

One of the many interesting questions about the history of the South Australian olive industry is why was it so successful – modestly successful but successful nonetheless and certainly more successful than we would have predicted. The early colonists and their agriculture were British and Northern European. Few had more than a superficial understanding of Mediterranean horticulture. None had studied olive culture or had any substantial experience of cultivating and processing olives. Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, South Australia boasted over 70,000 productive olive trees, at least 4 commercial oil presses producing up to 200,000 litres of oil per year and an industry that some predicted would soon rival those of Mediterranean Europe!

It took less than three years to prove that the South Australian climate and soils favoured the cultivation of the olive. Added to which many colonists displayed considerable ingenuity in adapting what they did know – British horticultural practice – to what they didn't, including how to grow such unfamiliar crops as olives. These factors, however, explain only the initial, horticultural achievements of the industry, not its long-term development. To improve on their early success, South Australian olive and oil producers needed specialist knowledge. For this they looked almost exclusively to France.

French olive culture influenced the South Australian olive industry, I propose, in three ways. Firstly, for mid-nineteenth century British, the south of France epitomised the Mediterranean and Mediterranean agriculture. Southern France was *the* major centre of olive oil production and trade; it was logical, therefore, to imitate the French. Secondly, because of the authoritative position of the French olive industry, South Australian olive enthusiasts were advised almost exclusively by French sources of information, especially reference books and access to 'experts'. French-trained horticulturists settled in South

Australia and, conversely, influential colonists toured French olive-growing areas.

Thirdly, because of both of these factors, the most direct, concrete and lasting French influence on South Australian olive culture derived from the importation of olive varieties from France. Their prevalence in the olive population of South Australia persists in the surviving colonial groves even now.

Olives were introduced into South Australia in 1836; by 1844 there were about 12 olive trees, probably all different varieties. At least some of these trees, including the original tree, were seedlings; the fruit would have been small, tree yields low or highly variable and fertile trees difficult to propagate. By the early 1840s, olive promoters recognised the need for known, "good sorts" of olives.

In July 1844 the Directors of the South Australian Company resolved that "the [London] manager make enquiries as to the procuring [of] good olive trees and mulberry plants for South Australia"¹. David McLaren, the London Manager, advised William Giles, the South Australian Manager, of the Board's decision:

The Board thinks that the climate of South Australia and most probably the soil will be found particularly favourable for the production of oil and silk.... We shall be happy to hear what progress is made on their cultivation and to know what facilities there are for procuring plants... it may be necessary to get them from the South of France.²

In fact the Company did not wait for Giles's reply and decided to source its olives from France. On 13 September, the South Australian Company ordered "50 olive plants from

¹ Mortlock Library, BRG 42/2, South Australian Company, Minutes of Board of Directors, 19 July 1844.

² Mortlock Library, BRG 42/27, South Australian Company, Letter, David McLaren to William Giles, London, 8 August 1844.

Mess. R. Gowers to be forwarded to London properly packed in order to being sent to Mr Giles at the end of the year. "³ Gowers procured olive 'truncheons' of known, good varieties, from a number of reputable nurseries in the region. These were shipped from Marseilles, via London, to Adelaide in April 1845, arriving in July.

Unaware that the Company had already ordered the olive stock – he didn't receive this information until February⁴ – in January 1845 Giles solicited the advice of George Stevenson, being "worthy of credit in these matters"⁵. Stevenson's subsequent memorandum recommended "that [the Company] should send to Provence both for the best mulberry and olive plants – a couple of hundred strongly rooted young trees packed carefully in boxes and forwarded so as to arrive here in May or June would be stock sufficient to begin with...."⁶ Quite independently, then, both the British and South Australian branches of the South Australian Company preferred to source olives from the south of France.

In fact 51 olive trees survived the voyage "⁷. The five varieties were typically Provençal:

30 oliviers Salonnen, 17 oliviers Blanquet, 1 olivier Verdale, 2 oliviers Bouquettier, [and] 1 olivier Gros Redonnau⁸.

³ Mortlock Library, BRG 42/2, South Australian Company, Minutes, 13 September 1844.

⁴ Mortlock Library, BRG42/27, South Australian Company, Letter, McLaren to Giles, 14 October 1844

⁵ Mortlock Library, BRG 42/29, South Australian Company, Letter, William Giles to David McLaren, Adelaide, 24 January 1845

⁶ Mortlock Library, BRG 42/37, South Australian Company, George Stevenson on the Cultivation of the Olive, Mullberry &c, Memorandum for William Giles, North Adelaide, 27 January 1845

⁷ Mortlock Library, BRG 42/9, Joseph Watts [Acting Manager] to David McLaren, Adelaide, 2 August 1845

⁸ William Boothby, *The Olive, its Cultivation and Products...*, 1878. Also Samuel Davenport, *Cultivation of the Olive and Manufacture of its Fruit*, 1875.

Giles consigned these to John Bailey, Colonial Botanist and a gifted professional nurseryman, to be planted in the Company's 'Park Farm', adjacent to the land that Giles had recently leased to Bailey for his "Hackney Nursery"⁹.

Ironically the South Australian Company forgot about their olive trees almost as soon as they were planted. More important matters diverted the Company's attention – the threat of Corn Law reform in England, the discovery of copper at Burra and the construction of the Port Adelaide railway. Also when Bailey bought out his lease and adjacent blocks in 1853, he effectively purchased the imported olive trees and their progeny¹⁰.

Bailey was certainly skilled at propagating. When the nursery stock from the "Hackney Gardens" was auctioned, from May to August 1858, the catalogue listed over 17,000 olive trees¹¹. These could have only originated from the 51 French imports.

Moreover, all of these trees were eventually distributed and account for the major olive groves planted in and around Adelaide until the end of the 1880. In 1864, Samuel Davenport, arguably the "father of the Australian olive industry", transplanted the surviving original French trees¹² which, like Bailey, he used as nursery stock. Similarly, from 1854 to the late 1870s, the Adelaide City Council used Bailey's olive trees to re-vegetate the Parklands and city parks. In 1875 the Council estimated that it had planted 30,000 olive trees in the Parklands and city squares, including about 6000 around the Old

⁹ Mortlock Library, BRG 24/28, Letter, William Giles to John Bailey, Adelaide, 24 June 1844; BRG 42/9, Joseph Watts [Acting Manager] to David McLaren, Adelaide, 2 August 1845

¹⁰ Mortlock Library, BRG 42/10, South Australian Company, Register of Company Lands, sect 256, Hackney

¹¹ *Catalogue* xxxx

¹² xxxx

Adelaide Gaol¹³. Ten years later, Paolo Villanis, a Piedmontese vine and olive expert, inspected the Parkland olive groves on behalf of the Council: "I find that some of them have exactly the form and character of corresponding varieties cultivated in France", he reported, distinguishing four main varieties:

"a small olive which in France is known as Franc Olivier", the "Olea angulosa de Gouan... very much cultivated at Montpellier", the "Cournaud, very much cultivated in the South of France" and "La Pointue"¹⁴.

Although Villanis also identified several Spanish and Italian varieties, French varieties dominated.

Olive trees were, of course, imported from elsewhere. According to Davenport, by 1886 "South Australia [had] become rich in the possession of olive stocks of reputation secured to her from Malaga, Gibraltar and Lisbon; from Cannes, Nice, and the south of France via Marseilles; and from Florence and Bari via Brindisi."¹⁵ However, until well into the twentieth century – and with the one exception of Boothby's Lucca, imported in 1877 – non-French varieties were not propagated or widely distributed. France remained the source of choice throughout the nineteenth century and trees of French extraction proliferated.

Davenport's selection of olive stock illustrates this preference for French varieties. As early as 1843 Davenport wrote to his father that he "intended to get if possible a number

¹³ xxxx *The South Australian Register*, 17 June 1875

¹⁴ Adelaide City Council, C15 798/1885, Letter, Paolo Villanis to Town Clerk, Adelaide, 31 March 1885

¹⁵ Samuel Davenport, "The Olive in South Australia" in J.F. Congrove, *South Australia... a Handbook for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, 1886, p.100

of olives from Montpellier..."¹⁶; not only did he write himself to "the south of France", he also asked his father to order on his behalf olives, almonds and also "the most approved books" from Montpellier¹⁷; Davenport did not, however, plant olives until at least 1852 and not seriously until 1864. However, throughout his long career as an olive producer, Davenport continued to favour French varieties.

The table summarises the stock that Davenport is known to have imported, or at least ordered, from Europe, from 1863 to 1878.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Number of trees</i>	<i>Varieties</i>
1863–64	France (Marseilles) from Bonnefort nursery, Lyons	40?	13 L'Arabancier le Blanquier le Caillet Amandier Courniau Picholine Mouraou Odorant D'Espagne Verdale Saourin Vermillaou Boutillanes ¹⁸
1877	France (Tarascon)	20	10 Plante de Soleil? Picholine Verdale Blanquet Le Noir

¹⁶ B.S. Baldwin (ed.), "Letters of Samuel Davenport, Chiefly to his Father, George Davenport, 1842–49", *South Australiana*, 19xx; letter 6 October 1843, Adelaide, p.41

¹⁷ B.S. Baldwin (ed.), "Letters of Samuel Davenport, Chiefly to his Father, George Davenport, 1842–49", *South Australiana*, 19xx; letter 21 October 1843, Adelaide, p.43; letter 2 December 1843, Macclesfield, p.54

¹⁸ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1863-64

			Le Pleurier 4 others ¹⁹
1877	France (Grasse)	2	1 Olivier de Grasse (Caillet) ²⁰
1877	France (Nice)	24	5 Large D'Espagne 'Best in the World' Boutillan Noustrale ²¹
1877	Italy (Florence)	12	6 Frantoio Leccina 4 others ²²
1877	Italy (Bari)	12	4? Arecuzzo Paesana Monopole Grosse di Spagna
1883	Spain	8	3 ²³

Just under three quarters of the trees and over two thirds of the varieties were imported from France. In 1870 Davenport estimated that he had 600 or 700 olive trees, "all of French varieties"²⁴.

Davenport was hardly representative of early South Australian olive growers and not producers shared his preference for French varieties. Rather, during its period of growth from the 1870s to the 1890s, Davenport and his Company dominated the olive industry. And, through his practice of giving specimens to other nurseries to propagate as well as

¹⁹ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1877-8

²⁰ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1877-8

²¹ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1877-8

²² Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1877-8

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²⁴ *The South Australian Register*, 20 July 1870

through his own nursery, Davenport's predominantly French olive trees spread throughout South Australia and the rest of the country.

Not only French varieties and trees but also French ideas and methods dominated the olive industry. Again Davenport illustrates this. "It is from France chiefly that I have any information on the olive"²⁵ he acknowledged in *Some New Industries for South Australia*, published in 1864 on his return from Britain and Europe. Davenport referred almost exclusively to France, French varieties, French olive nurseries, French cultivation and production methods and, most importantly, French reference books. The list of recommended "books for reference on the olive" are all French:

"Traité sur La Culture de l'Olivier", par "Barjavel", prix 4 francs; "Traité de l'Olivier", par "Amoureux," prix 5 francs; "L'Olivier, sa Culture et ses Produits" par "Raibaud L'Ange," prix 2 francs.²⁶

He even provided details for a reliable bookseller in Marseilles. Elsewhere in *Some New Industries...* he cites two other sources: "Reynaud of Nîmes", presumably his *Guide pratique de la culture de l'olivier: son fruit et son huile*²⁷ and [Leydier's] *Maison Rustique*²⁸.

Then, in his lecture to the South Australian Chamber of Manufactures on 19 July 1870, Davenport again cited only French sources and added two more: the Proceedings of the Central Society of Agriculture at Montpellier in 1852 and other writings of Louis-César

²⁵ Samuel Davenport, *Some New Industries for South Australia*, Adelaide, 1864, p.7

²⁶ Samuel Davenport, *Some New Industries for South Australia*, Adelaide, 1864, p.22

²⁷ Joseph Reynaud, *Guide pratique de la culture de l'olivier: son fruit et son huile*, Nîmes, 1863

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Cazalis-Allut²⁹. More than *Some New Industries...*, in one or another of its published forms³⁰ this address was highly influential, confirmed Davenport as an authority in his own right and thereby reinforced the pre-eminence of French ideas in local olive culture.

All other South Australian writers on olives relied on French sources. In 1871, for example, Arthur Page translated portions of Alexis Riondet's *L'Olivier*³¹ for his pamphlet on olives. And, second only in influence to Davenport's books, William Boothby's *The Olive: Its Culture and Products in the South of France and Italy* lists nine French 'authorities consulted' compared to two relatively minor Italian sources³².

In France:

Amoureux, P.J., on the Olive
M. Couture, curé de Mirimas, on the Olive
J.A. Risso, Natutal History of Nice
M. Reynaud, of Nimes, on the Culture of the Olive
M, Gustave Henzé, Inspector-General of Agriculture, 1870 — Reports
M.A. Riondet, Hyères District
H. Raband, L'Ange, on the Olive
A. Coutance, 1877, on the Olive
Signor Giolo Cappi, 1875, on the Cultivation of the Olive

In Italy:

Dr. Bennett, Shores of the Mediterranean
Reports—1876—on the Condition of Agricultural Products in Italy, by the
Department of the Minister of Agriculture³³

Of its 42 pages, 75% of Boothby's book was devoted to French olive culture.

²⁹ *The South Australian Register*, 20 July 1870

³⁰ *The South Australian Register*, 20 July 1870; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Chamber of Manufactures*

³¹ William Boothby, *The Olive in the South of France and Italy*, Adelaide, 1878, p.8; A. Page, *The Olive*, np, nd; Alexis Riondet, *L'Olivier*, Paris, 1867

Coincidentally Davenport was in Europe at the same time as Boothby — in fact they met at Brindisi. His 1877 notebook lists 31 books that he purchased on the trip, all of them French, most on viticulture but including several on general agricultural topics relevant to olive producers³⁴. Similarly, preparing to leave Tunisia to take up his position as South Australian Government Viticulturist and Viticultural Instructor in 1892, Arthur Perkins purchased reference books for the new Roseworthy Agricultural College; again these were all French, again mostly on viticulture but again several on general agriculture; he also subscribed to *Progrès Agricole*, *Messenger agricole du Midi*, *Journal d'Agriculture*, and *Anales Agronomiques*, all of which included articles on olive culture³⁵. As Principal of Roseworthy (1904–1911) and especially as Director of Agriculture (1911–1936) Perkins indulged his personal and professional interest in olive culture³⁶; perhaps not coincidentally, while he headed the Department of Agriculture, his staff invariably recommended French varieties, 'French' methods of propagation and pruning and so on³⁷.

Perkins was one of only two immigrants to South Australian who could claim any formal training or substantial European experience in olive culture. Chronologically the first was Paolo Villanis, a Piedmontese civil engineer and agriculturist. On Davenport's recommendation, Villanis emigrated to South Australia in 1881, was contracted by Davenport, Thomas Hardy, and others to supervise their vineyards and in 1883 by the

³² William Boothby, *The Olive in the South of France and Italy*, Adelaide, 1878

³³ William Boothby, *The Olive in the South of France and Italy*, Adelaide, 1878, p.[43]

³⁴ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1877-8

³⁵ Jeff Daniels (ed), *The Personal Letterbooks of Professor A.J. Perkins*, Roseworthy, 1982

³⁶ See, for example, A. J. Perkins, "On the Scope in South Australia for the Extension of Olive Groves", *Journal of Agriculture of S.A.*, January 1917, pp.443–462

³⁷ For examples, xxxx

Adelaide City Council to tend the Corporation's olive plantations³⁸. Although Italian, Villanis appears to have been much influenced by French olive practice. His list of "the best varieties of olives cultivated in France and Italy" included only French varieties³⁹. And his monograph on olives, *The Cultivation of the Olive and the Methods of Making Olive Oil as recommended by the best Italian and French Authors...*⁴⁰ is based on his experience in both Italy and France and refers equally to both French and Italian practices.

Perkin's credentials were more formal and unequivocally French. As well as "personal experience acquired in earlier years in Mediterranean countries"⁴¹ Perkins studied at the École Nationale d'Agriculture at Montpellier from 1887 to 1890. After graduating he returned to Tunisia, at that time a French protectorate; his letters to Samuel Davenport indicate that he was personally interested and experienced in olive culture⁴².

Leaders of the olive industry recognised the contribution made by experienced *oléoculteurs* such as Perkins and Villanis and tried to attract others to South Australia, particularly experienced, practical agricultural labourers. As early as 1874, the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society considered "the advisability of importing laborers from France, skilled in Vine Culture, the making of Wine and Cognac Brandy, as well as those having a knowledge of the preparation for market of Olives, Rasins, Figs, Prunes,

³⁸ Adelaide City Council, C15, Paolo Villanis to Mayor of Adelaide, Adelaide, 9 July 1883

³⁹ Adelaide City Council, C15, Paolo Villanis to Mayor of Adelaide, Adelaide, 13 July 1883

⁴⁰ Paolo Villanis, *The Cultivation of the Olive and the Methods of Making Olive Oil as recommended by the best Italian and French Authors together with the Results Obtained after long practice*, Adelaide, 1884

⁴¹ See, for example, A. J. Perkins, "On the Scope in South Australia for the Extension of Olive Groves", *Journal of Agriculture of S.A.*, January 1917, pp.443

&c."⁴³. The Emigration Agent in London, Francis Dutton, advised Samuel Davenport, then President of the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society and also Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, that he was

entirely mistaken in supposing that these classes of persons are now suffering from the combined ills of war and vine and silkworm disease. As a matter of fact all accounts from France agree that for a quarter of a century there have not been so exceptionally large harvests of all sorts, wine included, as France has this year been blest with, and that consequently the laboring classes in those districts are in anything but the pitiable condition Mr Davenport supposes; the French, moreover, are not an emigrating nation, ...[and] I should only be deluding you if I held out any hopes of these people being induced to emigrate to South Australia unless free passages and engagements guaranteed on arrival could be offered to them.⁴⁴

Davenport was more successful in persuading a small number of French vine and olive pruners to come to South Australia but only temporarily and without Government sponsorship⁴⁵. Plans to attract French vigneron and olive farmers as permanent settlers, like the Barossa Germans, were completely unsuccessful.

The olive industry was influenced less by European visitors than by local olive and wine enthusiasts visiting Europe, and mostly the south of France. The P&O Line's introduction of an Egyptian route to Australia and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 facilitated these nineteenth century study tours either *en route* to or *en retour* from Britain. Here again Samuel Davenport was the most frequent traveller, making five trips to England from 1850 to 1888⁴⁶, two of which included France and Italy, in 1863 and 1877.

⁴² Jeff Daniels (ed), *The Personal Letterbooks of Professor A.J. Perkins*, Roseworthy, 1982, p.xxi

⁴³ Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society, *Report for the Year ending March 31 1875*, p.10

⁴⁴ Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society, *Report for the Year ending March 31 1875*, p.46

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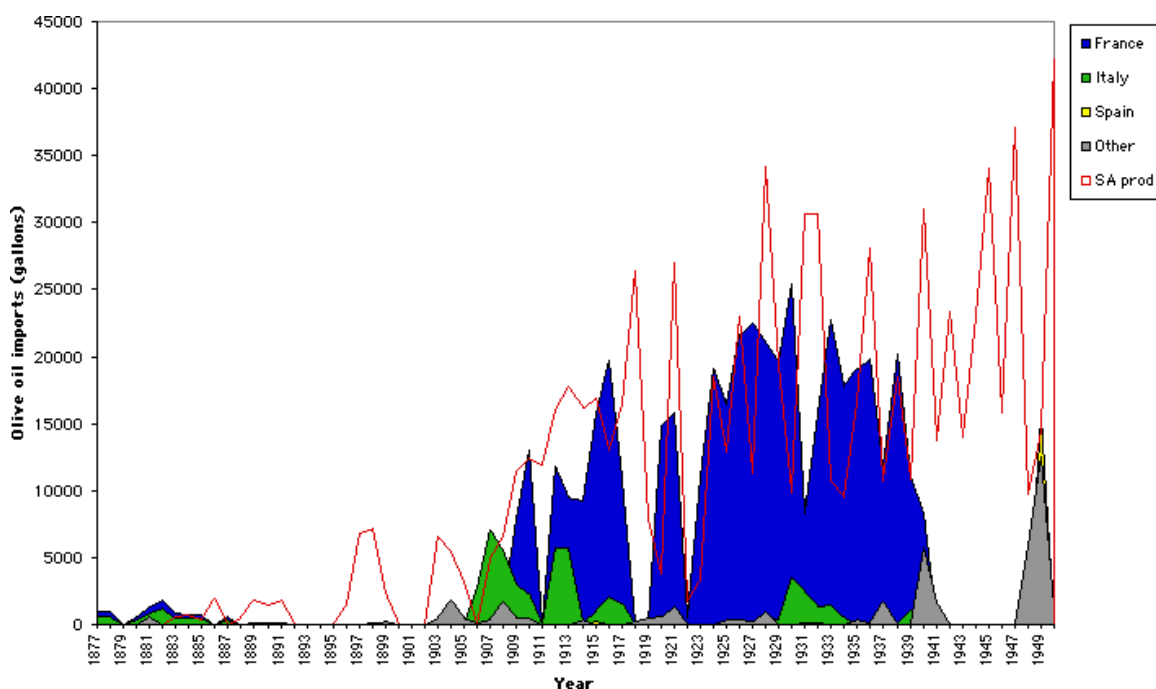
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Davenport's diary and notebooks provide details of the 1863 trip. He disembarked in Europe at Corfu on 24 May and arrived in Venice about 28 March from where he travelled relatively quickly across Northern Italy, reaching Genoa on 12 April, a total of 14 days in Italy, only few of them spent in major olive growing areas. He arrived in France, at Mentone on 17 April and remained in the south of France for over a month, visiting Cannes, Marseilles, Tarasçon, Montpellier (twice), Cette, and Avignon before leaving from Lyon on 20 May for Geneva, Berne, Paris and London. This French sectors of this trip occupy more than three quarters of Davenport's notebook; it details meetings with expert wine-makers and olive producers, visits to groves and pressoirs and lavender distilleries, notes from books on olives, methods for pruning and shaping trees, orders for olive cuttings and other plants, sketches of presses and so on⁴⁷. The itineraries of Boothby's and Davenport's tours, both in 1877, and Perkin's trip in 1910 reveal a similar reverence for the south of France as the premier olive growing region.

Such colonial encounters with the south of France illustrate the third and most pervasive way in which French olive culture influenced the South Australian olive industry. Until about 1910, France dominated world olive oil production and while the South Australian olive industry needed an archetype, France was the logical choice. It was also the easy option; the colonial squireocracy was more likely to read, write and speak French than Italian or Spanish; certainly Davenport, Boothby and Perkins did. It was also a more acceptable model than Italy, Spain or Greece.

⁴⁷ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1863-64

French influence manifested in intangible but important ways. In particular, until the mid-1940s, French olive oil defined the taste of olive oil for Australians. Not only did French *négociants* dominate world trade during the nineteenth century, French imports dominated the South Australian olive industry. The graph charts olive oil imports by country of origin as well as estimated South Australian production from 1870 to 1950. Over this period, nearly 90% of imported oil originated in France (less than 8% from Italy, less than 1% each from Egypt, Greece and Turkey, less than 0.5% from Spain!).



Although local manufacturers and bottlers protested that local oil was not adulterated with questionable imported olive oil, all of this would have been blended with (low quality) South Australian oil. Consequently, despite low consumption of olive oil, when South Australians did use olive oil in the kitchen, it would have been at least partially French oil. Not surprisingly, therefore, South Australians described the taste of olive oil in terms that are regarded still as typically "French": soft, fruity, subtle and balanced

rather than astringent, peppery, strong and structured, characteristics which are typically (Central) "Italian".

Well into the twentieth centuries, then, French olive culture set the mould for the local olive industry. South Australians failed, however, to be influenced in the one way that would have sustained the early olive industry: increased olive and olive oil consumption. Rather than as a general culinary fat, olive oil was used sparingly to grill fish and to dress salads, neither of which were common dishes. During his trip in 1863 Davenport collected "French appertizers" and memorable meals, including some that included olives or olive oil:

Preserved olives
Anchovies in oil and *vinaigre*
Radishes butter and ham
Sausage [radishes and butter]
Prawns, scalloped oysters and cuddlefish [sic]

[?]
Lemon with chops
Lemon with fish
Roast fowel [sic] with watercress
Fish with brown bread and butter⁴⁸

For most Australians olives and olive oil remained at best a novelty, otherwise an unpalatable luxury. South Australians did not incorporate olive oil into their cuisine as much as the southern French. It would be another century before significant numbers of affluent young South Australians would have their own encounters with the south of

⁴⁸ Private Collection, Samuel Davenport, Notebook, 1863-64

France, French food and French olive oil and, as Michael Symons has argued, bring these influences back to Australia⁴⁹.

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