

Introduction

Ian Woodrow

The fascinating and beautiful world of plants is a theme that connects many of the articles in this issue of *University of Melbourne Collections*. Whether as the focus of taxonomic botanical research, the inspiration for exquisite illustrations in lavish publications, a feature of carefully planned and lovingly executed gardens, the essential materials for creating both practical and decorative objects, or an aspect of the exploration of a newly colonised land, plants have widely differing uses and meanings to different people. This is vividly demonstrated in the present volume by the juxtaposition of the authors' contrasting interests and points of view. For example, the apparently humble bryophytes are among the most significant holdings of the University of Melbourne Herbarium, a resource essential to teaching and research at our own School of Botany. Dr Gillian Brown discusses three botanists—one amateur collector and two leading scientists—whose work on this group of plants (often overshadowed, metaphorically, by their more showy flowering cousins) has greatly enhanced the Herbarium's collections.

Another scientist in the School of Botany left a very different legacy to the University—the Ernst Matthaei

Memorial Collection of Early Glass. Professor Peter Attiwill, himself an eminent botanist, discusses these beautiful creations that link, through the shared material of glass, Matthaei's scientific career with the decorative arts. Professor R.C. Bald was a distinguished international scholar of English literature, but his interdisciplinary approach extended to the history of landscape gardening, a subject reflected in his unexpected bequest of rare books to the University of Melbourne that is discussed here by Richard Aitken.

Plants and products derived from them have long been an invaluable resource for the world's indigenous peoples. Many of the finely crafted artefacts assembled in Melbourne by Dr Leonhard Adam from communities in Australia and overseas (currently on display at the Ian Potter Museum of Art), exploit the versatility and beauty of local timbers, plant fibres and dyes. Conversely, part of the process of European colonisation of these peoples' lands was the documentation, re-naming and taxonomic classification of the 'exotic' flora and fauna. In this latter context Dorothea Rowse examines a volume of botanical illustrations produced by a British official in South Africa in the 1820s. But perhaps the

interplay of arts and sciences is best demonstrated in Humphrey McQueen's and Peter Lyssiotis's superb volume *Men of flowers*, which brings together a philosophical, even poetic, discussion of three of history's seminal biologists, with the arts of illustration, typography and bookbinding to create a beautiful new entity.

I am sure that these and the other contributions to this latest issue of *University of Melbourne Collections* will appeal to readers with an interest not just in botany, but in history, the arts and collecting.



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