

Treasures of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Collections

'Icones plantarum medicinalium' by Josephus Andreas Jacobus Plenck

Published in Vienna between 1788 and 1812, this eight-volume work, the full title of which is 'Icones plantarum medicinalium secundum systema Lynnaei cum enumeratione virium et usus medici chirurgici et diaetetici', reports on the therapeutic uses of 758 plants.

The first seven volumes of *Icones Plantarum Medicinalium* were published in Vienna during Plenck's lifetime. However, the eighth and final volume did not appear until 1812 and was edited by Joseph Kerndl. The first volume contains a dedication to Joseph II, the Holy Roman Emperor from 1765 to 1790. For each plant Plenck's commentary, written in both Latin and German, reported the name, class, order, genus, species, place of origin, pharmaceutical properties, odour, taste, pharmacologic effect and medicinal uses.

The eight volumes contain 758 hand coloured copper engravings of the medicinal plants along with the commentary. The engravings are all large full page (approximately 32cm x 48cm) and are "delightful, and very decorative in treatment". The engravings have been attributed to Johann Ignatius Albrecht although some authorities claim that a few of the engravings are based on earlier work by the Austrian botanist Nikolaus Joseph Jacquin.

Joseph Plenck was born in Vienna in 1735 and, after completing his secondary education, studied surgery. Between 1758 and 1763 his studies were interrupted by the Seven Years'



Illustration of *Iris germanica* from Volume 1

War where he served, despite not having graduated, as a regimental surgeon. After the war, and after finally receiving his degree, Plenck went on to practise surgery in Vienna.

By the age of 35 Plenck had been summoned by the empress Maria Theresia to teach surgery at the University of Tynau. From there he

moved on to universities in Buda and, finally, Pest. In 1783 he applied for and was appointed to the position of Director of Military Pharmacies in his home city of Vienna.

In 1786 Plenck was invited by the emperor Joseph II to join his newly founded Military Medical Academy, known as the Josephinum. There Plenck taught botany, surgery and mineralogy until ill health forced his retirement in 1805. He died in Vienna in 1807.

During his lifetime Plenck was responsible for many successful scientific works and wrote on a huge number of subjects, not just limited to his teaching responsibilities, and including works on pharmacy and pharmacology.

The eight volume set in the library is part of the collection of Daniel Hanbury (1825–75) which was presented to the Society by his brother Thomas in 1892. Daniel Hanbury, a member of the well known Hanbury family (both his father and uncle were founder members of the Pharmaceutical Society), was considered one of Britain's greatest pharmacologists and a leading figure in British pharmacognosy.

The library holds over 60,000 books. Many, such as this treasure, cover the origins of pharmacy. A contemporary collection covers all aspects of pharmacy, pharmacy practice and related subjects. The collection can be searched on the online catalogue (<http://olib.rpsgb.org>) and many items are available for loan to