Basic Detail Report

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Title

Banks' Florilegium Acacia holosericea, plate 93

Date

1981

Primary Maker

Frederick Polydore Nodder

Medium

Ink on paper

Dimensions

Overall: 735 x 570 mm Mount: 735 x 570 mm, 1 mm Image: 460 x 300 mm Sheet: 720 x 560 mm Sight: 485 x 324 mm

Name

Engraving

History

James Cook's first voyage of exploration to the Pacific was in command of HMB ENDEAVOUR between 1768 and 1771. The Royal Society of London petitioned King George III for an expedition to Tahiti to view the transit of Venus on 3 June 1769, and to explore the Pacific Ocean. The naturalist Joseph Banks accompanied James Cook on the voyage, and funded the employment of naturalist Daniel Carl Solander, natural history artist Sydney Parkinson, landscape artist Alexander Buchan, secretary and artist Herman Spöring, and four field assistants. The Scottish born Sydney Parkinson was known to Banks, having worked with him at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. During the expedition, Parkinson made some 1,300 sketches and watercolours of specimens and landscape views. Initially, Parkinson was able to complete a sketch and watercolour of each specimen, however his workload dramatically increased after the death of Buchan in Tahiti in 1769. As specimens were continually collected by Banks and Solander, Parkinson resorted to detailed annotated sketches, with the intention of completing the watercolours upon his return to England. However, on the homeward voyage, Parkinson contracted dysentery at Batavia (now Jakarta), and died on 26 January 1771. Upon returning to England, Banks became a preeminent figure in the field of natural history. He later became president of the Royal Society, and was eventually created a baronet. His enormous influence extended beyond natural history, and he corresponded with Pacific missionaries, and advised the British government on the colonial prospects of New South Wales. Despite a bitter battle with Sydney Parkinson's brother Stanfield, Banks refused to relinquish Parkinson's sketches, arguing that as he had employed Parkinson to produce the illustrations, they belonged to him. Banks then employed five artists (Thomas Burgis, John Cleveley, John Frederick Miller, James Miller and Frederick Polydore Nodder)

between 1772 and 1778 to complete Parkinson's sketches. He then employed 18 engravers - at an enormous cost of over £7,000 - to engrave the works onto copper printing plates. Daniel MacKenzie, the principle engraver, produced over 250 engravings. The other engravers were Gerald Sibelius, Gabriel Smith, Charles White, Robert Blyth, Frederick P Nodder, William Tringham, Jabez Goldar, van Drazowa, Thomas Scratchley, John Lee, Jean-Baptiste Michell, William Smith, Edward Walker, John Roberts, Thomas Morris, Bannerman and Francis Chesham. A total of 743 selected engravings were made. Banks intended to publish the works in full colour in a 14 volume folio, however due to other competing interests, the project was put aside. The publication never eventuated and the watercolours and specimens were deposited with the British Museum in 1827 (a part of which later became the Natural History Museum). Over the next 150 years, the engravings were only printed twice - 318 of them were published in 1900, and 30 were published in 1973, both times in monochrome. In 1980 Alecto Historical Editions of London, in partnership with the Natural History Museum, began the task of printing the entire collection of original engravings, which took ten years and saw the 743 engravings printed in colour for the first time. Banks' Florilegium, as the collection is known, was published in 35 parts and limited to 100 sets. The florilegium records the plants collected by Banks and Solander in Madeira, Brazil, Tierra del Fuego, the Society Islands, New Zealand, Australia and Java. The Australian National Maritime Museum holds in its collection parts 1 to15, consisting of 337 prints of the plants collected in Australia, from Botany Bay to Booby Island, with a great majority of the specimens being collected in the Endeavour River region.