

### Plant Taxonomic Literature in Australian Libraries

N. T. Burbidge

CSIRO/Australian Biological Resources Study: Canberra pp. 520 \$17.50

Harder to review than a dictionary but not so hard as a telephone directory, this book combines something of the qualities of both. It is 'an updated and greatly expanded edition of the *Select List of Publications in Systematic Botany Available in Australia* prepared by Dr Nancy Burbidge on behalf of the Systematic Botany Committee of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in 1951 . . . The present work was compiled as part of the Flora Project undertaken by the Australian Academy of Science in 1973, with limited private funds, as a preparatory step towards the much larger task of writing a new Flora of Australia'. It is a compilation of titles and bibliographic details, by alphabetic order of authors, of about 8-10 000 works of relevance to plant taxonomy (all groups) which are held in Australian libraries, with a list for each or at least some of the libraries where it is held. 'Works appearing in current journals widely available in Australia have generally not been included', but those in older and uncommon journals often have been. The list includes not only strictly taxonomic works, but geographical, historical and biographical as well, together with popular, non-technical books which contain good illustrations of Australian plants.

The list of titles and of holdings is as complete — and as incomplete — as the participation of the contributing libraries. This participation has been very uneven. There are some important libraries which have not contributed at all, and others which have contributed less than fully. Such imperfections are a direct result of relying on libraries to supply the information with whatever staff they could spare, and the remarkable thing is not how many gaps there are, but how large the list is, considering the circumstances of its production. It is a tribute to the persuasive powers and high reputation of the late Dr Burbidge that the list is so full. To achieve completeness would have required special staff employed for some years, and this publication must be taken as being nearly as complete as could reasonably be achieved by voluntary cooperation.

The big gap, indeed, is not in the list of library holdings, but in the innumerable photocopies and reprints on individual plant groups in the personal working libraries of taxonomists throughout Australia. There is, however, no means of cataloguing all these, and no way of tapping this rich resource, except by accurate guesswork, and friendly cooperation — both, happily, common taxonomic attributes. That being the case, this compilation is likely to be as near as we will ever get to listing the locally available useful literature for Australian taxonomists. The subject index intended to accompany it, which could have been of enormous advantage, unfortunately proved to be impracticable.

It is entirely appropriate that this important aid should bear, as its frontispiece, a charming and characteristic photograph of Dr Nancy Burbidge, whose idea it was, and who carried it through to the point of starting editing, before her death, in the interest of furthering the Flora of Australia which was so dear to her heart. Botanists have cause to be grateful to Dr Alison McCusker for completing the work, and to CSIRO and ABRS for jointly sponsoring the publication of this most useful book, both milestone and memorial.

G. A. M. Scott

### **Botanists of the Eucalypts**

*Normal Hall*

CSIRO: Melbourne 1978 pp. 160 \$7.50

In this book Mr Hall has provided us with 'short biographies of people who have named eucalypts, whose names have been given to species or who have collected type material'. These biographies are concise and informative records of the people. In some cases a portrait or photo is provided, which adds 'colour' while not distracting one in the direction of 'just looking at the pictures'. The record is incomplete, but a wealth of facts and historical detail is contained therein, and much of the information is Australian history rather than just Australian botanical history.

Australians tend to be careless of their heritage and tend to allow economic factors to dictate a 'practical' research aim. It is therefore refreshing that someone has cared enough to research and record biographical data of some of those who contributed to the knowledge of the Australian Flora. Quite clearly Mr Hall has demonstrated the urgency of recording this aspect of our heritage. Numerous contributors were modest, humble folk of whom memory has faded and, as each year passes, obscurity increases. Mr Hall is to be congratulated for taking this step to help stem the tide of advancing obscurity for these people.

The biographies have been restricted to contributors associated with only one genus and as a result there is still an enormous bank of unrecorded information. However, while this is so, it does cover all of the major early botanists; indeed the choice of genus has been most appropriate towards this end. The value here, of course, is that Mr Hall has given us concise bibliographies on these scientists all within one work. Of necessity, his list of references provides the key to in-depth studies for the more serious student of History.

His liberal approach of including people associated with undescribed species (*nomina nuda*) is to be applauded. However, the restriction on the number of citations of species with which a person was associated, where a worker's contribution was large, seems to be regrettable. This could have been overcome with a third

appendix which listed *all* names applied to the genus *Eucalyptus* together with the authority, the collectors of type material and the honouree where applicable. Indeed my only criticism of this book is associated with the appendices. It is not clear whether Appendix I is a *complete* list of the people who have collected type material, described species or been honoured in eucalypt nomenclature. If it is not, then a complete list with an annotation indicating those persons about whom little or nothing is known would add value to the work. As it stands now, Appendix I adds nothing to the information contained within the book.

An appeal is made in the Preface for contributions to remove gaps in the information, and the above additions and modifications to the appendices would make it easier for a prospective contributor to ascertain if his information were relevant or superfluous.

This book represents an invaluable beginning to the collation of the history of botany and botanists in Australia, and as such can be recommended as a must for the bookshelves of all Australians who care about their heritage. Mr Hall and other potential bibliographers deserve enthusiastic encouragement and support to continue the research, collation and publication of our heritage before it is too late.

*Helen Hewson*