The introduction of olives into South Australia,1836–1845

For personal and research purposes only. © Craig Hill 2019

When South Australia was enacted in 1834, no-one anticipated the attention that olive cultivation and the production of olive oil would attract during the colony’s formative first two decades. Certainly the foremost promoters of South Australian colonisation were not publicly enthusiastic about olive cultivation and their pamphlets did not specifically name olives as a potentially valuable crop for the new colony. The main propagandist organisation, the South Australia Association, promised prospective settlers fertile soil and a congenial climate that, it maintained, would support wheat and flour, fine wool, tobacco, flax and hemp, cotton and wines, “for the production of which the soil and climate of Australia in the latitude of the proposed colony are well adapted.”. That the soil and climate of South Australia was equally well if not better adapted to the production of olives did not occur to either the promoters or the first settlers and there appear to be no references to the benefits of olive cultivation or oil manufacture for the new colony in any of the available pre-settlement literature or other sources. Yet when the *Buffalo* arrived in South Australia in December 1836 — and despite the difficulty of keeping them alive during the voyage — it carried as many as seven viable olive seedlings.

Two factors militated against but did not completely preclude the introduction of the olive: firstly, very limited knowledge of olive culture and, therefore, of the value of olives and olive oil and, secondly, ignorance of the suitability of the South Australian environment for olive production.

According to their own accounts — or lack of them — few colonists left Britain in 1836–1837 intending to grow olives, a crop with which almost all were unfamiliar. Few if any had more than a superficial knowledge and even fewer any direct experience of olive culture, the manufacture of olive oil and the main, culinary uses of olive products. This is particularly evident from the national and occupational composition of the South Australian population during its formative first two or so decades: colonists came from countries and exercised occupations in which olives and olive oil were at best exotic or, more likely, an unpalatable and unnecessary luxury on which struggling colonists would not waste valuable time or resources. Or even more likely, the small, independent farmers that the South Australian Association hoped to attract may not have even known about olives.

According to the census of 1861 — the first attempt to systematically collect and publish comprehensive statistics on the population of the colony — of a total population of 126,830 92% were of British or Australian origin and 7% were German; the French represented less than 0.1% of the population and immigrants from other Mediterranean countries were so few that they were bundled into the less than 1% of ‘Others’. Reflecting the geographical reach of the emigration agents and the Immigration Commissioners’ preference for immigrants with small farming experience, a disproportionately large number of early immigrants were from southern England where the agriculture was based on cereal crops, animal husbandry and some horticulture. To all but a few colonists, then, olives and olive oil were as foreign as their new country.

Similarly the professions of most colonists, although generally ‘agricultural’, were related more to pastoralism and broad-acre cereal-based agriculture than to horticulture and arboriculture; although 46% of the total working population of 50,406 in 1861 was engaged in ‘agricultural, horticultural and pastoral pursuits’— easily the biggest occupational group — only 663 (1.3%) described themselves as ‘horticultural, market gardeners, vignerons, gardeners, labourers &c’ and therefore likely to be at all familiar with even the basic principles of olive cultivation. Of the 13 colonist identified by Samuel Davenport as having some interest in olives in 1870, for example, only one — A[ntonio?] Tocchi — was a native of Mediterranean Europe and just two — Davenport himself and John Morphett — had spent any significant time in olive-growing areas, France and Egypt respectively. Local olive oil producers sought his advice and opinion and he was involved in the first unsuccessful attempt to press olive oil, yet Tocchi was a distiller and was never a major olive grower or successful oil manufacturer. Paradoxically, then, all of the early olive enthusiasts were Anglo-Saxon and did not have first-hand knowledge of olive production.

In contrast to their almost complete ignorance of olive culture, prospective settlers did know something about the new colony’s physical environment and could therefore deduce what crops might be suitable. Until 1836, the only descriptions of South Australia came from maritime explorers such as Flinders and his French counterparts, internal explorers such as Sturt and Barker and from whalers and sealers stationed on Kangaroo Island. Their reports — of low rainfall, high temperatures, high rates of surface evaporation, sandy soil and few rivers — depicted an environment in which the climate, landscape and vegetation were comparable with parts of Mediterranean Europe. Approximately similar latitudes of southern Australia and Spain-France-Italy, the nineteenth century theory of climatic bands based on latitude and the imperialist tendency to transfer the known of the Old World to the unknown of the New supported this Mediterranean allusion. First-hand descriptions of South Australia in the first few years of colonisation, say until 1840, compared the climate and topography of the new colony perhaps too favourably with those of Southern Europe – although these early accounts were propagandist, exaggerated the benefits of South Australia and emphasised similarities with the familiar. Robert Gouger, first Colonial Secretary and one of the early promoters of South Australia, likened the climate to that of the south of France; Gouger also wrote that "the climate of South Australia is one of the most delightful in the world. It is the climate of Italy without the sirocco"; T. Horton James claimed that the soil and climate resembled Castille; John Stephens repeated the observation of the editor of the *South Australian Gazette* that "ours is the climate of Italy; not the campagna da Roma but of Nice or Naples. The climate far surpasses France". Some colonists inferred that, again based on equivalent latitudes, the climate of South Australia was comparable to that of New South Wales and, therefore, the colony should support similar crops, including vines and olives such as were known to be cultivated successfully at, for example, the Macarthurs' properties at Elizabeth and Camden Parks.

Several of the first waves of settlers, however, were accomplished amateur horticulturists or practising gardeners whose British methods could be more or less readily adapted to non-British crops, including but not limited to olives. Their inexperience with such crops was more than compensated by their enthusiasm and dedication, their experimental approach and their conviction that horticulture in general would be essential to the survival if not to the amenity of the colony. Equipped with Loudon's *Encyclopedia of Gardening*, seeds and cuttings either from Britain or acquired on the voyage to South Australia, a few tools and the confidence –

perhaps even arrogance – of nineteenth century British colonialism, the landed settlers initiated a grand horticultural experiment. Not only olives, in the first few years of settlement the colonists introduced a broad range of horticultural crops – lemons, oranges, citrons, cumquats, grape vines, figs, mulberries, dates – most of whose cultivation was unfamiliar and whose potential was not guaranteed. Some, bananas and pineapples, failed. Others, including olives, flourished.

❦

The first olive tree(s) in South Australia were planted in the spring of 1836 by the advanced party of the South Australian Company at its temporary settlement near Kingscote on Kangaroo Island. According to Arthur Perkins, “in his reminiscences W.L. Beare, son of Thomas Hudson Beare, at the time second officer of the Company, stated that Charles Powell, gardener of the Company, planted fruit trees, olives and vine cuttings, nearly all of which grew; he also planted a mulberry tree on the island, which had come out on the *Duke of York*..” Ultimately the olive tree did not survive or was transplanted to one of the other Company gardens.

Slow to produce a commercially viable crop and resource- and labour-intensive, olive cultivation was, logically, an improbable venture for a private company settling substantially unknown land and needing a quick and certain financial return on their initial capital investment. There appears to be no documentary evidence for the Company’s interest in olives at this early stage; minutes of the Directors’ meetings, the correspondence between the Directors and the various managers and the private correspondence of Company officials offer no explanation. Olive culture was, however, consistent with the Company’s major declared objective: “the improvement and cultivation of their country land and the leasing or sale of part of it…”. The utopian vision of the Company’s founders anticipated “experienced farmers possessing small capital”, through hard work and sober habits and enjoying the protection of British institutions would be able to accumulate sufficient wealth eventually to lease or purchase small sections of the Company’s extensive rural landholdings. As the major land-owner in early colonial South Australia, the Company recognized that the land “could only become valuable by cultivation” and this value could only be realised by introduction “into the colony [of] a new description of emigrants — a farming tenantry, the flower of the yeomanry of the fatherland — that all might be assimilated as closely as possible to British institutions”. Anything that might contribute to “the true source of prosperity, namely, the cultivation of the soil…” would indirectly benefit both the Company and the colony. Although the Company’s own business activities in the first decades of colonisation focussed on banking, infrastructure development, pastoralism, whaling, broad-acre cereal production and, always, land purchases, it also encouraged economic diversification by introducing new products, demonstrating their adaptability to the South Australian environment and, often, distributing them freely to their tenants and other farmers. The social experiment at the heart of South Australian colonisation, and the South Australian Company’s entrepreneurial role in it, was manifested therefore in an agricultural experiment that incorporated a broad range of potentially useful, “secondary” products such as olives.

The manifests of the Company ships do not mention olive trees – nor mulberry or any other variety of trees – suggesting that the tree planted in Kingscote was transported as “personal” cargo. More likely, then, the first olive tree was the initiative of an enterprising individual acting privately, rather than of the Company itself. The most likely protagonist was George Fife Angas, founder, director, chairman and major investor in the South Australian Company. Again the evidence is circumstantial. Angas' personal and business papers reveal no references to olives. But only someone of Angas' authority and resources could have arranged for one of the Company's ships to invest space, effort and precious water on such nonessential cargo as an olive tree, especially on the expeditionary voyage. Not only did he personally fund the purchase and outfitting of the first Company ships, Angas controlled all preparations for the voyage; on 26 January 1836 he noted in his diary that "I am now deeply engaged in the outfit of the three ships…. The whole of the thoughts, plans and arrangements have fallen mainly upon me, and… I have had little assistance from the Directors." Judging by his correspondence with Charles Delacour and Edward Wheeler, the first managers of the South Australian Company, Angas was consulted in detail on all aspects of commissioning the ships, from a new mast for *The Duke of York* to the ships' cats. Angas did send the first mulberry tree to the colony; in April 1836, Charles Hare, the Company's accountant in South Australia, wrote regarding the tree that Angas placed in his care: "I have been thinking about the silkworms and the white mulberry and when I have made my observations on the climate, soil &c, shall communicate the results of my cogitations.". It is plausible then that Angas similarly sent the first olive tree.

Angas appears to have been an unlikely patron of olive culture. A financier and investor, born and raised near Newcastle in the north of England and resident in Devonshire in the south, with overseas experience only in tropical Honduras, he seems to have been indifferent to any form of Mediterranean agriculture, olives included, until his involvement in the colonisation of South Australia. In 1832 Angas invested in and was appointed a Director of the South Australian Land Company, the committee of which lobbied the Government for the establishment of a chartered colony in southern Australia along lines proposed by Edward Wakefield. Although the Secretary of State for the Colonies rejected this initial scheme, "this committee, in their researches for correct information as to the general character of the country in which it was intended to introduce this novel mode of colonisation, spared no pains, having laid under tribute every publication relating to the subject, and every individual within their reach who had personally visited any part of its islands or its coasts.". Robert Gouger's synthesis of this "correct information" on southern Australia was incorporated into Wakefield's seminal work on systematic colonisation, *The New British Province of South Australia*, published in 1834; it included a catalogue of "exportable commodities which the soil and climate of the new colony are capable of producing": slate, coal, timber, bark, gums, salt, salt fish, seals, whales, wheat and flour, fine wool, hides and tallow. The "articles at present imported into the Australian colonies, but which might be cultivated there advantageously…[being] the produce of similar latitudes in the northern hemisphere" listed wine, flax and hemp, cotton, almonds, aniseed, bees' wax and honey, barilla, cheese for India and China, carraway, cochineal, coriander, dried fruits such as figs, currants, raisins and prunes, hops, vegetable oils, olives, citrons, oranges… to which may be added the very important article silk.". This brief mention of vegetable oils and olives was the first time that olives were recommended as a suitable crop for cultivation in South Australia. Included in Wakefield's influential book, it was assured of a wide readership especially amongst those investing in or emigrating to the new colony.

Moreover, before 1837, there was no alternative source of advice. For Angas and others committed to the new colony, Gouger's list, including olives, must have represented the best chance for agricultural success in South Australia.

All of this is, of course, speculation. However, it is consistent with three major general themes evident in the early development of the olive industry: firstly, the essentially experimental nature of horticulture, if not all non-mainstream agriculture, in early colonial South Australia; secondly, support for and investment in the horticultural experiment by organisations such as the South Australian Company and the colonial and municipal governments; and thirdly the role of influential individuals in initiating and sustaining the experiment.

Other individuals independently introduced small numbers of olive trees, setting the pattern for the following decade or so. Soon after the Kangaroo Island planting, in December 1836, the Governor, Captain John Hindmarsh brought as many as six olive trees from London on *H.M.S. Buffalo*. These were first documented in August 1837; "His Excellency the Governor," George Stevenson reported, "has some orange, olive and fig trees that have stood out in the open air all winter, and look remarkably healthy."

Hindmarsh was an even more unlikely olive grower than Angas. During his long and distinguished naval career he had served in olive-producing countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Egypt but there is no evidence that this career-mariner was interested in olive culture. In South Australia, Hindmarsh exhibited no inclination for any agricultural pursuit. Although Hindmarsh privately purchased land – he had borrowed money from Angas partly for this purpose – this was mostly unsuitable for agriculture and more likely speculative investment; in March 1837 he bought by auction 23 ‘town acres’ scattered around North and South Adelaide and, later, one ‘country section’ close to Adelaide and which was soon subdivided, now the suburb of Hindmarsh. Recalled in July 1838, Hindmarsh sold his properties and with them, presumably, the olives.

George Stevenson hinted at the source of Hindmarsh’s olive trees and the reason he brought them to South Australia. “We have sufficient experience that the olive will flourish here”, he claimed in his second lecture on agriculture delivered to the Adelaide Mechanics’ Institute on 8 November 1839, “ — for notwithstanding the mismanagement and neglect which some fine varieties sent out by the Messrs Loddiges in the *Buffalo* endured, some of them survived and are now becoming fine trees.”

Conrad Lodigges and Sons’ Hackney Botanic Nursery Garden was the foremost horticultural centre in nineteenth century Britain, combining commercial horticulture with scientific discovery and research, publication and inventive techniques. As Loddiges developed its extraordinary collection of exotic trees, shrubs, palms and ferns – stored and displayed in huge steam-heated glasshouses at its nursery in London’s Hackney – it acquired a unique reputation for shipping live botanical specimens. Two main methods were employed: firstly forcing plants to ‘hibernate’ by prolonged chilling and then packing them tightly in moistened Sphagnum moss or charcoal wrapped in hessian and then canvas (the success of which depended on the plants remaining dormant during the voyage and arriving in late winter or spring). Secondly and more successfully, small plants were planted in Wardian cases, large, sealed glass terrariums that almost eliminated the need for watering on the voyage and also protected the plants from salt-spray and extreme heat. It is believed that

Hindmarsh's olive tree(s) were transported in a Wardian case. This suggests that, as was a common arrangement, Lodigges engaged the impecunious Governor to take out selected European plants to test their adaptability in South Australia in exchange for live specimens or seeds of unique South Australian flora to be shipped back to England in the Wardian case. Lodigges trade in botanical specimens, as a supplier of olive stock and as a source of horticultural expertise represent a continuing influence on the early development of the olive industry.

The Governor's premature return to Britain in July 1838 allowed Stevenson to assume ownership of these trees, explaining their apparently spectacular recovery from neglect. These olives were probably planted initially somewhere near the Governor's original residence in what is now Elder Park. They did not, however, remain long at this temporary vice-regal location — there is some circumstantial evidence that, either when the original Government House burnt down in 1837 or with Hindmarsh' departure in 1838, Stevenson transplanted these first olives to his own garden in North Adelaide. Alternatively the trees had been planted initially on one of Hindmarsh's two town acres (acres 964 or 993) that were later leased by Stevenson and became part of his famous experimental garden between Melbourne and Finnis Streets, North Adelaide.

However he acquired them, it is evident that, by 1839, Stevenson assumed ownership for the olive trees that Loddiges had placed in Hindmarsh's care. In November 1839 Stevenson claimed that he had "four sorts [of olives] in perfect health"; given the limited sources of olive stock at that time, at least two of these could only have been Hindmarsh's original trees. And in 1875 *The South Australian Register* claimed that "the tree [!]…brought by Governor Hindmarsh was planted by the late Mr. George Stevenson in his garden, subsequently Mr, Borrow's, at North Adelaide. It now measures nine feet in circumference at the base and extends over a large piece of land.".

Stevenson himself introduced at least one olive tree, also in December 1836. "A[n olive] slip brought out by Mr George Stevenson in the *Buffalo*, seven years ago, has borne fruit", reported *The Adelaide Observer* in August 1843, "The tree is an exceedingly handsome one, and measures nine feet in height, and seven in diameter". With uncharacteristic modesty and possibly in deference to his employer, the Governor, Stevenson did not refer specifically to this cutting either in the available extracts from his diary of the voyage to South Australia or in his many articles encouraging olive culture in the new colony. Stevenson's grand-daughter, who had access to his complete diary, later credited him with the introduction of the olive: "Having travelled widely before arriving in the Buffalo, he had developed his powers of observation, and already, at Rio de Janeiro, he had secured slips and olive seedlings, which he had brought out with him to South Australia.". Later historians have accepted Stevenson's seminal role; for example Robert Sexton claimed that on 4 October 1836 "Stevenson obtained a number of plants which formed the basis of his North Adelaide garden, the final remnant of which was a huge olive tree in Finnis Street…. Late arrivals to join the ship at Rio were… a collection of bananas, pines, cactus and other plants. Hindmarsh was later credited with having introduced the olive and loquat to South Australia.".

That Stevenson procured his olive cutting and other horticultural stock in Brazil is significant. The *Buffalo*'s intended course to the colony was *via* the Cape of Good Hope; however Hindmarsh's indecision and poor judgement as Captain of the *Buffalo* and his personal extravagance led to a water shortage that forced the ship to detour to Rio. Stevenson's tree was, therefore, a fortuitous addition to South Australia's small olive collection. Despite Stevenson's later interest in horticulture, he did not, it seems, intend to bring olive stock when he and his wife boarded the *Buffalo*.

From 1836 Stevenson proved to be a gifted horticulturist, combining practical gardening with experimentation and promoting alternative agricultural products. He was widely regarded as "The Father of South Australian Horticulture", some acknowledging his contribution in the most graniloquent terms:

> George Stevenson! Ought not a monument be raised to his memory? If the man who causes two blades of grass to grow where formerly there was one is a benefactor to his species, then George Stevenson was much more than this. Posterity ought gratefully to remember him. This pioneer and his wife came out with Governor Hindmarsh in the *Buffalo* in December, 1836.… It was he who read the Proclamation under a large gum-tree on December 28th, 1836. On this occasion his love for flowers was evident. While others noted the booming of the cannon, the shouts of the immigrants, the cold collation and the speeches, the eye of this pioneer fell lovingly upon the shrubs and flowers with which the plains of Glenelg were studded. They were welcomed as friends. …it is as the pioneer horticulturist that George Stevenson deserves to be remembered. As soon as the site for the city was surveyed he secured four acres of land in North Adelaide. Here he built a house and, at great expense and trouble, planted a garden. He tried to secure every variety of vine, fruit tree, and shrub. This pioneer did more than any early settler of whom tradition speaks to develop in the young community a love for useful and ornamental gardening. The knowledge acquired by reading and by practical experience he freely imparted to others. His garden was one of the "show spots" of the primitive settlement, and he has been rightly named "The Father of Horticulture in South Australia".

Little is known of Stevenson as a horticulturist before 1836. His pre-colonial expertise and experience is usually inferred from the success of his demonstration gardens and nurseries in South Australia and from his lectures and articles on diverse agricultural topics in *The South Australian Register*. He had some, albeit tenuous connections with horticulture, particularly as practiced around the Mediterranean. He was the son of a gentleman farmer in Northumberland, he knew Lodigges before leaving Britain

— he may well have been instrumental in arranging for Hindmarsh's shipment of plant stock — and he had helped his brother establish a farm in Canada. Stevenson had also travelled extensively in Central America, the West Indies, Canada and Europe, from about 1830 to 1836 as joint editor and 'travelling correspondent' for the radical Whig newspaper, *The Globe and Traveller*; during his travels it is possible that he observed olive trees and the environments which favoured their cultivation. However, unlike, for example, George Francis, another influential horticulturist in colonial South Australia, Stevenson had no formal botanical or horticultural training, was not a member of any relevant association and appears not to have published anything of significance on any aspect of horticulture. Similarly, unlike other noted pioneer gardeners such as Dr Charles Everard, Dr. William Wyatt, John Barton Hack or Charles Anstey Stevenson did not purchase land in South Australia, . His garden in North Adelaide was on land that he leased and the land on which he established his nursery garden, "Leawood", belonged to his mother-in-law. Understandably Stevenson preferred to invest his capital in his principal business venture, his partnership with Robert Thomas in *The South Australian Register and Gazette*. At the same time, he was never wealthy, having to borrow money from Angas not only to establish the newspaper but for personal reasons. Until his arrival in South Australia, therefore, Stevenson's horticultural accomplishments seem to have been as an earnest student rather than an experienced practitioner.

Stevenson's advocacy of "gardening" was at least partially political. His liberal Whig political opinion favored free and independent small producers over the squatocracy created by unregulated monocultures such as pastoralism. From 1835 Stevenson also supported the systematic colonisation of South Australia, sharing the view of the

South Australian Company that the success of Wakefield's scheme depended ultimately on the intensive cultivation of the soil. This imperative explains why horticulture occupied much of Stevenson's time and effort after he and his wife disembarked.

From 1836 Stevenson contributed uniquely to olive culture in South Australia in three important ways.

Firstly, in his own gardens, Stevenson practiced the horticultural experimentation that he preached, both testing the acclimatisation of introduced plants and demonstrating the productive potential of the new colony. "The science of Gardening — important and interesting at all times and in all countries", he lectured in 1839, "— is particularly so in a young country like our own, where every step in its progress is a new experiment in the art — a fresh test of the productive capabilities of an untried soil, and where each successful result is not limited to the mere gratification of the cultivator, but affords consolatory and important evidence that the land of our adoption may, with ordinary industry and attention, become rich in the finest products of the earth and eventually the granary and vineyard of our own and other countries.".

From October 1837 to the mid–1840s he accumulated the largest collection of plants in the colony, planted mainly in "Stevenson's Garden" on four acres between Melbourne and Finnis Streets in North Adelaide. In 1843 Stevenson's gardener, George McEwin, compiled a *Catalogue of plants introduced into South Australia by George Stevenson, Esq. and grown at Melbourne Cottage, North Adelaide*, listing almost 800 'useful and ornamental' plants. Of these, over 430 were 'economic' or 'useful' fruit trees, shrubs, plants etc. included four varieties of olives, described as "1. Common, 2. Large leaved, 3. Box leaved, 4. Broad leaved" and presumably incorporating Stevenson’s own olive cutting and the remnants of Hindmarsh’s collection. In August 1842 Stevenson also planted “Leawood”, his mother-in-law’s property in the Adelaide Hills (near “Devil’s Elbow, now divided by the Mount Barker Freeway) also as a demonstration garden and nursery.

Stevenson planted olives in both gardens – some, or their progeny, have survived at both sites. Although he sold excess stock and produce from the garden, there is no evidence that he distributed olive trees or even seeds to the public for cultivation. The gardens can be interpreted, therefore, as a practical experiment designed to test the suitability of a wide range of plants for this new environment about the climate, soils and topology of which so little was really known. Consequently, while Stevenson appears to have recommended exotic and predominantly ‘Mediterranean’ crops, this was not necessarily through any ideological or philosophical affinity with the Mediterranean or Southern European products such as olives, but simply because olives, figs, almonds, citrus fruits and vines thrived here.

Secondly, Stevenson had access to the means of publicising his views including those on the economic development of the colony through farming. In promoting horticulture in general, Stevenson advanced olives as a crop that warranted the attention of settlers. As editor and joint-owner of *The South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register* from 1835 until 1842, he reported frequently on general agricultural topics and chronicled such horticultural achievements as Lt Field’s introduction of the first orange tree, Mr Davis’ success at growing lemons, the quality of Dr. Everard’s watermelons and the progress of his own olive trees. Stevenson’s most substantial dissertation on practical horticulture was a series of lectures that he delivered to the Adelaide Mechanics’ Institute on 27 September, 8 November and 13 December 1839 and published firstly in the *South Australian Register* and in *The Royal South Australian Almanack and General Directory for 1840*. “All the most valued and useful fruits grown in the South of Europe, “ Stevenson contended, “can be also grown in perfection here, and we may surely be contented with the proofs we have that South Australia must eventually become the peculiar country of the orange, the pomegranate, the fig, the olive, the vine and of every description of grain most prized as animal or human food.”

On olives, Stevenson wrote:

> The *Olive* is another tree well adapted for our climate, and in respect of soil, the sunny slopes of our hills are admirably suited to its natural habits. The splendid orchards of Tivoli, near Rome, and those on the rich descents from Mount Ida in Crete to the shore, resemble very nearly in their aspect and soil those which, at some future day, may stretch from Adelaide to the mountains. We have sufficient experience that the olive will flourish here.... I have four sorts in perfect health and Mr. Bailey has about as many more in the Botanic Gardens, from which he expects to obtain a dozen or two layers during the present season. Layering is the most certain mode of propagating the olive, although in Italy strong branches about an inch thick and three or four feet in length are often planted as cuttings and succeed. From the ripe seed they grow freely. Nay, I have heard of an Olive cultivator who planted a bottle of *pickled olives* and much to his astonishment, I daresay, many of them grew!... You all know the mercantile uses to which the olive is applied, the delicacy and value of its oil, and its use or abuse as a pickle. In a few years it is probable that it may be cultivated here to some extent; but at present I have detained you at sufficient length on what is certainly a tree that we can only plant for our children to gather fruit from.

Stevenson, it seems, was less than enthusiastic about olive culture, understandably since other fruits yielded more immediate and easier returns. Despite this, in less public forums, he advocated and encouraged planting olive trees in the optimistic belief that future generations would be able to solve the problem of how to profit from them, that is how to make and use the oil.

Thirdly, Stevenson enjoyed considerable personal as well as journalistic influence, particularly in horticultural matters, with many of the leading colonists, colonial administrators and powerful supporters of South Australian colonisation in Britain. His official appointments included: Personal Secretary to Governor Hindmarsh, Clerk of the Legislative Council, (temporarily) Protector of Aborigines, and, later, Justice of the Peace, Registrar of Shipping, Alderman for Adelaide, Postmaster and Customs Officer and City Coroner. Stevenson also cultivated personal influence, through membership and holding office in the most influential agricultural and educational associations. In 1840, for example, he was a committee member of the South Australian Agricultural Society, member and auditor of the Literary and Scientific Association and Mechanics' Institute and member of the committee of the Botanical and Horticultural Gardens. As importantly, it is probable that Stevenson was a confidential agent for George Angas, advising him and the South Australian Company on matters such as emigration policy.

On 12 November 1838 John Bailey applied for 'free' emigration to South Australia under the agency of the South Australian Company. Bailey was an ideal immigrant. Although he described himself as an "Agriculturist" — which could have applied to a rural day-labourer or independent farmer — his credentials as a practical horticulturist were impeccable. About 1815 Bailey was apprenticed to Conrad Loddiges and Sons, the famous London nursery, where he was employed for 23 years, becoming "well versed in the theory and practise of Botany and gardening". During this period Loddiges developed its two-way trade in botanical specimens and curiosities, especially Cape bulbs and Australian flora, at times sending its own collectors to the colonies. According to his son, Frederick Manson Bailey, in 1835 Bailey "had been selected to go out as Colonial Botanist of New Zealand, but the Bill to colonise that place did not pass the British Parliament. Thus, being unsettled, my father started for

South Australia in the *Buckinghamshire*, in November 1838, with the intention of farming.”. This plan was not realised; instead Bailey became one of the colony’s most eminent horticulturists and nurserymen.

Bailey maintained his association with Loddiges, as both agent and collector. “Prior to leaving he was presented by his employers with a purse of 150 sovereigns”, wrote George Loyau, “and they also gave him several cases of plants, containing the vine, date, damson, olive and other trees. Most of these arrived in good condition, and formed the nucleus of the large number at present found in this colony.”. The *Buckinghamshire*’s manifest confirms that C. Loddiges & Sons consigned 4 boxes, Wardian cases, with Bailey. In 1891 Frederick Manson Bailey, remembered that his father “made collections of plants about the town and district. These were principally sent to his old friends, the Messrs Loddiges of London, in a live state or as seeds. The native flower of the Adelaide district is probably the least interesting of the Australian colonies; it cannot be wondered at, therefore, that we find his energies directed more towards the introduction of useful economic plants than to collecting indigenous flowers.” And about 1910, Frederick also recalled “the principal plants [that] we brought out in six Wardian cases, the following of which I recollect: – the West Indian lime, Bengal citron, crimson-flowering China peach, six kinds of olives, a large fruiting blackberry…[and so on]. My father had also a large collection of seeds.”. The plants were placed in the care of George Stevenson

Loddiges also furnished Bailey with letters of recommendation to Colonel William Light and Thomas Gilbert, the Colonial Storekeeper. According to Bailey himself, “he was by those gentlemen introduced to the notice of His Excellency the Governor as a Person well qualified to fill the situation of Colonial Botanist and Keeper of the

Botanic Garden.", the post to which he was appointed in April 1839. The history of Bailey's tenure as Colonial Botanist from 1839 to 1841, his part in founding the 'second' Botanical Gardens in Lower North Adelaide and his consequent acquaintance with influential members of the Committee of the Botanical and Horticultural Gardens, particularly George Stevenson, has been recorded elsewhere. The relevant factor here is that, following his retrenchment, Bailey vacated the Botanical Garden in early 1842 and removed most of the trees, including the olives, arguing that "no plants were given by the Messrs Loddiges to the Gardens"; he was also permitted to collect seeds from annuals and some of the shrubs that he could not transplant.

Resurrecting his ambition to farm, in March 1842 Bailey leased Section 239 in North Unley from the South Australian Company "for a period of 14 years from 24th June next with a yearly rent of 20/- per acre". The land, now bounded by Greenhill Road, King William Road, Hughes Street and Unley Road, was — and still is! — subject to severe flooding. The unsuitability of the land for farming and the South Australian Company's need for his horticultural skills, induced Bailey to abandon farming in favour of establishing a commercial nursery. Bailey negotiated an alternative lease with the Company. William Giles, the Colonial Manager of the South Australian Company documented the agreement: "I have this day leased to you (for a Nursery Garden) a portion of the South Western Corner of Section 256 containing fives acres more or less, for the term of twenty one years from 24 June 1843[!] at the following rental viz: 1st, 2nd & 3rd years @ 2/6 per acre, following 18 years @ £10 per annum payable half yearly."; the inclusion of the purpose, "for a Nursery Garden", is significant. In October 1845 the terms of the lease were changed, extending the area to 7 1/2 acres (which incorporated part of what was by then the Company’s grove), lowering the rent for the first year and conceding Bailey the right of preemption at any time before the expiry of the lease in June 1855. The property, on the north-eastern corner of Hackney Road and North Terrace, was adjacent to Park Farm, the South Australian Company’s supply depot and “experimental station for agricultural crops and garden plants”. The demarcation between Park Farm and Bailey’s Nursery (and Giles’ own residence) and between Bailey as tenant or horticultural manager became increasingly obscure.

Named after Loddiges’ enterprise in the suburb of London, Bailey’s “Hackney Nursery”, later known simply as “Bailey’s Garden”, opened officially in May 1845, although it had been operating for at least six months. The proprietor “spared neither time nor expense to make his collection as extensive as possible”; his first catalogue listed over 100 fruit trees, over 300 varieties of grapes and over 400 ornamental trees and shrubs, bulbs and herbaceous plants. This included six varieties of olives, unnamed and, interestingly, listed under “Trees and Shrubs” rather than “Fruit Trees”. Bailey’s Garden and his reputation soon eclipsed even Stevenson’s. “In the days when those who are now very old colonists were comparatively new chums,” wrote ‘A Suburban Resident’ in 1881, “there was started a garden and nursery which for nearly half a century has been known as ‘Bailey’s Garden’ by a gentleman of that name who through his love for plants and his zeal in importing from every possible source laid the foundation for a debt of gratitude on the part of South Australian colonists which I greatly fear will neither be paid nor acknowledged. Well do I remember the summer when the news went forth that for the sum of half-a-crown any one might go into the garden and eat as much fruit as they liked on condition that none was pocketed.… The numerous noble trees even now remaining on the old site testify to the work done by Mr. Bailey and so long as they are allowed to stand will keep his memory green.”.

As well as Bailey’s and Stevenson’s specimens, several other olive trees were introduced from 1836 to 1844. For example, in 1837 Dr Charles Everard brought a single tree from Cape Town; in 1840 he wrote to his sister “we have in our country garden [“Ashford”] apples, cherries, plums, peaches, medlars, mulberry, almond, pomegranate, vine and loquat” with no mention of the olive. And John Morphett might have imported olive trees from William Macarthur’s Camden Park in New South Wales in the early 1840s. Both Everard and Morphett were cited later as major olive growers but their initial attempts to cultivate olives seem to have been less than successful.

At the end of 1844, then, South Australia boasted few olive trees, derived from less than 12 original plants of un-named varieties, from perhaps 4 or 5 independent importations. This represents hardly an auspicious and promising beginning for systematic olive cultivation in the new colony. And, given the economic and political imperatives of the first decade of the colony and the relative insignificance of marginal and expensive horticultural trials to the survival of the colony, it was more likely than not, in 1844, that olives would remain, at best, a curiosity.

* * *

In retrospect the crucial factor that ensured continuing interest in olive cultivation proved to be a fortuitous partnership between the well-resourced South Australian Company, the expert Bailey and the advocate Stevenson.

The local Manager of the South Australian Company, William Giles, consistently advised the London office that the Company should actively promote horticulture and, like Stevenson, experimented with the cultivation of a wide range of exotic fruits. In January 1839 he reported that

> I have now growing in the [Company's] garden and looking healthy, Apple tress, Pears, Cherries, Plums, Raspberries, Currants, Gooseberries, Peaches, Nectarines, Apricots, Guavas, Pomegranates, Almonds, Grapes, Lemons, Limes, Oranges, Citrons and Loquats.

To provide horticultural stock, by June1839 Giles recommended that the Company establish a dedicated nursery:

> On the subject of a nursery I think very little need be said to shew that no person or persons owners of large tracts of lands ought to neglect a nursery…. Permit me to suggest that no time should be lost in preparing land for a nursery which ought to include also an acre for the cultivation of the grape."

The Company established its Park Farm in what became Hackney partly for this purpose. Ultimately, however, it mattered little to the Company – or Giles – whether the Company itself owned the nursery or whether it leased its land for this purpose to someone, like Bailey, who, as a trained horticulturist, was better able to provide the same services to the Company, its tenants and, more generally, to the colony. Hence, in June 1845, the Company endorsed Giles' "intention to discontinue farming operations and hope to hear that the [Park] Farm has been leased advantageously", which, in October, Giles accomplished by expanding the lease for Bailey's Garden.

From about 1839 to 1845, however, the South Australian Company was interested in and had the resources to support horticulture in the new colony and rejoiced that “the certainty of our Province being an agricultural as well as a pastoral country seems already very satisfactorily established”.

Probably in response to reports of the successful cultivation of various plants in the colony and the exhibition of olives at the first South Australian Agricultural and Horticultural Show, in July 1844 the Company instructed its Manager, David McLaren, “to make inquiry as to the procuring of good olive trees and mulberry plants for South Australia”. McLaren duly sought such advice apparently from two main sources, Robert Gower and Company of Marseilles and from William Giles regarding local sources of olive plants. McLaren wrote to Giles in early August:

> The Board thinks that the climate of South Australia and most probably the soil will be found particularly favourable for the production of [olive] oil and silk, they therefore wish to know if there is any part of the Company’s property available to the growth of the olive and white mulberry. We have observed that olives were exhibited at the late agricultural show. We shall be happy to hear what progress is made on their cultivation and to know what facilities there are for procuring plants in the adjacent colonies or China — if they do not exist it may be necessary to get them from the South of France &tc. The mulberry will probably have to be raised from seed…
> I have written on the subject to a house in Marseilles. I presume [that the] month of May or June would be the best time…to plant the olives.
> When you reply to these inquiries be particular in describing the localities which you deem suitable — the character of the scenery — the exposure — quality of soil and particular location that we may know exactly the place on the map.

In January 1845 Giles reported back to the Company on local sources for olives and other plants:

> With respect to the growth of Olives and White Mulberries, knowing Mr Stevenson had the finest plants on the colony, I have conversed with him on the subject this morning. Mr Stevenson has five varieties of the Olive. One tree is 10 feet high and bears considerable quantities of fruit. He is very sanguine as to the congeniality of both our climate and soil for the growth of these fruits and has promised to write me a few lines stating his views on the subject. There can

> be no doubt but that all our Sections on the Banks of the Torrens above the town would be admirably situated for the growth of the Mulberry, the Olive, the Grape, the Fig & the Almond, and that no money could be more profitably expended than in the cultivation of these fruits. I think you will give me the credit of acknowledging that I am only now reiterating sentiments expressed ever since I have been in the colony.
> …Park Farm would be an excellent site for the growth of the olive and mulberry…

Giles enclosed a copy of a “memorandum for Wm Giles…on the Cultivation of the Olive, Mulberry &tc” from Stevenson:

> There are numerous sites on the Park Farm excellently adapted to the cultivation of the olive, mulberry and fig; and I scarcely know a spot on the banks of the Torrens better adapted to the culture of the vine both for raisins and wine. Indeed the Company’s Preliminary sections generally are, so far as I know them, well suited to the growth of these plants. You are aware that in my own gardens [in Lower North Adelaide] I have successfully demonstrated that the soil and climate of S. Australia are in all respects congenial to them and that my conviction is that there is no district of the South of Europe where they constitute its agricultural wealth, superior for the same purposes to South Australia.
>
> … I have five sorts of olives and eight different figs. In the nursery I observe about 400 young trees ready for distribution next winter.
>
> Should the Company however desire to make an experiment on a scale worthy of itself I would recommend that they should send to Province 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 as they can be propagated with rapidity and certainly from layers. Take care that some plants of the olive be the la Reyhna variety…
>
> Messrs Loddiges of Hackney are the best persons to apply to for further information and advice.

Giles added that “I have every reason to believe that his [Stevensons’s] opinion is worthy of credit in these matters…

> I believe the olive may be obtained in Sydney in considerable numbers, but the plants are small, and the best sorts are not easily ascertained; they are sent here in small numbers and sold at from 3/- to 5/- each. If it is the pleasure of the Directors to send me out one or two hundred strong plants, the utmost attention shall be paid them.

Given the minimum eight month turn-around in communications, any advice that Giles could have offered on local sources for olives would have arrived in London too late. By the time that the Company received it, it had already organised to export olives and other plants to South Australia.

The Company apparently conferred this project with some importance and appreciated the urgency of organising olive plants in time for shipping to London and thence to arrive in the South Australian spring. McLaren contracted Robert Gower and Company, the agents in Marseilles for the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company soon to be known simply as P&O, to source and ship suitable plants to London. In early September 1844 McLaren informed Giles that

> Since our last Board [Meeting]…I have heard from Marseilles as to the olive and mulberry plants. Our correspondents write that they should be about 5 feet long [ie truncheons] and carefully packed…[The] prices seem very high to which the freight…will add very considerably.

The Board itself read Gower's letter at its meeting on 13 September and resolved immediately

> to order 50 olive plants from Mess^{rs} R, [sic] Gower, to be forwarded to London, properly packed in order to being sent to Mr Giles by the end of the year. Also a small specimen of different kinds of Almond seeds.

McLaren could therefore advise Giles, on 14 October, that "we have ordered 50 olive plants to be forwarded to us from Marseilles which shall be sent by the first vessel after we receive them" and, on 6 November, that he hoped to forward the olive plants "by the next vessel".

Between November 1844 and April 1845 the Company sourced and prepared the olives for shipment, apparently with some difficulty and involving a series of delays. On 25 November Roberts and Gowers invoiced the Company for the olives and other plants. However, on 10 December, McLaren notified Giles that “these trees have not yet been received”, adding

> You will note from the instructions and the circumstances that a considerable number of different kinds of plants have been sent gratis in the expectation that we “will send them something” “plants and trees the produce of South Australia” — let this be carefully attended to, sending as great a variety as possible with very [detailed?] and accurate descriptions — send duplicates by another opportunity in case of any misadventure.
>
> …I was ordered to instruct [you] to be careful in selecting the most suitable place for planting the trees &c procured from Marseilles, the greater part of which ought to be in one place, while other localities may be tried with a few plants, in order to regulate future operations of the same kind.

McLaren also advised Giles that “you will have time to make every necessary preparation” because the ship on which the Company planned to transport the olives was not due to sail until “the end of this month, but more likely about the middle of January”.

In the event, the olive truncheons did not leave London until 7 April 1845, on board the *Taglioni*. The reason for the delay, according to McLaren, was prudence: “The utmost care has been taken of them, hence the delay which has occurred in getting them shipped has been unfortunate but unavoidable.” However the delay meant that the olives would arrive in South Australia in mid-winter, a less than optimal time for planting or ‘trenching’ the olives truncheons. The postponement more likely and more directly resulted from the Company contracting the preparations of the olives for shipping to Loddiges, and their encouragement of a grander horticultural experiment as had been suggested in the Stevenson memorandum. Whatever the reasons, the *Taglioni* now carried approximately 200 olive truncheons, rather than the original 50 ordered from Robert and Gowers, as well as “eleven packages, fruit trees, seeds…” and a Locust tree, “one of the most beautiful and useful trees of Italy.”

The *Taglioni* arrived at Port Adelaide on 24 July 1845. Within two weeks Giles’ deputy, Joseph Watts, informed the Company that

> The trees have arrived in excellent condition and are planted out in Section 256 [Park Farm], the ground having been previously prepared for their reception and the situation in every respect most suitable.

Giles himself later confirmed this: “…the olive trees arrived in good condition; the mulberries had suffered but many of them I hope will be saved”; Giles’ report to McLaren also refers to a letter from “ our tenant, John Bailey, on this subject”, indicating that the trees had been placed in his care.

About a year later Giles again reported to McLaren that the “trees have been making rapid growth and we shall propagate from layers” and including a report from Bailey on the “very great progress [of] the olive trees:

> It is known that the olive tree will retain its virility longer than most trees when the branch or truncheon is severed from the parent tree, but it gives me great pleasure to state that those imported by the Company have exceeded my most sanguine expectations. Many of them have made shoots from two to three feet in length and the few that have not grown yet are now full of sap to the top of the stem and during the coming spring I have no doubt will all grow and it would give me pleasure to be able to plant the remaining piece of ground next season if I should be able to increase so many from them. I would beg leave to state that the information I received from Wm Macarthur Esq [John Macarthur’s son from Camden Park, New South Wales] in answer to my enquiries about the planting of them I found of great service to me and it will be found valuable to the Company.

Bailey’s letter suggests that at least his intention was not only to propagate olive trees but also to plant out a, olive grove on the Company’s ‘Park Farm’.

Although it was “pleased to find that the olive trees… have done so well” and while encouraging “the extensive cultivation of various fruits” and other produce, the

South Australian Company was less enthusiastic about continuing to invest in ventures that did not return it a more direct and immediate profit. By the mid-1840s, the Company’s priorities shifted from the need to demonstrate that the soil and climate of South Australia were very favorable to farming, to speculative land-sales in and around Adelaide and, increasingly, mining at Kanmantoo and, later, in the mid-North and it began to divest its more agricultural and horticultural activities. In June 1845 – ironically at about the same time that the olive truncheons arrived – the Board advised McLaren that it “approved of your intention to discontinue farming operations and hope to hear that the [Park] Farm as been leased advantageously”. In October 1845, Bailey’s lease was extended to include part of Park Farm – Giles himself continued to occupy some of “the olive garden” – and in October 1853 Bailey purchased outright the property which became well-known as Bailey’s “Hackney Garden”.