THE FERN SOCIETY

OF VICTORIA Inc.

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NEWSLETTER

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JAN/FEB, 1989

FERN SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.

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Postal Address: P.O. Box 45, Heidelberg West, Victoria, Australia, 3081

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<u>SUBSCRIPTIONS:</u> Single - \$13.00 (Pensioner/Student -\$9.00); Family - \$16.00 (Pensioners -\$11.00);

Overseas - A\$25.00 (by Airmail).

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Our December meeting at Rippon Lea was attended by about 80 members and their families, who enjoyed an inspection of the magnificent fernery and gardens followed by afternoon tea and drawing of the Special Effort.

Many thanks to Jean Boucher and her associates who laid out tables and dispensed the drinks under rather more difficult conditions than usual, and to all who brought along plates of refreshments. Thanks also to Margaret Radley and Joy Horman for their work with the special effort, to those who provided items for the hampers and, particularly, to Mavis Potter and Beth Ward, who baked and decorated the Christmas cake, which was the main prize. baked and decorated the Christmas cake, which was the main prize.

There is an article elsewhere in this issue with information for our Fern show in April. As we did not have a Show in 1988, there will be a good number of new members who have not experienced the pleasure to be derived from participation in the activities. I hope that many new members will come and join the "regulars" in making this a highly successful event.

We have finally been able to secure an accommodation booking for the trip to Wilson's Promontory. This is being organized by Albert Ward and Keith Hutchinson (see pg for details). We did not give this information at the December meeting so that country members would have an equal chance to secure a booking - but be quick, accommodation is limited.

> Best regards, Bob Lee.

1989 FERN SHOW

Saturday, 8th April - Sunday, 9th April

The Show will be held on the above days at Nunawading Horticultural Centre and Will be Open to the public, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Sunday. Setting up will begin at 12 noon Friday, 7th April (further details on times for this day in the March Newsletter).

One of our chief needs from this time right up to the Show is publicity to inform the public of the event, particularly as there was no Show last year. The Show Committee will be organizing publicity through the media as usual, but the assistance of everyone is needed in this area. Advertising leaflets will be available at the February meeting and everyone attending is asked to take some and arrange to have them displayed in places where they are likely to attract the attention of potential visitors to the Show. Please try to promote the Show at every opportunity over the coming weeks.

The members of the Show Committee responsible for organizing the event tis year are:

Bob Lee (Chairman)	Ph: 8	36	1528	
Betty Allgood	(059)	68	4858	
Julian Basser	5	96	3132	
Bernadette Blackstock	3	91	5517	
Ian Broughton	(059)	64	6402	
Derek Griffiths	3	36	3157	
John & Norma Hodges	8	78	9584	
Joel Macher	5	60	8867	
Bill Taylor	7	54	8275	
Barry White	3	37	9793	
Barry & Gay Stagoll	7	29	2712	
	or 8	44	1558	

We should like to hear reasonably soon from members willing to help in the Show activities -setting up and staffing the display, helping in the sales area, providing the tea and coffee service, etc - so that a roster can be arranged to cover all periods adequately. "new blood" is particularly sought and feeling that you do not have an adequate knowledge of ferns should not be at deterrent from joining in. There is always plenty of backup available in the event of a difficult question and you learn from the answer.

A good display requires a lot of ferns and we hope that many members will contribute (again with a special invitation to new members and those who have not been involved before). Now is the time to make this decision so that selected plants can be brought into prime condition before April. Large spectacular ferns always 1989 FERN SHOW

stand out as highlights in a show (so we will be hoping for plenty of these) but the display is really intended to generate an enthusiasm for ferns in the visitors by presenting a wide range of varieties of well-grown and well-groomed specimens. So do not be too modest in assessing the suitability of your plants for the purpose. If in doubt, talk to one of the Show Committee.

Please ensure that all display ferns, especially uncommon ones, are clearly labelled. We have been embarrassed at times, trying to answer questions about spectacular, unusual ferns that are not identified. If you are not sure of the name, try to have the fern identified in advance, rather than hope someone at the Show will recognize it.

Members who plan to sell ferns at the Show must tell us of their attention in advance, so that the necessary arrangements can be made. There is no limit, either high or low, to the number of plants that can be brought along for sale (and we would encourage anyone with a few suitable surplus plants to participate), but we do wish to discourage the sale of small tubes as the effort of handling them is disproportionately high. Please note that people selling ferns are expected to contribute a reasonable number of plants to the display in proportion to their sales volume. Where plants of a very small size are offered for sale, it would be a great help if a specimen of each type of a reasonable size could be brought along for the display, so as to give customers a better idea of what the more mature fern will look like.

We should be grateful if members, planning on coming to the Show, would save up and then bring to the Show any smallish cardboard boxes they may acquire, which could be used for packing sold ferns.

Bob Lee

NEXT MEETING Slide Night with Doug Thomas Thursday, 9th February 1989 7.30 p.m. at the WELSH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HALL 320 LATROBE STREET, MELBOURNE Doug has kindly agreed to give this month's talk after an unavoidable canellation of Chris Goudey's scheduled presentation.

Legionella and the 'Greenhouse Effect'

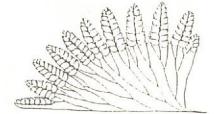
According to a recent report in the Melbourne "Age" newspaper (8/12/88), some suburban and commercial greenhouses may be harbouring a bug that causes legionnaires' disease. An outbreak of a pneumonia-like disease (Longbeachae type 1), which had recently hit Adelaide, may be related to the use of black plastic overhead watering systems. The South Australian

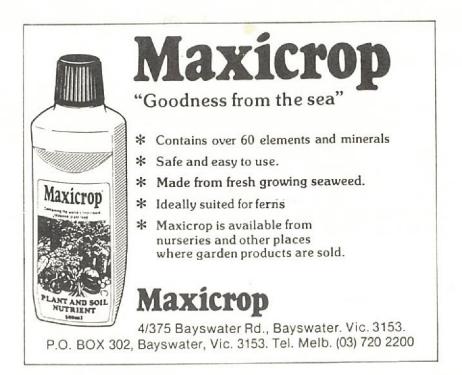
Health Commission's communicable diseases control unit has found there was a correlation between the outbreak of the disease and either gardening or greenhouses. The unit's director, Dr. Cameron, is reported to have pointed out that most of the seven people who recently contracted the disease were avid gardeners. "These are people, for instance, who have ferns and they've got sprinkler systems set up. In particular, ... above ground, strung up on pergolas and the suchlike, with fine sprays." It has been suggested that water lying in the plastic piping in the sun could provide appropriate breeding conditions for legionella bacteria, which are flushed out into the air when the system is turned on. Support for this theory has also come from a recent report from Sweden of a case of a legionella victim who repaired greenhouses and worked in "mists". It is not yet clear what is the extent of the danger to Fern Society members, who have overhead mist sprays in their fern houses. Perhaps as a precaution, we should avoid entering whilst the spray is on and wait until the mist has completely settled.

🛠 Special Effort - Xmas Hampers:

For our Xmas hampers, generous donations of ferns together food and drink were made by numerous members. The lucky winners of this extra special effort were:

- 1. June Pritchard
- 2. Jean Trudgeon
- 3. Alf Wallbridge
- 4. Jean Boucher
- 5. Caroline Goudey
- 6. Bob Lee





The Rippon Lea Fernery by Chris Goudey

(The following article has been adapted from one recently published in the The British Pteridological Society Journal, <u>The</u> <u>Pteridologist</u>, <u>1</u> (1988) 196.)

INTRODUCTION

The restoration of a massive fernery on the 'Rippon Lea' estate at Elsternwick in Victoria has just recently been completed. The structure is like an enormous aircraft hanger, consisting of an arc-shaped iron frame, sixty metres long on the outside of the arc, thirty-seven metres on the inside by eighteen and a half metres wide. The overall height is in excess of nine metres and the whole structure is covered with timber slats.

The fernery has been acclaimed as the finest fernery of its type surviving in a private garden anywhere in the world today.

HISTORY

From the mid 19th century on, the fern craze which was sweeping through England was beginning to take hold in Australia, and many ferneries were constructed in the great gardens of the time. In this State a number of quite amazingly large and bold structures are recorded from Ballarat, Geelong, the Western District, Mount Macedon and the Dandenong Ranges. All, save the newly restored fern-house at Rippon Lea, no longer exist, but a reminder of just how much importance was placed on ferns at that time may be gleaned simply by standing and reflecting for a moment within the dome of the last remaining example of the Great Fern Craze in this country.

Most fashions and excesses which arise suddenly decline just as suddenly, and Pteridomania was no exception. After 1900, changing interests in the nation saw a rapid falling away of fern culture, and it has been necessary to wait nearly 70 years before the rekindling of enthusiasm for ferns as garden plants.

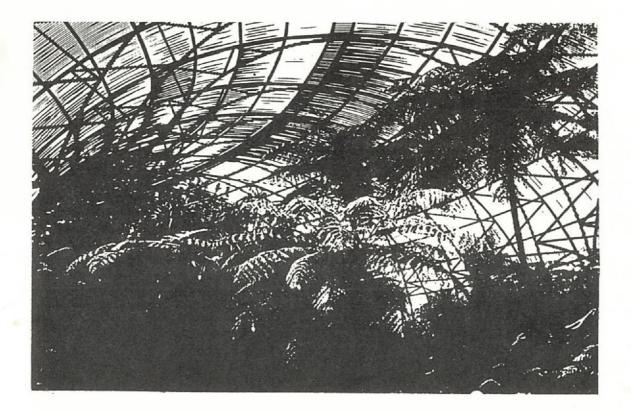
THE NATIONAL TRUST

When the National Trust acquired the Elsternwick property 'Rippon Lea' in 1974, it assumed responsibility for the restoration and presentation of the house and garden and was quick to realize the significance and extreme importance of the fernery element of the garden. It was not until May 22nd 1984 that sufficient funds were available to commence the enormous task of restoration of the structure. Eventually to cost over \$250,000, significant grants of financial support were obtained from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, the National Estate Grants Committee, the Ian Potter Foundation and the Friends of Rippon Lea.

EXTERNAL RESTORATION

At the time when restoration work commenced, the iron structure of the fernery was covered almost entirely with a dense covering of various creepers - no doubt planted to provide shade to the ferns growing below as the original slats used for that purpose gradually deteriorated. Palms emerging through the roof of the structure caused concern as they swayed and struck the iron ribs during times of high winds. Internal irrigation systems no longer operated, and for the ferns themselves only those species of the very hardiest nature were growing successfully. It was, therefore, prior to commencing work on the actual structure itself, seen as necessary to remove all creeper growth and the emergent palms, thus exposing the iron work for restoration purposes. When the fernery was first constructed the iron members which make up each rib of the building had been rivetted in place and it was quickly found that most of these retaining rivets had deteriorated over the expanse of time. Therefore, all rivets were removed and replaced with new high tensile steel bolts. Once this was achieved, carpenters set to and secured the timber members to the iron framework thus enabling the slats to be attached exactly to the original concept and design. Each slat, or lath. received four coats of paint, the colour being determined by laboratory analysis of the few remnant slats occasionally found high on the roof of the structure.

During the process or restoration, constant advice was sought from metallurgists and engineers, and particularly from Professor Len Stevens, Dean of the Department of Engineering at Melbourne University, whose eye for detail and constant encouragement was greatly appreciated by staff engaged on the project. No attempt was made to 'clean up' the iron work of the structure itself, as it was explained that the patina (the rusty covering over the iron) was extremely stable and was best left alone as it served to protect and insulate the iron from further deterioration.



INTERNAL RESTORATION

On completion of the external matters of restoration, work was commenced on the internal arrangements of the fernery. Careful notes and drawings had been maintained of every detail of the fernery and so it was now possible to commence the task of restoration of the element. Reference to early photographs of the fernery also helped in restoration decisions.

Major internal works included the rebuilding of the many rock walls and rock terraces that form the basis of the internal appearance of the fernery. The installation of an effective watering system and the re-establishment of the system of waterfalls and creeks which contribute to making the whole resemble a natural fern gully.

Rippon Lea garden staff engaged on the restoration of the fernery soon developed an appreciation of the fortitude of the gardeners who first assembled the mighty structure, particularly where the rock-work was concerned. The very large, heavy and cumbersome rocks could only be manipulated by lever and the original patterns fully restored, an attitude of deference to the skills of the original contractors pervaded.

IRRIGATION

Irrigation in the fernery may be effected by the use of either 'lake' water or Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works supply. M.M.B.W. supply may be preferred towards the middle or late summer period, when the quality of 'lake' water may sometimes be less desirable for use on ferns.



As well as an 'in-ground' system, moisture may be supplied to ferns in the form of a mist. High in the roof are situated fogging nozzles which serve to humidify the fernery and are especially valuable in the hot, windy, days of summer and autumn.

The necessity for such a system was recognized by Frederick Sargood during his original construction of the fernery.

THE FERN SOCIETY'S ROLE

Members of the Fern Society of Victoria contributed to the restocking of the fernery. A list of the species already in existence at the gardens was compiled and an appeal for ferns to members of the F.S.V. was established. A large number of species were donated and passed on to Oliver Frost, the curator at Rippon Lea. At the same time a raffle realized several hundred dollars which was sufficient to buy a number of large, hard to obtain exotic tree ferns to add to the variety already in existence in the fernery.

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CONCLUSION

The fernery element at Rippon Lea has been acclaimed as the finest fernery surviving in a private garden anywhere in the world. It presents to interested persons in Australia, as well as overseas visitors, an unique opportunity to study a large assembly of fern types growing side-by-side in an environment created to protect them in the form of a very large and, in its own right, interesting building. This structure is a huge cathedral, its slatted roof resting on an iron framework held secure on iron columns and featuring an almost total lack of obstruction supports throughout its vast internal dimension. To add to the effect, the whole is constructed in a huge arc, and is very, very impressive.

In Victorian times, the number of fern species, varieties and cultivars available for culture was remarkable, especially by the 1890's. Today over 60 genera, including some 250 species, varieties and cultivars, are under cultivation, and this is possible because conditions have been so arranged that a wide range of habitat opportunities have been created and can be exploited.

Careful attention to conditions of husbandry -provision of a generous depth of mulching material, a porous and well-drained soil medium, the provision of an abundance of earthworms, attention to matters of pH of the soil with appropriate adjustments where necessary, a proper nutritional programme and careful attention to matters of pest control -ensure that the best possible environment for growing ferns is available.

The property 'Rippon Lea' was the home of Frederick Thomas Sargood who lived there from 1868 to 1903. Sargood was many things -politician, businessman, interested in the military and well-known in the social life of the Melbourne of his time. He is perhaps best known nowadays for his influence in the creation of his great garden - a garden of many features - but none I believe a more fitting reminder of the completeness, thoroughness and total competence of Sargood, the horticulturalist, then the Great Fernery of Rippon Lea.

The National Trust welcomes anyone with an interest in ferns to visit the fernery and see for themselves the plants growing there. Staff are always on hand if any special query need to be answered.

In concluding I would like to extend my appreciation to. Oliver Frost, the curator of the 'Rippon Lea' gardens, for making available to me an unpublished article compiled by him.

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IRBAN FERNS

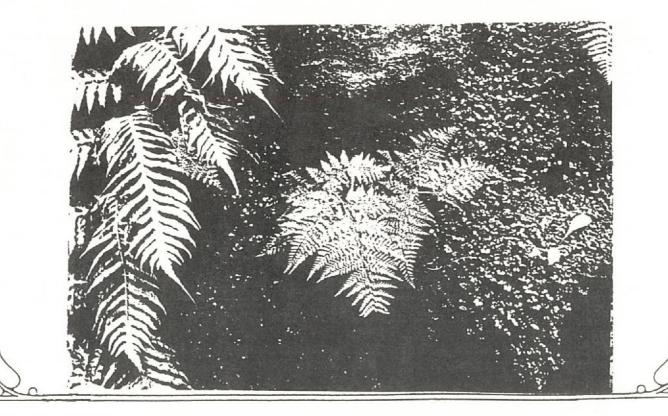
A recent railways strike provided an opportunity to conduct a census of ferns at a nearby suburban station (Darling on the Glen Waverley Line). Several years ago, several small ferns were noticed poking out their heads from beneath the platform.

On closer inspection, no less than 50 plants were found congregated under the up-line platform, facing south-west. Adiantum capillus-veneris (12 plants), Cyrtomium falcatum (13), Nephrolepis cordifolia (25) and one small withered Pteris tremula were found in the cracks between the concrete retaining blocks, supporting the platform. The first two species are calciphiles ("lime-loving"), preferring the alkaline conditions associated with the concrete and the others are generally indifferent to pH. They were all sheltered from the direct rays of the sun and received ample water through seepage. Obviously better protected from the rush of passing trains, many of the plants were located on the up-line side of small concrete pillars supporting the retaining wall.

The opposite platform direct sun all year and so was a "fern desert", with only two small Nephrolepis, struggling for survival and one very healthy Pteris growing in gravel at the base of the platform.

Only the Pteris tremula is native to this region of Victoria, with the others presumably being established from household plants by wind-blown spore.

Robbie and Terry Turney



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BUYER'S GUIDE TO FERN NURSERIES:

Victoria

- Allans Flat Plant Farm Retail. Tomkins Lane, Allans Flat, 3691, Ph:(060) 27 1375. (25Km south of Wodonga on the Yackandandah Road) Specializing in ferns and indoor plants. Open daily, except Wednesdays, and all public holidays.
- Austral Ferns Wholesale Propagators. Ph:(052) 82 3084. Specializing in supplying retail nurseries with a wide range of hardy ferns - no tubes.
- Beasley's Nursery Retail. 195 Warrandyte Road, Doncaster East, 3109. Ph:(03) 844 3355.
- Cool <u>Waters Fern</u> <u>Nursery</u> Wholesale Fern Propagators. Beech Forest, 3237, Ph:(052) 37 3283. Specializing in cool climate native ferns.
- Fern Acres Nursery Retail. Kinglake West, 3757, Ph:(057) 86 5481. (On main road, opposite Kinglake West Primary School). Specializing in stags, elks and birdsnest ferns.
- "Fern Glen" Wholesale and Retail. Visitors welcome. Garfield North, 3814, Ph:(056) 29 2375.
- R. & M. Fletcher's Fern Nursery Retail. 62 Walker Road, Seville, 3139, Ph:(059) 64 4680. (Look for sign on Warburton Highway, 300m east of Seville Shopping Centre. Closed Tues. except on public holidays).
- Mt Evelyn Fern Centre Retail. 63 York Road, Mt. Evelyn, 3796, Ph:(03) 736 1729. Mail orders welcome.
- Ridge Road Fernery Wholesale and Retail. Weeaproinah, 3237, Ph:(052) 35 9383. Specializing in Otway native ferns.

New South Wales

- Jim & Beryl Geekie Fern Nursery Retail. 6 Nelson Street, Thornleigh, 2120, Ph:(02) 484 2684. By appointment.
- Marley's Ferns Retail. 5 Seaview Street, Mt. Kuring-gai, 2080, Ph:(02) 457 9168.

Queensland

Moran's <u>Highway Nursery</u> - Wholesale and Retail. P.O. Box 467, Woombye, 4559, Ph:(071) 42 1613. (1Km north of Big Pinapple. Turn right into Kell Road).

