Richard Hamilton - Wed 17 Oct 2012:

Family members, distinguished guests, ladies & gentlemen,

Welcome to our place.

When I opened my winery in 1972 a Hardy wine family elder welcomed me as the 12th man. There were then only eleven other wineries in the region.

There are now one hundred and eleven.

I was new, but I came with credentials. I was a fifth generation winemaker. I was raised in a vineyard and I was weaned on Hamilton Ewell Moselle.

An advantage of having such a history is that over generations we have seen the wine booms and busts arrive, recede and recur. And we have seen them out.

In the words of Rudyard Kipling:

“To meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same”

We are here today to recognise and honour the contribution our forebears made to South Australia in wine, medicine, surgery, the arts, law, government, history and lifestyle.

We are celebrating the anniversary of the arrival of my ancestor Richard Hamilton in the newborn colony of South Australia 175 years ago.

To place that in perspective, 1837 was the year Queen Victoria became Queen of England and elsewhere, Charles Dickens published ‘Oliver Twist’, photography was invented, Samuel Morse patented the telegraph and Wild Bill Hickok was born. I’m sure there is a connection there somewhere.

Richard, the First, was a tailor in the English town of Dover and I am cut from his cloth. He appreciated the wines of Bordeaux and may even have imported some on the side. He bought land on Long Island in America and was intending to emigrate there.

Richard’s young son William was cabin boy on a vessel which landed at Kangaroo Island in 1836. When he returned to England he gave glowing reports to his father on the opportunities of South Australia. Richard changed his original plan to move to Long Island, and that’s why we are dining here today and not in New York.

Richard, my great, great grandfather brought some of the first grape vines to South Australia and in 1837 established the colony’s earliest vineyards at Marion. Some claim that John Reynell preceded him by, oh, minutes, but lets just agree that they are wrong. History is written by the winners.

The Hamiltons pioneered grape growing and wine making in early Adelaide. When Richard died his son Henry built the venture into a large, commercial enterprise and Frank Hamilton, my grandfather, took it to the next level.

My uncle, Syd Hamilton, was a technical genius and innovator, in the use of refrigeration to make more delicate table wine styles. At the age of 76 Syd purchased land at Coonawarra and created Leconfield.

My father, Burton Hamilton was my strongest influence. Given my desire to pursue a medical as well as a wine career I would not have been able to establish both without Burton’s encouragement, experience,
wisdom, hands-on hard work and gently persuasive cellar door demeanour. His portrait graces one my most beloved wines, the Burton’s Vineyard.

Despite our dour, Anglo-Scottish heritage, the Hamiltons were pioneers of multiculturalism.

John Zeeck, a Russian winemaker who escaped the revolution, studied winemaking in Germany, came to Australia in the 1920s and was a mentor to my Uncle Syd.

Maurice Ou was of Scottish-Chinese origin and studied winemaking at Montpellier in France. Maurice was a magician of a winemaker, a great inspiration to me and many of his skills stood me on good stead in my own venture. I owe him a great deal and I am delighted to welcome Maurice’s son Serge here today.

While we draw on our long history and experience, we are equally committed to excellence to innovation and always were. We grow our own grapes, make our own wines and we stand proudly behind the fruits of our labour. We were the first to plant Chardonnay in McLaren Vale in 1975.

The nature of families being what it is, and blood being thicker than wine, various Hamiltons have since bred wineries as prolifically as my forebears bred Hamiltons, and I would like to acknowledge my brother Hugh and his daughter Mary, and my cousins Robert and Mark.

In 2007 we consolidated our company so as to clarify and unify its public face: ‘Leconfield - Home of Richard Hamilton Wines’.

This building is a modern interpretation of an Australian homestead with a distinctive Danish influence - and we may thank my once Danish wife Jette for that inspiration.

This building was designed to maximise the view of our vineyards and the Willunga escarpment; a sight of which I will never tire.

I proudly acknowledge our staff, in particular winemakers Paul Gordon and Tim Bailey, General Manager Simon Linden, vineyard managers Bendt Rasmussen and Lee Harding, Marketing & Sales Manager Mark Dimberline and Kate Mooney our Events Coordinator who coordinated this event. And to all other staff, thank you.

And of course an overwhelming thank you to my wonderful wife Jette and equally wonderful children, Annasofia and Thomas.

If I have missed a distant relative or anyone else of importance and hurt your feelings, the Doctor’s advice is ... to rub wine on it.

Our combined aim is to remain a family-owned company and to continue to make world class wines.

Ours is a story worth telling and well worth celebrating. We are delighted to have you celebrate it with us.

At the beginning of this speech I mentioned that 100 new wineries have sprouted in McLaren Vale since I started here.

This is my advice to the newcomers:

Take heart.

It’s the first 175 years that are the toughest.