FLORA OF AUSTRALIA

Volume 1 Introduction

2nd edition

Section 4: Management

Images of Australian Plants

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IMAGES OF AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

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People have used plants in their decorative imaging for longer than man's recorded history demonstrates. The flower, in particular, has captured our imagination and provided an escape into a world of beauty, symmetry, and colour far beyond that provided by everyday drudgery. There was nothing new in depicting Australian plants, except the plants themselves.

The first European images of Australian plants were published in 1703 in the context of exploration of the world. Europeans were searching for new lands with new plants for trade and utilisation, and to satisfy curiosity and other scientific endeavour. William Dampier (1652–1715), on the first officially sanctioned English voyage, of the *Roebuck* in 1699, collected some plants in the vicinity of Shark Bay and the Dampier Archipelago, Western Australia, and had drawings of some of these made for his book, *A Voyage to New Holland, &c In the Year 1699* (Dampier, 1703). The artist is anonymous. These drawings were aimed at informing the British government and future mariners of what they might expect to find in New Holland (Australia).

It was not until 1772, when James Cook (1728–1779) returned from his exploration of the Pacific Ocean, including the landings on Australia's eastern shores, that Australian plants began to be known and grown in Europe. The naturalists on the voyage, Joseph Banks (1743–1820) and Daniel Solander (1733–1782), collected plants and their seeds, while Sydney Parkinson (1745–1771) busily sketched them. Unfortunately, although Parkinson's work was prepared for printing (a large number of plates being painted and engraved by Frederick Polydore Nodder (fl. 1770–c. 1800)), it remained unpublished for over a hundred years, until James Britten printed a selection in *Illustrations of Australian Plants Collected in 1770 during Captain Cook's Voyage* (Britten, 1900–1905).

Meanwhile, the British government decided, largely on the advice of Banks, to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay in New South Wales. This was effected in 1788, though the settlement was actually established at Port Jackson. From that time on, Australian plants entered the world of European utilisation, both in Australia and in Europe. At Port Jackson the settlers had to make do with what was available; in England the gardeners, scientists and artists were busy with a new wealth of the exotic. The French, too, were stepping up their interest in the Southern Hemisphere and their voyages stocked French gardens and halls of science.

For the early colonists the only means of communication were words and images. While the scientists struggled with the former, ordinary people, even the convicts, made best use of the latter. John Calaby (1988) has documented the early natural history art of the Colony. Significant collections of the surviving early works are in the Natural History Museum, London, the Mitchell Library, Sydney, and the National Library of Australia, Canberra. In 1989, the National Library of Australia published a bound collection called the *Hunter Sketchbook* (Calaby, 1989). John Hunter (1737–1821), a member of the First Fleet, who became the second Governor of the colony, maintained a sketchbook. Most of the paintings in this are reputed to have been executed by Hunter himself, although other, more competent, artists also made contributions.

Thomas Watling (1762–?1814), transported to Australia in 1793 for forgery, was assigned to the Colony's Surgeon-General, John White (d. 1832), to make drawings of the local plants, animals and birds. White supplied these drawing to James Edward Smith, who used them to produce the first "Flora" documenting Australia's plants: *A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland* (Smith, 1793). The engraver of the plates was James Sowerby (1757–1822), who went on to be one of the more prolific illustrators of Australian plants in the early nineteenth century.

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The famous French botanical artist Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759–1840) also illustrated Australian plants. The first published was *Eucalyptus obliqua*, in L'Héritier's *Sertum Anglicum* (L'Héritier, 1779–1792). More dramatic are Redouté's colour printed stipple engravings in Étienne Ventenat's, *Jardin de la Malmaison* (Ventenat, 1803–04). The latter engravings were based on Australian plants growing in Empress Josephine's garden, her garden being stocked from English gardens and from collections made by Jacques Julien Houtou de Labillardière (1755–1834).

Labillardière was the botanist on the expedition lead by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux (1740–1793) to Australia and the Pacific, in search of La Pérouse, an explorer lost in the western Pacific not long after the arrival of the British First Fleet in Port Jackson. Nicolas Piron (fl. 1791–1797), botanical artist, also accompanied the expedition.

Based on his own collections, and on the drawings made by Piron, Labillardière published the second Australian 'Flora', *Novae Hollandiae Plantarum Specimen* (Labillardière, 1804–1806).

The activities of the French forced the British Government to have the whole Australian coastline surveyed. Matthew Flinders (1774–1814) was appointed for the task, in command of the *Investigator*, and the expedition left England in July 1801. On board were Robert Brown (1773–1858), botanist, Peter Good (fl. 1801–1803), gardener, and Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826), botanical artist. Bauer made over 1500 drawings of Australian plants, the majority of which have not been published.

Following the publication of Labillardiere's book, Jonas Dryander (1748–1810), Joseph Banks' librarian, published a paper documenting the number of species of Australian plants published to that time (Dryander, 1806). There were 370 and approximately 275 of them had been illustrated at least once. This did not approach the 362 original sketches of Sydney Parkinson, let alone the 1542 drawn by Ferdinand Bauer while on the protracted Flinders' survey. So while the number of published illustrations was apparently large, it was far behind the potential. Bauer aimed to prepare a parallel work to illustrate Robert Brown's *Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae et Insulae Van-Diemen* (Brown, 1810), which was the third and by far the most comprehensive Australian 'Flora'. But his *Illustrationes Florae Novae Hollandiae* (Bauer, 1813), publishing 15 plates, was a financial failure, as was Brown's *Prodromus*. Neither of the men went on to complete the documentation of their labours.

A veritable army of English and European artists, engravers and colourists continued illustrating plants from around the world, including from Australia. When Joseph Banks died in 1820, William Jackson Hooker (1785–1865) took a leading role in English botany, together with John Lindley (1799–1865). Both men were artists in their own right and both were associated with the grandly illustrated periodicals of the time, continuing a tradition established by William Curtis (1746–1799). Curtis founded the *Botanical Magazine* in 1787 and it has appeared regularly ever since, becoming *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* upon his death. Hooker was its editor from 1827 till his death. He also produced most of the drawings between 1826 and 1834; the engraver was Joseph Swan (fl. 1821–1872). From 1834, Hooker employed Walter Hood Fitch (1817–1892) as artist and engraver. Fitch went on to become one of the most prolific artists of all time and certainly of Australian plants. He achieved this through his own particular ability to 'reconstruct' the plant from a flattened herbarium specimen where necessary, through his speed and efficiency as a draftsman, and through adopting lithography as his method of plate preparation. Hooker also initiated a number of his own 'periodicals', of which *Hooker's Icones Plantarum* has endured.

Sydenham Teast Edwards (1769–1819), originally an artist for Curtis, began his own periodical, *The Botanical Register*, in 1815. This became *Edwards's Botanical Register* following his death. By 1830 John Lindley became the editor of the *Register* till it ceased publication in 1847. An Appendix to Volume 23, *A Sketch of the Vegetation of the Swan River Colony*, by John Lindley (Lindley, 1839) is of particular significance to Australian botany. Lindley also produced a number of important illustrated works, many of educational significance, others monographic in genre. He employed a number of artists, of whom Sarah Ann Drake (1803–1857) is particularly noteworthy.

By the time Ferdinand Mueller (1825–1896) became established as Government Botanist in Victoria, the impetus and quality of illustration of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century had waned. While Mueller published world-wide, he was also determined to promote scientific publication in Australia. He therefore organised the first plates of botanical illustration of Australian plants to be drawn and published in Australia. The honour fell to Ludwig Becker (1808–1861): an example of his work is the plate of *Rhus rhodanthemum* in *Transactions of the Pharmaceutical Society of Victoria* (Mueller, 1858). Becker and his contemporary, Frederick Schoenfeld (?1810–1868), were artists and lithographers. Mueller's *Plants Indigenous to the Colony of Victoria* (Mueller, 1860–65), contains a fine collection of Schoenfeld's work, as does *Analytical Drawings of Australian Mosses* (Mueller, 1864). In later Mueller monographic works such as *Iconography of Australian Species of Acacia* (Mueller, 1887–1888), *Iconography of Australian Salsolaceous Plants* (Mueller, 1889-91) and *Iconography of Candolleaceous Plants* (Mueller, 1892) Robert Graff (fl. 1886–1894) was Mueller's artist and lithographer. Graff did more work than Becker and Schoenfeld but his standard was not as high.

Mueller established a network of collectors and artists to assist him with the massive job of collecting and documenting Australia's flora. Among the artists who cooperated with Mueller in this way were Louisa Ann Meredith (1812–1895) who published *Some of my Bush Friends in Tasmania* (Meredith, 1860); Fanny Ann Charsley (1828–1915) who published *The Wildflowers around Melbourne* (Charsley,1867); Louisa Atkinson (1834–1872) who worked with William Woolls; and Ellis Rowan (1848–1922), who had work published in F.M.Bailey's *Comprehensive Catalogue of Queensland Plants* (Bailey, 1909). Rosa Fiveash (1854–1938), working in South Australia, illustrated monographs for J.E.Brown and R.S.Rogers.

Margaret Flockton (1861–1953), a prolific artist, illustrated for Joseph Maiden at the Herbarium in the Botanic Gardens, Sydney, notably *The Forest Flora of New South Wales* (Maiden, 1903–1925) and *A Critical Revision of the Genus Eucalyptus* (Maiden, 1909–1933). Flockton worked at a time when the standard of scientific botanical illustration was in a serious decline. This makes her contribution all the more commendable. In art, Flockton was a contemporary of Margaret Preston (1875–1963), who worked in the genre of fine art, frequently using Australian native plants as her subject.

During the early and mid-1900s most States had a Flora documenting their respective plants. These were illustrated with line-drawings, but most of the work is little more than adequate for the purpose. Research papers were either not illustrated, illustrated with poor line drawings, and/or illustrated with photographs.

Popular and semi-popular floras emerged, some to treat a selection of plants, some with a more general coverage. Thistle Harris's *Wild Flowers of Australia*, published in 1938 and illustrated by Adam Forster (1850–1928), was reprinted eight times over four decades. Rica Erickson (1908–) published and illustrated her own semi-popular treatments of interesting groups of plants in Western Australia: *Orchids of the West* (Erickson, 1951), *Trigger Plants* (Erickson, 1958) and *Plants of Prey in Australia* (Erickson, 1968). Erickson went on to play an important role in stimulating younger artists to become botanical illustrators. Stan Kelly (1911–) painted nearly all the species of *Eucalyptus*, which were published in two volumes (Kelly, 1969, 1978).

Around the 1970s a revival began. Winifred Mary Curtis (1905–), Nancy Tyson Burbidge (1912–1977), and Hansjoerg Eichler (1916–1992) appear to have been particularly instrumental in this revival, though the stimuli were manifold and included the celebration of the bicentennary of the landing of James Cook on our eastern shores in 1770. Outside Australia William Stearn (1911–) provided a challenge through publishing *The Australian Flower Paintings of Ferdinand Bauer* (Stearn, 1976), presenting Australians with a long overlooked standard, to which local artists could aspire. Curtis worked with Margaret Stones (1920–) on an illustrated *Endemic Flora of Tasmania* (Curtis & Stones, 1967–1978). Nancy Burbidge illustrated her own flora, *The Flora of the Australian Capital Territory* (Burbidge & Gray, 1970), and Eichler encouraged taxonomists to have their scientific research illustrated with quality line-drawing executed by trained artists. Ludwik Dutkiewicz (1921–),

Terrence Nolan (1934–), Margaret Wilson (formerly Menadue) (1942–), Gillian Rankin (fl. 1980s), Christine Payne (1949–), Anita Barley (nee Podwyzynski) (fl. 1980–), and others, emerged. They set a very high standard, which is being followed with distinction, and is exemplified in the *Flora of Australia* and in revised State Floras published during the 1980s and 1990s.

The *Flora of Australia*, through the initiative of its Editorial Committee and inaugural Editor Alexander George (1939–), has encouraged the use of painting in our science too. Limited though the outlet is, a number of very talented botanical painters are now working in Australia and some have had their work used as the frontispiece for *Flora of Australia* volumes (e.g. Bryony Fremlyn, this volume).

Botanical artists are now employed by herbaria and like institutions, working freelance, or teaching. At present, artists are employed on the staff of several of the State herbaria, mainly in the production of line drawings: Gilbert Dashorst (1956–) in Adelaide, Will Smith (1954–) in Brisbane, and Lesley Elkan (fl. 1990s) and Nicola Oram (fl. 1990s) in Sydney. Other herbaria and botanists employ freelance artists as work is required. Celia Rosser (1930–) is the science faculty artist at Monash University. A major project of Rosser's is providing a complete set of paintings of *Banksia* species for *The Banksias* (Rosser & George, 1981, 1988). William Cooper (1934–), David Mackay (1958–), Katrina Syme (1947–) and many others are working freelance. Margaret Saul (1951–) and Jenny Phillips (1949–) are important teachers of botanical art. Australia currently has artists equal in ability to those working elsewhere in the world and rivalling the great artists of the late 1700s and early 1800s.

While the scientific record was proceeding apace, others were capturing the images in their own way and for a multitude of purposes: fine art, decorative art, literature, trade marks and emblems.

For fine art, the volume is enormous. Jennifer Phipps has attempted an 'anthology' of flowers and gardens in Australian art in her book *Artists' Gardens* (Phipps, n.d. [1986]). The flower subjects are not all Australian, but many are, and Phipps chose a good selection of significant examples. Paul Jones (1921–1996), although known worldwide for his extraordinarily detailed acrylic paintings of cultivated plants, has also painted some of the plants of his native land.

Jennifer Isaacs, in *The Gentle Arts: 200 years of Australian Women's Domestic & Decorative Arts* (Isaacs, 1987) has documented a wide range of arts and crafts, many of which have employed representatives of the Australian flora as motifs. This is not surprising, given our heritage of using flowers in design, especially for decoration of the things around us. The plethora of objects upon which the images appear is as universal as all of our household items and décor; all of our clothing and adornments; many of our public buildings and churches; our stationery; and some literature.

The methods of creation embrace the full range of creative craft available for home-making:– needlework (embroidery, tapestry); crochet; knitting; craft sculpture (silk, felt and paper flowers, leather embossing, copper embossing, bread dough moulding; cake decorating); 'weaving' (lace, woven tapestry, rug making); sewing (patchwork, applique); painting (stencilling, china painting, flower painting); woodwork (marquetry, carving, poker work); and stained glass. Simultaneously, floral arrangement of cut and dried flowers, both by professional florists and by amateurs, utilises Australian flowers. Norman Sparnon in *The Beauty of Australia's Wildflowers* (Sparnon, 1967) demonstrated how ideal Australian flowers are for the Japanese Ikebana flower arrangement method. Our flowers have been slow to enter the traditional European florist trade, but they are becoming increasingly popular (see Orchard & Wilson, this volume).

Commercially, flowers are used in the design of patterns for textiles (clothing and furnishing) and wall papers, and for stationery.

It is rare for plants to be the subject of fiction, but May Gibbs (1877–1969) made unique characters out of the Gum Nut Babies and the Big Bad Banksia Man, in children's literature (e.g. Gibbs, 1917). However, many books are published depicting our flora in a range of

genres, from our own *Flora of Australia*, through to items like *Banksia menziesii* (Nikulinsky, 1992), by Philippa Nikulinsky (1942–), *A Year of Orchids* (Pugh, 1983) with paintings by Clifton Pugh (1924–1990), and *William Fletcher* (Anderson, 1983) by Trevor Anderson, featuring the work of William Fletcher (1924–1983). Some beautiful books on botanical art and artists have been produced, some concentrating on Australian work (e.g. Gooding, 1991), some more general (e.g. Blunt & Stearn, 1994; Rix, n.d., 1981; Sherwood, 1996). Poets, too, have employed plants in their imaging and philosophising, Judith Wright (1915–) being one of the masters—*The Cycads*, *Gum Trees Stripping*, and *The Forest* are evocative examples (Kramer, 1985).

Australia and each of its States and Territories has an official floral emblem. They are: *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) for Australia; *Anigozanthos manglesii* (Mangles' Kangaroo Paw) for Western Australia; *Gossypium sturtianum* (Sturt's Desert Rose) for the Northern Territory; *Swainsona formosa* (Sturt's Desert Pea) for South Australia; *Dendrobium phalaenopsis* (Cooktown Orchid) for Queensland; *Telopea speciosissima* (Waratah) for New South Wales; *Wahlenbergia gloriosa* (Royal Bluebell) for the Australian Capital Territory; *Epacris impressa* (Common Heath) for Victoria; and *Eucalyptus globulus* (Blue Gum) for Tasmania. The Australian Coat of Arms also features *Acacia pycnantha*.

The new Australian Parliament House in Canberra, opened in 1988, has many images of native plants. In the foyer a series of beautiful marquetry panels around the walls depicts flowers and plants from all parts of the country. The panels were designed by Tony Bishop, sculptor, in association with the architects Mitchell Giurgola and Thorp, and made by Michael Reuter. Australian flora is also prominent in the Great Hall, in the tapestry, designed by Arthur Boyd and manufactured at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, and in the embroidery, designed and coordinated by Kay Lawrence.

Peter Luck in his book *Australian Icons* (Luck, 1992) explored the 'things that make us what we are'. He used *Banks' Florilegium* (Anonymous, 1981–1988), a second (complete) printing of Parkinson's plates, as the icon representing our flora, an odd choice considering that it is extremely expensive and not easy to access. Mimmo Cozzolina in *Symbols of Australia* (Cozzolina, 1980) took a different approach. He investigated trade-art and its trade marks and symbols. He determined that the 'gumtree' (*Eucalyptus*) has been used most commonly. The Waratah (*Telopea*), Wattle (*Acacia*), and Black Boy (*Xanthorrhoea*) are commonly used. Kurrajong (*Brachychiton*), Treefern (*Dicksonia*), and Ti-tree (*Leptospermum*) were also identified.

Postage stamps have long been seen as an effective means of publicity/propaganda for a country and Australia has effectively used stamps to promote itself. Yet it is noticeable that the unique Australian flora has been under-utilised in this medium. Although some early Commonwealth stamps used flowers as framing elements, it was not until the higher value definitive set of 1959–1964 that the Australian flora was featured in its own right. This monocolour set included Christmas Bells (*Blandfordia*), Flannel Flower (*Actinotus*), Wattle (*Acacia*), *Banksia* and Waratah (*Telopea*). In 1968 another set of 6 stamps featured the State floral emblems, this time in multicolour. Since then the flora has been more commonly depicted: a highlight of flora stamp issues was the 1986 Australian Bicentennial III: New Holland – Cook's Voyage issue, which features Joseph Banks, Sydney Parkinson and Parkinson's paintings of *Banksia serrata*, *Hibiscus meraukensis*, *Dillenia alata*, and *Correa reflexa*. The Australian National Botanic Gardens maintains on its World Wide Web site an illustrated index to Australian floral designs on stamps.

In paper currency, the five dollar note, released with the advent of decimal currency in 1966, also featured Joseph Banks and an assemblage of Australian flora.

This brief account touches only on some of the highlights of past and present use of Australian plants in arts, crafts, design and literature. However it does demonstrate the importance of the Australian flora as icons of national identity and its important role in the culture of the nation. As demonstrated elsewhere in this volume, Australia is custodian of a unique suite of plants, one of the megadiverse floras in the world. Such an important resource will undoubtedly be used increasingly in trade, commerce and cultural contexts.

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