

ASBS

*Australasian  
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Botany  
Society*



# Newsletter

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# AUSTRALASIAN SYSTEMATIC BOTANY SOCIETY INCORPORATED

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Hansjörg Eichler Research Fund:  
on March 14<sup>th</sup> and September 14<sup>th</sup> each year.  
Australian Conservation Taxonomy Award:  
on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015, 2016

**Cover image:** *Ternstroemia monostigma* W.R.Barker (Pentaphragmaceae), a New Guinea endemic. Male and female flowers and parts (minus petals), fruit, seed in section. Artist Taikika Iwagu. With permission of the National Herbarium of Papua New Guinea.

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in February 2015

## Revised book review

### Allan Cunningham's Tasmanian explorations and collections

Review by: Alex George  
Kardinya, Western Australia

**The Botanist and the Judge: Allan Cunningham in Tasmania 1818–1819.**

*By A.E. & T.A. Orchard.*

**Botanical interpretation by S.J.**

*Jarman & G. Kantvilas.*

*Privately published, Weston Creek,*

*A.C.T., 2014. Pp vi, 176.*

*ISBN 978-0-9941505-0-9 RRP \$A34*

*(paperback).*

*Available from A.E. Orchard, PO Box*

*3427, Weston Creek, A.C.T. 2611*

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This is the fourth in a series of publications by Tony and Tessa Orchard on one of Australia's most significant early explorers and plant collectors, Allan Cunningham (Orchard, 2013; Orchard & Orchard, 2013; Orchard, 2014). They derive from an exhaustive search for original sources—journals, correspondence, herbarium specimens, as well as relevant literature (including newspapers), though two important works on Cunningham are not cited (McMinn, 1970, Curry *et al.*, 2002). Almost everyone who has studied the systematics of Australian plants has dealt with his collections but to many, despite the biography by McMinn, he has been a shadowy figure and his specimens (especially the labels and numbering 'system') confusing. The Orchards' work will culminate in a new biography that presumably will cover discussion of earlier studies and the various versions of Cunningham's journal such as those held at the Mitchell Library. The slant of these first four works is clearly botanical, containing detailed listings and analyses of his collections that may not appear in the biography.

The book starts with an 'Introduction' that briefly explains Cunningham and Barron Field (the 'Judge' of the title) and how their lives were intertwined. The book has much more than these two, however, covered in nine chapters plus a very important appendix. A 'Prelude' summarises the discovery and

exploration of Van Diemen's Land before Cunningham's arrival in January 1819. It also summarises his activities in New South Wales from December 1816, and the first voyage with Phillip Parker King in the *Mermaid* (to balance the summaries of the voyages in a later chapter, and so make this a better stand-alone work, a little more detail would have been good here).

Next is 'Preparations for the Journey to Tasmania', a transcript of Cunningham's journal covering the days in Sydney from 21 November 1818 to the voyage south and arrival off Hobart on 31 December.

The chapter 'Cunningham in Tasmania' is a transcript of his journal from 1 January 1819 to their arrival back at Sydney on 14 February. In general, Cunningham wrote each day about his activities, the landscape, vegetation, the ease or difficulty of moving through it, and the weather (the last apparently following an instruction from his patron Joseph Banks to include observations on climate). He also wrote about managing his collections—drying, sorting and packing specimens and seeds. There is nothing about the built environment and people (including his companions). Although his schooling was limited, he gained a good knowledge of English and the Classics (McMinn, 1970), and he clearly had a very good knowledge of relevant botanical texts. Given that his effects taken on his voyages included several boxes and a 'Government chest', it seems likely that he took his reference books along, but one suspects that he had a retentive memory for plants and their names. The Latin of his descriptions of plants that he believed to be new species is generally correct.

Unless it is still known by the name given by Cunningham, each plant mentioned in the journals is given its current accepted name with author, in an endnote, this being the important contribution by Jean Jarman and Gintaras Kantvilas. The authors note that they have

retained Cunningham's spelling and abbreviations but have amended the punctuation 'to reflect modern usage, and improve readability'. References are included in the endnotes to each chapter and generally are meticulous.

There follows 'John Septimus Roe', surveyor on King's voyages and in Van Diemen's Land, and later Surveyor-General of Western Australia, with whom Cunningham was associated in all of King's Australian surveys and who would have picked up an awareness of plant collecting from him.

A chapter titled 'Naming the Huon Pine' discusses the discovery of the timber by early settlers (who found it washed up on river banks) and their frustration at not locating its source; its early exploitation; then Cunningham's difficulties and ultimate success in finding fertile material that allowed it to be identified. From Brown's description of *Dacrydium* in Flinders' *Voyage to Terra Australis* (1814) he surmised that it was related to that genus but would prove 'probably to be a new genus'. It would be published as a *Dacrydium* by William Hooker in 1845, but some 160 years later placed in a new genus *Lagarostrobos* by Chris Quinn, vindicating Cunningham's opinion.

There is a short chapter on Robert Littlejohn, a Scottish gardener and an early settler and collector in Van Diemen's Land, whose collection of seeds was passed to Cunningham to be placed in order and a selection sent to Aiton at Kew (Cunningham listed 44 samples).

The Orchards even found a view of Hobart from the report on a French expedition that shows where Littlejohn's property lay.

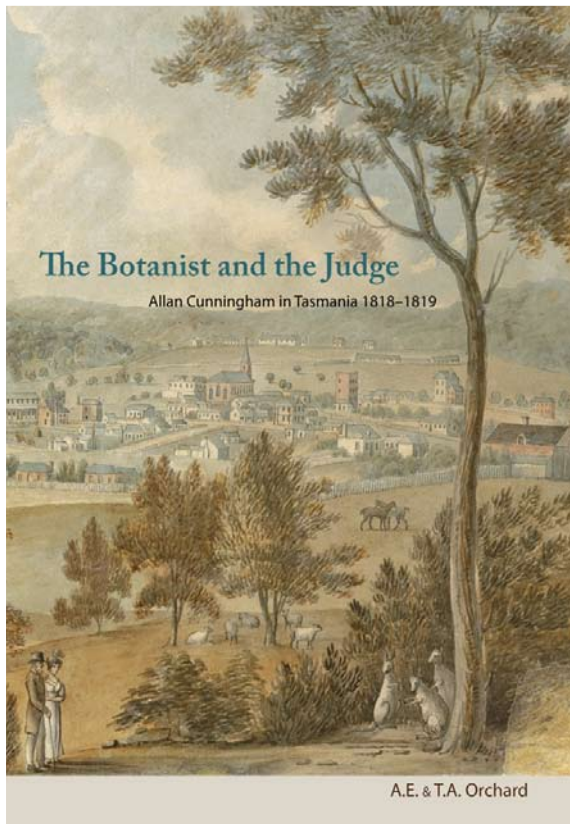
'Supreme Court Judge Barron Field' is an account of his life and career that included a term as Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. He was a controversial person who alienated many in the colony but improved the judicial system. He also wrote poetry, rather despised by critics in Sydney, but included in *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales by Various Hands*, a book that he edited. He was instrumental in getting two manuscripts

published, the journals of explorer John Oxley and the memoirs of a convict, James Henry Vaux, whose life is neatly summarised here. Cunningham contributed several chapters to *Geographical Memoirs*, there describing a new genus as *Fieldia*, naming it after the judge.

Then comes 'Allan Cunningham's Later Career', a very good, concise account describing the later voyages with King, his trip across the Blue Mountains with members of a Russian expedition in 1820, his further explorations in New

South Wales, visits to Norfolk Island and New Zealand, his sojourn in England and return to Sydney.

'Phillip Parker King' is a short chapter that outlines his life and his role as captain of the *Mermaid* and *Bathurst* on which Cunningham served as plant collector, later continuing their acquaintance in Sydney. King was an executor





of Cunningham's estate and assisted in raising funds for a monument to him, placed in the Botanic Gardens in Sydney.

Finally, and what will be of great practical value for botanists, is 'Appendix: Plant Specimens Collected in Tasmania'. This tabulates all the collections from Van Diemen's Land that the authors traced. In one column it gives Cunningham's notes and in another column lists each specimen found, the herbarium where housed and any annotations on the sheet, followed by the current name with author(s). A huge amount of time has gone into locating these sheets and recording the data (it whets the appetite for further papers in this series that will do the same for his other Australian collections). The authors give translations of Cunningham's short Latin descriptions that he wrote for plants that he believed to be new species (except no. 110).

The image on p. 39 of a herbarium sheet at Kew of *Acacia verticillata* is a splendid example of the challenge for the botanist facing a sheet on which are mounted multiple specimens and labels from several collectors, as was commonly done in the 19th century when paper was in short supply.

There are copious illustrations (many in colour), mostly from published works, chosen to show the *dramatis personae*, the places and landscapes, plants and specimens. Those of plants are taken from contemporary publications, plus two made by the gardener/artists at Kew in the 1820s, George Bond and Thomas Duncanson, not previously published. Recent photographs are included of Mt Wellington and Macquarie Harbour.

No reason is given for the use of Tasmania in the subtitle, instead of Van Diemen's Land or Island. It was not given its current name until 1855. In the text and endnotes modern placenames are used (not always quite correctly, e.g. King George's Sound, Hell's Gates). While it is probably clear to all Australian readers, for those unfamiliar with Hobart's mountain it might have been worth mentioning that Cunningham's Mount Table is Mt Wellington, although the latter was substituted on many herbarium labels.

I have few criticisms and they are minor. On p. 3 I would have thought that in the late 18th and early 19th centuries Europeans were expanding exploration of the *unknown* world (why explore the known?). On p. 6 it's not strictly correct that in 1800 the British Government thought that the French might have 'designs on parts of the newly settled continent'. Although they suspected that the western part (New Holland) was connected to the east (New South Wales), this was not confirmed until Flinders' surveys of 1801–03; and they were certainly concerned at the French interest. The French expedition of 1800–03 was led by Nicolas (not Nicholas) Baudin. It would have been nice to have the full legend for the illustration of Huon Pine on p. 76, to a less extent that on p. 74. For readers not familiar with the practice of numbering plant specimens it would have been worth explaining the abbreviation s.n. (Latin, *sine numero*, without number). I noticed a few other typos and inconsistencies but none is misleading and they are not worth mentioning.

This is a well-researched work, clearly written and beautifully illustrated. Importantly, it has a good index (but I noted that diacritics have disappeared, and the entries for the first paragraph on p. 4 are listed as p. 3, presumably due to a late amendment in pagination). The book will be an essential source for anyone studying or interested in Cunningham's collections and the exploration of Tasmania. I have enjoyed reviewing it and look forward to the other publications on this collector still to come from these authors.

## References

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