

# GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (May 2003)

By Rob Upson

## HENRY LEGGO

For centuries, the mainstay of the economy of the English county of Cornwall was tin and copper mining. As mining methods, implements and machinery improved, the Cornish miners became experts in their field. This expertise was put to good use on the Bendigo and other goldfields. However, not all the Cornishmen that found their way to Bendigo in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were miners. Many had occupations such as builders, tradesmen and businessmen.

One such Cornish family were the Leggo brothers. Arthur Victor Leggo ran a metallurgical works in California Gully and the father, W.E.Leggo, acted as the firm's Australia wide representative. Arthur Leggo also invented the Leggo ore-roasting furnace and made munitions for the Federal Government in the First World War. A second brother was E. Hedley Leggo and a third, born at Eaglehawk in 1869, was to establish a company whose name would become synonymous with Italian style cuisine.

In 1879 a Mr. F.R.Rickards arrived in Melbourne and began work as a clerk at the biscuit manufacturers, T.B.Guest & Co. In 1881 he set up a food wholesaling business in High St. Bendigo and it was here, the following year, that he employed a 13-year-old boy, named Henry Madren Leggo. By 1888 Rickards and Leggo had become partners in the firm with the major brand being Hercules Tea. In 1890 Henry married Edith Susan Edwards.

In 1894 Henry Leggo's initiative and business skills led him to buy out Rickards' interest and the company then traded as H.M.Leggo & Co. The next year he bought a nearby skating rink in Short St. and converted it into a factory for the manufacture of vinegar, pickles, sauces and other grocery items under his Excelsior Brand. A further expansion took place when H.M.Leggo & Co. bought the wholesale coffee and spice business of the late William Budden in 1899.

In 1926 a section of the organization moved to Abbotsford. In the same year Leggo's had gained high recognition when it was awarded the Champion Gold Medal for its tomato sauce at the Bendigo Spring Show. Other tomato based products and Italian cooking sauces were soon to make an appearance. In 1955 the Company set up a tomato processing plant at Epsom in the former factory of Henry Williams Pty. Ltd.

In 1958 Harvest Foods acquired the Leggo Company and the manufacture of its products were eventually transferred to the Harvest Foods premises in Moorabin. In 1967 Plumrose took over Harvest Foods and 10 years later built a new processing plant at Echuca. The manufacture of Leggo's products was now transferred to this plant. In 1995 the J.R.Simplot Company of the USA took over the Echuca plant. This company had by now acquired the processing of other brand names such as Herbert Adams, Edgell, Birds Eye, Chiko and Nannas.

Henry Madren Leggo died in 1938 and his wife Edith died a few months earlier in the same year. The brand name Leggo is still part of today's cuisine.

*Sauces:*

- *Where Now Cousin Jack? By Ruth Hopkins*
- *Simplot Australia Pty Ltd website*
- *The Annals of Bendigo*

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