

# BOTANICAL HISTORY OF THE FLORAL EMBLEMS OF AUSTRALIA

BY Sophie C. Ducker

**T**HIS PAPER CELEBRATES THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY of the Baillieu Library and at the same time shows how books in libraries are essential for the elucidation of botanical problems. It is the older generation of librarians and botanists that we have to thank, however, that we can use today their priceless heritage invested in the older books so necessary for stories of exploration and the science of botanical determination. To show how exploration and botanical history are integrated I have chosen the plants used as floral emblems of the States of the Commonwealth.

All the floral emblems of Australia were chosen after Federation and in the 20th century, but the botanical histories of the plants of the emblems go back to the earliest exploration of Australia. They all show the diversity of the history of the states of Australia and the differing progress of botanical exploration of the regions. The descriptions and illustrations are varied not only in age, quality and origin but also in availability, so I have chosen only four pertinent illustrations.

## THE COMMONWEALTH EMBLEM

The floral emblem of the Commonwealth of Australia is the flowers of the golden wattle *Acacia pycnantha* Benth., which is a shrub widely spread in south eastern Australia and particularly plentiful in Victoria in open woodland, where it grows up to ten metres high flowering in the cold winter months. It was first collected by Thomas Mitchell (1792–1855) on his exploring expedition into New South Wales in the first half of the 19th century. The story is told in his *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia* (1838). This is an important document because it provides the first description of the interior of New South Wales and Victoria in the early part of last



century. Mitchell was later surveyor general of New South Wales. Early explorers always sent their trophies to their home country where they were then described. The English botanist George Benthams (1800–1884) named 228 Australian acacias, including *A. pycnantha* in the *London Journal of Botany* in 1842. It was he, assisted by Ferdinand Mueller (1825–1896), who later wrote *Flora Australiensis*.

The first Australian illustration of the golden wattle was published relatively late by J. E. Brown in the  
*continued on page 26*

**Fig. 1:** The floral emblem of Australia: Golden wattle in John E. Brown, *The Forest Flora of South Australia*, 1886–1891. (Special Collections, University of Melbourne Library.)

from page 25

*Forest Flora of South Australia* in 1884 (Fig. 1). Since 1908 it has been incorporated in Commonwealth floral emblems such as stamps, the Order of Australia insignia and presentations made by the Commonwealth, but designated officially as late as 1988 (see Boden, 1985 and for other emblem data).

## THE EMBLEM OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Famous is the New South Wales floral emblem the waratah, *Telopea speciosissima* (Sm.) R. Br. This plant was first collected in New South Wales in 1791 by John White (1756?–1832), a naval surgeon and also a naturalist who arrived here with the First Fleet in 1788. It was described and figured in Smith's *Botany* (1793) as *Embothrium speciosissimum* Sm. (Fig. 2). The famous English botanist Robert Brown (1773–1858), who sailed with Flinders round Australia, renamed the waratah *Telopea* from the Greek *telepos* "seen from afar" (1810). The brilliant flower heads appear in the spring on a large shrub which is found in New South Wales, particularly in the Blue Mountains and in central coastal regions. At the turn of the last century there was a move afoot to name the waratah as the floral emblem of Australia. Sir Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929) and possibly Ferdinand Mueller were in favour of it (see Mulvaney and Calaby, 1985). So it decorates the Mueller Medal, designed by Spencer for his friend and established in 1899 to be given annually by the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science for "Researches in Natural Science".

There was a general fashion in the use of the waratah in Australian decorative art (see Baker, 1915), but



**Fig. 2:** The floral emblem of New South Wales: Waratah in James Edward Smith, *A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland*, 1793. (Grimwade Collection, University of Melbourne Library.)

Australians from other states were unable to identify with the emblem so the wattle was chosen in the armorial bearings of the Commonwealth of Australia. The waratah was proclaimed the floral emblem of New South Wales in 1962.

## THE TASMANIAN EMBLEM

Although the Dutch and English explorers were here early and collected some isolated plants and animals, it is really the French who did the major early recording of our Australian flora and fauna. Cook's expedition in the *Endeavour*, with Sir Joseph Banks and Dr Daniel Solander on board, fired the imagination of King Louis XVI of France. He sent La Pérouse in the ships

*La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe* to explore the Pacific. After a visit to Port Jackson in January 1788 they disappeared without a trace. The riddle of the fate of *La Pérouse* and the general interest in New Holland led the king to dispatch another expedition with two ships *Recherche* and *Espérance* under Bruny D'Entrecasteaux, with the botanist La Billardièrè (1755–1834) on board. On his return to France, La Billardièrè published an account of the journey (1800) and the first flora of Australia (1804–1807). While in northern Tasmania he collected the Australian blue gum, *Eucalyptus globulus* Labill in Recherche Bay in 1792; back home it was described and illustrated in his account (1800). The first Australian illustration (Fig. 3), however, is by the artist and writer Louisa Anne Meredith (1812–1895) in her lovely book *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania* published in London in 1860 and dedicated to Queen Victoria. It is shown intertwined with the love creeper

*Comosperma volubile* Labill. The Tasmanian blue gum is found widely in Tasmania but also in eastern Victoria and south eastern New South Wales and has been used extensively for plantation planting. The handsome tall tree with smooth bark is useful for timber and honey production. It was declared the Tasmanian floral emblem in 1962.

## THE VICTORIAN EMBLEM

La Billardièrè is also the collector and author of *Epacris impressa* Labill, the common heath, and he published it in his second book on the flora of New Holland in 1805. It was collected by La Billardièrè in 1792 on the same expedition under the leadership of D'Entrecasteaux. The type locality is the same as that of the Tasmanian blue gum in *capite Van-Diemen*, namely northern

Tasmania. This time an artist on the expedition, Piron, gives us the first illustration, but there is practically no information known about him. Frans Stafleu, the editor of the facsimile edition, writes in 1966,

Piron (fl. 1791–1795). No particulars are known to me of Piron, the artist of the expedition, except that he, like La Billardiere, belonged to the republican faction on board *la Recherche* and *l'Esperance*. The drawings by Piron were probably mostly made on the spot.

The illustration in the book is an engraving by the sculptor Plée. The common heath is also mentioned in Mitchell's 1838 book into the explorations into eastern Australia because the plant is common and widespread in southern Victoria occurring mainly in heath land. It occurs also in South Australia and southern New South Wales. It flowers all year but mainly in the winter months in red, pink and white forms. It was declared the Victorian floral emblem in 1958. Victoria was the first state to proclaim officially a floral emblem.

## THE EMBLEM OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A plant which recalls the explorer Charles Sturt (1795–1869) is the well known Sturt pea *Swainsona formosa* (G. Don) J. Thompson. This is one of the first plants ever figured in a book from the Australian continent, namely in William Dampier's book, *A Journey to New-Holland*, in 1703. It is the account of Dampier's second visit to Australia in September 1699 when he was in command of HMS *Roebuck*. This buccaneer turned sea captain was not only an extraordinary sailor and gifted in his writing but also a keen naturalist. Among the plants, birds and

animals he collected, described and illustrated was the flower of the Sturt pea (Fig. 4). This was collected on Rosemary Island, the present day East Lewis Island in the Dampier Archipelago. His plant collection will be on loan from the Oxford Herbarium for the tercentenary celebrations in Perth this year. However, the type of Sturt pea was collected at the Ashburton River by the marine surveyor Phillip Parker King (1791–1856) during his first exploration of the Western Australian coast in the *Mermaid* (see A. S. George, *William Dampier in New Holland*).



**Fig. 3:** The floral emblem of Tasmania: Blue gum in Louisa Anne Meredith, *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania: native flowers, berries, and insects, drawn from life...*, 1860. (Special Collections, University of Melbourne Library.)

First described as *Donia formosa* by George Don (1789–1836) to honour his father George (1764–1814), *Swainsona formosa* has undergone many name changes, the latest being made by the Sydney botanist Joy Thompson. It is an

annual or bi-annual creeper with brilliant red flowers and found in Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia where it was declared the floral emblem in 1961. With the preparations for the tercentenary and special emphasis on Dampier a new name, *Dampia formosa* (G. Don) A. S. George, has been suggested because the flower differs so much from the characters of the those of other members of the genus *Swainsona* (see A. S. George, "Willdampia, a New Generic Name For Sturt Pea").

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S EMBLEM

*Anigozanthos manglesii* D. Don, Mangles kangaroo paw, is the floral emblem of Western Australia, designated in 1960. This characteristic Australian plant is found only in Western Australia from Shark Bay to the south. *Anigozanthos* was first collected and named by La Billardière (1800) when he discusses the unequal parts of the flower, hence, it is believed, *anis*, Greek for unequal. *A. manglesii* was first collected by James Mangles (1786–1867) at the Swan River in 1833 when he stayed with his cousin Ellen Stirling née Mangles, the wife of Sir James Stirling (1791–1865), first lieutenant governor of Western Australia. It was described by

David Don (1799–1841), an English botanist who was at the time the librarian to the Linnean Society. James Mangles also received seed from Georgiana Molloy which was grown and flowered in 1839 at Whitmore Lodge, Berkshire, the seat of his brother Robert Mangles (see Hasluck, 1955). It was first illustrated by Robert Sweet in 1835, apparently from dried specimens, in the *British Flower Garden*, (see D. Geerink, 1970).

*continued on page 28*

from page 27

## THE NORTHERN TERRITORY'S EMBLEM

The emblem of the Northern Territory is Sturt's desert rose, *Gossypium sturtianum* J. H. Willis, gazetted in 1961, which is found also in the drier and rocky regions of all other states except Tasmania. The name honours also Captain Charles Sturt who discovered and named the Murray River and the Darling River. Sturt collected the plant "in the beds of the creeks on the Barrier Range" as he says in his *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia* (1849). Dr James Willis (1910–95), who made the new combination (1947), was the government botanist in Victoria. However, in some older texts Sturt's desert rose is called *Sturtia gossypoides*, a name first applied by Robert Brown in 1849. *G. sturtianum* is closely related to commercial cotton *Gossypium arboreum* Linnaeus.

## THE EMBLEM OF QUEENSLAND

The Queensland floral emblem is the purple Cooktown orchid, *Dendrobium bigibbum* Lindley. The flower was described and figured for the first time in *Paxton's Flower Garden* by Lindley and Paxton, 1853. It was described by John Lindley (1799–1865), the first professor of botany at University College London. He was famous as an orchidologist and named many of our Australian orchids. The plant was collected by a Dr Thompson, probably a ship's surgeon, on Mount Adolphus, a small island north of Cape York in Torres Strait and given to Mr Loddiges at a Hackney nursery, where it flowered in 1852. In the wild it is an epiphyte growing, like many orchids, on trees in



**Fig. 4:** The floral emblem of South Australia: Sturt pea in William Dampier, *A Voyage to New Holland*, 1703, (Grimwade Collection, University of Melbourne Library.)

low altitude, semi-arid regions in Queensland from the Archer River to Torres Strait and Papua and New Guinea (see Upton, 1989). However, earlier specimens were flowered in Kew Gardens in England in 1824.

Queensland at its centenary in 1959 proclaimed the Cooktown orchid as its emblem.

## THE A.C.T.'S EMBLEM

Naturally the Australian Capital Territory emblem has been nominated only recently, in 1982. It is the royal blue bell, *Wahlenbergia gloriosa* N. Lothian. The name honours the Swedish botanist Goran Wahlenberg (1780–1851), a friend of J. D. Hooker. The original collection was made by the botanist P. R. H. St John (1872–1944) in March 1930 on the summit of Mount

Buffalo in Victoria. The royal blue bell is found generally in grassy places between boulders on mountain tops of the Australian alps at about 5,000 feet. It was described by Noel Lothian (1915–), a botanist and garden director in 1947, who thought it worthy as a garden plant in cooler areas.

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The botanical history of the royal blue bell illustrates well an important point: there are three distinct periods in the history of the Australian flora. During the first period, plants were collected by explorers who haphazardly found these plants on their fleeting visits and then took their trophies home to their countries to be described. This is exemplified by the common heath. During the second period the plants were collected by Australian residents who sent their collections to European experts. This is well illustrated by the seed collections made by Georgina Molloy or the botanical history of nearly all of our acacias. During the third and last period Australian botanists have been collecting and describing the Australian plants such as the royal blue bell. ■

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This work was carried out in three libraries: in the Baillieu Library where I thank the ever helpful Merete Smith; in the Royal Botanic Gardens Library where the expert guidance of Helen Cohn is much appreciated; and thirdly in my private library.

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## THE UNIVERSITY SEAL AND THE LIBRARY

by George Tibbits

WHEN THE UNIVERSITY of Melbourne Council, which preceded everything, set about creating the University by gaining a site, appointing professors, and having the Quadrangle built, it needed a seal with which to endorse and give legal standing to its first contracts. It called for expressions of interest. These were the days before the University angel. Of the artists who submitted ideas none were successful, and of their designs none survive. After which, the University instructed its architect, Francis

Malony White, who had designed the Quadrangle at the end of 1853, to make a design for a seal based on the design of the building whose basements were just then being built. As with the unsuccessful artists, White's design does not survive, though a seal used by the University Library suggests what it was like. On the front cover board of very old books in the Library there is a gold embossed view of the Quadrangle building from the south east. This was "the University" as it was called, and without doubt the perspective is the one which F. M. White prepared for the University seal. This was a view that lost favour because its main feature, the towered south front of the Quadrangle, was never built. Later views of "The University" were always from the north east across the lake towards the Quadrangle. The Library seal on its oldest books therefore shows the earliest "prime view" of the University, an image of the unrealised south front of the Quadrangle. It is a university seal from a time before the angel appeared as the ethereal spirit of the University. ■



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