

Westall's

New Botanical Drawings



William Westall (1781–1850)
21. Logwood. Jamaica with
sketches of detail
Courtesy Natural History
Museum, London

With the recent surfacing of 19 Westall artworks, Richard Westall considers the relationship of William Westall and Ferdinand Bauer

In an earlier issue of *National Library of Australia News* (February 2007), I outlined the way in which the then Royal Colonial Institute had acquired the bulk of the drawings which William Westall A.R.A. (1781–1850) had made during the voyage around Australia of the *Investigator*, captained by Matthew Flinders.

These drawings are now owned by the National Library of Australia, and have been reproduced comprehensively in

Westall's Drawings published by the Royal Commonwealth Society in 1962.

A few further pictures relating to Australia—by, or attributed to, William Westall—have appeared since then, and a few years ago 19 pencil drawings of trees drawn between 1801 and 1806 surfaced. These were acquired by the Natural History Museum (London) in 2004 from a descendant of the artist, and consist of sketches of trees in Australia, China, India and Jamaica. (When the *Investigator's* voyage around Australia was completed in 1803, Westall travelled to China and India before returning to England in 1805. He made a subsequent trip to Madeira and Jamaica, returning in 1808.)

William Westall's tree drawings held in the National Library's collection have recently occasioned comment from Professor Michael Rosenthal. In a lecture to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, in 2005, he said of 'Hawkesbury River No 3' (1802): 'The drawing is immediately interesting in appearing to cope easily with representing completely unfamiliar terrain and unfamiliar trees.' Rosenthal also referred to 'the ease with which Westall has drawn eucalyptus'.

This is only the most recent observation regarding Westall's botanical work. Earlier, Rex Reinitz in *Early Artists in Australia* (1963) commented on 'two botanical sketches of remarkable fidelity, one of a gum-tree and the other of a banksia'. He noted that 'Westall's trees were to become quite a feature of his work in Australia.'

Dr Bernard Smith, in an essay within the *Westall's Drawings* book, stated that 'Westall [made] drawings of the eucalyptus, grass tree, palm, pandanus, hoop pine, banksias [etc] in their natural settings. They were made, not as botanical records, but as working drawings for larger compositions.' Smith also drew attention to the fact that Westall became 'increasingly concerned with the delineation of the peculiarities of the Australian vegetation, an interest which led to individual tree studies.'

Bernard Smith noted the suggestion made by Johann Lhotsky (1795–1866) in W.J. Hooker's *London Journal of Botany* (1843) that the engravings of Westall's pictures in Flinders' *Voyage to Terra Australis* (1814) inclined him to think that Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1820) had assisted Westall, 'for I know no book where plants and groups of foreign trees ... are portrayed with such surpassing beauty and truth.'

Ferdinand Bauer, the botanical artist assigned to the *Investigator* voyage, was indeed a superb artist, and it is reasonable to conjecture that the older man did give tuition to young Westall. Thomas Perry, in the introduction to *Westall's Drawings*, suggested that Westall perhaps had Ferdinand Bauer standing by his side, showing him how to portray 'accurately the form and foliage of the vegetation'. However, the 19 Westall tree drawings which have recently surfaced—many of which were made when Bauer was far distant—show the mistakenness of Lhotsky's opinion and effectively underline the fact that Westall did not need Bauer's assistance. Indeed, the authenticity of Westall's work is confirmed by no less than four founder members of the Linnean Society—Aylmer Lambert, Jonas Dryander, Richard Salisbury and William Maton—who recommended that William Westall in June 1805 become a member of that Society, to which he was duly elected that December.

One thing is now certain, if it was not before: Elisabeth's Findlay's view, in her interesting and beautifully illustrated book *Arcadian Quest: William Westall's Australian*

Sketches (published by the National Library in 1998), that 'Westall did not have the temperament for the painstaking and relentless work involved in scientific drawing' is groundless.

The 19 new tree sketches by William Westall are in process of being conserved and catalogued by the Natural History Museum in London. Below is a tentative listing. Original numbering has been retained. (Those in bold are reproduced on these pages.)

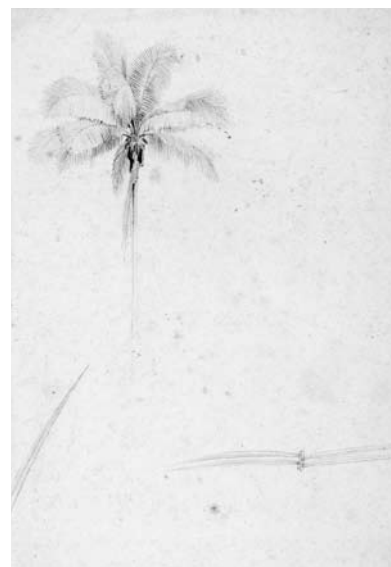
1. Calabash Tree. Jamaica? India?
2. Tamarisk Tree. India
— can be viewed on *The Art Fund* website, at <http://www.artfund.org/>
3. Castor Oil Tree. India?
4. Palm. Fan Palm? Australia?
5. Tall Tree. China/India?
6. Palm. Similar to 'Westall's Drawings' 120.
7. **Tree with leguminous climber. Jamaica**
8. Palm Australia?
9. Pimiento. Jamaica
10. Not known not Australia
11. Possibly Australian tree with smaller drawings of fruit
[There are no drawings numbered 12–15]
16. Asiatic tree—possibly lychee type fruit with the word 'sour'
17. Asiatic tree—not known
18. **Bamboo. China.**
19. **Fan Palm. Australia.** Sketches of detail similar to 'Westall's Drawings' 121
20. **Palm. Australia with sketches of detail**
21. **Logwood. Jamaica with sketches of detail**
22. Cotton Tree. Jamaica
23. **Palm—Australia**

below, left to right:

William Westall (1781–1850)
18. *Bamboo. China*
Courtesy Natural History Museum, London

William Westall (1781–1850)
7. *Tree with Leguminous Climber. Jamaica*
Courtesy Natural History Museum, London

William Westall (1781–1850)
23. *Palm. Australia*
Courtesy Natural History Museum, London





Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826)
*Grove of Tree Ferns with
 Shallow Valley Beyond and
 (left) Stumps*
 Courtesy Natural History
 Museum, London

opposite top:
 William Westall (1781–1850)
 19. *Fan Palm. Australia*
 Courtesy Natural History
 Museum, London

opposite bottom:
 William Westall (1781–1850)
 20. *Palm. Australia with
 sketches of detail*
 Courtesy Natural History
 Museum, London

There is also a drawing in the author's possession, similar to number 18 'Bamboo China', signed 'WW'. The two sketches are the basis of Westall's fine painting, *The Hong Kong Merchant's Garden* which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1814 as *View in a Mandarin's Garden* and at the British Institution (1843) with the same title. There is both an oil and a watercolour version of this picture—the latter once owned by a renowned gardener, Mr Loddiges of Hackney. In the manuscript by Robert Westall for the obituary of his father William, Robert described the Chinese view with its 'feathery bamboo and the ariel palm'. (The word 'ariel' was changed to 'lofty' in the article published in the *Art Journal*, April 1850,

pp. 104–05; original manuscript in author's possession.)

It is important to note that in *Westall's Drawings*, Thomas Perry writes with relation to three drawings—nos 120, 121 and 122—that they 'do not show sufficient botanical detail to permit positive identification. None of them appears to be an Australian species and it is possible that these three drawings were made during Westall's visit to the West Indies.' However, the tentative view at the Natural History Museum's Botany Library is that 6 and 19 above are of Australian trees.

Together with the 19 recently surfaced Westall drawings held at the Natural History Museum are six or seven drawings

made by Ferdinand Bauer. There is uncertainty about one, a tree fern, which may possibly be a Westall drawing. The other five or six are of Norfolk Island, which Bauer visited in 1804. The landscapes of Norfolk Island have something of Westall's touch in them, and if Westall had not been in Asia at the time one might be forgiven for attributing them to him.

Five of the Bauer drawings have been fully catalogued. Two were reproduced by Raymond Nobbs in *Norfolk Island and Its First Settlements 1788–1814* (1988). They were also reproduced by David Moore in *London Archives of Natural History* 25 (1998). This includes some rough preliminary sketches on the reverse of one drawing. There is one other drawing of Norfolk Island not catalogued by the Museum. The illustration used in the present article (not depicted in Nobbs' book) is catalogued as 'Grove of tree ferns with shallow valley beyond and (left) stumps'.

Evidence of the long-term relationship between Bauer and Westall is to be found in Bauer's great work *Flora Graeca*, a series of 10 volumes published between 1810 and 1840. In his book *The Flora Graeca Story: Sibthorp, Bauer and Hawkins in the Levant* (OUP, 1998), Walter Lack writes that 'Bauer's work stopped after the seventh title page; the remaining three were probably all executed by William Westall, perhaps drawn by Imrie and not Bauer.' Niniam Imrie, who died in 1820, was a Captain in the Royals. The coloured engraving in volume 9 (published 1837) entitled 'Phycus' gives W. Westall as the artist, while those in volumes 8 and 10 give no such information, although attribution to Westall would seem reasonable. Westall did quite a number of tasks for publishers, bringing illustrations by amateur artists up to the required standard for publication. The engraving of Phycus is in the Radcliffe Science Museum, Oxford. In *Flora Graeca* the text suggests that the view of Phycus (Marmaris) was probably sketched by Imrie during a stop en route from Istanbul to Cyprus, and later William Westall 'seems to have used it for a coloured drawing, now lost'.

Walter Lack establishes that Bauer and Westall discovered together the carnivorous plant *Cephalotus follicularis Labill* (Cephalotaceae) at King George's Sound, Western Australia, on New Year's Day 1802,

and it is clear that Westall adopted Bauer's colour coding system (used as a device to recall the real colours of botanical specimens) in his tree illustrations.

The overall impression one gets from viewing the 19 new Westall drawings in the Natural History Museum collection, together with a number of delicately drawn detailed insets, is that most probably Ferdinand Bauer and William Westall had had a profound influence on each other during the *Investigator* voyage. Bauer took the role perhaps of 'paternal guide' to balance Matthew Flinders' more authoritative orders, and Robert Brown, the ship's naturalist with Bauer, instilled a respect for botany and scientific depiction that benefited Westall's work in Australia and elsewhere. Westall's main botanical work depicted trees. They are always accurate and well drawn—a definite bonus for any topographical and landscape artist.

RICHARD J. WESTALL is William Westall's great-great grandson. He has been researching the lives of the artists Richard and William Westall for 30 years. His website at www.bradonpace.com/westall provides information on the two artists and their works

