Cresswell and Gosse

Select the caption you wish to read from the index below or scroll down to read them all in turn

Cresswell and Gosse

Cresswell

- 1 Date palm
- 2 Cocoanut tree or coconut palm
- 3 Elephant creeper

Gosse

- 4 Devonshire cup coral
- 5 Dog whelk
- 6 Great or spiny spider-crab
- 7 Soft coral
- 8 Sea squirts

Cresswell

1 - Date palm

Phoenix dactylifera (?) Artist unidentified Late 1800s Watercolour with pencil border

The tree depicted in this drawing has been tentatively identified at Kew as Phoenix dactylifera. However, the strange wavy trunk is not typical of that species. Probably native to northern Africa, the date palm is now found throughout the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. Many distinct varieties are grown for their fruit.

Cresswell Collection

2 - Cocoanut tree or coconut palm

Artist unidentified Late 1800s Watercolour and gouache with pencil border

The coconut palm, widespread throughout the tropical regions, is believed to have originated in India. Most parts of the plant are potentially useful, but the fruit particularly so. The outer, fibrous layer gives us coir for matting, upholstery filling or potting compost, whilst inside is the coconut meat. This is usually processed into coconut milk and used in cooking.

Cresswell Collection

3 - Elephant creeper

Argyreia nervosa var. speciosa Artist unidentified Late 1800s Watercolour with pencil border

Possibly the artist chose to illustrate this plant because the root is used in ayurvedic medicine, a system of traditional medicine practised in India. One of the artist's themes in this series of drawings seems to be plants of social and economic importance. A member of the Convolvulus family, its seeds may contain mind-altering alkaloid chemicals.

Cresswell Collection

Gosse

4 - Devonshire cup coral

Caryophyllia smithii Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888) About 1850–1860 Paper collage in watercolour, gouache, coloured chalks and pencil

A solitary coral species named in 1828 after Thomas Smith. He was a London barrister who first found it on the south coast of Devon, "adhering to a rock in a pool of water". In A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devonshire Coast, Gosse describes searching for, and finding, this animal along the rocky coast near Ilfracombe, North Devon.

5 - Dog whelk

Nucella lapillus Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888) About 1850–1860 Paper collage in watercolour, charcoal and coloured chalks

Although dog whelks' shells vary much in shape and colour, they are always thick and heavy in order to protect the animal from the force of the waves.

A dye similar to the famous Tyrian or imperial purple can be extracted from the dog whelk.

The vase-shaped objects on the underside of the rock are egg capsules. A single animal has been observed to produce 245 of such capsules.

6 - Great or spiny spider-crab

Hyas araneus Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888) About 1850–1860 Paper collage in watercolour and coloured chalks

Gosse obtained this rather sluggish type of crab while dredging in the waters of Weymouth Bay, Tor Bay or off Ilfracombe. He was often accompanied by Charles Kingsley, author of Westward Ho! and The Water-Babies.

Common in the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans, this crab has the distinction of being the first non-indigenous species to be recorded from Antarctic seas.

7 - Soft coral

Alcyonium species Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888) About 1850–1860 Coloured chalks on paper

This soft coral is attached to a piece of rock. The yellowish, fleshy stock has numerous polyps projecting from its surface like tiny white blossoms. One of the polyps is shown enlarged by Gosse in the top left. Each has eight rays. There is no continuous hard skeleton but irregular calcareous spicules, or spiky chalk-like structures, are scattered through the stock to give it some rigidity.

8 - Sea squirts

Botryllus schlosseri Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888) About 1850–1860 Paper collage in watercolour

Sea squirts are simple chordates. These are animals that possess a notochord, a type of primal backbone. Each of the 'rays' making up the flower-like colonies is an individual animal. They are embedded in a tough protective matrix, like jelly. Sea squirts are filter feeders. They draw water in through their mouths into a pouch where particles are bound up with mucus and passed to the stomach.