

GILBERT PHILLIPS

By Paul Foster

As a sportsman a surgeon and lover of women and wine, Gilbert Phillips was a larger-than-life individual. He seemed to succeed in every adventure and at university excelled academically while becoming both a top oarsman and boxer. He went on to be one of Sydney's best sailors and his standing in medicine was such that when Patton was injured in the push into Europe it was Phillips that the US Army flew from England to operate on their General.

It was in England, when Phillips was engaged in tertiary study, that he furthered his knowledge not just of wine but of the notions of nineteenth century English socialism. The sort of thinking that saw the emergence of the co-operative movement and which in Australia spawned organisations like Dairy Farmers and the NRMA. Back home, Phillips followed its idealism and set up a non-for-profit company that would source and sell wine for share-holding members at best-possible prices. Gathering together a group of friends, he founded The Wine Society. That was in 1946.

The Society is still alive and well and these days boasts some 60,000 members from around Australia. A portrait of Phillips in the green gown of a surgeon stares down across the boardroom but the principal way that Phillips is remembered is in the Dozens of premium wines that the Society makes available to its members. The Gilbert Phillips Dozens are released regularly and comprise wines that the Society's tasting panel deems well above the average. The Dozens come in various formulas and frequently comprise special parcels that the Society has been able to source.

Two interesting wines, each of which made delicious drinking, that The Society has included in recent Dozens are these.

The Society Dr Gilbert Phillips Reserve Hunter Valley Semillon 2002

Classic Semillon of the style that used to be called Hunter Chablis. Delicate, yet full of flavour, with lots of fresh acidity in a long dry palate. Straw, honey and lemon. The source remains a secret.

Mitchelton Cabernet Sauvignon 2006

Mitchelton's premium Cabernet, normally available only at cellar door. An outstanding wine combining finesse with intensity of flavour. Black plum, blackcurrant, blackberry fruit, charry oak and a firm tannic finish.