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A ‘Botanical Garden’ for Adelaide: Myths and Locations

While examining and assessing a history about a place that was planned, designed and planted it is relatively easy to misrepresent information and fact. It is also true that historical narratives are written the way people wish history to be written according to their own objectives and lens.

The historical development and dreams imbedded in the Adelaide Botanic Garden is one such example. It is a large tract of land that bears witness to the endeavours of successive directors, and is a creation of their time and their philosophies. The roles of George Francis, Richard Schomburgk and Noel Lothian are integral to the standing of this Garden and its form and scientific collection today.

The place itself occupies a key portion of the Adelaide Park Lands and was specifically designated by an Order of the Legislative Council in 1859 and the Adelaide Botanic Gardens Act 1860 for this purpose following numerous debates, petitions and public meetings for which Francis largely championed. In Colonel Light’s plan for Adelaide there is no spatial location allocated for a botanic garden but it is clear that the establishment of a Garden was considered a priority by the South Australian Colonization Commissioners who sponsored the venture that created South Australia as a colony and Adelaide as its first settlement.

A lonely large granite boulder, with a bronze plaque, sits within the lawns of a roadside garden strip near the corner of North and West Terraces in Adelaide. Unobserved from the hurried vehicular traffic and relatively unseen due to the declining landscape contours, it is a memorial that commemorates the role and contribution of Thomas Allen in the foundations of the horticultural industry for South Australia. Like this memorial, Allen is an obscure personality in early writings on Adelaide’s settlement. There are but a few references to him and his family in both period and contemporary publications except references that he established the first ‘garden’ in Adelaide. In Dunedin, there has also been some confusion as to his contribution to their horticultural industry that has recently been unravelled pointing to two Thomas’ in Dunedin about the same period.

The first attribution to Allen’s role was drawn by Francis when retrospectively sketched the origins of the Garden. Francis credited Allen as the first nurseryman and developer of a ‘colonial garden’. But he does not identify the site of this first ‘garden’. Instead, Max Lamshed in his 1955 Centenary History of Adelaide Botanic Garden that was edited by Garden director Noel Lothian, first discussed where past sites for the Garden were proposed and prepared a map of the sites. Lamshed pointed to site ‘A’, located on a bend on the River Torrens in the present Tulya Wodli, as
being the first site. He quoted Light from an 1837 plan as proposing this site: ‘The island is intended to be made a Botanic Garden’.5

Australian Colonization Commissioners who sponsored the venture that created South Australia as a colony and Adelaide as its first settlement.6

But this site, according to Lamshed, was quickly deemed unfeasible due to ‘river flooding’.7 This is a curious conclusion as the site, with its high raised embankments, was not then and is not today flood prone. Instead, it would have presented a reliable water supply to a Garden, that later provided the supply to the City’s Slaughterhouse, and an interesting topographical landscape to transform. It is more probable that colonial administrators found that they had to allocate land urgently to the Protector of Aborigines to establish a ‘Native Location’ and address the concerns of Moravian missionaries about schooling the ‘natives’. Walter Bromley, in April 1837, was appointed the second interim Protector of Aborigines and was temporarily allocated land ‘reserved for the Botanic Gardens’ to service his duties. Bromley established a tent encampment before being directed in November 1837 to shift to the Piltawodli site to the northern banks of the River Torrens: ‘it being desirable that I should remove my tent [to] about a mile from the town to a place chosen by the natives close to the river’8. A child passenger on the HMS Buffalo in December 1836, Chittleborough has reminisced about this first encampment:

...[Bromley] soon established a sort of location for the natives, by having shelter sheds built for them near where he resided, a little west of Buffalo Row, on the south bank of the gully already referred to and close to the present cattle sale yards. The blacks did not take kindly to the sheds, and preferred their own wurleys to the captain’s idea of comfort.9

Lamshed concluded that Allen established a ‘colonial garden’ not on site ‘A’ but at an area on the south side of the River Torrens surrounding the Gaol and stretching into the former railway yards. This he called the second site, or site ‘B’. This conclusion is also curious as the land is least suited for a garden given the soil type and its raised limestone prominence, and it would have involved extensive water cartage for irrigation. It also conflicts with the site being on ‘low banks’ and its propensity for experiencing stock crossing damage. The former is clearly not evident on the site, and it has been historically recognised that stock did not cross the River Torrens at this point but rather at site ‘A’ and at the old ford at Pinky Flat now under the waters of Lake Torrens. Site ‘B’ was also ear-marked as the site for the new Adelaide Gaol as it was safely above the floodwaters of the River Torrens, on a limestone prominence, and enabled Sheriff Boothby ample land to establish an olive (Olea europaea) plantation around the Gaol to fulfil his interest in olive oil and olive production and to provide for prisoner physical labour in planting and managing the plantation.10

Site ‘C’ is concluded by Lamshed as flanking both sides of the River Torrens near the present site of the City of Adelaide’s Nursery. This is factually correct in terms of a Garden being established. On May 31 1839 the Colonial Register recorded an announcement by Governor Gawler recording the appointment of John Bailey, and the development of this site which was subsequently identified on colonial maps.11

The Register noted, Bailey,
... an experienced botanist from the celebrated gardens of the Messrs. Loddiges, Colonial Botanist of South Australia, ... [had] ordered the preparation of a suitable portion of land on the terrace below the South Australian Company’s brick kiln.12

Unfortunately Bailey’s endeavours at site ‘C’ were also unsuccessful due to the removal of his colonial salary and works funding within a larger economic depression that affected the colony under Governor Grey, and he was suspended from duties in September 1841. He thereupon successfully established the private ‘Bailey’s Garden’ in Hackney. In 1852 site ‘C’ was transferred from the colony to the City under a Municipal Ordinance in conjunction with the larger Park Lands, and George Francis leased and sought to maintain site ‘C’ adjunct to several landscaping and rate assessment contracts to service the City of Adelaide’s and neighbouring Districts, before relinquishing it when he was first appointed Superintendent of the Garden in 1855.

Thus, while sites ‘A’ and ‘C’ were correct, site ‘B’ was not correct; yet Lamshed attributed this location as being where Allen established his ‘garden’.

This spatial myth was repeated by Barbara Best in her 1986 biography of George William Francis a review of the life of her great-grandfather. Best re-drafted the map prepared by Lamshed, published it in her biography, pointing to site ‘B’, and delegated Allen to being a ‘botanist and experienced gardener.’ In the one sentence discussion, Allen is noted as gaining a leasehold at site ‘B’ from 1837-1840 and ‘grew a successful fruit and vegetable garden there’. The very short reference to Allen denies his expertise, his appointment to Hindmarsh, and the intent of the leasehold.13

This spatial location, site ‘B’, was enshrined by Robert Swinbourne in his Years of Endeavour: An historical record of the Nurseries, Nurserymen, Seedsmen, and Horticultural retail outlets of South Australia published 1982 when reviewing the history of South Australia’s horticulture and nursery industry albeit as a short reference. Swinbourne appropriates Lamshed’s map and conclusions, does not question the validity of it and that Best has also appropriated the same information, and puts it forward as the location of T. Allen & Son’s nursery.14

Each author perpetuated and repeated each other’s statements and conclusions, and do not question the facts about Allen and this ‘Garden’.

The questioning of these narratives came about when an entry on Allen was first proposed for the Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens (2001). It re-surfaced in the Adelaide Botanic Garden Conservation Study (2005), and again in the Adelaide Park Lands & Squares Cultural Landscape Assessment (2006) for the City of Adelaide. This question also identified a number of obscure ‘Thomas Allen’s’ in other states and led to an investigation that eventually uncovered Allen’s activities from ‘Bushey Park’ at Hampton Court in England, Rio de Janeiro, Adelaide, Hobart, Melbourne, and thence in Dunedin. The published Oxford entry is but a summation of the life of Thomas Allen, and is today somewhat incorrect.15

The real location of site ‘B’ is within Tarndaya Womma: Park 26 nestled between the present King William Road and the old ford. This is a tract of land stretching northwards from the present Adelaide Festival Theatre complex. This conclusion has been drawn from a re-assessment of historical information pertaining to the Park Lands and River Torrens, and also references to Allen.16

The site was clearly ideal as it was on ‘low banks’ adjacent to the southern River Torrens, and immediately in front of a reliable waterhole that was the main point
where water carters obtained water to service Adelaidean's in the 1830s-40s. This location was also next to the old ford that led to the northern settlements. Thus ford and waterhole meant cattle crossing, and this was an easy location to enable your parched cattle and sheep to be watered before entering Adelaide. It also comprised alluvial rich soil that had been deposited from the regular floods that occurred, prior to the construction of the weir and Lake Torrens in 1880.

There are three other points that validate this conclusion. The first is Freeling's survey map of Adelaide dated 1849. This map depicts the City as well as the Park Lands, and was used by the Crown Surveyor's Department in 1855 to delineate changes of road alignments and boundaries for the Government House Domain. To the immediate north-west of the House is an extensive garden mapped. It consists of four main garden compartments, with two secondary compartments, each compartment surrounded by possibly hedges or similar, and the garden is separated from the rest of the land or Domain by what appears to be the 'closely spaced stringybark palings' described by the Register in 1837. There is also a small hut or shed identified on the map within the fenced enclosure. There is no textual reference to this garden, other than it being in the 'Government Domain,' on the 1849 plan and there is no historical mention to this location in other period literature.

The second source is a sketch prepared by artist Eugene von Guérard that surveys the ford crossing looking north-north-west from a raised position approximately near the back of the Government House enclosure. While the garden cannot be physically observed in the image, von Guérard has detailed in the left foreground an extensive collection of northern hemisphere plants. The act of including plants in his paintings and sketches was a feature of von Guérard's art that reflected a Humboldtian inquiry into the science of natural history whether it be plant, animal or geological history, and he known as being reliably accurate in his depictions both in terms of species and that they were growing on the site. Thus we have northern hemisphere flowering plants and foliage which is a curious addition in the image unless they were under cultivation in the immediate foreground of the view.

The third source is Allen's appointment as 'Gardener and Ground-workman to His Excellency the Governor Captain Hindmarsh, R.N.' This was a formal title and carried with it the obligation to the service the table of the colonial Governor with suitable vegetable foodstuffs. With this title Allen would have had latitude in selecting a suitable site for a garden but also would have a desired a site relatively close to the House in the Domain for ease of carrying produce.

These primary sources point to site 'B' not being near the Gaol but on the southern bank of the River Torrens between Pinky Flat and the present Government House. Thus, Francis re-wrote the history of the 'colonial garden' before the Garden was established, seeking to erase its role and presence, and Lamshed repeated this myth in his centennial history which Best and Swinbourne.

**Developing First 'Botanic' Garden in Adelaide: Arriving and Developing the Garden**

Even before Allan set foot on the shores of the yet to be settled South Australian colony, he was advertising his services and expertise. In an advertisement in the inaugural issue of the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register* published on 18 June 1836 Allen placed an advertisement extolling his background and abilities. The only advertisement for this type of skill in the issue, it stated:
ALLEN, BOTANIST, FRUIT and KITCHEN GARDENER, Fellow of the Horticultural Society of London, late Chief Gardener to His Majesty William the Fourth, Landscape Gardener and Ground-workman to the Honourable Commissioners of His Majesty's Woods and Forests, in layout-out and planting St. James's and Regent's Park; Botanist and Cultivator to the Australian Agricultural Company, New South Wales; appointed Gardener and Ground-workman to His Excellency the Governor Captain Hindmarsh, R.N.

N.B. T. ALLEN and SONS respectfully beg leave to offer their services to the Gentlemen Capitalists to select, enclose, lay-out, and plant their Gardens in the best manner, both for utility and ornament, on the most reasonable terms, and with the utmost dispatch. In subsequent editions, Allen added the claim of being 'Practical Gardener to the Horticultural Society of London.' Allen and most of his family arrived in Adelaide in 1836 on the Tam O'Shanter, a 360 ton ship privately chartered and commanded by Captain Whiteman Freeman. There are some inconsistencies about this information. The ship manifests state that his eldest son, Frederick William Allen, was on board the three-masted Buffalo that left Portsmouth on 23 July 1836, and the rest of the family were on the Tam O'Shanter that left London on 20 July 1836. The 'Register of Emigrant Labourers', recording passengers applying for free passage, states the following:

25th May 1836, living at 18 Argyle Street (off Regent Street) London, Thomas Allen (49) Gardener applied for his wife (44) and daughter (10). The following people at the same address and on the same day also applied.

Frederick William Allen (23) Gardener Steward to the Buffalo
Amelia Allen (21) Sempstress
Charlotte Allen (20) Sempstress
Thomas Henry Allen (17) Artisan
Joseph William Allen (16) Gardener (sic; struck through reference)]22.
Sarah Allen (15) Sempstress

On board the Buffalo were also the main government entourage including Captain John Hindmarsh, the new governor, together with Colonial Commissioner James Hurtle Fisher, the Governor's Private Secretary George Stevenson, Colonial Treasurer Osmond Gilles together with 270 passengers. The voyage was eventful as passengers, animals, and the Governor's instructions collided on a small floating space.

Allen's appointment to the Commissioners was as 'Gardener and Ground-workman to His Excellency the Governor Captain Hindmarsh, R.N.' This appointment to Hindmarsh occurred prior to the departure of the Tam O'Shanter and Buffalo. It ensured that Allen was granted a leasehold to develop a 'Botanical Garden' on the southern banks close to the Government House site. As part of this appointment, on 20 June 1836, Hindmarsh advanced to Allen £35 to acquire seeds and plants for the voyage. The appointment required Allen to supply vegetables and foodstuffs to the Government House kitchen. The substance of this appointment and the relationship is
unclear and undocumented. What ever it was it was probably re-drafted when Hindmarsh was hurriedly replaced by Governor George Gawler on 16 July 1838, thereby loosing any possible governor or royal patronage for his original appointment. Between 1836 to 1840 the family resided in houses in Hackney, Adelaide, and Walkerville; all suburbs where the major nurseries were being established and operated in Adelaide in the 1830s and 1840s. Even before arrival Allen had established a business relationship with his eldest son Frederick. Presumably Frederick had obtained a horticultural apprenticeship at St James’s and Regent’s Parks, under his father’s position. But this father-son business partnership was dissolved two years later in May 1838.24

By 1837 Allen had established a plant nursery or ‘garden’ on the banks of the River Torrens for Hindmarsh, creating a profitable business in the propagation and supply of plants, trees, fruits and vegetables. He claimed that the site for this operation was ‘at the Botanical Gardens on the bank of the Torrens, encouraged by the patronage they have received from the inhabitants of Adelaide.’ At the same time he established a stall in Gilles Arcade near Light Square for the sale and display of produce. Gilles Arcade was then a market place comprised of a series of ‘spacious covered stalls’ which could be rented for the sale of produce. The Allen & Sons stall regularly offered and displayed ‘watermelons, cucumbers, endives, lettuces, cabbages, turnips, carrots, peas, French beans, and herbs’.25 The melons were reputedly exported to Hobart Town during 1837-1838.

With the cessation of the father-son business partnership, Allen kept working at the ‘Botanical Gardens’ and offering for sale his produce. An advertisement in the Register of June 1838 records his available produce:

FOR SALE,
At the BOTANICAL GARDENS, Adelaide, a great variety of Lettuce, Cabbage, and other plants. Also, all kinds of Vegetables on the most reasonable terms.

T. ALLEN.

N.B.—A liberal allowance made to the trade and shops.26

The reference to the ‘Botanical Gardens’ is important to consider. It is clear that Allen established a ‘Botanical Gardens’ under the patronage of colonial Governor Hindmarsh on the banks of the River Torrens. The land was a lease and not freehold. The siting of this ‘Gardens’ has been incorrectly identified by subsequent authors. Further, Allen developed the ‘Gardens’, regularly using the phrase ‘Botanical Gardens’ in all his advertisements, and perhaps was ardently seeking the opportunity to be anointed as ‘Colonial Botanist’ and given charter to establish the colony’s ‘Botanic Gardens’ which later went to John Bailey.

Allen’s horticultural business appears to have mixed fortunes. Despite this, he was still advertising his produce in the issues of the Southern Australian in 1839. Allen appears to have occupied these ‘Gardens’ until 1840 wherein his advertisements disappear.27
Thomas Allen: A Profile

Thomas Allen was born to William and Sarah (née Murrills) Allen in the late spring of 1787 on 10 May at Edmonton, Middlesex, England. While his early schooling and apprenticeship years are unclear it is apparent that Allen was well educated, adept at chess and could write very good English and botanical descriptions in reasonably legible hand. From 1816 and 1820 he was employed at the royal gardens of ‘Bushey Park’ under William, the Duke of Clarence (or the FitzClarence family), rising to the position of ‘Chief Gardener’ or ‘Head Gardener.’ ‘Bushey Park’, or ‘Bushy Park’ now, is part of the larger Hampton Court Palace estate to the west of London.

Fig 1

Thomas Allen as photographed by his son Thomas Weaver Allen in Dunedin in 1862-68. Source: Ian Westergaard.
Allen's claim as being the 'Chief Gardener' to William IV is contained in an advertisement in the inaugural issue of the *South Australian Gazette & Colonial Register* published in June 1836 before the first ship had set sail from London. The advertisement offered Allen's services to future migrants and provides a glimpse of his early working life. Despite this claim as 'Chief Gardener', Allen family colloquial history also records him as 'Land Steward' or 'Head Gardener' to 'Bushey Park'. It is more probable that he was senior gardener to the estate in charge of the general horticultural and kitchen garden operations of the estate and not necessarily in charge of the estate itself.

The years at 'Bushey Park' were prosperous for Allen. On 17 October 1812 he married Sarah Weaver (1792-1856). While the Parish register entry states that 'both [were] of this Parish,' in a letter between Thomas and his daughter Amelia in May 1853, Thomas claims that he was 'living at Bushy Park with HRH Duke of Clarence' at the time.

The family settled into a cottage on the estate at 'Bushey Park' and Sarah bore a sequence of children that resulted in a large family. These included Frederick William (2 September 1813-1850), Amelia [Muir] (16 December 1814-1893), Charlotte [Dawson] (b. 14 April 1816) at 'Bushey Park'. The Duke's Chaplain, Dr Floyd, also baptised the first three of the children and the births were registered at the 'Church of Hampton, Middlesex'. These names reflect a close friendship with the royal FitzClarence family who also served as their god-parents. Two of the ten FitzClarence children were registered as godparents; Frederick (1801-1856) was registered as godfather to William Frederick Allen, and Amelia (1807-1858) was registered as godmother to Amelia Allen. The next two children, Thomas Henry (7 February 1820-1882) was 'baptised but not registered,' Joseph Weaver (9 January 1821-1886), were born at Kingston-on-Thames. There is a four year gap between Charlotte and Thomas Henry suggesting that there might have been one or two children who may have died at birth. Sarah [Stuart] (29 September 1823-1869?) was born at Turnham Green Terrace near Chiswick. Both Joseph and Sarah were baptised in 1825 at St James Church in Piccadilly. Another daughter, Julia Eliza (14 February 1828-10 August 1838) died in Adelaide, and Carey (d. 4 years), and Albert (1834-d. England) were thereafter born.

In June 1825 Allen and his family set sail on the *York* from Cowes in southern England as 'Gardener' to the Australian Agricultural Company. The ship, one of two barks comprising the inaugural fleet bringing settlers to Australia as part of the AAC also carried the Agent of the Company Robert Dawson.

As 'Gardener', he prepared a list of plants while in London suitable for cultivation in New South Wales for the Australian Agricultural Company. His handwritten 'Abstract for the Australian Agricultural Company in London 1825 for New South Wales by Thomas Allen,' lists some 112 plants that he perceived suitable for cultivation at Port Stephens demonstrating both a level of education and practical knowledge in botanical science. The list includes common and botanical names together with some planting information and characteristics.

While the ship *York* sailed in June 1825 Allen and his family did not disembark when it arrived at Port Jackson on 13 November 1825. Instead, Allen was discharged from the *York* at Rio de Janerio due to alleged drunkenness. It appears that Allen did not engender the favour of Agent Dawson nor Captain Moncrief in charge of the *York*. The relationship was acrimonious prompting Allen to resign from the Company and
leave the York in Rio de Janeiro. However, despite Dawson’s version reported back to the Company directors in London now accepted as fact, the dispute was not about drunken behaviour but a matter of Allen trying to secure quality ship accommodation and food for Sarah who was nearing child birth.35 36 Even worse, Allen was prevented of ‘... attending to several valuable (Wardian) boxes of plants (including many) ... presented to him by the Horticultural Society’.37

Allen returned to England from Rio de Janeiro on The Sisters on 31 August 1825 and his AAC ‘Gardener’ appointment quickly disappeared from his published curriculum and he became ‘Botanist and Cultivator’ to the Company. In 1825 Allen was employed by the Commissioners of Woods & Forests for 11 years ‘in laying out and planting St. James’s and Regent’s Parks.’ The years of employment are 1825 to 1836.38

In 1826 he wrote a small article in the popular Gardener’s Magazine edited by horticultural propagandist and advocate James Claudius Loudon. A fellow to the Royal Horticultural Society, Allen discussed raising Oak (Quercus ssp) plantations from acorns referring to the properties of the New South Wales ‘Mimosa ... as a colonial substitute for oak bark’.39 He was obviously known to Loudon, was viewed as a credible ‘garden architect’, as Loudon referred to Allen in an 1827 issue of the Magazine:

Mr. Allen, an early correspondent of this Magazine, has gone out as a nurseryman and garden architect and we have already seen, in a South Australian newspaper, one of his advertisements, offering his services in laying out and planting small gardens.40

Allen also claims that he was a fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society, using the abbreviation in an 1827 Gardener’s Magazine article, and in the 1836 South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register advertisement. While the Society, today, has no record of the fellowship, it is not conclusive as their records are incomplete in the 1800s.41

With the demise of his horticultural business in the late 1840s, Thomas and Sarah appear to have retired to a small cottage in inner Adelaide, occasionally commuting between their children’s residences depending upon their health. During the 1840s-50s their children were spread around Adelaide, at Strathalbyn, and in Melbourne and Hobart. Following Sarah’s death in 1856 in Melbourne, Thomas set sail from Melbourne to Dunedin in 1862 on the Omeo. While the date of the sailing is unclear, it appears that he was journeying to join his daughter Amelia who had settled in Dunedin earlier in 1861. Allen passed away in Dunedin on 27 April 1868 in the boarding house managed by his daughter, Amelia, called Bedford House. He was buried by undertaker Walter Geddes in the Southern Cemetery in Dunedin on 29 April 1868.42

On the Role and Contribution of Allen

It is clear that Thomas Allen was a literate and knowledgeable individual, especially in botanical science. He earned the favour of the Duke of Clarence with his work performance and expertise at ‘Bushey Park’ that enabled him to receive the Duke’s support for further employment. He appears to have had a personal manner, approachable yet one that suffered from a trusting manner to his superiors which was often not wise and resulted in unfortunate circumstances that prevented him from achieving success. If luck had been on his side, he was in the right position to
develop and manage the horticultural advancement of the Australian Agricultural Company’s property at Port Stephens in New South Wales, and he might have been appointed as ‘Botanist’ to the colony of South Australia and thereby empowered to formally establish the first botanic garden in the colony. These eventualities were not to be largely due to his relationships with his superiors that appear to be outside of his control and not due to his personality.

Allen is a forgotten individual that made solid starts on two significant horticultural ventures in Australia that were not realised. He had the character, knowledge and expertise, and carried royal patronage, but not the strength of presence to create his dreams. His role in South Australia is in particular under-valued, hidden behind incorrect information created by contemporary histories that elevate Francis. Further, site ‘B’ for the Adelaide Botanic Garden has long been documented incorrectly, and Allen was a suitable contender to develop a 'Botanical Garden' in Adelaide but his political acumen and his timing prevented this eventuality. In the Australian Agricultural Company, his superior painted a false picture of his character that has been perpetuated in histories of the Company. Both events would have frustrated him and wilted his enthusiasm for horticulture and gardening.

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ENDNOTES:

1 Adelaide Botanic Garden Act 1860; Correspondence Relative to the Appropriation of a portion of the Park Lands to the Purposes of a Botanic Garden in South Australian Government Paper No 74, 8 June 1859; Susan Marsden, Paul Stark & Patricia Sumerling, Heritage of the City of Adelaide: An Illustrated Guide, City of Adelaide: Adelaide, 1990, pp.274-277.


3 The most recent reference, with some errors, published about Thomas Allen was contained in the Richard Aitken & Michael Looker (eds), Oxford Companion to Australian Garden, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.15-16, that states:

ALLEN, Thomas (1787-1868), landscape gardener, horticulturist, and nursery proprietor, was the first person to advertise and establish a nursery in SA. Born in Edmonton, Middlesex, England, he worked as Garden Steward (1806-20) to the Duke of Clarence (later King William IV) at Bushy Park, and Chief Gardener (1820-31) to King George IV, serving as ‘Landscape Gardener & Ground-workman’ on the design and planting of London’s St James’ and Regent’s Parks under architect John Nash (1752-1835). Allen married Sarah Weaver (1792-1835), daughter of noted landscape painter Charles Weaver, in 1812.

Migrating to NSW, Allen served as ‘Botanist & Cultivator’ to the Australian Agricultural Company during the 1830s. Working there as a gardener he also corresponded with J.C. LOUDON. Trading as Thomas Allen & Sons, he advertised in the first number of the South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register (1836) offering prospective migrants ‘services to Gentleman Capitalists to select, enclose, layout and plant their gardens in the best manner, both for utility and ornament, on the most reasonable terms, and with the utmost dispatch’. Allen, appointed ‘Gardener & Ground-workman’ to Governor Hindmarsh, established a nursery on leased land on the banks of the river Torrens (c.1837), offering a ‘great variety of Lettuce, Cabbage, and other plants. Also, all kinds of Vegetables on the most reasonable terms.’ In 1838 he opened a stall in Adelaide’s Gilles Arcade market to sell his vegetables and plants. Lack of success in Adelaide led him to migrate (c.1840) with his family, via Hobart, to Dunedin, New Zealand, where he died. A son, Joseph Weaver Allen (1822-1887), who worked as a gardener in Adelaide, later became a prominent portrait and landscape photographer in New Zealand.


19 *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 16 June 1838, p.1c.


21 *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 20 January 1838, p.1d.


24 *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 16 June 1838, p.1c.

25 *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 20 January 1838, p.1d.

26 *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 23 June 1838, p.1b.

31 Letter, Thomas Allen to Amelia Muir, 26 May 1853; Westergaard, ‘Biographical Notes’, np.
38 South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register 18 June 1836, p.1a.