Storrington **Horticultural Society July 20023 meeting report.**

The meeting welcomed Paul Abbot who talked to us about the Victorian fern craze known as Pteridimania.

This was a period in the Fern’s history when during the latter part of the Victorian ere it became fashionable to display Ferns both inside and outside the home.

Pteridimania became popular and the main period of popularity was between 1850 to 1890.

The collecting of ferns and displaying them drew people of different social classes. For some it was a fashionable interest and for others a scientific hobby. Ferns were pressed in albums for display, widely used for decoration with pottery and china both being good examples of fern decoration. Perhaps more lavishly were the fern displays both inside and outside the home often in purpose built cabinets.

The best and well known cabinet was the Wardian case in a variety of designs, invented by Nathaniel Bagshaw about 1829 a keen fern collector to protect his ferns from the air pollution of 19c London, and this also probably was a forerunner of the modern Terrarium.

Wardian cases soon became features in stylish dining rooms in Western Europe and helped develop the spread of the fern craze and the later craze for growing Orchids.

Interestingly there are only about 70 British and native hybrids in addition to these are odd variants of wild species and it was from these that the Victorians cultivated ferns often producing hundreds of ferns from a single variant.

The history of the fern is remarkable it being one of the oldest surviving plants on the planet.

Ferns are classified as vascular plants because they have the capacity to use specialized tissues to transport water and nutrients through the plant. They are unique in the plant world because they reproduce not by flowers or seeds, but via spores. These ancient moisture and shade loving plants date back to the Jurassic period some 200 million years ago.

Some historians think the evolution of ferns began with aquatic seaweed evolving into something similar to today’s familiar Ferns

Today historians tell us there are at least 10,500 fern species although some estimate there may be many as 15,000 because new ferns are still being discovered particularly in tropical areas.

Not surprisingly ferns are most abundant in tropical environments even smaller countries such as Costa Rica have as many as 900 species double the number found in North America and amazingly there are even a handful of ferns in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The meeting ended with a raffle and light refreshments. The next meeting is on August 18th at the Storrington Village Hall commencing 7.30pm when June Colley & John Baker will be talking to us about Lovely Lillies. Plants will be on sale.

Michael Webber

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