

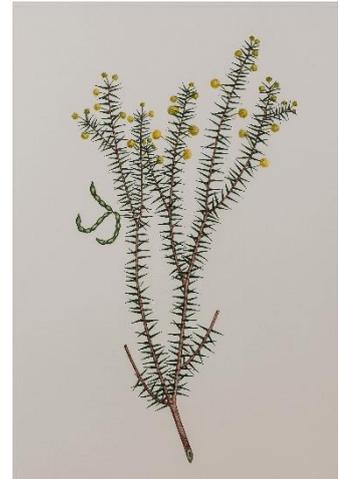
Plate 86 *Acacia Ulicifolia*

Mimosa ericaefolia

Juniper wattle, Prickly Moses (derived from prickly mimosa),

Wattle, Juniper

Botany Bay, Australia, 28th April – 6th May, 1770



The genus name '*Acacia*' comes from the Greek '*acis*' meaning 'thorn' and the species name '*ulicifolia*' from having foliage similar to the genus '*ulex*', meaning gorse. The plant was first described by Richard Anthony Salisbury in 1796 who named it *Mimosa ulicifolia*. However, in 1957, the Australian Plant Name Index, which publishes the authoritative sources for Australian plant nomenclature, placed it in the genus '*Acacia*' by A. B. Court.

Acacia ulicifolia is a shrub that can grow up to 3m high, or remain close to the ground, probably depending on the degree of exposure of its habitat. The shrub has a smooth, grey bark and 'leaves' that are short and needle-like, 8 – 14mm long. The blooms consist of a flower-head on a slender stalk 8 – 15mm long. The flowers, pale cream in colour and spherical in shape, bloom between mid-autumn to mid-spring.

The shrub is endemic to Australia and widespread in New South Wales along the coast and table lands. It is also found in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. As a cultivated shrub it is generally adaptable and hardy and used mainly as a hedge plant exploiting its attractive foliage rather than the flowers. Horticultural propagation is not straight forward in that growth has to be from 'scarified' seed or from a 'boiling water' treatment. Currently, in the wild, *Acacia ulicifolia*, is not listed as a threatened species under the Australian Threatened Species Act, 1995.

Acacia ulicifolia is a plant that has been the subject of much debate regarding its true botanical status within the Linnean binomial nomenclature system. A common synonym is *Mimosa ulicifolia*, the name given by Salisbury in 1796. While mimosas and acacias are closely related, they are two distinct species. The debate has arisen from the possible shortcomings of the Linnean system of classification which relies on readily observable, distinguishable features such as ornate flowers. More recent molecular and DNA evidence has shown, e.g. that the genus *Fabaceae* may be misleadingly and incorrectly called *Mimosa*. This historical problem is evidenced, in part, by the extensive range of common binomial names associated with a given plant and, as in this case, the classification revised and corrected from *Mimosa* to *Acacia*. The genus *Acacia* consists of over 1000 species, and the genus *Mimosa* has around 400 species. It is not clear what

the shrub was called at the time of collection by Banks and Solander in 1770 but Richard Anthony Salisbury named and described the shrub *Mimosa ulicifolia*, twenty-six years later in 1796.

Richard Anthony Salisbury (1761 – 1829), was a British botanist with a colourful and questionable reputation among his contemporaries. He knew Joseph Banks and other botanists of that time but was involved in several disputes that caused him to be ostracised by his contemporaries.

He was born Richard Anthony Markham in 1761 in Leeds, the son of a cloth merchant but changed his name to Salisbury due to financial support received from a distant relative, Mrs Anna Salisbury, to support his studies. Salisbury's honesty in legal and financial matters were questionable and often devious. He established substantial gardens at one of his father's estates near Leeds, and soon after 1800 bought Ridgeway House, Mill Hill, the former estate of the famous gardener, Peter Collinson. However in 1807 Salisbury sold Ridgeway House to a foundation that became Mill Hill School, after which most of the plants and trees disappeared. He carried on a long-lasting dispute with James Edward Smith, founder of the Linnean Society of London (1778). In 1809, Salisbury was appointed the first honorary secretary of the Royal Horticultural Society, of which he was a founding member. However, his successor found he had left the accounts in disarray. It was around this time Salisbury moved to a small house in Edgware, London, where he established a garden that contained a large number of exotic and rare plants.

Although a competent botanist by any standards, Salisbury opposed the use of the Linnean system of plant classification. He also plagiarised the work of Robert Brown who presented a paper at a meeting of the Linnean Society in 1809. Salisbury memorised the presentation and subsequently published the work ahead of Brown, who published in 1810. In retrospect, Salisbury was nevertheless regarded as a meticulous botanist who made a significant contribution to the science of botany but was known to be difficult to get on with.

Robert Parkinson

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