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A Gibson Library Reading Guide, 2023

Botanical Illustration in the Nineteenth Century

~ A Reading Guide ~



The early 19th Century saw a rise in the interest of botany both for scientific advancement and popular recreation. The influx of new plants from other parts of the world stimulated artists and gardeners. At this time Sir William Hooker created Kew Gardens in their present form. His son, Sir Joseph was an intrepid explorer to such areas as Sikkim Himalayas.

Botanical illustration was a socially acceptable pursuit for young ladies. James Sowerby's *A Botanical Drawing Book* (1788) – “originally designed for the use of his pupils” was intended to “blend Amusement with Improvement”. The early years of the 19th century saw a proliferation of botanical copybooks of varying quality. Botanical artists were also commissioned to illustrate unscientific flower books such as *Romance of Nature* c.1833) by Mrs Meredith.

Walter Hood Fitch, the most prolific of all the botanical artists, led the field in high quality lithography. He was dominant throughout the mid- Victorian years. Of his work Sir Joseph Hooker said he had “unrivalled skill in seizing the natural character of a plant”. Towards the end of the 19th century, he and his nephew were almost alone in continuing this art. The decline of lithography was due to the invention of photography and the revival of the woodcut, which provided cheaper illustrations.

We have a wide range of books on botanical illustration. The titles on this reading list are a mix of reference only and items that can be borrowed on an Essex Libraries card. Reference books can only be viewed in the Reading Room, please enquire in advance.

BOTANICAL ARTISTS, ART & FLORA

Walter Hood Fitch – A Celebration / 1992 / J. Lewis

Muscologia Britannica / 1827 / W. Hooker & T. Taylor

Art of Botanical Illustration / 1955 / W. Blunt

Botanical Illustration / 1978 / R. King

Art in Nature: over 500 plants illustrated from Curtis' Botanical Magazine / 1991 / M. Rix (intro)

The Art of the Botanist / 1981 / M. Rix

The Flowering of Kew: 200 years of flower paintings from the Royal Botanic Gardens / 1988 / R. Mabey

A Celebration of Flowers: 200 years of Curtis' Botanical Magazine / 1987 / R. Desmond

The Treasury of Flowers / 1975 / A. Coats

Orchids from Curtis's Botanical Magazine / 1986 / S Sprunger (ed)

The Orchid Paintings of Franz Bauer / 1993 / J Stewart & W Stearn

Select Orchidaceous Plants / 1862-1965 / Warner

British Orchids / 1886 / Webster

New & Rare Beautiful Leaved Plants / 1870 / S. Hibberd

A Popular History of the British Ferns and the allied plants comprising the Club-mosses, Pepperworts and Horsetails / 1855 / T. Moore

A Natural History of New and Rare Ferns / 1865 / E. Lowe

British Fungi / n d / G. Massee