

A classic of British dendrology in a magnificent folio edition

Jacob George Strutt, *Sylva Britannica; or, Portraits of forest trees, distinguished for their antiquity, magnitude or beauty*. (London: A.J. Valpy for Colnaghi & Co., 1826). 22 inches x 14 3/8 inches (559 x 365 mm). 32 pages, 50 engraved plates.

Jacob George Strutt (1784–1867) was a landscape painter and etcher rather than a botanical draughtsman in the strict sense. He was essentially a delineator of forest scenes rather than tree anatomy. Appropriately, the publishers Colnaghi were a firm of picture dealers and print sellers. Strutt focused on the individual rather than the species: when he moved to Rome, he painted “Tasso’s Oak” (1851), a tree distinguished for its “antiquity,” to borrow a term from the subtitle of *Sylva Britannica*.

The impressive folio dimensions and the artist’s evident mastery of etching technique make this book one of the most spectacular of dendrological publications, clearly inspiring later works as diverse as R.U. Piper’s naïve *Trees of America* (Boston, 1855–58) or L.L. Dame’s huge collection of photographs, *Typical elms and other trees of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1890). The much-reduced woodcuts after Strutt’s drawings published in J.C. Loudon’s eight-volume *Arboretum et fruticetum britannicum* (London, 1838) reveal how much his artistry depended on delicacy of line expanding into unrestricted space.

This copy of Strutt’s exquisite work, from the Chicago Botanic Garden Library, is in a binding of contemporary half-calf, with a gilt-lettered spine, marbled boards, and the bookplate of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society (“Stickney Fund 1870”).

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