



Banksia integrifolia, from Joseph Banks, *Banks' Florilegium ...*, London, Alecto Historical Editions in association with the British Museum (Natural History), 1981–88. Rare Books Collection, RARESXF 581.99 B22F

Banks' Florilegium

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Acquired 2016

In the course of James Cook's first great voyage of exploration in the *Endeavour* (1768–71), the botanical artist Sydney Parkinson made 952 botanical drawings of plant specimens collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander at locations ranging from Tierra del Fuego to Java, with half coming from the east coast of Australia. Parkinson's system was to sketch a quick outline in pencil of the specimens and colour in just enough detail for accurate completion later, aided by Banks' and Solander's written observations.¹

Although Parkinson died of dysentery after the expedition left Batavia (present-day Jakarta), other artists were able to make watercolour paintings using his detailed drawings. From these, 743 copperplates were produced between 1771 and 1784, financed by Joseph Banks at the cost of about £7000. However, the intended prints were not made at the time; the plates, still unused, were donated to the British Museum in 1827.

Under the authority of the British Museum, in 1900–05, the plates depicting Australian plants were printed using a lithographic process and published by Longmans in London. In 1973, 30 of the plates were printed directly from the copperplates, in black only, by the Lion & Unicorn Press in London. In 1980, Alecto Historical Editions, London, announced that it would finally use the original copperplates to produce coloured prints. One hundred sets of the 743 plates were to be made for sale in 35 parts, for issue over the following decade. Hand-colouring each print – as would have been the technique used in the 18th century – was not financially viable and so the *à la poupée* method² was chosen to produce excellent colour renderings, reflecting Parkinson's original work.

When the publication was announced, both State Library Victoria and the National Herbarium of Victoria sought to buy a set. Since each set was priced at around \$100,000, a joint purchase was agreed, with the prints being shared between the two institutions. Thus, since 1989, the prints of the Australian plants have been lodged with the herbarium and the prints of the non-Australian plants with the State Library.

Early in 2016, the State Library had the opportunity to buy a set of the prints, in excellent condition, that was being deaccessioned by the Morgan Library & Museum of New York. The herbarium and the State Library agreed to buy it together. It has now been divided, with the prints of the non-Australian plants going to the herbarium and those of the Australian plants (funded in part by the State Library Foundation) coming to the Library to complete its set.