

Book Review

Ferns

Neil Timm

**A new HPS full-colour
72-page booklet**

£5.50 to members; £7.50 to
non-members inc. p&p

Ferns turned out to be a most surprising read. Surprising, because it was hugely enjoyable and inspirational and not at all the dry academic read I'd half expected. Neil has shared with the reader his vast knowledge of this ancient family of *Pteridophytes*, telling us that one member, *Osmunda*, can be traced back 250m years showing little significant change.

The anatomical details are accompanied by clear photographs, leaving no doubt as to which fern is classed, *inter alia*, as bipinnate or pinnatifid. Beautiful line drawings by Sue Ward help elucidate the fern's reproductive process which is almost animal-like at one stage, with sperm swimming to fertilise an ovum found within the archegonium.

A fascinating chapter on the history of their cultivation and use reveals that, as with many other plants, their popularity for the garden has fluctuated over the centuries. It peaked in Victorian times, and ferns are currently in vogue. Very generously, considering that his income is from selling this genus, Neil includes detailed propagating instructions for anyone wanting to try growing their own.

This really is a gem of a book; within its 68 pages there is all the information to fire a beginner or to rekindle the interest of a lapsed fan. With the sections recommending which fern to plant where and the chapter on using ferns in the garden, I am now enthused and ready to plant ferns all over.

Anna Peacock

