

Ferdinand Bauer

Background notes

In 1801 Matthew Flinders was asked to command a scientific voyage to Australia to chart the coastline. Sir Joseph Banks supported the expedition and appointed Austrian Ferdinand Bauer (1760-1826) as botanical draughtsman and Scotsman Robert Brown (1773-1858) as naturalist.

The ship *Investigator* was refitted to accommodate a dedicated plant room so the botanists would have space to store their living and cut specimens and undertake their studies. Despite this preparation, the expedition was beset with difficulties – *Investigator* was in bad repair and abandoned at Port Jackson. Flinders headed back to England on board the *Porpoise* to acquire a second ship. He took with him a large proportion of the scientific collections, leaving Brown and Bauer to continue their studies in Sydney. On the way to England, however, *Porpoise* was wrecked, destroying the collections. Fortunately, Brown had retained a second set of specimens at Port Jackson, meaning that most of the botanical collection could eventually be replaced. It included the first recorded floral specimens from South Australia and Victoria.

By the time they returned to England in 1805, Brown had collected and described over 3000 botanical specimens, many of which were previously unknown to science. In 1810, Robert Brown published one volume of an intended two volume set on the flora of New Holland, *Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae et Insulae Van Diemen*. Sadly, the first volume was not a financial success, although it was scientifically acclaimed.

Bauer intended to produce a lavish set of botanical plates to illustrate Brown's work and spent six years on the production. He was so determined to retain control over his illustrations, that he undertook all the work himself – the original illustrations, the engraving of the plates and the subsequent hand colouring. Finally, in 1813, only 50 copies of 15 folio plates were ever published. Like Brown's accompanying work, *Illustrationes florae Novae Hollandiae* was a commercial flop. Bauer's attention to minute detail and his very accurate recording of colour resulted in some of the **most scientifically correct illustrations of Australian flora ever published**. Ferdinand Bauer is now considered one of the **greatest botanical artists ever**.

[Archived SLNSW - website](#) downloaded 12/10/17