



# Fern Fever: The Story of Pteridomania

*Sarah Whittingham*

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## **Fern Fever: The Story of Pteridomania** Sarah Whittingham

Of all the many passions and crazes in nineteenth-century gardening and natural history, none was as long lasting or as wide reaching as fern fever, or Pteridomania as it became known. The obsession with ferns was not confined to a few professional botanists but it affected men, women and children from all classes through the British Isles, the Empire and America.

Books and articles encouraged thousands to set out on fern forays. Their overwhelming desire to 'capture' a rare specimen led them to wade through streams, scale rock faces, descend gorges and lean over fast-flowing rivers. Accidents were common, sometimes fatal, and over-collecting and even fern stealing were rife.

Sarah Whittingham has explored verdant ferneries and Pulhamite grottoes throughout the land, read hundreds of Victorian works on ferns, and examined ferny items from Coalbrookdale benches to Royal Worcester pottery to reveal the incredible extent of the craze. She introduces the key players - John Lindsay, Nathaniel Ward, George Loddiges, Edward Newman, Thomas Moore - together with many others.

It was possible to live a life in ferns from the cradle to the grave: if you were to go to the seaside, visit the theatre, view an exhibition, decorate your house, read novels, play music and even spend time in hospital, you would come upon ferns and ferneries.

*Fern Fever* encompasses garden history, social history, and the decorative arts, illustrated with over 150 beautiful images from around the world. It includes a list of places to visit where you can experience the Victorian fern craze first hand today.

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