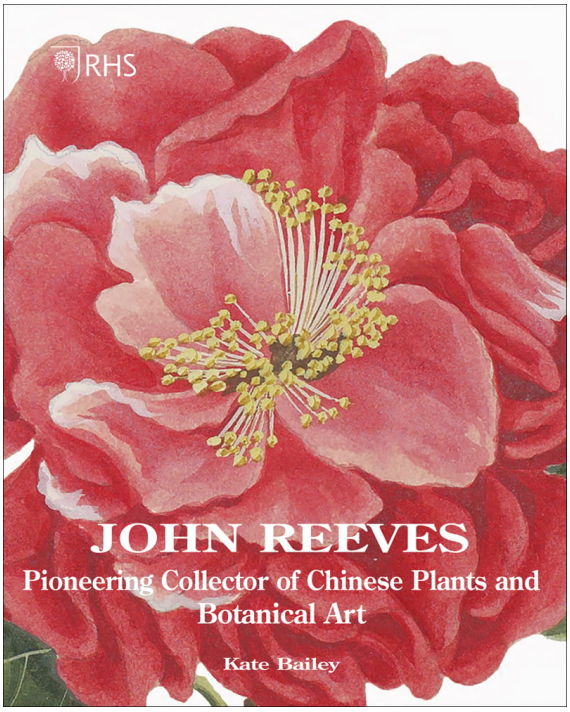
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John Reeves

Pioneering Collector of Chinese Plants and Botanical Art

Kate Bailey

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- Sixty images from the RHS Reeves Collection, a hauntingly beautiful collection of Chinese botanical artwork
- An insight into what life was like as an East India Company tea inspector in early nineteenth-century China
- Contemporary scenes of Canton, now the city of Guangzhou

This is the story of the Reeves Collection of botanical paintings, the result of one man's single-minded dedication to commissioning pictures and gathering plants for the Horticultural Society of London. Reeves went to China in 1812 and immediately on arrival started sending back snippets of information about manufactures, plants and poetry, goods, gods and tea to Sir Joseph Banks. Slightly later, he also started collecting for the Society but despite years of work collecting, labelling and packing plants and organising a team of Chinese artists until he left China in 1831, Reeves never enjoyed the same degree of recognition as other naturalists in China. This was possibly because he had a demanding job as a tea inspector. Reeves himself never claimed to be a professional naturalist and the plant collecting and painting supervision were undertaken in his own time. Furthermore, *fan qui* (foreign devils) were restricted to the port area of Canton and to Macau, so that plant-hunting expeditions further afield were impossible. Furthermore, Reeves never published an account of his life in the country, unlike Clarke Abel and Robert Fortune, but he left us some letters, notebooks, drawings and maps. The Collection is held at the Royal Horticultural Society's Lindley Library in Vincent Square, London. It is a magnificent achievement. Not only are the pictures accurate and richly coloured plant portraits of plants then unknown in the West, but they stand as a record of plants being cultivated in nineteenth-century Canton and Macau. In *John Reeves: Pioneering Collector of Chinese Plants and Botanical Art*, Kate Bailey reveals John Reeves' life as an East India Company tea inspector in nineteenth-century China and shows how he managed to collect and document thousands of Chinese natural history drawings, far more than anyone else at the time.

Kate Bailey started working life as a reluctant solicitor. At the age of 54, on the strength of nothing more than a magazine article about a paper conservator, she abandoned the law and enrolled at Camberwell College of Arts for a degree in paper conservation. After obtaining an M.A., and being accepted for a Ph.D., for three years Kate stalked Reeves in libraries, museums and auction houses while at the same time drawing on her own childhood memories of Singapore and Hong Kong in the early 1950s. A post-doctoral year at the V&A followed, working on a collaborative project into the pigments found on Chinese export paintings using the Reeves pictures for comparison. Then came a request for a book to bring the work of a modest, dedicated East India Company tea inspector and his band of skilful Chinese painters to a wider audience. Kate continues to research, write and lecture on Reeves and related art-botanical subjects.

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