously a group of 500 Rhodesian mounted police led by Leander Starr Jameson, marched via Bechuanaland (now Botswana) onto Johannesburg in an effort to bring down the government of President Paul Kruger. The main sponsor of this campaign was Cecil John Rhodes who was at that time Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, and who vowed to bring the newly discovered gold wealth under the control of the British Government. The Jameson Raid was the precursor to the Anglo Boer War which was fought from 1899-1902.

Unwittingly, Dr Antonie found himself at the epicentre of the pending battles between Jameson's men and the Boer forces which were fought close to Krugersdorp on New Year's Day 1896, as well as on the day thereafter.

Of his own volition, and in anticipation of the pending engagement with the resultant prospect of casualties, Dr Antonie set up a makeshift hospital in a building loaned to him for this purpose by Messrs Harry Greenacre & Co. The temporary hospital could accommodate 60 to 70 patients at a time.

The first wounded to be brought in were Jameson's men who represented the overwhelming number of casualties from the battle, numbering 53 in total, including 8 burghers. In discharging his

hippocratic oath, Dr Antonie saw it as his duty to treat all wounded in an unpartisan manner, and as a result there was an unfair allegation that both parties were not treated equally, and that Dr Antonie had favoured the one side: "preference having been given to Jameson's men to the detriment of the wounded of the burgher forces. In particular it was alleged that when the first supply of bedsteads reached the hospital these were given to Jameson's wounded while the burghers were left lying on the floor."

A turning point was the Jameson Raid

One of the more seriously wounded amongst Jameson's men was a certain Major Willoughby. President Kruger himself demanded that Willoughby be dispatched forthwith for questioning to Pretoria, which Dr Antonie refused to allow due to the severity of his injuries (Major Willoughby's Webley .45 revolver remains in the possession of the family, although his blood-stained tunic did not survive the passage of time).

Another of Jameson's men, Colonel Gray, a senior commanding officer, was wounded

in the foot and after passing out from pain was allowed to stay at Dr Antonie's house, and not in the hospital which was the official military requirement.

As a result of the above events, Dr Antonie was accused of treason and a commission of enquiry was set up to hear the charges against him. The end result was that Dr Antonie was dismissed from his government post as District Surgeon of Krugersdorp, despite a number of petitions that were highly supportive of his actions at the time of the raid and during the immediate period thereafter.

The damaging charges that were brought against Dr Antonie were devastating to their private lives and led not only to a growing disillusionment with life in the Transvaal Republic, but also with his profession as a doctor.

The final straw was the death of their eldest daughter, May, who died of diphtheria in 1897. His knowledge that a serum had been invented that could have prevented her death made their grief even harder to bear and they decided to return to the Cape, and thus ultimately to the soil.



▲ Oakleine Viljoen

The Homestead built by Dr Viljoen for George Rawbone and Hannah (the original homestead is the office building) ▼





Shortly after his return to the Cape from the Transvaal, Dr Antonie Viljoen was invited by friends to attend the sale of a farm in a then unfashionable area of Caledon, known as the Groenland, now better known as the Elgin Valley.

The farm, named Oak Valley, was a large property but almost completely undeveloped, and was sold to him at auction on the 15th December 1898 for £4,000. At the time Dr Antonie's friends "severely rebuked him for his incalculable folly in buying a worthless bit of hungry sour veld in the despised Groenland", but some years later he reminded his youngest daughter, Oakleine, that "nature never allows a vacuum".

However, there was to be a serious interruption to his new found farming career as a result of the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War on the 18th October 1899 which subsequently saw Dr Antonie despatched to the Orange Free State where he once again set up a temporary hospital with a mandate to render assistance to the wounded, irrespective of nationality. Dr Antonie, with two other doctors from the Cape, met with President Steyn in Bloemfontein before being sent to his posting at Boshoff where a simple hospital to treat 30 patients was improvised in an old magistrates court. During November 1899 Dr Antonie himself was struck down with illness and was granted permission by the President to return to the Cape. On the way back he was arrested at Richmond station and taken into custody by the British, but was released on parole on condition that he went directly to his farm and did not return to the Free State near the war. Thus it was that Dr Antonie remained on parole on Oak Valley for the entire duration of the war. A highly unusual condition of his "farm-arrest" was that he had to pay the salaries of two uniformed guards to guard him until the war ended on the 31st of May 1902!

In October 1900, less than 2 years after purchasing Oak Valley, he was to purchase the adjoining farm, known as Glen Norman, for a further £1,200. Dr Antonie arranged with the auctioneer to hold the sale next to the common boundary with Oak Valley and when the property was knocked down to him he opened the gate and walked onto his new farm without the risk of having to break his parole order!

A breakthrough in the economic development of the Elgin Valley was the building of the railway line from Somerset West, via Sir Lowry's Pass, to Caledon. Opened in 1902,



Return to the Land

CHAPTER 2

this project was promoted by Dr Antonie as he saw the long term benefits for the region. Dr Antonie also actively canvassed support for the building of a pass between Elgin and Vyeboom / Villiersdorp, which when constructed was named Viljoen's Pass in his honour. It was completed in 1903.

Dr Antonie wasted little time in applying his mind to the development of Oak Valley and within a short period of time ordered his first fruit trees in March 1899. His first order was followed up by a payment in July 1899 for 100 Ben Davis trees delivered from the Pickstone Nursery in Groot Drakenstein. These orders cemented his role as the pioneer of apple and pear growing in the Elgin Valley. These crops were destined to become the major economic engine of the region, as is still the case today.

Dr Antonie's strategy was to farm in a scientific way and to this end he purchased the most modern equipment available and his implement shed in 1904 "was a sight worth visiting, for in it one can see the best and latest models of threshers, reapers, manure distributors etc, even a winnower to clean the seed." By 1909 Dr Antonie had invested £3,000 to build the original Burtondale dam, complete with an 8km long contour furrow for irrigating the crops by means of gravity.

From the turn of the century onwards, Dr Antonie planted vines on the property. By 1907 he had 50,000 bearing vines in the ground. The cultivars included Semillon, Palomino, Cinsaut, Cabernet and Montpellier. A cellar followed in the same year and the first grapes were pressed on the property. The original cellar building is still standing and the concrete fermentation tanks are still to be seen. Sadly the cellar was taken out of production in 1944 during the time of the Second World War.

Dr Antonie also grew potatoes imported from Jersey as these were the most sought after potatoes on London's Covent Garden market. His goal was to beat the famous Jersey potatoes into the marketplace, but when he managed to achieve this by shipping them to Southampton on the Union Castle line, the British public would not buy them as they refused to believe they were new season potatoes!

Livestock farming was also practised and 500 sheep were on the property by 1904. By 1907 pigs had been introduced to Oak Valley and were kept in camps under the oaks where they could feed on acorns. The main breed was Yorkshires and by 1910 the piggery had grown to 800 strong.

Dr Antonie had a great love for trees, especially oak trees, and forests of oaks

were established on the property soon after he purchased the land. Today there are over 4,000 oak trees, mainly English oaks, on Oak Valley. So great was his love for these trees that he wrote in his will that none of the oaks could be removed without the consent of his executors. Acorns were harvested from the oaks and sold for pig feed.

Other trees planted included wattle, and by 1916 there were 300 acres of wattle in production. The wattle was used in the

*He was the pioneer of
apple and pear growing
in the Elgin Valley.*

tanning industry and yielded around 100 tons of bark a year which was sold to Mossops Tanning Co in Wellington. Other products sold from the wattle plantation included droppers used for fencing, whilst charcoal was made in two large brick kilns and was sold mainly to the SA Milling Company as a source of fuel. Production reached 3,500 bags a year by 1916. Gum trees were also planted and these were used for railway sleepers and for props for use in the mining industry in Johannesburg.

By this time Oak Valley had been converted into a modern, diversified farming operation producing a wide range of agricultural products. Dr Antonie's energy and drive had transformed him from a medical doctor into a farmer extraordinaire, as was witnessed by his achievements on Oak Valley.

Oak Valley was also a very social place and there were many visitors to the farm. Guests would arrive on the Friday night train together with the provisions required for entertaining them. People from all walks of life were hosted at Oak Valley, these ranged from fellow Parliamentarians to Rudyard Kipling and General de la Rey.

As an educated man of considerable standing, Dr Antonie felt it was his duty to make a contribution to both his country and to society. In 1903 he was elected to the Cape Legislative Council for the South Western Circle, where he

spent much time and effort in repairing the divisions and rifts between Boer and Brit that existed as the raw legacy of the Anglo Boer War. In 1904 Dr Antonie was elected to the House of Assembly as the representative for the Caledon district. One of his successes was a significant contribution to conservation in the Cape when he introduced a Bill in Parliament to provide for the protection of wild flowers, by prohibiting the gathering and sale of certain plants. He also cooperated in the establishment of the National Botanical Garden at Kirstenbosch.

Dr Antonie was especially active in Parliament in promoting the rights of women in terms of voting and education and in 1907 tabled a motion supporting franchise for women. The pinnacle of his political career was being elected to the Senate at the formation of the Union of South Africa where he continued to support women's rights.

Dr Antonie also served on the board of the National Bank of South Africa from 1914 onwards, and in 1918 was elected to the board of the SA Mutual (now known as The Old Mutual). He was particularly proud of these directorships because he believed "that such positions were offered to men, not because they were rich, but because of their integrity."

However, the ultimate honour was to come in the form of a knighthood bestowed on him by the King in July 1916, a fitting honour for a man who throughout his life made every effort to repair the divide that existed between Boer and Brit.

Sir Antonie died of a heart attack on 26th October 1918 at the age of 60 at his home on his beloved Oak Valley, and was buried on a kopje overlooking the oak trees that he had planted and nurtured throughout his farming career.



Sir Antonie's will was a very complex document which favoured male heirs above female heirs, in stark contrast to his support for women's rights in both the Cape Parliament and the Senate.

The provisions of his will stipulated that only a male heir could "own" the property under the legal framework of entailment, a very British concept which was popular at that time.

In terms of his will the fiduciary owner/inheritor, who had to be of the male gender, could farm the farm and enjoy the fruits of his labour for the duration of his lifetime, but with the proviso that the latter's future successor was to be the eldest surviving son in perpetuity.

This law was abolished from the SA statute books in 1965, but any son and heir born with a vested right prior to that date was entitled to exercise that right free of the encumbrance of the entailment provision.

James Rawbone was a young Englishman who had studied forestry in Nancy in France. He was recruited by the Cape Colonial Government as a forestry officer and was based at the Tsitsikamma Forest near Knysna in the Southern Cape. He subsequently married Rosalie Bain, daughter of Thomas Bain and granddaughter of Andrew Geddes Bain, the pioneer road and pass building family of the Cape.

In 1886 their son, George Crundwell Rawbone, was born prematurely in a house at the entrance to the Blauwkrans Pass and the frail baby was wrapped in a sheepskin to ensure his early survival in this remote part of the country, better known for its indigenous forests and stunning natural scenery. Many years later, after the conclusion of World War II, George was to purchase a small farming property in Elgin which he named Blauwkrans, in recognition of his place of birth.

When the Cape Colonial Government inexplicably decided to divest itself of the Tsitsikamma forest in the 1880's, James Rawbone seized the opportunity to purchase a piece of this unique national treasure which stretched from Nature's Valley to the



George Rawbone

CHAPTER 3

Storms River Mouth. Soon afterwards government recognised their folly and expropriated the land back from him.

With the capital from this expropriation he purchased Broadlands Farm next door to Sir Lowry's Pass in the Western Cape, for a sum of £1,820 in January 1888. James Rawbone, besides being a qualified forester, was a stockman at heart and built up a famous Ayrshire dairy stud. He was president of the Stud Book Association from 1911-1923 and was also a well recognised breeder of racehorses for which Broadlands in later years became well known. As a keen racegoer, he was also elected Chairman of the South African Turf Club.

The Broadlands homestead has subsequently been recognised as one of the finest examples of historic colonial architecture in South Africa and is described in detail in research conducted by author and interior decorator Graham Viney. George, as the only child of James and Rosalie Rawbone, would have inherited Broadlands, but on 22nd November 1913 he married Hannah Viljoen, Sir Antonie's eldest surviving daughter. This decision was to completely change his life and thus his career path.

The marriage of an Afrikaner lady to a young man of English stock with a differ-

ent political background in the post Union era was somewhat unusual, but in the spirit of the grand wedding that was held at Broadlands, differences were set aside on the day.

The speakers at the wedding were Sir John X Merriman and Sir Thomas Smart, both opponents of Dr Antonie in parliament and in politics. Reference was made by the speaker to the union of the husband and bride as being symbolic of the Union of the New South Africa.

George and Hannah moved into a new house on Oak Valley which Dr Viljoen built for them as a wedding gift. This house now forms part of the main homestead on the property and was originally built in the Sir Herbert Baker style. The original building was subsequently expanded considerably to accommodate the needs of a growing family. The original plans for the homestead, including its first renovation, were uncovered in the Sir Herbert Baker archives at the University of Cape Town.

The young George Rawbone proceeded to farm at Oak Valley under the watchful eye of his father-in-law, Dr Antonie until the latter's death in 1918. It must have been a difficult decision to make for George, as he was not the official inheritor of the property in

terms of Dr Antonie's will, so he filled the role of caretaker owner until his eldest surviving son James Viljoen Rawbone inherited the farm after the death of his mother Hannah, in 1943.

George Rawbone's real contribution to the fortunes of Oak Valley was the introduction of canning peaches which were enormously successful in the thirties and in the years during and after World War II. At that stage Oak Valley was producing about a quarter of the

George was a recognised breeder of racehorses.

country's total canning peach crop, some 1,700 tons. The cling peaches were sent to Jones and Company in Paarl for canning. Canning ensured a long shelf life and the products achieved great popularity given the rising tide of consumerism, especially in the UK and Europe.

George Rawbone also had a great love for the Doyenne du Comice pear variety which was the favoured pear of the nobility at the time. It was, however, a very shy bearer and the largest orchard of Comice on the farm which was

known as “Die Groot Peerboord” took 27 years before it produced its first crop!

With the advent of the Second World War, the demand for wine fell away and George Rawbone took a decision to mothball the wine cellar which had been in production since 1907.

After Hannah’s death at the relatively young age of 54 years, George later married Muriel Sparg and lived at the nearby Blauwkrans farm until his untimely death in 1964 following a motor car accident. Muriel and George had a son, Christopher, but he was also tragically killed in a motor car accident when he was only 16 years old whilst studying at Bishops school in Cape Town.

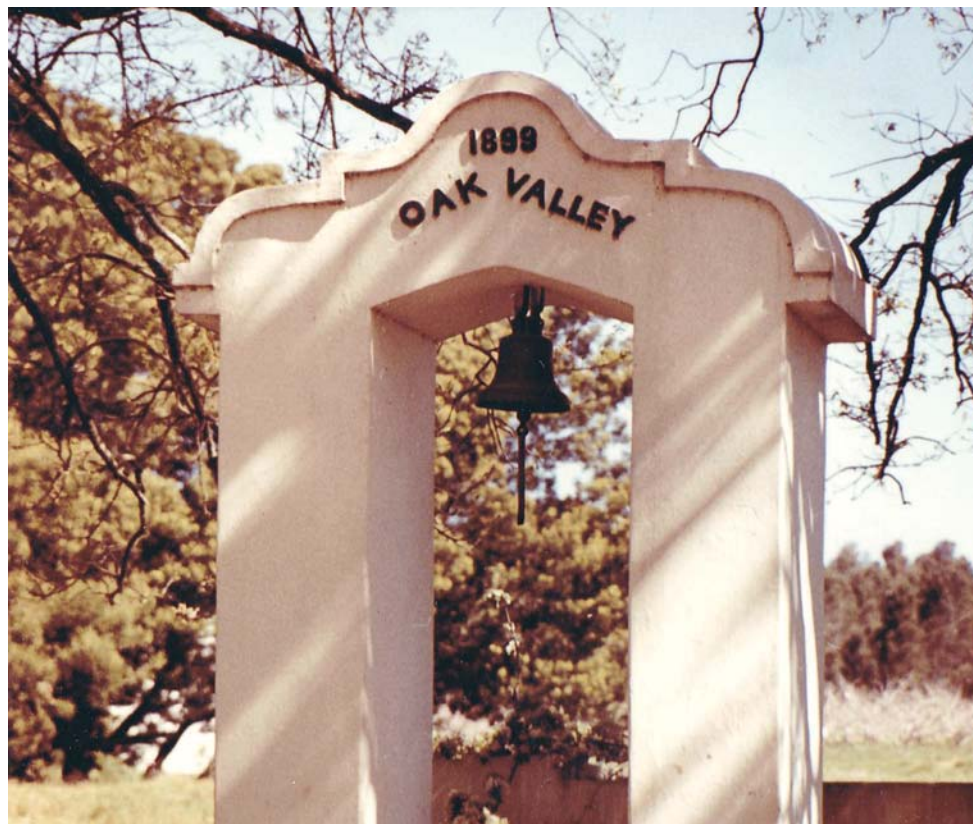
Muriel thus lost both her husband and her youngest son within a year of each other. Muriel had an older son, Michael, from a previous marriage.

It was Michael’s idea, which he developed whilst working in England, to start a fresh apple juice processing business in South Africa. This was the concept which led to the opening of the Phippen Juice Factory which preceded the birth of the famous Appletizer fruit juice brand from Elgin.



▲ Doyenne du Comice pears

The Bell ▼





James (Jimmy) Rawbone was born on the 23rd December 1919. His elder brother, Anthony was born in August 1916, but sadly died from injuries suffered during labour some 10 days after his birth. Jimmy also had an elder sister, Rosalye who was born in 1917 and who later married and went to live in Kenya with her husband, Debbie Patten-Beacon.

In terms of the will of Sir Antonie, Jimmy was destined to become the first male fiduciary heir to the Oak Valley property, which occurred after the death of his mother, Hannah, in 1943 when he was only 24 years old.

Jimmy was educated at Western Province Preparatory School and subsequently at St Andrews College in Grahamstown. At the age of 12 he contracted measles which left him partially, but permanently, deaf. This was a burden which he learned to deal with courageously for the duration of his life.

Whilst at St Andrews, at the age of 16, Jimmy was given a German Adler sports car by his father George, who was something of a motorcar fanatic, and who himself reputedly owned a total 74 cars during his lifetime, ranging from a Bentley to a Mini Cooper Sports!

Jimmy used to drive from Elgin to Grahamstown in his newly acquired sports car. As it was illegal to own a car whilst at St Andrews, he made a deal with Charles Fortune, the well-known broadcaster and cricket commentator who was then teaching at the College. The terms of the arrangement were that Charles could use the car during the week, whilst Jimmy drove it (albeit illegally) on weekends!

After matriculating from St Andrews, Jimmy was accepted to study at Cambridge University in England, but never completed his degree. Instead he chose to enroll at Davis College in California where he studied agriculture until the outbreak of the Second World War. He then left for South Africa to enlist in the army. His time at Davis was well spent, and despite him not graduating due to the intervention of war, his studies gave him a solid foundation grounded in the science of agriculture, which was to stand him in good stead when he started farming at Oak Valley after the war.



James Rawbone

(later Rawbone-Viljoen)

CHAPTER 4

Jimmy was dispatched to North Africa with the Artillery Corps, but his deafness resulted in him being sent back to South Africa for health reasons. Back at home he continued to serve in the Army with postings, *inter alia*, to the artillery battery at Simonstown and elsewhere.

The death of his mother Hannah in 1943 saw Jimmy take on the role of proprietor at Oak Valley, at first under the guidance of his father George. George subsequently bought a smaller farm in the Elgin Valley, named Blauwkrans, to which he later retired.

Jimmy married Mary Averil Howell on the 12th of April 1944. Averil, as she was better known, was the daughter of Major Harry Howell and his wife René, who also farmed with fruit in the Warm Bokkeveld just outside of the town of Ceres. Averil was a very beautiful woman who bore him three children, Anthony, Diana and Peter.

The will of Sir Antonie stipulated that any future inheritor of Oak Valley should change his surname to Viljoen and that he should be of the male gender. As Sir Antonie had two surviving daughters, ownership of the farm came to Jimmy after the death of his mother. Jimmy (who was born Rawbone) was the last surviving member of this branch of the

Rawbone family, took the matter to court in 1947 where his interests were represented by Sir de Villiers Graaff who was later to become the leader of the Opposition in Parliament. The court ruled that the two names could be joined as long as the last name was Viljoen. So Jimmy became James Viljoen Rawbone-Viljoen – an extremely complex outcome!

Jimmy was an exceptional farmer and used his scientific background, combined with an astute commercial instinct, to take the Oak Valley farming enterprise to new heights.

The primary foundations for the development of the property were laid, to a large degree, by the continuing good fortunes of the canning peach industry, which during the war years and in the period immediately thereafter, was assisted by the legacy of food rationing in the UK and Europe. Anything in a can sold for very high values in a market that had for years been starved of even the most basic of foodstuffs. Prosperity was virtually guaranteed.

In the same fashion the apple and pear industry was also favoured by a strong demand for fresh fruit in these markets. This was fuelled by improvements in cold storage technology and refrigerated shipping, which enabled fresh produce

to be received in the UK and Europe in a very much improved condition in terms of quality. The driver was the seasonal time difference between the Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere fruit crops.

A great leap forward was the formation in 1948 of the Elgin Fruit Packers Cooperative Ltd with Oak Valley as one of its founder members. Jimmy was elected to serve on the first board of directors.

A demand for fresh fruit favoured the apple and pear industry.

Elfco, as the Elgin Fruit Packers came to be known, was to become one of the giants of the South African fruit industry. Today this business, now known as The Two a Day Group (Pty) Ltd, packs and stores over a quarter of a million bins of apples and pears a year and is the largest fruit packing operation in the country.

A fruit juice processing plant, known as Elgin Fruit Juices, was built in 1980 and an international marketing company

called Tru-Cape Fruit Marketing (Pty) Ltd was formed as a joint venture with Ceres Fruit Growers in 2002.

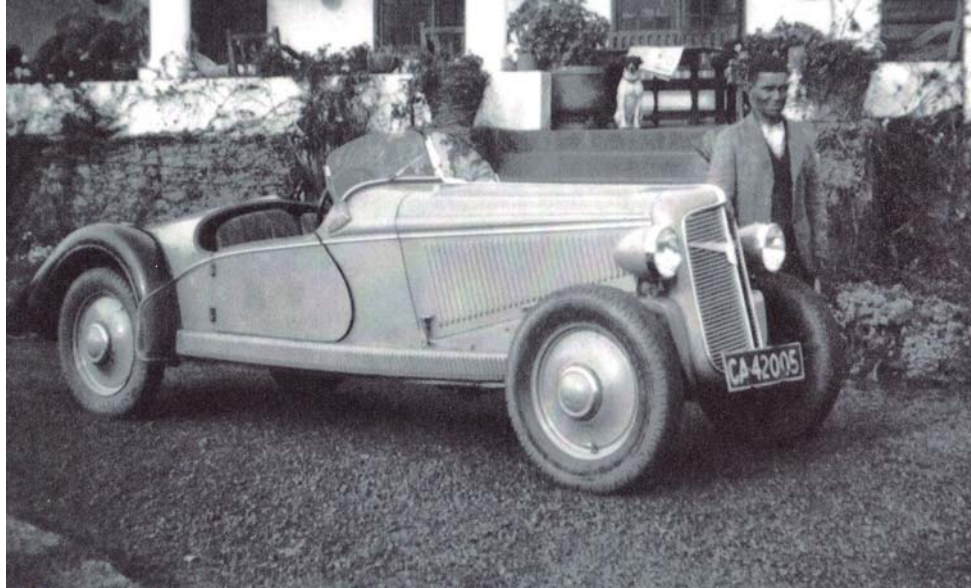
Jimmy was elected as the chairman of Elfco and filled that role for a mammoth 21 years from 1962 to 1983, a time of rapid growth both in terms of membership and of fruit volumes handled.

Jimmy was divorced from Averil in 1958 and subsequently remarried to Diane Edna Delson (nee Goode) in 1960. They had one child together, a son who was born in 1963 and was christened James in true Rawbone family tradition.

A period of great prosperity for the fruit industry followed the dark war years and Elfco, as well as Oak Valley, benefited financially during this boom period.

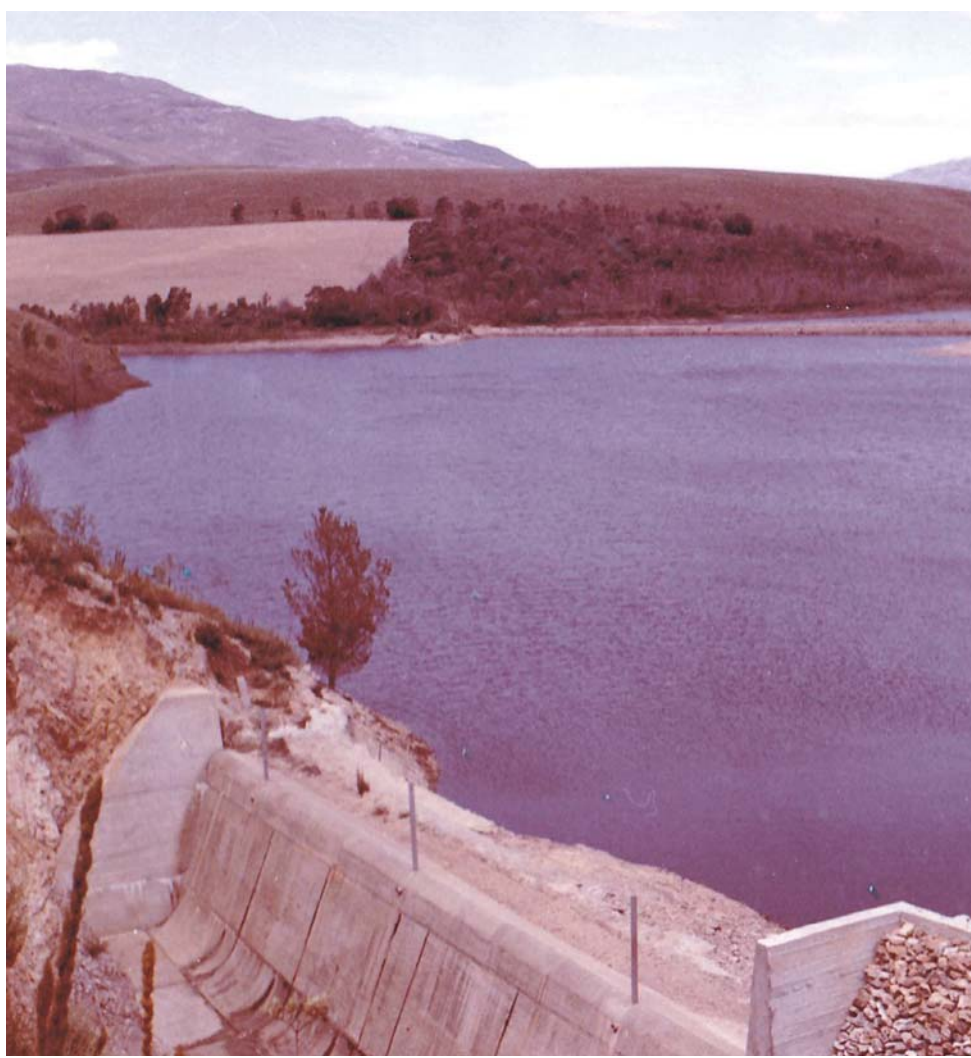
A newspaper columnist, writing under the *nom de plume* of The Wanderer wrote: "A land agent told me today that an Elgin farm I could have bought for £11,000 after the war has been subdivided and the owners of the two halves have recently refused a total of £100,000 for the land. They just laugh at buyers offers."

"How those who put their money into gold mines wish today they had bought apple farms. Yes, just a humble 40 acre farm is a better holding than the majori-



▲ Jimmy's 1935 Adler sports car

Burtondale dam built in 1956 ▼



ty of shares in half a dozen of the mines quoted on the stock exchange today.”

Water is always a critical issue in fruit farming and without irrigation no commercial production is possible. In order to exploit the full potential of Oak Valley the required water resources had to be secured and stored in dams for use during the dry summer months when irrigation requirements are at their peak and water is scarce in a winter rainfall region such as Elgin.

Jimmy saw water as the greatest inhibiting factor for the development of the full potential of the farm and in 1954 began the construction of Burtondale dam with a capacity of 723 megalitres which at the time was the largest privately owned dam with a concrete spillway in the country. The dam was designed by Ninham Shand and built by Murray & Roberts Construction.

This was followed by the construction of Waterkloof dam in 1960. This was a large storage dam with a capacity of 1,487 megalitres of irrigation water, again to the design of Ninham Shand but this time built by Kriel Construction.

The Burtondale catchment dam was linked to the Waterkloof storage dam via a 375mm (15 inch) pipeline which

formed the backbone of a very complex water reticulation system on Oak Valley.

The final piece of the water puzzle was the building in 1974/75 of the Eikenhof Dam, a district irrigation scheme privately funded by farmers in the Elgin Valley at a cost of R1.87 million. This was coupled to a reticulation scheme capable of delivering irrigation water across the full breadth of the valley to member farms. This development created a further 2,273 megalitres of water for Oak Valley and fulfilled the water requirements needed for the expansion of Oak Valley to its full potential. The farm now has the capability to irrigate over 800 hectares of fruit orchards, mainly thanks to Jimmy's foresight.

This focus on water was visionary, and given water legislation as it exists today, no building of dams on this scale would be possible at the current time.

Not only was the construction of these dams part of an excellent long term strategy but it also provided Jimmy with projects that he had great enjoyment in implementing. His greatest legacy to Oak Valley was the dams and he had fun building them.

By 1967, at the height of the apple boom, Oak Valley had 235 hectares of

fruit orchards, 67% of which were apples, 22% pears with the balance being canning peaches. Peaches at that stage were in the process of being phased out as the wet soil conditions in Elgin, especially post-blossom, were not ideal for peach growing, despite the fact that cling peaches had played such an important role in Oak Valley's prior fortunes.

The last peach orchard on Oak Valley was finally grubbed in 1970, signalling the end of an era.

Jimmy's greatest legacy was his investment in social infrastructure.

It is interesting to note that in 1967 a full 40% of the orchards on the farm were of non-bearing age which demonstrates the continuing strong demand for fresh fruit, especially from the traditional export markets, mainly the UK.

Jimmy's farming activities were not only confined to Oak Valley and in 1958 he purchased a farm then known as Highlands (now Iona) on top of the mountain near Kleinmond which he proceeded to plant to apples after building a large

irrigation dam on the property. In the sixties he also purchased two adjoining farms in the upper Hemel-en-Aarde valley known as Diepgat and Cordale. The latter two farms were purchased to expand his sheep farming activities. These additional farms were intended to create a farming career for his youngest son Peter, but were subsequently sold when Peter expressed no interest in a career in agriculture.

With just under 20% of the total of ± 1200 hectares of arable land available on Oak Valley planted to fruit trees, Jimmy took a decision in 1960 to diversify into sheep farming on mainly dryland sub-clover and grass pastures. He began with the Merino breed of which 250 were purchased from Frank Delpont, a farmer from Caledon, but soon discovered that these animals were not suited to the cold and wet Elgin conditions where foot-rot was a major problem.

Instead in 1964 he opted for the Corriedale breed which had its origins in New Zealand. These sheep were much better suited to Elgin but the problem later became one of genetic diversity as the gene pool for this breed in SA was very narrow. To counter this Jimmy imported rams from the famous Bushy Park stud in Canterbury.



▲ Merino sheep introduced to Oak Valley in 1960 Peter with Palora peach ▼



A major bush clearing operation was put into effect during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, which saw much of the area of the property which was previously infested with dense bush, converted to dryland pasturage. This strategy meant that the soil was "tamed" whilst at the same time running livestock was beneficial to the fertility of the soil. The establishment of pastures also meant that fruit orchards could be planted on these open lands as and when required.

Livestock farming on Oak Valley also included a Jersey herd of around 30 cows which was named the Peregrine Jersey Stud, and the cows were milked at hugely subsidised values to supply farm workers and their families. Coupons were sold from the office and a milk cart, pulled by mules, delivered milk to the different housing areas on the farm every evening after work. Workers' wives or children brought their own bottles to be filled in exchange for the subsidised coupons. The balance of the milk was converted into Jersey cream and butter which was sold off the farm.

The spiralling costs involved in running the herd, essentially for social welfare purposes, as well as health concerns around the high butterfat content in Jersey milk in general, led to a dispersal sale of the herd in 1972.

However another chapter opened with the start-up of a Charolais cattle stud in 1968 when five heifers in calf were imported from France to supplement the limited genetic pool that was available in South Africa. Unfortunately the bulls produced in Elgin were not resistant to the many cattle pests and diseases found up North and sales of the bulls produced in the Western Cape met with poor demand. This ultimately led to the sale of the herd in the 1980's.

One of Jimmy's great legacies was the investment he made in social infrastructure on Oak Valley which, was unparalleled in agriculture in South Africa at the time.

In 1954 he built a school on the farm for pupils from grades 1-4 as there were no proper schooling facilities in the town. The school fell under the academic jurisdiction of the Moravian Church, although teachers' salaries were funded by the State. A headmaster's house was also built adjoining the school.

The school had proper interleading classrooms that could be opened up to form one large hall. A school library and kitchen completed the complex. It was modern and very functional and provided the children at Oak Valley with a sound educational opportunity.

In 1964 Jimmy constructed a crèche, which was licensed to accommodate 64 pre-school children. It was fully equipped with mini-toilets, a kitchen and laundry, as well as a baby saloon with cots and a playground.

In 1964 Jimmy also undertook the construction of 21 Elgin Timber housing units for the farm workers. These houses were modern 3-bedroomed units with bathrooms, kitchens and lounges and were evolutionary for agriculture in the context of the times.

The ship's log books bear testimony to amazing catches.

In 1969 Jimmy was honoured with the designation of Master Farmer by the Ministry of Agriculture in South Africa.

Jimmy's story would not be complete if no mention was made of his love for the sport of angling and boating. He grew up in a conducive environment as his father, George Rawbone, had holiday houses, first in Hermanus and then Cape Agulhas where Jimmy spent many of his holidays and where his love for fishing first took hold.



▼ The school built 1954

▲ Diana at entrance

The creche built in 1960 ▼



His first fishing experiences revolved around rock and surf angling, mainly in Hermanus, but during the war years whilst on leave from the army he discovered boat angling when invited to go fishing from a converted lifeboat operating out of Struisbaai.

After these boating experiences the fishing bug bit even harder and Jimmy bought his first boat Mathilda after the conclusion of World War II. This boat, like the others to come, was moored at Gordon's Bay harbour, a convenient 20 minutes drive from the farm.

Jimmy was a pioneer of big game fishing in Cape waters and together with his great friend Mike Stott was selected as a member of the Commonwealth Angling Team which in 1949 fished in an international Bluefin tuna tournament out of Nova Scotia, Canada. This milestone led to both Jimmy and Mike being selected for Springbok colours in angling, a first for the sport in SA.

His second boat, Belinda, was a 32 foot Chris Craft imported directly from the USA. Fast and fully equipped for game fishing, she was a definite step up from the older more traditional Mathilda.

The culmination of Jimmy's sport fishing life was the building in 1955 of the boat

Nimbus in a specially constructed shed on Oak Valley.

An Italian boat builder, Joe Nardini, was employed full time to build the craft. When complete, Nimbus was loaded onto a low bed trailer and taken from the farm to the docks in Cape Town for the launch, using a giant crane.

Nimbus was 48 feet long and weighed in excess of 15 tons and was fitted with twin 55Hp GM Detroit diesel engines which in later years were the only motors of their kind still in operation anywhere in the world. This bears testimony to Jimmy's fastidious attention to detail in maintaining his boats.

Fishing was an integral part of Jimmy's life and the annual fishing trip of two weeks duration, which took place in March annually, became the highlight of his fishing calendar. Jimmy's great friends Des Hare, Roy Hare, Victor Lilford and Peter Michener, an ex-submariner, were regular members of his crew.

The ship's log books bear testimony to amazing catches, especially on the 12 Mile Bank off Cape Agulhas which Jimmy was the first recreational boat owner to fish. These fishing trips reached as far up the coastline as Cape St Francis and on occasion Nimbus

entered both the Breede River Mouth and the Knysna Heads. In their time these trips were pioneering adventures in terms of the history of sport fishing in South Africa.

Jimmy gave his active support to Major Dougie van Riet to use Nimbus for the purpose of sea rescue operations out of Gordon's Bay Harbour where Dougie occupied the position of Harbour Master. This activity led directly to the formation of the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) in South Africa.

Jimmy continued his active involvement in all issues relating to the farm until his retirement in 1992.

His last years were complicated by the onset of Alzheimer's disease, an extremely sad and undeserving end for someone with such an energetic and challenging mind.

His death on the 22nd March 1999 brought an end to a most important chapter in the history of the farm as well as to an illustrious and successful business and farming career.

His legacy will undoubtedly live on as his contribution is both visible and embedded in the very heart of the modern day Oak Valley.



THE DIRECTORS OF
THE NATIONAL SEA RESCUE INSTITUTE
ACCORD THEIR THANKS TO

JAMES (JIMMY) RAWBONE-VILJOEN

FOR OUTSTANDING HELP WITH THE LOAN OF M.F.V. "NIMBUS" IN SAVING
LIFE AT SEA, ASSISTING BOATS IN DISTRESS AND RAISING FUNDS FOR STATION
9, GORDONS BAY.

HIS HUMANITARIANISM AND GENEROSITY IN MAKING "NIMBUS" AVAILABLE FOR
RESCUE OPERATIONS OVER A PERIOD OF SEVENTEEN YEARS HAVE RESULTED IN
SAVING NUMEROUS LIVES AND RECOVERING DISABLED BOATS OF CONSIDERABLE
VALUE.

THE USE OF "NIMBUS" FOR TRAINING N.S.R.I. CREW PRIOR TO THE ACQUISITION
OF THE STATION'S BOAT HAS BEEN INVALUABLE, AND IN FUND RAISING "NIMBUS"
HAS EARNED MORE THAN THREE THOUSAND RANDBS TOWARDS THE PURCHASE OF
RESCUE LAUNCH 10-01.

J. J. ...
Chairman

J. S. ...
Secretary



▲ NSRI certificate

Building Nimbus ▼

▲ All in a day's catch

Nimbus at sea ▼





Two-A-Day
Juicy Crisp
ELGIN APPLES
ASK YOUR FARMER
TO SPECIFY '2-A'

UNIT
D

893

873

872

The fruit division is the cornerstone of the business and has been so ever since Sir Antonie Viljoen planted the first commercial deciduous fruit orchard in Elgin in 1900. These trees were supplied by California trained Harry Pickstone whose nursery was established in 1895 with the active support of Cecil John Rhodes.

Of all the crops that Sir Antonie tried, fruit, especially apples, was the crop that grew to become the economic backbone of the farm and indeed of the Elgin / Grabouw valley itself. The commercial success of apple farming and to a lesser extent pears, also saw fruit orchards being established at a later time over the mountain in Vyeboom, Villiersdorp and beyond.

By 1904 Sir Antonie had established 3,000 fruit trees on the farm and by 1907 this number had grown to 7,000.

By 1910 there were 8,000 trees on Oak Valley, mostly apples and pears, and the fruit, branded “AV,” was packed and shipped directly to England with “as much as 116½ tons having been sent away in a single season.”

By 1916 there were a total of 90 acres of apple, pear and prune orchards, but the apple remained king at Oak Valley with Dunn’s seedling, which originated in New Zealand, being the favourite variety. Dunn’s, or Ohenimuri, as they were also called, was a crisp, if somewhat tart dessert apple, best known for its good storage qualities, especially in an age where cold storage was unavailable.

During George Rawbone’s tenure the fruit branding was re-worked and became “OV – Oak Valley Brand” billed as “Empire Fruit No 1.”

George’s personal favourite was the Doyenne du Comice pear which was an extremely temperamental variety to cultivate and handle, but nonetheless it won consumer support being the chosen pear of royalty.

The biggest limiting factor that prohibited a major expansion of apple and pear production was the absence of modern cold storage technology, which limited the



The Fruit Division

CHAPTER 6

shelf-life, and thus the marketability of the product on a large scale.

Cling peaches, on the other hand, could be canned, making the shelf-life of the product almost limitless.

This factor, above all others, saw canning peaches grow in importance, especially during and after World War II when the rationing of foodstuffs created an enormous pent up demand for these and similar products.

The freshly harvested cling peaches were dispatched to H. Jones & Company in Paarl for canning, as were the Bon Chretien (otherwise known as Williams) pears, which is an excellent canning variety and which still forms the bulk of all canned pears worldwide to this day.

In later years canned fruits lost much of their lustre as the advent of healthy eating was to see fresh fruit rise in the ascendancy.

The most rapid expansion of the apple and pear industry happened after the war with the advent of improved cold storage technology and availability. Refrigerated shipping went hand in hand with this growth which was supported by rising per capita incomes in the UK and Continent during the post war reconstruction period.

The previous two decades had suppressed market demand, firstly during the Great Depression of the thirties followed by seven years of war. Peace brought with it growing prosperity and the fruit orchards of Oak Valley were beneficiaries of this economic spring.

After the war Jimmy Rawbone set about the development of modern orchard capacity in a professional manner. Having experienced American agriculture first hand, his instinct was towards mechanisation.

In 1948 he imported the first Caterpillar bulldozer to be used in SA farming. This machine, a CAT D7, was put to work clearing dense bush, mainly black wattle (a not-so-welcome legacy of Sir Antonie's), on the virgin Aprilskraal section of Oak Valley.

From 1950 onwards, "modern" orchards spaced 22' x 22' were planted in uniform blocks irrigated by means of portable aluminium sprinkler pipes using water drawn from a newly built dam fed by virgin mountain water. A specially constructed brick-and-plaster lined furrow, built in 1953, was used to fill the Aprilskraal dam which was built in 1953 from the mountain streams in the winter for irrigation during the dry summer months. The Aprilskraal section of the

farm was the first truly modern extension of fruit farming on Oak Valley.

This development also witnessed the introduction of the latest in farming technology and machinery including Hardi spray-machines imported from Scandinavia and a giant KEF sprayer, the fan of which was driven by its own 6 cylinder diesel engine, which was imported from America. It was so heavy it had to be drawn by a Caterpillar D2 or D4 tractor, especially when the orchards were waterlogged in the early spring.

Global overproduction overtook global demand in the fruit industry.

All of this development activity on the farm required the support of modern packing and cold storage facilities which were provided for via the Elgin Fruit Packers Cooperative Ltd from 1948 onwards, where Oak Valley was one of the 10 original founding members, with Jimmy serving on the first board of directors.

Elfco as it was known, also hired the services of technical personnel whose job it was to assist growers in keeping

pace with rapidly improving technology, both in terms of the science of pomology but also through advances in post-harvest technology.

Initially yields were modest by today's standards and only 24% of all orchards in 1967 had yields of more than 37 tons per hectare. This was due mainly to wide plant spacings (22' x 22') combined with the use of seedling rootstocks.

The next revolution in fruit farming was the advent in the 1960's of high density plantings (15' x 9') on Merton clonal rootstocks, imported from The East Malling Research Station in the UK, which changed the yield paradigm completely. Today acceptable levels of yield are at least double that of the sixties. A modern orchard is able to produce around 70-80 tons of apples per hectare on a continual basis and some orchards yield even more than that.

The good years in the fruit industry continued unabated until the 1990's when global overproduction finally overtook global demand. At the same time consumer tastes changed with the advent of new apple and pear cultivars, as well as growing competition from exotic and tropical fruits which became increasingly available in our most important export markets.



▲ CAT D7 bulldozer clearing bush on Oak Valley

Fiona Moodie and Two-A-Day label ▼



The formation of the EU saw agricultural subsidies increased to a point where 45% of income earned by a European fruit grower came in the form of subsidies funded by taxpayers. This represented a double financial blow to fruit farmers when the General Export Incentive Scheme (GEIS) was withdrawn by the new democratic SA government in the mid-nineties.

These events occurred at the same time as the explosion of apple production in China, where within two decades the Chinese production increased from 10 million tons to 35 million tons per annum (this compared to EU's 8 million tons per annum average).

The consequences for the fruit growing regions such as Elgin were extremely severe and between 1997 and 2001 many farmers were forced to sell up and leave the industry.

Oak Valley was protected by its diversification strategy, where cut flower production had become as significant a contributor to profits as that of fruit, in some years even exceeding it.

Oak Valley adjusted to the change in consumer tastes and large capital investments were made in new orchards with "modern" varieties such as Royal Gala,

Braeburn, Fuji, Pink Lady, Sundowner and others being planted.

Those growers still stuck with the traditional Granny Smith, Golden Delicious and Starking varieties went backwards fast, especially when aging orchards were not timeously replaced.

As in most industries, technological advances are ongoing and Oak Valley was at the forefront of these advances.

Accurate irrigation management has always been one of the most challenging problems of fruit growing, but the introduction of the neutron probe technology in the 90's enabled irrigation scheduling to be implemented scientifically and according to the measured moisture needs of a fruit tree. Irrigation scheduling was implemented via a central computer, which controlled the supply of irrigation water to the different orchard blocks according to measured soil moisture stress levels.

Similarly, the use of pesticides was reduced through innovations such as mating disruption, where pheromone emitters flood the orchard with the female hormone of the codling moth preventing the males from finding a partner to mate with. Oak Valley also pioneered the use of SIT (Sterile Insect Technique)

where male moths are irradiated, made infertile and then released into the orchards.

Other techniques, such as the use of trunk bands, meant less dependence on the use of chemical pesticide applications thus ensuring that fruit was grown in a more sustainable way in line with consumer expectations.

Supermarkets around the world are becoming more and more conscious of

Oak Valley is Tesco Natures Choice, GlobalGap and Sedex accredited.

their customers needs and have introduced strict protocols to ensure that their suppliers grow produce in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

In recent years Oak Valley has achieved Tesco Natures Choice accreditation (one of the first fruit farms outside of the EU to do so), which was subsequently elevated to the gold class. Oak Valley also obtained GlobalGap accreditation and was the first farm in South Africa to obtain the Sedex accreditation for Ethical

Trading. Oak Valley is a preferred supplier to Waitrose in the UK and receives assistance from the Waitrose Foundation in support of its social investment strategies.

The modern Oak Valley produces 20 000 tons of apples and pears per annum from 350 hectares of orchards. New orchard plantings using the best plant-material and rootstock combinations ensure that yields will continue to climb into the future.

Above all the fruit business is a people intensive business and Oak Valley's fruit division employs over 600 people during the peak harvest period, a ratio of 1.7 workers for every hectare of orchard planted.

The social investment made on Oak Valley over the generations was recognised and in 2007 it was rewarded with 1st place in the Rudnet Health Awards programme. Social responsibility has always been a priority at Oak Valley, as witnessed by the benchmark housing and employee related infrastructure on the farm.

Deciduous fruit is expected to lead the way on Oak Valley for many years to come thanks to the foresight of Sir Antonie Viljoen and his successors.



▲ Tru-Cape branded apple packaging

Sorting through apples ▼





Fruit farming has traditionally been known for its volatility, especially with regard to exchange rates due to the industry being mainly export orientated.

Given this background it was decided during the mid 1970's to experiment with alternative crops grown specifically for the local market, including crops under protection.

The initial thrust was directed towards vegetable crops, initially tomatoes in plastic tunnels. This market, however, was overtraded at the time as there were many new entrants in the field and the initial trials lacked promise. It seemed as if everyone wanted to grow crops in plastic tunnels as it represented a new approach to farming in South Africa at that time.

In 1977 Oak Valley interviewed a young Dutch production manager who had a background in the flower industry in Holland. Arend Doorduyn was subsequently employed by the company. On questioning Arend where to locate a greenhouse his answer was "somewhere between my bedroom and the bathroom!" We knew then that we had found a committed manager as greenhouse farming requires precision growing, coupled with a permanent eye on the ball.

His suggestion was to grow fresh cut flowers, namely Chrysanthemums, as nearly all of the local production was sourced from the Transvaal region and air freighted down to the Cape.

The existing Oak Valley plastic tunnels were modified to grow Chrysanths as a blackout system was required, together with lighting, as well as good ventilation and crop cooling. The first crop showed great promise and in 1979 a new glass fibre cladded Paxit greenhouse measuring 3 600m² was ordered, complete with fan and pad cooling and automated temperature controls.

The initial marketing was done through a local wholesaler, De Mooij Flowers, who undertook to sell the entire production. The quality of the Oak Valley chrysanthemums was extremely well received by the trade and within a short space of time the Oak Valley



Flowers

CHAPTER 7

product became the quality benchmark for chrysanthemums in the Western Cape.

At the same time the first global oil crisis made itself felt and this meant that flowers air freighted down from Johannesburg experienced immediate and sharp cost escalations.

Given the initial success of the fledgling flower business, Oak Valley decided to expand production. The Paxit greenhouse structure had been effective, but expensive to run, and was definitely inferior in terms of design when compared to the Dutch equivalent. A decision was taken in 1981 to import two Dutch designed glasshouses built by Smiemans BV in Holland.

This was the first time that commercial Dutch glasshouses using continual venting technology were brought into South Africa, complete with automated blackout systems, and cyclic lighting. A Priva climate controller was also imported to automate the growing process further by allowing the climate in the different greenhouses to be controlled from a central computer.

A coal-fired boiler was installed, and in addition Priva paraffin space heaters were used as a back-up source of heating as well as a source of CO₂ in the green-

houses during the difficult winter months. Low sunlight levels will always be problematic in the Cape winter as sunlight levels are less than half of the radiation experienced in Gauteng.

The expansion of the Oak Valley production resulted in more chrysanthemums being produced than De Mooij Flowers could accommodate, so an additional wholesaler, known as Flowers Cape, was engaged to take the balance of the Oak Valley production to market.

At the same time a portion of the Paxit greenhouse was converted to growing spray carnations on raised beds and there was also commercial experimentation with gypsophila.

By 1984 the relationship with Flowers Cape was not producing the required results, whilst de Mooij's health was failing and his family decided to dispose of the business.

Oak Valley was at a crossroads and had begun discussions in the same year with Kenly Farms who at that stage had by far the largest market share amongst flower wholesalers in the Western Cape. Given the marketing insecurity experienced with De Mooij and Flowers Cape, Oak Valley decided that it should start its own wholesaling arm, to be called Oak

Valley Flowers. For this purpose the brand Oak Valley Flowers was registered. This proved to be a watershed decision, one that would change the future direction of the flower division forever.

Initially Oak Valley agreed to supply two-thirds of its production to Kenly Farms and as a quid pro quo undertook to buy its own "supplementary" flower requirements from them. These supplementary flowers were made up of all the other types of flowers not grown by Oak Valley,

Oak Valley set the quality benchmark for chrysanths in the Western Cape.

the largest of which was roses. In order to be a competitive wholesaler it was necessary to stock the full range of flowers available in the broader marketplace at any given time.

In response to the need to diversify the Oak Valley Flowers offering, the production of gladiolae in summer and lillium in winter also commenced. Lillium production would later expand into Asiatic, Oriental and Longiforum (St Josephs)

lilies, but at the beginning only Umbelatum lilies were grown.

Oak Valley Flowers soon discovered that its home grown flowers were in much greater demand than those bought in from other sources. It has always been a challenge to evaluate which flowers should be home grown, a decision made more complex in the knowledge that each flower type requires its own specific science and technology to produce. Roses presented the biggest challenges of them all as this crop requires harvesting morning and evening, 7 days a week.

In terms of competitive advantage in the production of chrysanthums, Oak Valley enjoyed a special relationship with Fides in Holland who were the largest breeders of chrysanthemums in the world at that time. Arend Doornduin had worked for Fides after completing his horticultural diploma in Holland before coming to South Africa. In terms of an arrangement with Fides, Oak Valley was able to trial new varieties from their breeding programme on an exclusive basis for the Southern Hemisphere.

This meant that Oak Valley Flowers was able to trial unique new products in the marketplace ahead of its competitors. One such variety named Coral Marble, had been rejected as being unsuitable for



▲ Offloading the imported greenhouse components shipped from Holland

Arend Doornduin with a bunch of Snowden single chrysanthums outside the Smiemans glasshouses ▼



northern hemisphere production, but grew well in the Cape and became extremely popular on the local market. Oak Valley also included Coral Marble in the flower export programme to Switzerland and when Fides learnt of its popularity asked us to supply them with plant material in order to take the variety back into their own supply programme in Holland!

In early 1980 Oak Valley had commissioned Dr Marius Leibold (later Professor) of the Department of Business Economics at Stellenbosch University to undertake a market survey of the cut flower and pot plant industry in the Western Cape. His most interesting conclusion was that the future for cut flower sales would lie with the multiple retail sector and not with traditional florists. This was indeed visionary as supermarkets did not have either flower or horti departments at that time.

It was in 1986 that Oak Valley Flowers was approached by Woolworths, who had started a Horti Department specialising only in pot plants. Pot plants were easier to handle in-store in terms of controlling waste. Their proposal was to do a trial with cut flowers in their food stores.

The supply arrangement for cut flowers to Woolworths was sealed over a lunch with Simon Susman, then the Foods

Director, on the terrace of the Van Riebeeck Hotel in Gordon's Bay and fittingly it was a bright, sunny day at the seaside.

The first full year of supply to Woolworths in 1987 saw sales of R149,000 amongst the five Cape Town stores of which the Claremont branch did 73%. By the following year sales increased to over R400,000 and by 1992 this had grown to R1,35 million.

During the mid-80's direct Oak Valley sales of cut flowers were eating into the Kenly Farms market share, but they were still a major factor as two-thirds of the Oak Valley production was still being sold through Kenly.

Eventually the decision was taken for Oak Valley to control its own destiny by progressing towards marketing its own production on a much larger scale. The feedback from the trade at that time was that the Oak Valley grown products were far superior in quality and shelf life than those from any other origin and Oak Valley Flowers had become the preferred suppliers. By expanding the Oak Valley presence in the market a far better direct feedback was also possible, which made quality decision-making easier. Such was the strength of the brand that Kenly Farms continued to take in the Oak Valley product whilst Oak Valley expanded its market share at their expense.

Growing the Oak Valley Flowers brand revolutionised the prospects for the flower business and in 1985 a decision was taken to expand the production area by a further 3,250m² of fibre glass clad greenhouse with continual venting technology, built by Toxopeus in South Africa under license to a Dutch manufacturer.

This expansion was followed by the construction of a larger 7,800m² Toxopeus greenhouse in 1987, with a further 9,000m² added in 1989, bringing the total area under production to over 3 hectares.

This was supplemented by 1 hectare of shadehouses completed between 1985 and 1988. The shadehouses were used to grow *Alstroemeria*, *Umbelatum* Lillies, Tulips, *Nerine Bowdenii* and *Paeony*, the latter crop being located in a valley on the lower part of the farm where high winter chilling was ideal for these plants.

Another project started in 1986 involved the production of the *Disa*, the quintessential flower of Table Mountain fame, in collaboration with Prof Sid Cywes who was an amateur breeder of these plants. A system of raised beds with flowing re-circulating water was developed to simulate the natural growing condition of the *Disa* in their natural mountain habitat. The R&D effort required was



▲ Smiemans Dutch glasshouses

Colourful flower kaleidoscope ▼

Picking and bunching inside the greenhouse ▼



immense and eventually, with some reluctance, it was decided to terminate this project as it proved to be a distraction to the core focus of the business which was growing and marketing commercial cut flowers.

Due to poor sunlight conditions in the Western Cape during the winter months, production declines by around 30% compared to summer production. This creates an imbalance between supply and demand in summer, so in 1987 Oak Valley explored potential export opportunities in Europe to take care of the summer surplus.

Thus Oak Valley became a supplier of chrysanthus to a Swiss flower import company called Sunflor which was owned jointly by 12 Swiss regional wholesalers. Switzerland was an excellent choice as it had very limited domestic production, had high per capita income consumers and was far enough away from Holland to make the transport costs competitive. In the northern hemisphere cut flowers become very expensive in winter and the southern hemisphere comes into its own as an origin.

Exports to Switzerland continued until 2001 when increased local market demand meant that more favourable prices could be obtained in the domestic market.

Oak Valley continued to supply Kenly Farms (now owned by Metropolitan) but devoted a greater focus on building its own marketing platform. Over time supplies to Kenly diminished until the business was bought out by its Managing Director, who chose to focus more on floral accessories than on cut flowers.

Oak Valley at this point had become the major player in the cut flower market in the Western Cape and by the mid-1990's had displaced the bulk of the wholesale competition in this market. In the meanwhile the relationship with Woolworths was growing.

Woolworths began a rapid expansion programme and by 1997 there were 18 stores in the Western Cape, up from only 3 stores a decade earlier. In 1998 Oak Valley Flowers sales to Woolworths exceeded the R10million mark for the first time and growth rates were hovering around 40% per annum. There was however a growing logistics problem as Oak Valley was delivering directly to the individual stores. This problem was finally resolved with the opening of the Woolworths Distribution Centre located in Montague Gardens which meant that all flowers could be delivered to a central depot.

Oak Valley Flowers pioneered wet deliveries of cut flowers in collaboration

with Woolworths, a first for South Africa. Flowers were supplied in buckets on mobile trolleys as opposed to in cardboard cartons.

1995 saw the commencement of supplies of bouquets or "mixed bunches" as they were called then. In that year bouquets represented a little more than 18% of total sales to Woolworths, but by 2004 bouquets had increased to 34% of total sales and a new era was born. This required additional infrastructure.

Oak Valley has become the biggest force in cut flower production.

In 1997, to cater for the rapid expansion in sales, Oak Valley commissioned a new flower handling and distribution store including dock levellers with modern office facilities and additional cold storage capacity. A standby generator was installed to ensure that flower quality would not be affected by power failures.

By 2003 Oak Valley Flowers was responsible for 49% of Woolworths' national cut flower sales, an extraordinary statistic.

Greenhouse expansions took place on a regular basis and the modern day Oak Valley has over 15 hectares of greenhouse and shadehouse production.

A highlight was the construction in 2008 of a greenhouse dedicated to the production of Alstroemeria, the most modern structure of its kind in South Africa. The greenhouse is equipped with fan and pad cooling, is protected from insect invasion by netting, and has equipment for soil heating and cooling. The Oak Valley Alstroemeria are considered to be the best quality available in the country and are produced to world class benchmarks.

The modern range of products include chrysanthemums, alstroemeria, Asiatic, Oriental, and St Joseph lilies, lisianthus, gladiolae in summer with iris and tulips in winter as well as a range of seasonal flowers and greenery products for bouquet manufacturing.

The flower division employs 160 people and is structured into both production and marketing arms. Its customers are divided into four categories namely, supermarkets, florists, hotels and special occasions. Oak Valley Flowers has grown since its inception in 1978 to become the biggest force in cut flower production and wholesaling in the Western and Southern Cape.



▲ Oak Valley Flowers branding

Making up the bouquets ▼





Sir Antonie Viljoen was the first to establish wine grape production on Oak Valley soon after his purchase of the farm. By 1904 there were 50,000 vines planted, mainly Green Grape (Semillon), Hermitage (Cinsaut) and white French (Palomino).

In 1907 he built a cellar and pressed his first grapes. The majority of the bulk wine was sold on to E.K. Green & Co., the wholesale wine merchants who had premises in Somerset Road, Cape Town and also in Paarl.

In typical style, and as an example of his creative thinking, Dr Antonie devised a method of cooling down the temperature of the juice during the fermentation process: "Dr Viljoen had his own design for cooling the fermenting-room. He carried a water pipe outside up the wall, ran it over the roof to the ridge and perforated the ridge pipe. When the water was turned on the pressure was so great that from the ridge there sprung a series of fountains, which pattered on the roof and kept it cool." Perhaps the first recorded case of cold fermentation in South Africa?

At the time of Sir Antonie's death in 1918 there were 100,000 vines on Oak Valley and the cellar was producing "150 to 160 leaguers of wine" (about 90,000 litres).

The winemaking continued under his son-in-law George Rawbone who persuaded Douglas Green, the son of the managing director of E.K. Green & Co, to make the wine in the Oak Valley cellar. Douglas had attended Elsenburg College and had further studied wine and champagne making in France after the First World War.

Some years later Douglas Green told his own son Douglas Jnr, that the most suitable grapes available in South Africa for the making of champagne were "the Hermitage (Cinsaut) grapes grown on Oak Valley and pressed off the husks." The sparkling wine which was made from these grapes was branded Dry Imperial and was produced through the bulk fermentation process at E.K. Green's premises in Cape Town. The sparkling wine was exhibited at the Paris wine show in the 1920's and won an award.

During the Great Depression of the 1930's followed by the difficult years which marked World War II, the demand for wine fell away and in 1944 George Rawbone decided to



Vineyards & Wines

CHAPTER 8

mothball the winery in favour of his successful canning peach growing.

By this stage the wine industry was subjected to the statutory powers of the KWV following its formation in 1918. These powers were extended incrementally over the years and the motivation was to “direct, control and regulate the sale and disposal by its members of their produce.” It was compulsory for a producer of wine grapes to join the KWV and in 1956 a quota system was introduced which limited the tonnage of grapes a farmer could produce. Permits, authorised by the KWV, were required to produce wine grapes. This continued right up to 1992 when the quota system was finally scrapped.

Boycotts and sanctions during the apartheid years added to the difficulties experienced by wine producers.

The influence of the KWV over the wine industry led to the stagnation of creativity in wine production and winemaking. One of the biggest problems was the quality of available plant material and serious virus problems were endemic. The responsibility for the quality of vineyard material rested squarely on the shoulders of the KWV and private individuals were not permitted to import their own plant material.

Equally important: the quota system dictated the areas where vines could be planted. An area such as Elgin was out of bounds for vineyard establishment, as were most of the other “new” production areas in South Africa.

Oak Valley, however, as a result of its previous winemaking history under Sir Antonie followed by George Rawbone, had a residual quota which allowed for 68 tons of wine grape production. This quota was progressively reduced by the KWV authorities as a result of diminishing production following the closure of the Oak Valley cellar. By the 1980’s there was a small 4 hectare vineyard of Cinsaut bush vines remaining, just enough to sustain the residual quota.

It was this self-same quota that enabled Oak Valley to legally reinvent its vineyards in 1985. Somewhat ironically this project occurred under the auspices of Nietvoorbij, the state owned research centre for the wine industry. In terms of a joint proposal a decision was taken to establish a vineyard to test the sustainability of new cultivars under Elgin growing conditions.

The Elgin Cultivar Evaluation Trial, as it was called, was established on the same site as the old Cinsaut block under the supervision of Danie van Schalkwyk and

Eben Archer, who was later to become the professor of viticulture at Stellenbosch University and the Oak Valley vineyard consultant.

The experimental block was located on the top of the hill overlooking the old wine cellar and was planted to eight different cultivars namely Merlot, Pinot Noir, Weisser Riesling, Schönburger, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc. There were 900 vines planted 2.75 x 1.2m apart, which

South-facing slopes offer grapes a longer time on the vine.

amounted to 2.4 hectares in total. The vines were supplied by Nietvoorbij using the cartonage system and were planted in late November 1985. Oak Valley was responsible for installing the trellising and irrigation systems and the survival rate for vines was good, despite the late planting date.

Also in 1985, Gunter Brözel, the legendary SA winemaker of Nederburg fame, approached both Oak Valley and Paul Cluver of the neighbouring De Rust

property with a view to forming a joint venture with Nederburg for wine production in Elgin. Paul Cluver accepted the offer resulting in their first wines being bottled and co-branded under the Nederburg label. Oak Valley decided to pursue its wine interests independent of third parties.

The first Oak Valley grapes were harvested in the summer of 1988 and the Nietvoorbij tasting panel's score sheet showed that the Sauvignon Blanc came out tops followed by Schönburger, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Interestingly the vineyard was north-facing as it was feared that the later varieties may not achieve proper phenolic ripeness if planted facing south. This concern was proven to be unfounded and today it is the south-facing slopes that are favoured as they offer the grapes a longer time on the vine, thus enhancing flavour profiles.

The collaboration with Nietvoorbij was terminated in 1992 as it was felt that the experimental vineyard had served its purpose in terms of proving Elgin to be a wine growing origin of great promise.

Elgin lies on an inland plateau at an average altitude of over 300 meters above sea level and is completely surrounded by mountains. The plateau is made up of a sequence of undulating



▲ Mountain vineyard on slope

Harvest day ▼



hills giving scope for a wide range of planting options in terms of aspect and slopes.

The Elgin climate is the key and is especially defined by a thick cloud cover over the valley in summer caused by the cool south easterly trade winds. As a result, temperatures are 5° to 10°C cooler than in neighbouring Somerset West or Stellenbosch on any given day. The south-easter blows in from the southern ocean and it is not unusual for rain to fall from this direction as the clouds get trapped by the surrounding mountains.

The relative coolness of the Elgin climate is reflected in the harvest dates of the grapes which occur anything from four to six weeks later than the surrounding wine growing regions. In terms of the Winkler classification Elgin is defined as Region II and the average temperature through the growing season, from October to April, is a relatively cool 18.3 degrees Celsius.

The soils of Oak Valley are developed from ancient Bokkeveld shale (350-400 Ma), that have undergone intensive weathering and are therefore acid. The soil formation predominantly comprises a reddish-brown, iron-rich gravelly material, underlain by structured clay with soft, weathered porous shale deeper

down. As a result the physical properties contain growth-limiting gravelly upper soil layers over a water-storing and regulating subsoil that “marries” perfectly with the climate and the high rainfall. This gives moderate growth in the early season combined with some protection against climatic heat or drought shocks during the ripening phase. These are of the most ancient soils on earth.

The climatic factors combine to enable the production of high acid, low PH red and white wines with prominent varietal characteristics. It is expected that a wine produced from a specific terroir will be true to type, and will have a distinctive character that will be recognisable from season to season despite variations in cultivation practice and management of the vinification process. This theory has proven to be accurate in the case of Oak Valley’s vineyards which have remained consistent and true to type over time.

With the experimental vineyard phase having been successfully concluded and many lessons learned, it was time to take Oak Valley’s vineyard project on to a commercial level.

In 1992, with the expert assistance of Eben Archer and Dawid Saaiman, in their role as consultants, new vineyards were established on south-facing slopes behind

the experimental block. The varieties planted were Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The clonal material was the best available locally at the time, but unfortunately the Pinot Noir clone 113 proved to be infected with leafroll virus which was the biggest problem with Pinot Noir plant material in those days. The grapes from these virus infected vines were sold to sparkling wine producers as they were unsuitable for quality wine making.

Also planted on a north-facing slope, was the new early ripening Clone 163 of Cabernet Sauvignon, a block of Cabernet Franc and 2 hectares of Merlot which Dr Archer referred to as an “Eskimo” as it was expected to perform best in a cool climate environment. The Clone 163 was obtained from Stellenbosch Farmers Winery as they had sole access to this plant material at that time.

By the end of the winter of 1992 Oak Valley had 10.5 hectares planted to wine grapes, which included the 1985 experimental block.

Oak Valley then had to consider a future home for its grapes and ultimately for its wine. During December 1990 Oak Valley received a proposal from Peter Finlayson to supply his new cellar with grapes from the experimental vineyard. They were in



the process of building the Bouchard Finlayson cellar in the Hemel and Aarde Valley and were looking for quality fruit as their own domaine vineyards were still in the establishment phase.

The agreed price for grapes was to be the Bergkelder price for category A grapes and the supply, initially from the experimental block, commenced during the 1991 vintage. Bouchard Finlayson, however, were not keen to purchase the Merlot as this cultivar did not fit in with their winemaking strategy, but eventually agreed to make the wine in order to secure the Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The cellar also took in the Weisser Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris and Schönburger which went into their now well known Blanc de Mer white blend.

Of the Pinot Noir, well known SA wine authority Michael Fridjhon wrote: "The barrel sample shows an intensity of colour, fruit and flavour never before seen in a South African Pinot Noir. No doubt it is the first of several wines, all made from better material than the watery BK5 (clone) which became the South African benchmark. Notwithstanding Finlayson's achievement in producing a wine that has redefined Pinot Noir in South Africa, it is important to realise that he benefited immeasurably from

the quality of vineyards from which he purchased his grapes."

The Oak Valley grapes were starting to make their mark in the world of South African wine and the 1991 Bouchard Finlayson Chardonnay was awarded 92 points in the USA by Robert Parker, and also won gold at the International Wine and Spirit Competition in London.

Off the back of his success, Bouchard Finlayson agreed to implement co-branding with Oak Valley on their labels, so the wine became known as a Bouchard Finlayson Oak Valley Chardonnay (or Pinot Noir or Sauvignon Blanc). Given Peter's standing as one of SA's foremost winemakers, this was a distinct long-term advantage for Oak Valley. The brand gained immediate visibility both in the trade and amongst wine writers and this momentum augured well for the future. It meant that when Oak Valley finally launched its own independent label much of the initial branding-building had already been done.

Further success arrived with the publication of the 1996 Platter Wine Guide where the Bouchard Finlayson wines made from Oak Valley grapes achieved 5 stars for the Sauvignon Blanc, 4½ stars for the Chardonnay and 4½ stars for the Pinot Noir.

Oak Valley continued to supply grapes to Bouchard Finlayson until the 1998 vintage when the Bouchard Finlayson domaine vineyards reached full production. An important chapter in the history of wine on Oak Valley had reached its natural conclusion.

Oak Valley continued to sell the grapes produced from the commercial vineyards until 2002 when a decision was taken to produce wine under the Oak Valley label.



*4½ stars for 2003
Sauvignon Blanc
on debut.*

Pieter Visser, an Elsenburg Graduate and fruit production manager at Oak Valley, who had been managing the vineyards as part of his job description, applied for the position of winemaker. This was an unexpected development as the original plan was to recruit a person with a broad depth of winemaking experience. Pieter Visser at that stage had limited part-time experience in making wine, but the grapes from his vineyards were consistently of exceptional quality. It is often said that a great wine is made in the vineyard so this

was to be his ultimate test. Most importantly the position of winemaker included responsibilities for the management of the vineyard so there was no prospect of divided responsibility.

Oak Valley rented cellar capacity at the neighbouring Paul Cluver winery and the first wine to be bottled under the Oak Valley label took shape in the form of the 2003 Sauvignon Blanc. The wine achieved 4½ Platter stars on debut and was widely acclaimed, adding to the growing reputation of Elgin as a promising appellation for quality cool climate wines. The long journey into wine had begun for Oak Valley after 18 years of learning and experimentation.

Great assistance was given to the less experienced Oak Valley winemaker by Andries Burger, his highly qualified counterpart at the Paul Cluver cellar. The whole initiative was a great demonstration of neighbourly cooperation, and one which enabled Oak Valley's wines to become a reality. Oak Valley rented an initial 200 tons of surplus production capacity in the cellar.

The cooperation with the Cluver family in wine had begun in 1985 when the first vineyards were established on both farms simultaneously. In 1990 Dr Paul Cluver and Oak Valley, together with



▲ Oak Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2003

Pieter Visser holding pipe ▼



Whitehall, saw to it that Elgin was declared a wine production ward in its own right, giving it stature as an independent appellation.

In 1998 detailed planning was done for the establishment of the first vineyard blocks on the lower slopes of the Groenland Mountains which became known as the "Mountain Vineyards." These lower mountain slopes had previously been sown to sub-clover and ryegrass pastures and were established in the seventies, so the prospect of a negative impact on standing mountain fynbos did not constitute a problem.

The cleared pasture land made it easier for the establishment of vines as sheep on the pastures improved the fertility of the soil.

However, liming and ploughing on the steep slopes which were up to 600m above sea level, proved to be a major challenge. The soil analyses showed that between 80-120 tons of lime was required per hectare to counter the acid nature of the soil. The logistics of this operation was so challenging that at one stage a helicopter was considered for transporting the lime onto the vineyard sites.

The majority of the vines planted on the mountain slopes were Sauvignon Blanc, together with Merlot and a lesser

hectareage of Pinot Noir, as well as a small area of Semillon for use in a blend with the Sauvignon Blanc.

The Mountain Vineyard blocks were established between 1998 and 2004 and totalled 21 hectares. The Oak Valley consultants had been of the opinion that no irrigation would be required as a result of the steep topography and the high clay content of the soils. However the first year of cropping showed water stress in the vines and a decision was taken to retro-fit a dripper irrigation system.

Due to the steep slopes and resulting high water pressures, a special pump had to be imported from Germany to cater for the extreme pressure. This added greatly to the establishment cost of the project.

The most challenging obstacle on the mountain slopes proved to be exposure to wind, more specifically, to north-westerly gales at blossom time. The wind factor was so severe that the anchor poles of the trellising system had to be replaced three times, whilst an extra pair of trellis wires was added to stabilise the vine canopies – extreme viticulture at its best!

Dr Eben Archer had predicted lower than normal yields, but never envisaged average yields below 4 tons per hectare. The wines would have to be very special

indeed to justify these establishment costs, coupled with low yields.

On top of these challenges the mountain had a further shock in store in the form of troops of hungry baboons. The Oak Valley baboons are referred to internally as Burgundy Baboons as a result of their great love for the Pinot Noir grape. To counter the threat Oak Valley was forced to employ three guards from the time of veraison to harvest to keep the baboons from plundering the fruit.

The baboons were in no mood to give up their appetite for these delicious grapes and resorted to splitting the troop into smaller groups to make life even harder for the guards.

On one occasion, in desperation, a guard picked up a stone and threw it at the alpha male troop leader. He was greatly astonished when all the baboons in the troop picked up stones and returned the fire in unison. The guard left the mountain, black and blue, and refused to return to his post!

In 2003 Dr Archer was employed full time by one of the major wine-making corporations and Oak Valley retained the services of well-known viticulturist Kevin Watt to take on the role of consultant. Kevin was very thorough and meticulous in his planning methodology and the

next vineyard development steered away from the extremes and challenges of the higher mountain slopes.

Included in the new plantings was a Pinot Noir block planted at a density of 10,000 vines per hectare, as is customary in Burgundy. All work in the vineyard was to be by hand as the narrow rows prevented the use of a tractor or conventional machinery.

The theory was to obtain less fruit per vine with greater leaf area per bunch which would benefit wine quality. At the same time overall yields were predicted be three times greater than a conventional 3,000 vines per hectare vineyard. This high density commercial Pinot Noir block is certainly unique in South Africa.

The Oak Valley property reaches to the summit of the Groenlandberg mountains and there are 282 hectares of pristine mountain fynbos on the south-facing slopes. Oak Valley takes great pride in actively contributing to the preservation of this unique heritage which is home to 5 Red Data listed plant species, including the largest known population of Protea Stokoei on the planet.

The mountainside also forms part of the demarcated buffer zone of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, a Unesco World Heritage Site.



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▲ Protea Stokoei

BWI Champion ▼



In 2005 Oak Valley qualified for membership of the SA wine industry's pace setting Biodiversity and Wine Initiative, and in 2009 became the 9th Biodiversity Champion to be accredited to the programme.

This obligation includes an undertaking in perpetuity to preserve and sustain the indigenous flora and fauna on the property for the benefit of future generations.

Oak Valley is a founder member of the Groenlandberg Conservancy as well as of the Green Mountain Eco-Route, the world's first biodiversity wine route based on the philosophy of sustainable wine production combined with wine tourism.

Oak Valley was recognised for its conservation efforts by being elected as the runner-up in the Woolworths Eco Efficiency awards programme in 2007 and in 2009 won the inaugural Best Environmental Practices Award under the Nedbank Green Wine Awards competition which covered the broad SA wine industry.

In 2009 Oak Valley was invited to become a member of the Berlin-based Business and Bio-diversity Initiative which had a global footprint in the management of the world's threatened biodiversity.

In the midst of this success the wines within the Oak Valley range were on a path towards achieving recognition on both a local and global scale.

Oak Valley had the rare distinction of never receiving less than 4 stars for any of its wines in the informative John Platter South African Wine Guide over an 8 year period since the release of the maiden vintage in 2003. The recognition achieved covers three 5 star nominations, including the pinnacle 5 stars for the 2009 Oak Valley Pinot Noir.

Other notable awards include:

- Gold, Regional and International Trophy for the 2004 Oak Valley Blend at the 2006 Decanter World Wine Awards in London
- The 2004 Oak Valley Blend also received 4½ stars in Wine magazine and was nominated South Africa's best Bordeaux styled blend of the vintage.
- The 2005 Oak Valley Sauvignon Blanc won Gold and the Regional Trophy at the 2006 Decanter World Wine Awards and was runner-up to the International Trophy.
- The 2005 Oak Valley Mountain Reserve Sauvignon Blanc was listed in the inter-

national publication "1001 Wines To Try Before You Die" by Neil Beckett.

- The 2006 Oak Valley Chardonnay won Gold at the International Wine Challenge in London and was nominated amongst Jancis Robinson's Top 10 SA White Wines.
- The 2009 Chardonnay won Gold and the Trophy of the Best SA White at the 2010 International Wine Challenge, the largest wine competition in the world.

Oak Valley is committed to sustainable production.

- The Oak Valley Chardonnay 2010 won Double Gold at the invitational 5 Nations Wine Challenge in 2011 and also the Winemakers Choice Diamond Award in the same year.
- The Oak Valley Chardonnay 2011 won the Regional trophy at the 2012 Decanter World Wine Awards.
- The 2008 Oak Valley Pinot Noir won Gold and the Regional Trophy at the 2010 Decanter World Awards as well as Gold at the 2009 Mondial du Pinot

Noir in Switzerland. This wine also won the Winemakers Choice Diamond Award as well as the Santam Classic Wine Trophy.

- The 2009 Oak Valley Pinot Noir won 5 stars in Platter and was awarded 96 points on the South African Wine Index (SAWi).
- Oak Valley was placed in the Top 10 Wineries of South Africa at the SAWi awards in 2011.

The above recognition has been earned in a relatively short period of time since the first wine was produced in 2003. If the first decade is anything to go by then Oak Valley can look forward to an even more exciting future in the world of fine wine in the years to come.



▲ Award-winning Pinot Noir 2009

Range of Oak Valley Wines ▼





Dr. Antonie Viljoen farmed with livestock on Oak Valley and by 1904 he had a flock of 500 sheep on the property. By 1911 the flock had grown to reach 2,500 animals farmed on 1,300 acres of sown pastures. Rams were imported from Australia and France to improve the bloodlines.

Also farmed were pigs, mainly Yorkshires, and by 1910 the numbers had grown to 800. The pigs were allowed to roam under the 4,000 plus oak trees that give the property its name.

The acorns were also collected and stored in 3 cement and brick bunkers located in close proximity to the oak forests. This was an important and convenient food source for the pigs and also played a role in utilising the oak trees that Dr Antonie had established. The acorn and pig story was to be copied in the future years at Oak Valley.

Nonetheless, livestock farming was never destined to surpass fruit as a major earner of income, but instead became an important means of taming the land by preventing the invasion of alien bush. Livestock will always have a very positive effect on soil fertility.

After a lengthy passage of time the next major drive to establish livestock on Oak Valley occurred in 1956 when Jimmy Rawbone introduced Merino sheep to the farm after purchasing 250 ewes from Jack Delport who farmed in the Caledon district.

However the Merino breed was not suited to the wet underfoot conditions of the Elgin valley and foot rot was a constant problem, despite the fact that Dr. Antonie had managed to farm with the same breed at Oak Valley in the early 1900's.

To counter the foot rot problem, Jimmy switched to the Corriedale breed which originates in New Zealand and was thus better acclimatised to wet conditions.

However the biggest problem with the Corriedale breed was the lack of genetic diversity in South Africa, so Jimmy imported a ram from the famous Bushy Park stud in New Zealand. At the time the major source of the Corriedale bloodline in SA was to be found in the Eastern Cape from where the original flock was sourced.



Livestock Farming

CHAPTER 9

Jimmy was committed to his sheep farming venture and in the early sixties he purchased a farm called Diepgat in the Hemel and Aarde valley. This was followed by the purchase of the adjoining property later known as Cordale.

Elgin was never going to be the ideal location for extensive livestock farming as land values, driven by the success of apples and pears, were relatively high meaning that other nearby areas were more economically viable with this form of agriculture.

At that time Oak Valley had the production capacity of 650 hectares of pasture which included 85 hectares of irrigated pastures and irrigated lucerne lands.

The natural grazing season for dry land pastures occurs during the spring months, but the alternative was to feedlot the lambs to round them off for market over 6 weeks prior to sale. The other option was finding a substitute feed source for the lambs so that the marketing season could be extended whilst continuity of supply could be achieved.

Undaunted and determined to find a solution, Jimmy proceeded to purchase a sophisticated plant for manufacturing feed pellets. The plant and equipment were installed in stages between 1969

and 1973. The pelleting plant was operational for over a decade until it was sold in 1981 as rising electricity costs made it uneconomical to run.

In the 1950's Jimmy farmed with a Jersey herd of 30 milk cows. The registered herd was named the Peregrine Jersey Stud and the main purpose of the project was to provide a healthy source of nutrition for the families of farm workers, especially for the children. Coupons were sold at the farm office at a greatly subsidised cost. A milk cart drawn by two mules delivered the milk in large stainless steel urns to the different housing sites on the farm every evening. The workers wives or their children brought their own bottles to be filled in exchange for coupons. Jimmy's motivation for supplying the milk at a sub-economic price was to ensure that any alcohol abuse would not result in the farm children going without a permanent source of nourishment.

The balance of the milk was converted into Jersey cream and butter and sold off, but the ever rising costs associated with what was in essence a social welfare project, led to a dispersal sale of the herd in 1970.

In the late 1960's Jimmy also farmed with a stud Charolais cattle herd, which

included five pregnant heifers imported from France in 1968. The imports were necessary as the gene pool for the breed was limited within South Africa. Unfortunately the bulls reared in Elgin were not resistant to the pests and diseases found in the northern regions of South Africa where the primary market for stud bulls lay, and sales were limited to the Western and Eastern Cape. As a result the entire herd was sold in the 1980's to a buyer from the Bot River area.

Oak Valley won the champion fat lamb trophy and prospects were bright.

Two major ongoing problems with sheep farming in the Elgin valley were stock theft and attacks on the flocks by marauding packs of domestic dogs.

A letter written in September 1987 records the loss of 68 sheep in the space of less than one month. The dogs form and hunt in packs and the problem is especially prevalent from the autumn through to the spring. The situation is compounded by the fact that Elgin is a highly intensive farming area with a large

number of people inhabiting the valley. To further aggravate the problem Oak Valley was one of very few farms where sheep were farmed making it a prime target for both the dogs and the stock thieves.

A further letter written in 1983 records the theft of 52 breeding ewes which were loaded onto trucks next to the adjoining N2 in the still of the night, and this continued until the gang was caught with 21 pregnant ewes, which had already been loaded onto a truck for transport to the Crossroads township outside Cape Town.

This problem was endemic and finally led to a forced switch from sheep to cattle farming in 1998. This was a big set-back for Oak Valley, which at that time farmed with 4500 breeding ewes of the German Merino breed. The German Merinos had replaced the Corriedale flock in the late 1970's as there was a much broader gene pool to work with.

The loss was made even harder given the success of the sheep farming venture which was making reasonable profits during the 1990's. Oak Valley at that time was the winner of the champion fat lamb trophy at the Goodwood show for three years in a row, and prospects were bright.



▲ Jersey herd

Simmentaler cows carrying Wagyu embryos ▼



During 1994 Oak Valley negotiated a programme to supply the Pick 'n Pay supermarket group with weekly batches of 75 lambs which had spent 30 days in the feedlot prior to shipment. This contract continued until the decision was taken in 1998 to cease sheep farming operations. The lamb was branded "Oak Valley Pasture Prime" in store, and such was the success of the initiative that the feedlot was not able to keep up with the demand despite only one store being used for the trial. The meat sold out within 3 days of reaching the shelves at Table View branch and the customers were queuing for more.

A change agent in the fortunes of the livestock division was an Australian by the name of Peter Jarmin who was travelling the world in the mid 1970's. Peter was referred to Oak Valley by David Susman, the then managing director of the Woolworths group.

Peter had owned a sheep farm in South Australia and his own father was a producer and wholesaler of the same clover seeds that Oak Valley used in its pasture establishment programmes. His knowledge of pasture farming led to a transformation of the carrying capacity of Oak Valley's dryland pastures. On his recommendation modern machinery was imported from Australia to work the

lands more productively. Peter spent 3 years at Oak Valley and even started his own business as a pasture consultant in the Western Cape.

The forced switch to cattle in 1998 in the wake of the stock theft and dog attacks saw the introduction of the Simmentaler breed onto Oak Valley. The animals were farmed for beef production but the switch caused the momentum that had been built with sheep farming to be temporarily lost. Oak Valley had to start from scratch even though the 600 hectares of pasture was still available for stock farming.

Oat hay was produced annually on roughly 80 hectares of the pasture area. The oat hay was cut and baled in the late spring and served as a food source during the off-season. Silage was also produced to supplement the available natural grass feed.

In 2004 a marketing initiative was commenced with Oak Valley beef offered direct to the public under the Oak Valley Pasture Prime brand. An order form was available for downloading from the website and orders grew slowly but surely, mainly by word of mouth.

As a result of the relative lack of profitability of extensive cattle farming in

high-value Elgin, a decision was taken in late 2007 to import the famous Wagyu breed, originally from Japan, where Kobe beef, as it was called, had developed a reputation for being the most flavoursome and tender beef in the world. 29 fertilized embryos were initially imported from Australia followed by a further 15 shortly thereafter.

Wagyu beef is recognised for its intense marbling and is high in unsaturated fat making it a healthier eating option. The price of the meat in Australia was more expensive by many multiples than standard beef, and the novelty value of this product on the South African market made it a promising addition to the livestock offering.

The old disbanded feedlot building, which had previously been used for the rounding off of lambs for the market was completely refurbished and made ready for the Wagyu project. An automated massage machine was imported to massage the Wagyu in line with best Japanese practice. Despite a disappointing 38% take from the original embryo implants, Oak Valley had 40 pure bred Wagyu stud animals by the end of 2013.

Similarly, in 2008 a piggery was constructed in order to produce porkers in the Iberico style which were free-range

and fed on acorns collected from the 4,000 oak trees on the property. The piggery was constructed using equipment imported from Spain and batches of experimental Jamón were produced.

The free-range concept is very much aligned with the requirements of the modern consumer who demands meat grown in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

By 2012 there were over 200 free range pigs and 42 tons of acorns were collected as a feed source to supplement the standard pig meal.

In 2013 a modern sow unit was built, again using imported Spanish equipment. Farming losses had been unacceptably high but the introduction of modern equipment utilising computer controlled heated lamps led to a substantial improvement in mortality rates. A production level of just under 1,000 pigs a year was forecasted.

Thus it was that pigs, initially introduced by Sir Antonie Viljoen in the early 1900's again formed a part of the Oak Valley livestock story.



▲ Wagyu calf

Free-range acorn-fed pigs ▼





The Pool Room Restaurant

The opening of The Pool Room Restaurant in 2012 was a significant step in the future development of Oak Valley as a tourism destination in its own right.

In addition to becoming an extraordinary culinary attraction, The Pool Room houses a wine tasting bar and deli, which showcase the estate wines, pasture reared meats and freshly baked breads.

One can expect views of lovely tree-shaded gardens, oak forests and mountain backdrops while overlooking the swimming pool and terrace. The restaurant offers delicious country-inspired cuisine with a Mediterranean slant. Fresh ingredients are sourced from the farm where possible, including free-range grass-fed beef, acorn-fed pork, charcuterie, seasonal vegetables picked from the restaurant garden and freshly baked artisanal breads from the wood-burning oven.

Oak Valley's Wagyu beef – a delicacy and rarity in South Africa – is also on offer from time to time depending on availability. Wagyu is a Japanese breed known for its intense marbling and flavour. The restaurant features a custom built wood-fired grill designed to optimise the flavour profile of Oak Valley's meats.

Gourmet Picnics on the expansive lawns set in the natural beauty of the homestead gardens also form part of the food offering.

The premise behind The Pool Room is idealistic in many ways. It stands for everything that makes Oak Valley great – an uncompromising belief in the integrity and quality of its farm-grown products.

It is the quintessential pasture to plate experience.



Tourism

CHAPTER 10



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▲ Quintessential pasture to place experience

Absa Cape Epic 2011 ▼



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Mountain Biking

During the course of 2007, Pieter Visser, the Oak Valley winemaker, set about building the trails that together form The Oak Valley Mountain Biking Experience. With Pieter himself being a keen mountain biker, the focus is on single-track, which is divided into 3 trails, including the Green Route (14km) for the whole family, the Red Route (24km) for the more energetic riders and the Black Route (32km) for technical riders.

The trails consist of 90% well-maintained singletrack, with bridges over farm fences and streams, making it a highly enjoyable ride. The rider experience includes beautiful natural scenery, forests of ancient oaks, vineyards, apple and pear orchards and trails that criss-cross over open grass pastures where the cattle graze as one cycles past. The trails are set against the stunning backdrop of the protected Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve on the slopes of the Groenlandberg Mountain.

The project was given a major boost when the Absa Cape Epic, the largest multi-staged MTB race in the world – and arguably the toughest too – chose Oak Valley as a location for the first time in 2008. Many of the world's top riders make up the ranks of the 1,200 strong field of competitors and the race is

broadcast in over 175 countries worldwide. It is the most viewed biking event after the Tour de France with over 8,000 hours of global TV coverage.

FNB Wines2Whales is another multi-stage event growing in popularity and using Oak Valley as its preferred venue. This event takes its riders through the Groenlandberg Mountains and neighbouring wine farms until reaching Walker Bay, the world's premier whale watching destination.

Mountain biking is the fastest growing sport in South Africa at the present time and Oak Valley is at the forefront of this exciting sporting trend.



▲ Absa Cape Epic Mountain Bike stage race

1902 Cottage ▼

1902 Cottage Rental

1902 Cottage is a historic stylishly renovated 1-bedroom and one of the oldest buildings on the farm. This self-catering cottage has one large loft bedroom upstairs and an adjoining bathroom. Downstairs is an open plan kitchenette, lounge, dining area and adjoining bathroom.

In tandem with the growth of MTB as a sport, the cottage has become a popular short-term rental with bikers and tourists alike. 1902 is within easy riding distance of the highly rated Oak Valley trails.









OAK VALLEY ESTATE

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