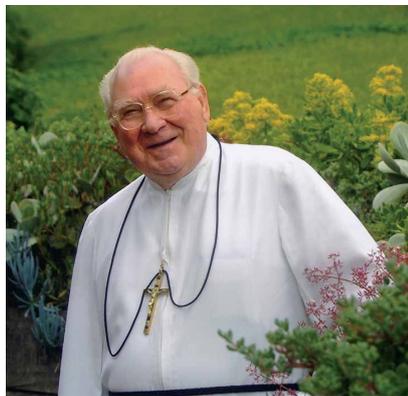


How a rare botanical Filipiniana came to the Baillieu Library

Augustine Doronila

On 12 June 2014, the anniversary of the Philippines' proclamation of independence from Spanish colonial rule in 1898, I searched, simply out of curiosity, the University of Melbourne Library catalogue for a rare book entitled *Flora de Filipinas*. To my great joy and surprise, Rare Books in the Baillieu Library held a copy of the highly regarded, richly illustrated third edition, known as the *Gràn edició*.¹ A further web search revealed that the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales is the only other public institution in Australia to hold this rare Filipiniana.

I made an appointment to view the first of the four volumes in the Cultural Collections Reading Room of the Baillieu Library. When the book arrived it looked the worse for wear, with the torn and faded cover separated from the spine. But as I opened the volume a label appeared, acknowledging the donation of Brother Octavius William Borrell FMS, deceased, of the Marist teaching order. Seeing this label took my breath away, as I felt a deep gratitude to this unique person who had made a strong impression on my life. From an initial conversation, Brother William and I had developed a strong friendship, based on common professional interests and a shared



love of plants. I was struck by his depth of knowledge, tempered with humility, and his generosity of spirit.

The Gràn edició of the *Flora de Filipinas*

The *Gràn edició* was produced between 1877 and 1883. Its first three volumes are based on the second (1845) edition of Father Manuel Blanco's *Flora de Filipinas* of 1837,² but with the addition of a Latin translation and lavish illustrations. The fourth volume consists of works by other botanists who, like Father Blanco, were members of the Augustinian order, some dating back to the 17th century.

In the words of Filipino art historian Luciano Santiago, the *Gràn edició* is 'the crowning glory of Philippine art and science in the colonial era'. Bound in crimson and

gold, the four majestic volumes contain an erudite text in Spanish and Latin, illustrated with 477 resplendent coloured lithographs. The twelve Filipino and five Spanish artists who contributed were 'a veritable *Who's who* of Philippine art in the last quarter of the 19th century'. And because Philippine artists drew the botanical plates, the book is also an important landmark in the nation's art history.³

The project was commissioned by the Order of Saint Augustine of the Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, also called the Calced Augustinians, which in 1565 had been the first religious congregation to establish itself in the Philippines. Five hundred copies of the *Gràn edició* were issued, plus 1000 less-expensive copies with black-and-white plates. After 600 copies of each coloured lithograph were printed, the plates were destroyed. The text was printed in Manila by Plana and Company, while the lithographs were printed in Barcelona by the Chofré Company. The total cost was 73,000 pesos—a huge sum at the time.⁴ The deluxe edition was sold at \$2.50 in Mexican silver per fascicle (16 pages of text and six plates).⁵ Thus the Augustinians contributed to the reputation of opulence among

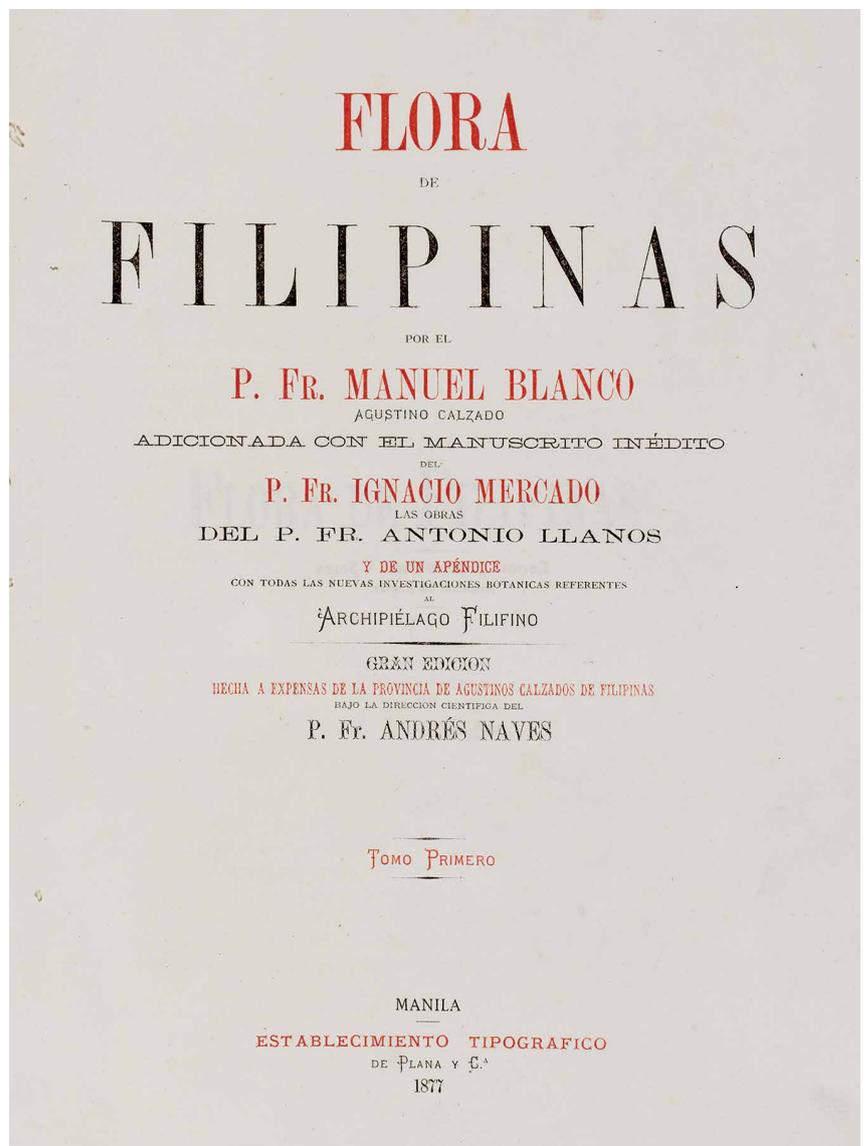
Opposite: Brother Octavius William Borrell FMS. Photograph courtesy Marist Brothers Melbourne Province Archives.

Below: Manuel Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas ...*, Manila: Establecimiento tipográfico de Plana y Ca., 1877–83, vol. 1 (1877), title page. Gift of Brother Octavius William Borrell, Baillieu Library Rare Books, University of Melbourne.

Philippine religious orders. The subsequent Spanish Revolution, American and Philippine–American wars, World War II and other conflicts ‘turned the magnificent tomes into a coveted rarity’.⁶

Father Francisco Manuel Blanco (1778–1845) was a Spanish priest, explorer and botanist who lived in the Philippines for 40 years. As he travelled around the country for his missionary work he collected plant specimens, which he described according to Linnaean principles. A modest man of God, in 1836 Blanco had to be commanded by the Spanish regent, Maria Christina, to publish his work, which appeared the following year in an unillustrated quarto volume, printed in Manila. His prologue from this first edition sets out the *raison d’être* of the *Flora*:

It was never my intention to frame a treatise on plants that would be worthy of publication. Mere curiosity impelled me to write what I considered interesting, but some persons who heard of my work urged me to publish it. This I have done after correcting many errors, which were due to haste and want of attention when it was written. I have enlarged it as much as the circumstances



Left: Cover of *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 1, which is awaiting conservation treatment.

Opposite: Manuel Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 1, frontispiece.



in which I was placed permitted me, and, although still containing mistakes and being far from perfect, it will at least serve to give a limited knowledge of the great botanical wealth of this fertile and pleasant country, and at the same time stimulate others to proceed with the work.⁷

But developments and progress in botanical taxonomy of which Blanco was unaware revealed major flaws in the book. In 1855 the highly respected English botanist J.D. Hooker described it as ‘a botanical curiosity ... The descriptions are intelligible, but, from the author’s want of acquaintance with scientific works, so many well-known plants are treated as new, that we consider it undesirable to devote time to their identification’.⁸ In 1918 the illustrious American botanist Elmer Merrill published a nuanced interpretation, in which he shed light on the book’s limitations (for example, many of the plants are not native to the Philippines, and many plates are inaccurate and depict plants not described by Blanco), but he also pointed out what was praiseworthy:

Few botanists in any country or in any time have labored under

greater disadvantages, and Blanco must be credited with initiative, industry, and perseverance. Most of the facts recorded are the result of his own observation, and even if he did make numerous grave errors in interpretation of species, his descriptions, as such, on the whole compare favorably with those of his contemporaries. In fact his descriptions in general, on account of their length, are distinctly superior to the very brief diagnoses appearing in the older botanical literature as a means of interpreting the species intended.⁹

Brother William Borrell FMS

I digress now by citing some milestones in the life of Brother William Borrell FMS, before I show how these are relevant to a further appreciation of the *Flora de Filipinas*.¹⁰

Octavius William Borrell was born in 1916 in Smyrna, then part of Greece but now known as İzmir and part of Turkey. His father, Stephen Octavius Borrell, was a British consular official who, with his wife, Helen, brought up their four children (Octavius William, Edward, Evelyn and Richard) in what was regarded as a very European city.

Although born and raised abroad, William maintained his British

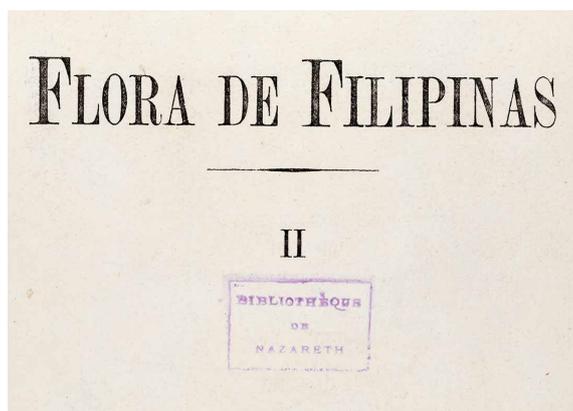
nationality. His primary schooling was done in Cyprus, Smyrna and Athens. In Athens he was educated at a French school and learnt French, Greek and some English. His secondary studies and teacher training were in the French language at the Marist Brothers training college at Herakleion, where he obtained the *Brevet élémentaire*. He completed his secondary studies in Shanghai, where he went in 1934 as a volunteer missionary, obtaining the French baccalaureate, majoring in French and natural history. He had started studying Chinese in Peking, but as he was sent to Shanghai, where Ningbonese is spoken, he did not become fully proficient at that stage.

In Shanghai Brother William was posted to a French–English bilingual school. In the French section he taught nearly all the junior secondary subjects and in the English section he taught the French language. This appointment lasted approximately from 1935 to 1952, except for three years of internment during the Japanese occupation. Even during that period he managed to teach secretly at St Ignatius, a Jesuit senior secondary school, where he prepared the top classes for the University of Aurora, in French composition, literature and grammar.



AGUSTIN SAEZ, DIBUJO, MANILA

Stamp of the Nazareth Library of Béthanie, Hong Kong, run by the Missions Etrangères de Paris, from *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 2.



During this long period in Shanghai, Brother William was very involved in the activities of the Aurora University Museum (Musée Heude), for which he collected botanical and zoological specimens. From 1942 to 1945 he was in charge of the museum's botanical department and worked with a colleague on a major botanical project, *Flore de Changhai*. He also wrote a paper on the trees and shrubs of Shanghai, but the publication of both works was prevented by the events of the Chinese Communist Revolution.

In July 1952 Brother William, together with other missionaries, was forced to leave China. After a short stay in Hong Kong he returned to England to visit his family. He spent a year at St Joseph's, Dumfries, in charge of a section of boarders, then in 1954 enrolled at Queen's College, University of Dundee (then associated with St Andrews University), to begin a four-year MA program, studying general French, philosophy, botany and zoology. He needed only Latin to complete his degree, when just before final exams he became ill with bursitis and blood poisoning and had to miss the exams. The only alternative was to return to sit the exam the following year. This he was not able to do, so he

returned to the missions without a degree or any general statement of his academic performance.

Brother William was then assigned to Sarawak, Hong Kong, Singapore and Papua New Guinea. He taught and was responsible for running a boarding school in Malaysia and then for setting up a science club at St Xavier's in Hong Kong. In 1972, at the age of 56, he accepted a posting to the small island of Kairiru in Papua New Guinea, where he encouraged students to be scientifically inquisitive about the natural history of their island. He began to collect and list the plants he found there.

His final posting, in 1980, was to Melbourne, at which time he contacted taxonomists at the University of Melbourne's School of Botany, seeking their help in completing his list of the flora of Kairiru. Academic staff recognised his great knowledge in many areas of science and, through his friendship with the head of the school, Professor Carrick Chambers, he was encouraged to publish his work. During his many years in Melbourne he produced *An annotated checklist of the flora of Kairiru Island, New Guinea* (1989) and *The flora of the Shanghai area* (Part One in 1996 and Parts Two and Three in 2004.¹¹

In the foreword to *An annotated checklist of the flora of Kairiru Island*, published when Brother William was 76 years old, Chambers described the value of this scholarly work:

Much of the pioneering exploration and documentation of the plant world has been by amateur botanists. Many have been surgeons and sea captains, teachers and missionaries, who have travelled to live and explore remote corners of the globe. These people have applied their talents, together with their fascination and love of nature, towards the systematic recording of their discoveries. Brother William Borrell is part of that great tradition. As a young missionary teacher in the 1930s he went to China, living there until the late 1950s. Through the years of war and revolution he and a colleague prepared a mammoth manuscript 'Flora of the Shanghai district' but this is another story which I hope one day will be fully documented elsewhere.

This present publication is the result of his posting as a teacher during semi-retirement to the little known island of Kairiru, off the northern coast

Jasminum sambac (*Nictanthes sambac* or *Jasminum bicorollatum*), from *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 4, part 2, p. 128. Commonly known as *Sampaguita* in Spanish, and Arabian Jasmine in English (although originating in the Himalayas), it was introduced into the Philippines in the 17th century and in 1934 was declared the national flower. It symbolises purity, simplicity, humility and strength. Its blooms are often made into garlands and its essence into perfumes. The tiny flowers display their purity when the flower buds begin to open at dusk.

of New Guinea, near Wewak and just west of the mouth of the Sepik. While teaching on Kairiru, William Borrell gathered a great deal of valuable information about the plant life of this island—information that could so easily have been lost. The people of Kairiru are indeed fortunate to have had such an observant teacher and collector.

The extensive herbarium collections on which this work is based are housed at Lae. Based on these and the living plants studied in the field, Brother William has prepared notes, which together with his own annotated drawings and photographs, contribute towards a better understanding of the flora of the New Guinea region.¹²

Brother William, in his introduction, paid respect to the local people's ecological knowledge:

I cannot claim absolute accuracy in the meanings of the local names of the plants, they were given by the high school students and the villagers. In that respect I was surprised by and admired the outstanding and deep knowledge these people

possess of their flora and fauna, and for that reason one has to trust their sincerity. Speaking of the incredible knowledge of nature he had observed about some Indonesian aborigines, a certain Dutch scientist once said 'I would readily give up my doctorate to possess the knowledge these people have of their environment'.

The University of Melbourne conferred upon Brother William Borrell the degree of Master of Science Without Examination (Botany) on 5 December 1998.

What motivated these men, who dedicated their lives to God, to also botanise? Brother William expressed it clearly at the launch of his Kairiru book in 1989:

... from my youth, anywhere I happened to be, in Greece, China, Malaysia, Hong Kong or New Guinea, I have always been inclined to try to know the environment. Even now I keep notes on the plants and animals of the area. After all one finds God in His Creation ... While teaching at St. Xavier's (Kairiru Island), I used to send plant



specimens to the National Herbarium at Lae for checking on my identifications. Till one day the Director of the Herbarium asked me if I could produce a checklist of the flora of Kairiru Island. That is how it all started. I took the challenge and today I am happy to present to my friends, my students past and present, results of my humble efforts ... The real reason for accepting the challenge was to give back in a scientific book form all that these students had given me.¹³

Brother William died, after a short illness, on 18 July 2007 at Bulleen, aged 91. He was in his 76th year of Marist life.

Father Blanco, Brother William and the *Flora de Filipinas*

I finally return to the question of how the Blanco *Flora* came to the University of Melbourne.

This copy of the *Flora de Filipinas* has an impressive botanical provenance. It bears the stamp of the Nazareth Library in Hong Kong, associated with Béthanie sanatorium, run by the Missions Etrangères de Paris. Béthanie was Hong Kong's first sanatorium, built at Pokfulam

on Hong Kong Island in 1875. Here some of the most important French missionary botanists in China spent time recovering from various infectious diseases common during that period. Among them was Père Jean Marie Delavay, whose plant collections and meticulous notes have been described as among the finest ever written. He published *Plantae delavayanae* (1889–90), which forever secured his position in botanical history. In 1888 he survived a bout of bubonic plague, but never fully recovered. This did not deter his explorations, but eventually he was forced to recuperate at Béthanie, collecting plants along the way.

Hong Kong's floral emblem, which appears on the national flag, is the Hong Kong Orchid Tree, *Bauhinia blakeana*.¹⁴ This spectacular purple-pink flowering tree was discovered by Père Delavay in 1888, growing in the grounds of an abandoned house near Pokfulam. He and his brother botanists propagated it in the Béthanie garden, and from there it was introduced to the Hong Kong Botanic Gardens and the grounds of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Canton (now Guangzhou). In 1908 it was formally named *Bauhinia blakeana* in honour of Sir Henry Blake, governor of Hong Kong from 1898 to 1939.¹⁵

Philippine books did find their way beyond Philippine shores in the 19th century, although usually in trickles—brought out by individuals for personal, institutional, or small-scale commercial purposes rather than as part of an established system of book exportation. Presumably this is how a copy of the *Flora de Filipinas* reached the Nazareth Library in Hong Kong, although whether through sale or donation is a matter of speculation.¹⁶

During World War II Béthanie was ransacked; the priests were imprisoned and later expelled by the occupying Japanese forces. The Nazareth Library was dispersed when the mission's printing press closed in 1950.¹⁷ We can only surmise that Brother William knew the French priests in Hong Kong and asked for the Blanco *Flora*, appreciating its importance. Brother William would also have understood the botanical significance of Béthanie; no doubt he seized the opportunity to salvage something from its library collection. His final posting, to the Marist community in Melbourne, allowed him to publish his botanical studies and to provide a permanent home for the *Flora de Filipinas*.

Tracing the provenance of the university's copy of the *Flora de Filipinas* opened up a story of not only the wonderful flora of the Philippines but of the remarkable

Unona odoratissima or *Cananga odorata*, from *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 2, before p. 238. Commonly known as Ylang-ylang, which means 'wilderness' in Tagalog, alluding to this plant's natural habitat, or possibly to *ilang-ilang*, meaning 'rare', suggesting its exceptionally delicate scent. Ylang-ylang is the floral scent in Chanel No. 5 and many other perfumes.

lives of men like Father Manuel Blanco and Brother William Borrell. Certainly botany was not their priority in life—both were acknowledged exemplars of their religious convictions and ministry—but they were tireless in collecting plants, mainly from mission localities to which they were posted. Both men were motivated by an inherent curiosity and interest in documenting the natural environment and ways of life of the people they served through their religious vocations. Father Blanco wanted to discover the useful properties of local plants, especially in the hope of alleviating various ailments afflicting his poor parishioners. Unlike his predecessor Father Mercado, however, Father Blanco did not possess artistic ability to complement his scientific gift. In contrast, Brother Borrell was a competent and accurate botanical illustrator, as demonstrated by the 300 excellent drawings in his first book. The satisfaction these two men derived from systematically describing their collections also inspired others to appreciate the beauty of the natural world around them.

Conservation work has now begun on these rare Filipiniana volumes. Dr Nicole Tse of the University's Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation is collaborating with Baillieu Library staff to apply state-



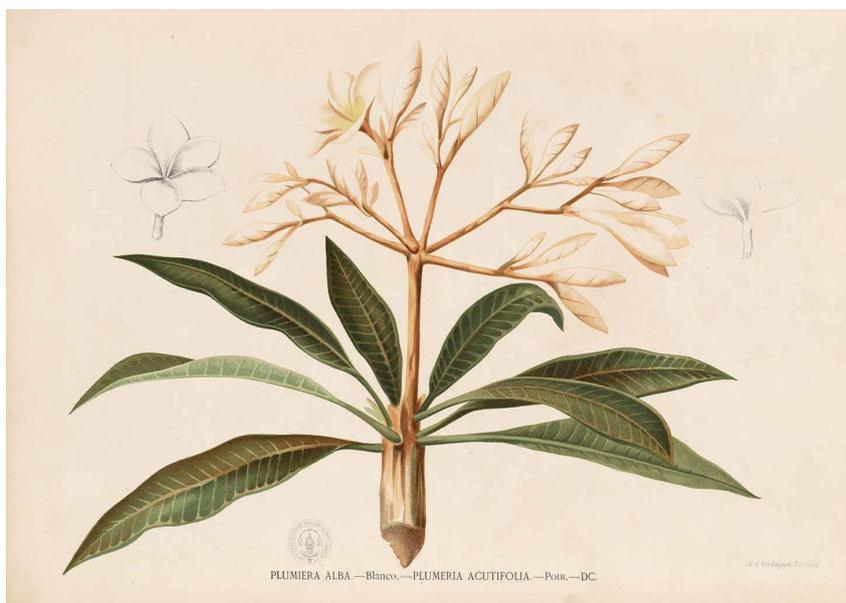
Plumeria alba (*Plumeria acutifolia*), from *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 1, after p. 148. Commonly known as Kalachuchi or Frangipani, it was introduced from Mexico, and in the Philippines is associated with ghosts and graveyards, often being planted in cemeteries.

of-the-art conservation methods to *Flora de Filipinas* and encourage greater appreciation of, and access to, this beautiful set of books by scholars and the wider public.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Mrs Irma Blanco, historian, for our discussions about, and the gift of, her archived China materials and notes from Brother William. I also thank Susan Millard, rare books curator in the Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne; Sally Stewart, librarian, National Herbarium of Victoria; Father Bill Uren SJ, Rector, Newman College, University of Melbourne; Emeritus Professor Pauline Ladiges, School of Botany, University of Melbourne; Father Robert Bonfils SJ, archivist for the Jesuit Missions in Asia; Brigitte Appavou and Annie Salavert, respectively archivist and librarian, Missions Etrangères de Paris; and Dorothy Weekes, archivist for the Marist Brothers, Melbourne.

Dr Augustine Doronila is a research fellow in environmental and analytical chemistry in the School of Chemistry at the University of Melbourne.

1 Manuel Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas / por el P. Fr. Manuel Blanco ... adicionada con el manuscrito inédito del P. Fr. Ignacio Mercado, las obras del P. Fr. Antonio Llanos, y de un apéndice con todas las nuevas investigaciones botánicas referentes al Archipiélago Filipino* (4 vols), Manila: Establecimiento tipográfico de Plana y Ca., 1877–83. (Flora of the Philippines / by Reverend Father Manuel Blanco ... including the unpublished manuscript of Reverend Father Ignacio Mercado, the works of Reverend Father Antonio Llanos, and an appendix with all recent botanical investigations concerning the Philippine Archipelago). Gift of Brother Octavius William Borrell, Baillieu Library Rare Books, University of Melbourne.



- 2 First edition: Manuel Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas: Según el sistema sexual de Linneo*, Manila: Printed by Don Cándido López, University of Santo Tomás Press, 1837. Second edition: Manuel Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas: Según el sistema sexual de Linneo*, Manila: Printed by Don Miguel Sánchez, 1845.
- 3 Luciano P.R. Santiago, 'The painters of *Flora de Filipinas* (1877–1883)', *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 1993, pp. 87–112.
- 4 Santiago, 'The painters of *Flora de Filipinas*'.
- 5 E.D. Merrill, *Species blancoanae: A critical revision of the Philippine species of plants described by Blanco and by Llanos*, Manila: Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Bureau of Science, 1918.
- 6 Santiago, 'The painters of *Flora de Filipinas*'.
- 7 Blanco, 'Prologue', *Flora de Filipinas* (1837), translated in Merrill, *Species blancoanae*.
- 8 Joseph Dalton Hooker and Thomas Thomson, 'Introductory essay', in *Flora Indica: Being a systematic account of the plants of British India, together with observations on the structure and affinities of their natural orders and genera, vol. 1: Ranunculaceae to Fumariaceae*, London: Pamplin, 1855, p. 595.
- 9 Merrill, *Species blancoanae*.
- 10 This profile was derived from Brother William's biographical notes and from the notes and correspondence of Professor Carrick Chambers (head of the School of Botany, University of Melbourne, 1980–84; director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, 1987–96), held in the archives of the School of Botany, University of Melbourne.
- 11 O. William Borrell, *The flora of the Shanghai area: Book 1, vols. 1/2: Pteridophyta, Gymnospermae*, Bulleen, Vic.: Borrell, 1996; O. William Borrell and Bing-Sheng Xu,

Diospyros blancoi (*Diospyros embryopteris* or *Diospyros discolor*), from *Flora de Filipinas*, vol. 2, after p. 28. This plant, commonly known as the Kamagong Tree, Mabolo Fruit, or Velvet Apple, is native to the Philippines and Palau. This illustration is by Emma Vidal (c. 1855—), who was probably the sister or daughter of Domingo Vidal y Soler, editor of the *Flora de Filipinas*. By submitting one plate, she has entered the chronicles of Philippine art as the only woman contributor to the *Flora*.



The flora of the Shanghai area: Book 2, vol. 3: Dicotyledoneae: Casuarinaceae to Appiaceae, Bulleen, Vic.: Borrell, 2004.

- 12 Carrick Chambers, 'Foreword', in O. William Borrell, *An annotated checklist of the flora of Kairiru Island, New Guinea*, Bulleen, Vic.: O.W. Borrell, 1989.
- 13 Excerpt from Brother William Borrell's acknowledgement speech at the launch of his book *An annotated checklist of the flora*

of Kairiru Island, New Guinea, held at Marcellin College, Bulleen, Victoria, on 18 September 1989.

- 14 *PlantExplorers.com*, 'Père Jean Marie Delavay (1834–1895)', www.plantexplorers.com/explorers/biographies/french-missionaries/pere-jean-marie-delavay.htm, accessed 10 August 2015.
- 15 Carol P.Y. Lau, Lawrence Ramsden and Richard M.K. Saunders, 'Hybrid origin

of "*Bauhinia blakeana*" (Leguminosae: Caesalpinioideae), inferred using morphological, reproductive, and molecular data', *American Journal of Botany*, vol. 92, no. 3, March 2005, pp. 525–33.

- 16 Correspondence with Professor May Jurilla, library historian at the University of the Philippines.
- 17 Correspondence with Ms Annie Salavert, librarian, Missions Etrangères de Paris.