ventnorensis

journal of the ventnor botanic garden friends' society

'Here because we made it happen'
- Phil Le May, Page 8

Volume 20 No. 1 Spring 2013

Spring/summer opening times

10am till dusk daily

For opening times for Visitor Centre, Garden Café, Plant Sales and Green House, please call the Garden on 855397

exhibitions/events

VBG Friends' Discount of 10% on all courses

5th April	APRIL DESIGN WALK Help us design VBG. Meet at the Visitor Centre for an hour's walk, designing the future of the Garden, with topical plant tales with the Curator.
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26th April 10am – midday	HANGING BASKET WORKSHOP Come and make your own beautiful hanging basket to enhance your home. £15 to include all materials. Booking essential. Contact education@botanic.co.uk or call 01983 855397
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To book, contact Irene Fletcher on 855397 or email education@botanic.co.uk or make your booking in the Plantation Room or Gift Shop

Front cover photograph: Cycas revoluta by Julian Winslow

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Printed on the Isle of Wight on 50% recycled paper using vegetable based inks

recycle

Curator's Notes

The first voyage of James Cook on HMS Endeavour introduced the Australasian flora to European botanists for the first time. I've often wondered before about how daunting this must have been, to be on Australia's East coast and see familiar plant families diversified to such a degree. Indeed Cook named Botany Bay in honour of the rich diversity he found there.

The true hero of the voyage of course was Joseph Banks, who, as a botanist, must have wondered about his inclusion on a mission whose primary purpose was to observe a transit of Venus near Tahiti in 1769. It wasn't until the second sealed orders were opened that the bulk of the mission, to seek evidence of the postulated 'Terra Australis Incognita' or 'Unknown Southern Land' became known, and Bank's role explained.

Of course, prior to Australia *The Endeavour* crew spent six months mapping the coast of New Zealand, the flora of which must have been, if anything, even more challenging than that which was to come. The islands' isolation, having arisen from the seabed and never been land-bridged to a continent, meant their primary colonizers were comparatively few; these evolved along unique pathways. Ecosystems emerged without many of the plant families which are so influential elsewhere; it must have been like being on a different planet.

'We are very familiar with plants from other parts of the world, as evidenced in our car-parks and suburbs - stuffed with muck from all over the place!'

It seems strange that over 200 years since the first sightings of the exciting plants from the Unknown Southern Lands that they are still quite alien to the British garden. We are very familiar with plants from other parts of the world, as evidenced in our car-parks and suburbs - stuffed with muck from all over the place! At VBG we hope to grow more exciting relatives of such omnipresent stalwarts. There is more to Buddleja than the Butterfly Bush, take a look in the South African Section. More exciting is to see the Australasian flora as it would have first been viewed. Our New Zealand Garden is planted to represent a section of the wild, seed from plants in association just as Simon Goodenough saw in the 1980s. In the Australian Garden, plants are grown exactly as listed by Banks two hundred years previously. On a sunny day the only British element you can see as you immerse yourself in this landscape is the sky . . . and we share that with Antipodea.

Chris Kidd
Curator

Annual General Meeting 2013

Notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society to be held on Thursday, 25th April 2013 at 7.00 pm in The Visitor Centre, Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Education Manager, Irene Fletcher, will give us a talk about Education in the Garden and Forest Schools at VBG.

Gardening volunteers meet every Wednesday morning, at the far end of the car park. Bring hand tools and a drink to have at coffee break.

Membership Renewals

If you haven't renewed your membership it is time to do so. Renewals were due from 1 January 2013. The fees have been held at the current rate of £15 for an individual member and an additional £7 for a second person at the same address.

Please do not delay in sending your membership renewal. You can use the form in the centre of this magazine. Remember that Membership will entitle you to substantial savings on entry to VBG if you purchase, from the Garden, an annual or two-year admission pass or book of tickets. You also get 10% off the standard entry charge per visit; 10% discount on purchases from the Garden Café; 10% discount on plant and seed purchases; 10% discount on purchases from the gift shop.

Data protection

Our mail-out labels are printed electronically with a computer. This means that we are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Provided all our members agree to their names and addresses being placed on an electronic database it will not be necessary for us to register the list, thus saving us money.

The Executive Committee undertakes not to let the list be used for any purpose other than for promoting the activities of the Friends' Society. If, in spite of this undertaking, any member objects to his or her name being electronically recorded please inform the Secretary.

FAMILY TREES AT VBG

Celebrate a birth, remember a loved one or record an occasion by buying a growing Olive Tree.

The tree will be marked with your family name as a living celebration or memorial. It will be tended by our gardeners and will be yours for the life of the tree.

Contact Phil Le May, 01983 853824 or phil@thepitts.org.uk

Proceeds to The Friends' Society

Chairman's message

Most of you will know that I am retiring from the position of Chairman in April. I will stay on as Vice Chair to maintain continuity and help the new Chair ease his way into the job. Much as there have been times when I, and especially my wife, wished that I could walk away from the trials and tribulations of the past I can reflect that the future now is very positive, and so the time is ripe for a new Chair to take the Friends forward. I can only thank all those who have been a great help and have stuck to the task in hand. Lindy and I are life members and are enjoying the Gardening Club sessions, so you will see us around for many years to come.

Phil Le May

What do the Friends do?

I have been asked by some of the new members to clarify just what The Friends 'do' and how they fit into the Garden now that the CIC has taken over. The Friends has a governing constitution in accordance with the strict criteria laid down by the Charity Commission. You will have been given a copy when you joined, but like all of us you probably put it to one side to read later and forgot it.

So what do we do? This comes down to Item 3 of the constitution, entitled 'Objects' – namely: The Society's Objects are to advance public education in botany and horticulture, in particular at Ventnor Botanic Garden.

We do this in a number of ways, such as promoting and encouraging school visits, aiding and financing, in part, the Education Officer Irene Fletcher; maintaining a reference library and holding lecturers and demonstrations; producing Ventnorensis three times a year; assisting with seed collection; giving practical help at events and with the Volunteers within the Garden. We host the Annual IoW RHS lecture. We are looking at ways to inform the public when they are visiting the Garden and will help the CIC with that decision and its costs. We have members acting as tour guides, meet & greeters, etc.

We also finance the purchase of plants requested by the Curator because without the plants we would have nothing to 'educate about'.

There is some leeway allowed as to how we achieve the Objects, but as long as we don't stray too far from the constitution, and we haven't, we don't fall foul of the Charity Commission. They receive a set of accounts each year and a review of what we have done.

ALL other business relating to VBG is handled by Ventnor Botanic Garden Community Interest Company. The Friends are there to support the Garden and any offers of help will be greatly appreciated by your executive and also the CIC.

Phil Le May

VBG Friends Winter Update

John Curtis is inspired by New York Botanical Garden to appreciate what VBG has, and describes the tremendous progress made this winter

A visit over Christmas to the 250 acre New York Botanical Garden gave me that provincial feeling at first. Immaculate glasshouses extended over acres of overplants with omnipresent labels. Even the car park had interpretive signage. But, they had nothing flowering outdoors in December and no Acacias about to burst forth for January. Landscape immersion as practiced at VBG had not yet landed. Nor could I look out over the sea.

Yet, it can teach us about scale and aspiration. Individual donors' names appeared on everything from trees to garden rooms, glasshouses and pavilions. Now we are finding donors for olive trees to complete the grove [see P17], and can look ahead to Chef Martyn Cutler's regionally inspired feasts amongst the olives as the Echium peak this June.

The CIC is a bridge to financial sustainability for VBG, not an eternal source of funds . . . The support of the Friends for special projects is now more important than it ever was under Council ownership

Dine among the olives: Artist's impression

This winter at VBG has been all about getting the Garden and the staff prepared for our first full season while the CIC bank balance plummets. Following insightful guidance from a Design Walk we are fixing the flow into the Garden, creating a passage from the entry piazza past three trachycarpus to a new path along the Top Lawn leading to the Tropical House. Inside Kate Ingrem has led a team to "imagineer" a new map (or maps) to make visiting and understanding the Garden easier. Chris Kidd & Co have been primping the Lower Nursery to go "on show" with guided tours of the glass house, to make VBG botany accessible.

We were all sad to see Mia, the all-electric vehicle lent to us by Ecoisland, leave just before the Christmas Village chalets arrived. However, VBG has volunteered to host one of the first electric vehicle charging points on the Island, so hopefully Mia will return.

To deliver our botanic mission, Friends' funds have bought in extra taxa of Puya and we applied to NCCPG to achieve National Collection Status for Puya. In the

Tropical House, both species of Victoria lily have been grown and cross pollinated and will produce *V. "Longwood Hybrid."* The renovation of Signal Point will give us a new garden space around it. We are replanting the Hop Yard and adding a new variety to guarantee plenty of TropicAle℠ in future.

The CIC is a bridge to financial sustainability for VBG, not an eternal source of funds. So, we are creating better plans for all our revenue generating activities from Cuisine, to Plant Sales, Retail, Education, and Events. For example, we have recruited our first two VBG@Home customers – a way to bring our plants and plantsmanship beyond our boundaries. The financial support of the Friends in funding various special projects is now more important than it ever was under Council ownership. We also need volunteers and interns of any age and experience to launch new initiatives: please contact Della if you can help or introduce a candidate.

I feel you all would have been proud of the recognition of the important role that VBG has to play for the Isle of Wight at both the January Ventnor Town Council meeting and at the recent launch of the IoW marketing organisation at Osborne House.

I look forward to your ***active*** support in 2013 in volunteering, recruiting new Friends, and spreading the word that ***something exciting is happening at VGB.*** On a practical level the most helpful things you can do for the Garden are to purchase Annual Passes and to dine in The Plantation Room.

Meet the Webmaster

Website manager Colin Smith

After reading Jane Cheverton's appeal in the Summer issue of *Ventnorensis* for an enthusiastic volunteer to take over the running of the Friends' website I contacted Jane to offer my services. She will be a hard act to follow.

I am an electrical engineer and retired to Steephill after over 40 years in the electricity supply industry in both operational and planning roles. I now work part time as a consultant engineer which should allow me time to maintain the website and pursue my other interests.

My wife Patricia [see Tour Guide, inside back page] and I moved to Ventnor from Essex nearly three years ago but we both have lifelong connections with Ventnor. My aunt was a patient in the Royal National Hospital in the 1940s and, with my grandfather, moved from London to Bierley, near Niton, soon after I was born.

Contact me with ideas you would like to see included on the website.

www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk Colin Smith

End of an Era

As Phil Le May steps down as Chairman of the Friends, he reflects on the delights and unexpected demands of the role

"I blame Jonyth!" says Phil Le May, when asked to look back at his years as Chairman of VBG Friends Society. "I attended an AGM one year and they were asking for people who didn't mind helping. I put my hand up thinking I might come down and do some gardening. Jonyth took me to one side and said I've got a job for you . . . "

Inspired: Phil came to value the Friends as much as the Garden

Phil was seconded to help Jonyth with plant sales for the next few years, and then she brought him onto the Executive committee. "The Chairman at the time, Tom Smith, was finding it difficult to carry on because of his health so I was his Vice Chairman, and very quickly I had to take over."

It is easy to see how one thing can lead to another when you volunteer, but Phil wasn't just your average keen gardener. Having been in the Royal Marine Commandos for 7½ years he left and went to agricultural college where he studied animal husbandry and land reclamation. He worked on farms in north Wales and Cheshire until a sudden change in his life made him question whether he wanted to work for 80 hours a week on farms – "though I did love it," he says. He moved to London.

"I thought 'I know about farming', so I transferred to gardening. Then in 1980 I went down to Brighton, and met Lindy."

He was, he says, in the right place at the right time. It was just when people were starting to spend money on landscaping their gardens, and as well as domestic gardens he was able to take on industrial landscaping while Lindy opened an indoor plant shop. "We did interior landscaping in London in the era when companies had plants everywhere and atriums, so we were doing indoor landscaping as well as outdoor." He adds: "As always that wasn't quite enough so I started to develop my hobby and to deal in art. I've been terribly lucky. I didn't just change jobs, I made major career changes."

So this is the man so craftily skewered by Jonyth Hill, then Chair of the Friends. He came not only with gardening knowledge but also with extensive experience in a variety of businesses. But who could have predicted that all those skills, and even some he didn't know he had, would be called upon during his tenure as Chairman of the Friends?

"I never thought I'd be having meetings with councillors at County Hall, or getting involved with politicians. None of us anticipated any of that. We took it all for granted that the Garden was here, it was going to remain . . . free entrance, bit of parking . . . And then the thunderbolt from the sky came along and it said 'The funding's going to cease in 2011.'"

With the crisis sparked by the Council selling off the Garden, the demands on Phil expanded hugely. "I'd never stood up and talked to 300 people, and it was enormously tough, a learning process which I didn't enjoy. I find it easy to say the wrong thing or get tongue tied. But it needed doing so I got on and did it."

He hadn't anticipated that being Chairman meant that if you've got 700 members you are the person people ask if they want to know anything and everything. "During the tough times the intrusion by email was intense. But it's a great job in lots of ways. The Garden was always important but the Friends were secondary. But you realise the Friends is hugely important to members – I can think of one who comes all the way from Ryde on the bus to volunteer. And that's why it became important to me. I soon came to realise that was part of the job of Chairman, to keep that for them."

Phil will, for the time being, only step to one side, and in the role of Vice-Chairman will be on hand while the new Chair finds his feet. "It'll be nice now for the next Chairman. It's a different era, a positive era. The one I was in was losing old friends, members of staff, the Garden contracting, nobody knowing what was going to happen – so it's a good time for somebody to take over in a very positive way."

There are still negative attitudes to overcome, he says: "There was a bit in the *South Wight Chronicle* saying Ventnor had lost two assets: the Winter Garden and the Botanic Garden. I felt rather cross about that. The last thing it is is lost. It's here and thriving. That negative attitude of people who hadn't even driven past, let alone bothered to visit, is difficult sometimes. But those who value it will always come."

When he retired from his business in 1998 and came to live on the Island full time Phil felt he was coming to a sanctuary, but is aware that too often those involved with the Garden don't take time often enough to just look at it. "I remember last year I was sitting up near Signal Point with John and Chris, wondering how we were going to make it work. And I looked around at the Arid Garden, which had only been in a couple of years, with trees flowering and yuccas flowering – I said 'This madness shouldn't be here. It's only here because we made it happen."

Roz Whistance

DISCOUNTS for members

The following suppliers have kindly agreed to give discounts to Friends' Society members. Please be aware that discounts and other benefits of VBGFS membership are subject to change. **Remember to take your membership card with you – a discount will only be given if you show it.**

Eddington House Nursery	Eddington Road, Nettlestone/Seaview: 10% discount
Deacons Nursery	Moor View, Godshill: 10% discount.
Ryde House Nursery	Binstead Road, Ryde: 10% discount.

Do not forget your Membership fee includes **10% off** for the Gift Shop, Cafe, Plants and Seeds. Just show your Membership Card.

Please do visit and show that we appreciate suppliers' support and goodwill.

Dear members . . .

It is hard to believe but it is a year since *Ventnorensis* was devoted to exploring the new Community Interest Group (CIC) in charge of Ventnor Botanic Garden. Since then the changes made to the Garden, both physically and to the regime, have been great and are being made even as I write this. But what does this mean to the Friends' Society?

It is a question many have asked. Friends have funded the expansion of the Olive Grove (Page 17), and helped create a Mediterranean Terrace around the Garden Café (Page 21). On Page 6 John Curtis, CIC leader, is emphatic that far from being superfluous, the Friends are even more vital than ever for the Garden. Phil Le May, Page 5, explains the way the Friends work; and Sally Peake offers a personal and impassioned plea to stay with the Friends and support their work (Page 20).

Phil has been Chairman of the Friends for a number of years and as he steps down he explains how he found himself in that role, one which developed in ways that nobody could have foreseen (Page 8.) We also meet Sara Limb, VBG's first bursary student through the Historic and Botanic Garden Bursary Scheme (Page 16). It was Sara who was on hand to greet those new olive trees – or, as they are known, the Family Trees.

Copy deadline for the Summer Issue: June 1st

Roz Whistance, Editor

Give a Friends' Membership Subscription gift

Apply now!*

plus **Gift Vouchers**

for Plant Sales and Gift Shop
available at the Visitor Centre

*Contact the Membership Secretary or ask in the Visitor Centre. Annual and Life Membership available.

Acacia at VBG

The genus Acacia has, even by antipodean standards, a lot of species, with some authorities recognising over a thousand. Its distribution, like so many interesting genera hits the hotspots of South America, South Africa and Australia with interesting sojourns into Polynesia, even Hawaii and the Bahamas. Acacia was known to ancient Middle Eastern civilisation, where it was postulated as a source of shamanic insight. Its wood is even claimed to have held the Arc of the Lost Covenant. The Parsha (Torah portion) reads:

Acacia baileyana "Purpurea"

"They shall make an ark of acacia wood (Atzei Shittim), two and a half cubits its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold; from inside and from outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make upon it a golden crown all around." (Exodus 25:10-11).

With such a pedigree, these are plants that should be of interest to us at VBG.

It is twenty years since five species of Acacia were recognised with Awards of Garden Merit, but this Garden has been growing Acacia since the earliest Hillier introductions in the 1970s. Many of these were damaged by the severe cold and hurricane of 1986 and '87, but a much damaged Cootamundra Wattle, *A. baileyana* survived and successfully seeded following the very mild winter of 2001. The plant shown in flower opposite is from a ten year old plant raised from this seed. The attractive glaucous greeny blue feathery foliage is clear to see.

2013 has been an early year for Acacia at VBG; in fact the *A. baileyana* has been open since the last week of December. Pictured also is a far superior specimen of *A. baileyana* "Purpurea". This plant was raised from seed imported from a commercial supplier based in New Zealand in the same year. From this batch of over a hundred seedlings we selected the five with the best colour: one became the late lamented dwarf specimen from the Top Lawn which was damaged in high winds in 2008 and lost as a result. The remaining four are in the Australian Garden where one particularly has become a very good specimen. Compare the foliage colour.

The other VBG Acacia are represented by forty eight accessions. *A. riceana* collected by Hardman and Bridger in the Hartz Mountains National Park, Tasmania, is a plant of beauty. Hardman noted at its collection the delicate weeping habit and blushing colour from the plants from which seed was collected. This is uncharacteristic of the *A. riceana* already in cultivation which are upright, spiky and somewhat unkempt in appearance. Fortunately the pleasant habit he observed has been passed on to at least some of the progeny, a plant from RBG Kew in 2000 and another from Bedgebury Pinetum in 2004 at VBG are good examples, though neither are particularly florific.

Acacia baileyana

A famous example of A. Dealbata at Abbotsbury attained 70 ft in height before being killed stone dead with a hard winter

Much is made of the beauty of the doubly pinnate Acacia leaves, as already mentioned. The commonest Acacia in cultivation in the UK is the fast growing *A. dealbata;* certainly this plant is the species most people refer to as Mimosa. This was introduced from Tasmania in 1820 and remained sporadically between hard winters, occasionally gaining majestic status. A famous example at Abbotsbury attained 70 ft in height before being killed stone dead with a hard winter. On the Isle of Wight there are some notable plants at Fishbourne and Bembridge, but these suffer a similar fate on the roughly thirty year cycle of winter severity than can be expected outside the Undercliff. *A. dealbata* needs to be well managed as a young plant to avoid producing overly heavy lower limbs which, later in life, will cause structural weakness as it quickly becomes a tree. This is achieved with judicious, light pruning – more like tipping soft growth – during early spring, something generally avoided with Acacia as they loathe being pruned. Established trees should either never be pruned or entire limbs removed professionally.

Of much interest will be a juvenile *A. dealbata* which arrived at VBG as a stowaway on a trunk of a tree fern planted in our Australian section in 2005. Along with several other interesting plants this sprang into life once the ferns were planted; we removed the seedling and transplanted it nearby. It should prove interesting as its provenance is wild, and from a colder part of Tasmania. As a seven year old it is rapidly becoming a tree, having showed its worth in surviving the vilest winters since 2010 in one of the cooler parts of VBG. We hope to see it producing flowers in the next few years; alas there are no buds to be seen in 2013.

Chris Kidd

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION* / RENEWAL* FORM

*Delete as appropriate

Please send to the Membership Secretary with your payment and/or the Standing Order Authority.

TITLE	FIRST NAME	SURNAME
ADDRESS		
E-MAIL		
Telephone		
Name of Second Member at the same address		
Name of Junior member and date of birth		

Membership Rates with effect from 1 January 2011

The Membership year runs from 1st Jan to 31st December.

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior*	Non UK
£15	£7	£2	£18

New Members joining after 1st July pay reduced rates:

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior*	Non UK
£8	£4	£1	£10

For New Members joining after **1st October** a Full Year subscription covers to 31st December the **following** year

Individual Membership	£
2nd Member same address	£
Junior Member	£
Non UK Member	£
Optional Donation	£
TOTAL	**£**_____

Signature **Date**

Membership Secretary VBGFS Virginia Newbold 4 Woodland Grove Bembridge PO35 5SG

STANDING ORDER AUTHORITY

To be sent to the Membership Secretary **NOT** to your bank

To THE MANAGER (Name and address of Bank)
Pay to the account of **Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society** National Westminster Bank Ventnor Isle of Wight Sort Code 54-41-31 Account No. 05441358 the sum of

£ AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS immediately and thereafter every 6 January until you receive notice from me in writing
Reference to be quoted (to be completed by VBGFS)
This order cancels any existing order in favour of this Payee
Signature
Date
NAME OF ACCOUNT TO BE DEBITED
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Botanic student

Sara Limb is VBG's first Historic and Botanic Garden Bursary Scheme student

Photo by Roz Whistance

Sara Limb checks the new Olive Trees

"I used to peer through a hole in our fence when I was a child. Next door's garden was so beautiful," says Sara Limb.

Sara's early attraction to gardening has culminated this year in a placement at VBG as a student under the Historic and Botanic Garden Bursary Scheme (HBGBS). Six months into the placement she is a member of the gardening team, while having a fantastic practical education under the tutelage of Kate Ingrem and now Luke Gunner, and mentored by Chris Kidd.

"I look after the tropical house, the back nursery and the herb garden, then help out with whatever jobs need doing. It's full time but I have half a day a week, or one day off a fortnight, to study. I send in my work every three months, and my supervisor submits notes to the Scheme's coordinator."

This is the first time VBG has taken a student through the HBGBS, which is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and is set up to "enable enthusiastic and committed horticulturalists to increase their horticultural and other technical skills through a practically based training placement, in a range of historic and botanic gardens." The host garden is expected to mentor and train the student, and pay no less than the minimum wage. The student will need some horticultural experience to be considered for the scheme.

Sara explains: "Before I did my degree I worked in a commercial nursery producing perennials. Then the nursery closed, and it seemed the perfect opportunity to go to university. I'd regretted not being studious at school, so it was great to do my horticulture degree at Pershore College – one of the famous horticultural colleges and part of the University of Worcester. While there I realised it was gardening I really wanted to do."

However, after university she found it difficult to get work. "You needed experience for gardening positions, and I had only worked commercially. So this scheme was perfect." Sara has to learn the botanic names of ten plants each week; carry out four projects during the year; and keep a technical diary every day. "It's really good because it makes me think 'why am I doing this?' And I go home and look up the plants and tools I've been working with that day, so I know why it's being done."

One of the projects in which she is heavily involved is the expansion of the olive grove. "I've been looking at a planting scheme and researching flora found in traditional olive groves in the Mediterranean, and their role in an area of biodiversity. And I've been particularly interested in the positive effects on the beneficial insects and their reliance on certain plant species. It's important to create areas as bio diverse as possible: the stone walls, the flowers that come up in the spring – it all matters and it's all fascinating."

Sara has spent time in Spain where friends run a small olive farm where fruit trees such as figs, capers and pomegranates help to create the necessary biodiversity. Six months into the placement and she is very happy. "It couldn't have worked out better. I'd never been to the Isle of Wight, and had never heard of this Garden. But as we drew up outside and I caught a glimpse of South Africa, I thought 'I love it already.'" As for life beyond VBG, Sara will certainly be well qualified with a wealth of experience to offer. And for VBG it has had a happy and successful first liaison with the Historic and Botanic Garden Bursary Scheme.

Roz Whistance

FRIENDS IN ACTION

Family Trees

"Over the years we've had lots of requests for benches to be placed as memorials to loved ones," says Phil Le May. "It isn't practical to fill the place with benches, and plaques give a sombre air: but an olive tree can be a family tree!"

In return for a substantial donation a family can put their name to an olive tree and it will be theirs for the life of the tree. The three cultivars chosen, *Olea europaea* "Pendolino", *O.* "Leccino" and *O.* "Frantoio" are about 8-10 years old and are commercial cultivars. There are also some older ornamental plants, about 30 years old.

"This is the first time olives have been grown so close to the sea," says Phil. "It will be interesting to see whether that affects the flavour of the olive." Look out for home grown olives in dishes in the Plantation Room and Café. **To sponsor a Family Tree see Page 4.**

Photo by Rosemary Stewart

Olive extension: the Grove ready for new trees

Weather in the Garden

(September to December 2012) by Chris Watts

In the last issue of *Ventnorensis* I wrote that rainfall of 35mm which fell on the 11th June could easily make it the wettest day of the year. How wrong I was!

All went well in September until the autumn equinox, but after that we experienced some of the wettest weather for many years, this prevailing right up to the year end. In these final 14 weeks of 2012, 574mm of rain fell, about 75% of an average year. The heaviest of the downpours came on the 23rd September (45mm, becoming the wettest day of the year), 22nd November (26mm) and 19th December (33mm). On this latter day it rained for 23.5 hours out of the 24!

There were many days where the total was between 10 and 25mm, too many (16) to pick out individually, but included were Christmas Eve and Boxing Day. The most intense fall, however, came on the 26th September, when 12.8mm was measured in 11 minutes. This equates to 70mm/hr, which the Met Office would probably classify as 'noteworthy', and it was the occasion on which water affected two business premises in the centre of Ventnor. Also in the mix at the start of November were thunder and hail showers, but fortunately any hail which falls here is seldom damaging to vegetation.

It wasn't altogether surprising that sunshine was hard to come by, and temperatures were mostly academic – although a short cold spell in December saw slight air frosts on the 6th and 11th. But it was the rain which dominated the headlines, and at the start of 2013 the ground was thoroughly saturated after a year which recorded more rain than any other bar one: 1960. (Note that records in Ventnor go back to 1839).

	Mean Temp C	Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights)	Sun Hrs	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Rain Duration Hrs
Sep	*15.3*	*0 (0)*	*165.3*	*96.9*	*8*	*35.1*
Oct	*12.2*	*0 (0)*	*79.5*	*183.1*	*22*	*85.4*
Nov	*9.2*	*0 (0)*	*56.1*	*112.5*	*14*	*63.9*
Dec	*7.6*	*10 (2)*	*n/a*	*186.3*	*18*	*102.3*
2012	*11.5*	*115 (10)*	*n/a*	*1116.6*	*142*	*574.6*

Note: Cols 2, 4, 5 *No sign: about average*
++/–– : significantly above/below average
+/– : modestly above/below average

Education with Irene

The last few months has continued with lots of activities on the education front. January has seen us running fruit tree pruning workshops in the grounds of Northcourt Manor and before that we had a weekend of wreath making and decoration making at the Christmas Market.

School visits continued right through the winter months, partly enabled by the generosity of the Friends in subsidising school transport costs by up to fifty per cent. *The County Press* ran a really good feature publicising this, firmly establishing The Friends as a supporter of education at the Garden.

I've been so encouraged by the fact that so many of the teachers I worked with five or 10 years previously have returned to the Garden, and it's exciting to see new generations of children becoming enthused about learning outside the classroom.

The two pre-school Forest School sessions continue weekly with the local nursery. The children have been lucky enough to observe a robin at very close quarters and have seen a red squirrel and a buzzard as well as a multitude of worms and mini beasts. So much of the Forest School ethos is simply about observing and being comfortable in the outdoors.

The work associated with the grant obtained last year culminated for Year Three in costume making for the lantern parade just before Christmas. Sixty children made butterfly and caterpillar costumes with me, an artist and another helper and most took part in the parade. To follow will be butterfly walks emphasising a couple of rare types, one of which is only found in the south of the Island.

Other classes have different animals and activities. Each has a wildlife study and an art or construction project – Year Two will shortly commence bird box making.

It is hoped, via The Friends, that we can secure further grants for education at the Garden. I see the site as an eco centre, covering education not just in the Garden but in its broader surroundings – the beautiful Downs on our doorstep and the Wildlife Trust Woodlands adjacent. We have a fantastic location in the AONB and lots of opportunities.

For adults, the Gardening Club continues, covering a variety of topics and practical activities. It is hoped to run a shorter version for children during the summer.

Keep an eye out for future events and workshops by checking our website. See Courses, Page 27. Thank You Letters, Page 21.

Irene Fletcher,
Education Programme Manager

Comfortable outdoors: Irene and Forest School children

What are Friends for?

What a silly question, you may be saying to yourself. But Sally Peake feels it is worth considering at the approach to the new gardening year and the first full year of the CIC-run VBG.

The Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends Society has, for the past 25 years or so, supported and financed the plans and ambitions of our curator and his staff. Largely this was a case of "if the Friends don't pay for it it won't happen, because the Council won't pay for it". So we have a long history of funding specific projects, often in conjunction with securing grants, to support the botanic aims of the Garden.

So where does our VBGFS sit now? I believe your current Committee strongly supports the role and ambitions of the CIC, including the need to make entrance charges. But have we persuaded you, the members, of the case for this? It would be my hope that the charges set by the CIC for entrance, workshops, lectures, etc will, in time, cover all of the essential running costs of the Garden (in essence, what the Council used to cover). In this case, the Friends can continue their excellent legacy of funding special projects and offering voluntary labour and experience to support the management team. Many of you have stepped up to the mark and are helping in the Garden in many different ways.

But for those unable to volunteer: as a Friend, you can buy a discounted annual pass to the Garden – unlimited entry and free parking for less than £1 per week. Have you done this? Or are you waiting to see whether you like the new system? At a lean time of the tourist season this money will help support the CIC's need to pay wages when entrance money from tourists is less and, perhaps more importantly, show your support for our wonderful Garden. For less than the cost of a weekend newspaper, for the princely sum of £1 a week you can have the warm feeling of knowing that you are truly a Friend in good times and bad.

It is surely no hardship to park up (for free), wander through a lovingly maintained landscape and, maybe, relax afterwards in the newly refurbished Plantation Room with your favourite tea/coffee/glass of wine (more discount for Friends!) and a botanical book to browse. Such contributions will release CIC funds, and its ambitions to speed up the process of investment in the Garden.

I am also aware that there are people on the Island, and particularly around Ventnor, who prefer to live in the past, with customary entitlements but without a sense of responsibility now for fair contribution. We Friends can explain to such people the need for change and attempt to 'win their hearts and minds' in support of the Garden's future.

With apologies to the late John F. Kennedy,

"Ask not what your Garden can do for you but what you can do for your Garden."

Whatever you decide you want of, or for, your Society, I wish you all Happy Gardening.

Sally Peake, Events VBGFS

Idea to action

If there was ever an example of Friends' funding in action it is the extension of the Garden Café's Mediterranean theme into the Garden. From idea to action within a matter of weeks, the courtyard will complement plans for the restaurant to be a venue for live music, comedy nights or simply as somewhere to relax with a glass of wine and a meal.

Before: fish and concrete

During: putting trees in (and backs out?)

After: ready for relaxation

A visit from Wroxall Primary

These are just snippets from the many letters received by the Friends after a school trip brought children from Wroxall Primary to the Botanic Gardens. They spent the time being shown all over the Garden, learning about the variety of trees, leaves and plants and having their own project of making giant sunflowers from found items.

"The adventure of looking for bugs was fun but slimey."

"The best part was making the Giant sunflower."

"I learnt about leaves and trees, my favourite is the eucalyptus leaf."

Their delight and excitement was clearly expressed in all their letters and it was obvious that they would all love to return.

One of the projects organised by Irene Fletcher for 2012/13 is to invite young children from local schools to see and learn about the VBG. To assist with that, the Friends have set aside a budget to contribute half of the cost of the bus travel, making it more affordable for the schools wishing to take part.

The success of this particular visit comes to life in their letters thanking the Friends: "Thank you for having us and paying half of the bus." And to Irene: "Thank you for teaching us about the amazing life of living things."

We shall all be looking forward to more children being introduced to the discovery and joy that is Ventnor Botanic Garden. Something that will add to their experience and be of value to them as they move on.

Evelyn Knowles

EVENTS

Open Gardens 2013

Following the great success of last year's new direction for the Friends in supporting the NGS Open Garden scheme with plant/and or tea sales, the following fixtures are in place. Details will be in the NGS leaflets, and we would urge all members to support these lovely events. Accompanied children go free.

Sunday 26 May — **Northcourt, Main Rd, Shorwell, PO30 3JG**
11.30am – 5pm — Admission £4.50

Mr and Mrs John Harrison

15-acre garden surrounding large C17 Manor House (not open), incl walled kitchen garden, chalk stream, terraces, magnolias and camellias. Subtropical planting. Boardwalk along jungle garden. Very large range of plants enjoying the different microclimates. Late summer beds of dahlias, cannas, grasses and bananas. The terraces rise 80ft behind the house with collection of hydrangeas.

Directions: Entering Shorwell from Carisbrooke, entrance on R, immediately after rustic footbridge, opp thatched cottages. From Chale or Brighstone take Newport Rd, turn L on bend shortly after PO.

Sunday 9 June — **Salterns Cottage, Salterns Rd., Seaview, PO34 5AH**
12 noon – 4pm — Admission £4

Susan and Noel Dobbs

A glasshouse, a potager, exotic borders and fruit trees are some of the many attractions in this 33ft x 131ft garden behind Salterns Cottage built in 1640 and listed. Enjoy the garden created by Susan in 2005, add a light lunch or home made tea and learn about the Dracula connection. Bram Stoker was Noel's great grandfather.

Directions: Directions: Enter Seaview from W via Springvale, Salterns Rd links the Duver Rd with Bluett Ave.

Sat 15 and Sun 16 June — **Blenheim House, Spencer Rd, Ryde, PO33 2NY**
1pm – 5pm — Admission £3

David Rosewarne and Magie Gray

A garden developed over nine years exploring the decorative qualities and long term effects of pattern making, colour and texture. This terraced 116ft x 30ft sloping site is centred on a twisting red brick path that both reveals and hides interesting and contrasting areas of planting, creating intimate and secluded spaces that surprise in its town centre location.

Directions: Market St entrance behind Ryde Town Hall/Theatre.

Thursday 20 June — **Wayside, Carpenters Rd., St Helens, Ryde, PO33 1YG**
11am – 5pm — Admission £3

Mrs Toba Cole

Well-established informal cottage garden with a mixture of trees, shrubs, climbing roses and clematis and densely planted with many unusual plants (propagated by the owner). S-facing with stunning views across to Culver Downs. Some uneven paving stones, but area of lawn for wheelchairs.

Directions: Take the B3330 for St Helens and park on St Helens Green.

22 and 23 June — **Ashcliff, The Pitts, Bonchurch, Ventnor, PO38 1NT**
11am – 5pm — Admission £4

Judi Lines

The garden was started from a blank canvas nine years ago and now contains many diverse areas of interest including areas of sun and shade. Plantings are of interesting and unusual perennials, shrubs and trees over approx 1 acre blending into the natural landscape, part of which is a cliff.

Directions: From A3055 follow directions for Bonchurch. Follow signs for Bonchurch pond and park in village or continue, following signs for parking in Bonchurch Shute.

Yarmouth Town gardens TBC

6 and 7 July — **Ashknowle House, Ashknowle Lane, Whitwell, Ventnor, PO38 2PP**
11.30am – 4.30pm — Admission £4

Jennie Fradgley

A variety of features to explore in the grounds of this Victorian house. Informative woodland walks, borders, wildlife pond and other water features. Ongoing development of ornamental areas. The well-maintained kitchen garden is highly productive and boasts a wide range of fruit and vegetables grown in cages, tunnels, glasshouses and raised beds. New orchard site.

Directions: 4m W of Ventnor. Take the Whitwell Road from Ventnor or Godshill. Turn into unmade lane next to Old Rectory. Field Parking. Disabled parking at house.

Sunday 11 August — **39 Watergate Rd, Newport, PO30 1XP**
10am – 5pm — Admission £3.50

Alex Muir Mackenzie

Stunningly imaginative gravel gardens at the front and back of this property show how different a suburban garden can be. Created from a blank canvas six years ago the gardens are planted with an exciting range of grasses and perennials for a long season of interest. A shallow wildlife pond and sculpture add points of interest.

Directions: Shide area, S of Newport. Head out of Newport on the Sandown Rd (A3020). Turn R at the National Tyre Garage into Shide Rd (B3401). At mini roundabout turn L.

Sally Peake, VBGFS Events

New Treasurer needed

The Friends' Society is looking for a Treasurer. If you or someone you know would be interested in the position please ring me, Jean Kelley (853221) who will explain the role in more detail.

Jean Kelley

New Membership Secretary needed

I have been the Society Membership Secretary for several years. In the last fifteen months or so I have become more involved in my hobby and, as a result, I have needed to travel more. This means that I am unable to continue to provide the appropriate level of service to the Society. Therefore I am looking to pass on the role of Membership Secretary. This is an interesting role and the way it is set up it enables the incumbent to make it their own.

The role of the Membership Secretary is to

Maintain a database of members,
Process membership application,
Process membership renewals, and
Provide labels for mailings.

The database is very straightforward and contains contact information to facilitate the mailing of *Ventnorensis* and news updates sent by email.

The contact information for a new member is recorded on the database and membership cards are posted to that member.

Renewals can be received by post (or left at the Garden) or by Standing Order. The renewal information is recorded and membership cards sent to the member.

A computer is provided and the cost of any stationery, stamps, etc is reimbursed (or a float provided).

If you would like to be more involved in the work of the Friends with a job that can be done in your own home call me (Virginia) on 01983 874246 for more information.

Virginia Newbold

Publicity Officer needed

The Executive would like to thank Jo Haigh for her sterling work as Publicity Officer. She will be sadly missed for her energy and enthusiasm.

This post is now vacant and we would like to hear from anyone who could to generate advertising for *Ventnorensis,* published three times a year. For details contact Roz Whistance on 753090 or rosalind.whistance@btopenworld.com

Farewell Kate

Volunteer coordinator Kate Ingrem has left the Garden, having been headhunted for a job near Lymington. She will be greatly missed, and after her send-off wrote:

'I would be grateful if you would please thank everyone on my behalf for the wonderful send-off they gave me last week – I was very flattered and you were all so kind and very generous. I wonder if you would please let them know that I am now fully kitted out with lots of new books and new secateurs and am very grateful for their generosity.

Week 1 at the new job is now complete and it has gone well (although it is definitely going to be a bit of a challenge) but Ventnor will still have a very, very fond place in my heart – the Garden and the people – and I will miss you all very much.

I will be in to see you before you know it (and will be very excited to see all the work that has been going on).

Thank you again and will speak to you soon.

Best wishes
Kate'

Photos by Rosemary Stewart

Goodbye to Kate: Volunteers wish a fond farewell to Kate Ingrem, Volunteer Coordinator, who has left to take up a new post in Lymington. She was given a grand send off, as well as something to remind her of her time at VBG. Her replacement is Luke Gunner.

And now … relax

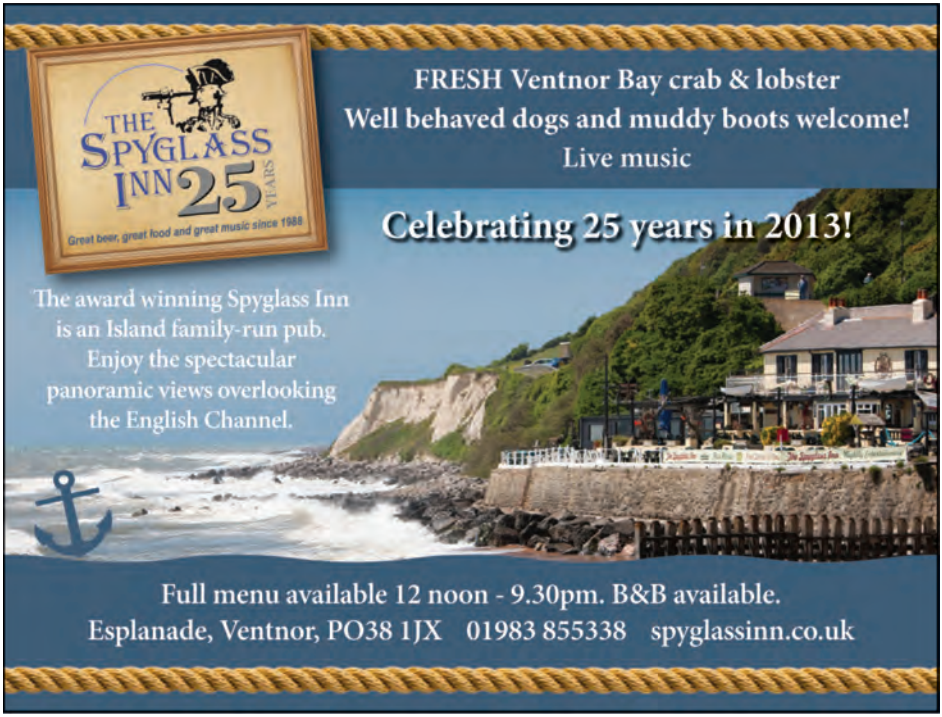
You have dug holes and sown seeds, so now take time to enjoy every aspect of the Garden. Look out for events in the Garden Café and the Plantation Room during spring and summer. Enjoy comedy nights, live music and entertainment while you sit and quaff wine and enjoy delicious and inventive food from Martyn Cutler's kitchen.

Be enchanted this Spring with a performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare. Taking Flight Theatre Company tours with casts of physically disabled, sensory impaired and non disabled professional actors. 30th May, New Zealand Garden. Adults: £14, children: £5 Carers/Pa's free.

Return to see the most romantic of his plays, Romeo and Juliet, performed by The Festival Players. Thursday 4th July at 7.30pm and Friday 5th July at 7.30pm. Adults: £12.50, Concessions: £10.00. Tickets available at Gift Shop or telephone 01983 855397

Wear warm clothing and bring your own seating. Gardens will be open one hour before the performance.

And if relaxing isn't your thing – try a Ghost Walk. Every Monday, see www.ghostisland.com



On Course this Summer

Look out for the summer programme in the next Ventnorensis and contact us for details of children's events .

Also coming from September, our longer courses including our famous Certificate in Plantsmanship.

Would you like to be on our mailing list to hear all about future courses/events and our lovely foodie offers and events from chef Martyn Cutler? Contact Irene Fletcher on 855397 or email edcation@botanic.co.uk or book in the Plantation Room or Gift Shop.

British Ecological Society Centenary 20th/21st July. Back in May last year, The Friends' Society obtained a small grant from the British Ecological Society which will enable us to hold a Festival celebrating the ecology of the Undercliff, followed by a week of activities such as bat walks, wild flower and wild food walks, butterfly spotting, rock pooling etc, as well as children's activities. This promises to be a fantastic week of interesting events, so please support us and take part! The Festival itself will also include Morris Dancing, music and information about the fascinating environment of the Undercliff . . . and, of course, food and drink.

Gordon Morton – an Obituary

Gordon Morton passed away just before Christmas last year after several years of failing health. He was Chairman of Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society from 1992-2001: the previous year he was Vice-Chairman. He was a modest, gentle person and a staunch supporter of Ventnor Botanic Garden. He guided the Committee through strategic development at Ventnor, particularly during the time of the 'Millennium Bid' to build a Visitor Centre.

Special gentleman: Gordon with Jonyth

Gordon was a very practical man, always at the side of his beloved wife Peggy, who was the Social Secretary, until her regrettable illness and death in 2001. He helped with the many social events from Christmas buffets, coffee mornings, concerts and also plant sales as well as the development of the Flower Arrangers' Border. He was never too grand to manhandle tables, trestles and chairs, or to work in the Garden along with the volunteers, and he even decorated celebration cakes - magnificently. He worked alongside the late Bob Millson to set up charitable status for the Friends, enhancing funds for many projects. He also, with Peggy, contributed articles to the magazine.

Gordon was sadly missed by many who had worked with him when he moved to Norfolk to be nearer his family. However, he made several return visits and was always so happy to see the continuing development of the Garden and in particular Peggy's Liriodendron tulipifera, a beautiful tree near the Japanese borders which was grown in her memory. It had been recommended by Simon Goodenough.

We send our heartfelt condolences to Gordon's family, and those of us who remember him feel privileged to have known such a delightful and very special gentleman. We are grateful for his invaluable contribution to Ventnor Botanic Garden and the Friends' Society.

Jonyth Hill

Keep up to date with a look at our webpages!

Ventnor Botanic Garden: http://www.botanic.co.uk

VBG Friends' Society: http://ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

Join the Friends on-line: http://ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk/index.php/join

Follow the Friends on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ventnor-Botanic-Garden-Friends-Society/147394338666945

Follow VBG Cafe on Twitter: @VBG Cafe

Video South Wight TV: http://www.southwighttv.com/the-plantation-room-a.html

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New members

A very WARM WELCOME to these friends who have recently joined the Society.

Dr J and Mrs K Ashmore ..... Whitwell
Miss J Atkins and Mr J Vaux ..... Seaview
Mrs D and Mr D Bennett ..... Ventnor
Mr B Bradbury and Ms D Williams .... Shanklin
Mr J and Mrs R Burnett ..... Niton
Mrs J Cleeve ..... Whitwell
Mrs P Cook ..... Ventnor
Mr R and Mrs E Cusworth ..... Niton
Mrs R and Mr J Currie ..... Bembridge
Mrs A and Mr J Dinneen ..... Whitwell
Mr A and Mrs L Ditton ..... Shanklin
Mr G and Mrs C Eades ..... Sandown
Mrs F and Mr A Foster ..... Bonchurch
Mrs J and Mr J Graves ..... Chale
Mrs D and Mr H Harris ..... Bembridge
Mr R and Mrs P Homer ..... Coventry
Mrs L and Mr P Hughes ..... Ventnor
Mrs A and Mr T Jefferies ..... Royal Wootton Bassett
Mr A and Mrs J Kemshall ..... St Lawrence
Mr R Lang ..... East Cowes
Mr A Milsom ..... Alverstone
Mr J Pawley ..... Ryde
Mr G Penning and Ms C Van Der Heijden ..... Royston
Mrs M and Mr C Pountain ..... Cambridge
Mrs J Rabbitt ..... Tonbridge
Ms A Reid ..... Ventnor
Mr D and Mrs M Stevenson ..... Arundel
Mrs B Thomas ..... Shanklin
Mr A Truckell ..... Niton
Mr J Veasey ..... Lincs
Mrs C Williams ..... Bembridge
Mr R Wilson ..... Ventnor

Honorary members Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd
Bill Kidson

THE GARLIC FARM
ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Corporate members

We would like to thank our corporate members for their continued support.

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VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

Winning over the 'Dandelion Lady'

In our last issue we heard from a 'Meeter and Greeter'. Now Patricia Smith describes her very first experience as a volunteer Tour Guide

It was 11am and I couldn't believe my luck – my notes stated "VBG: Exotic Plants! Subtropical! Unique!" Well, on this day in early August the Garden looked and felt fantastic. It was hot, sunny and calm! Slightly nervous, I knew I could do this but questions were racing through my mind: Would anyone turn up? Would they stay with me for a whole hour? How could I maintain their interest? "Just be yourself," our wonderful organiser and teacher, Kate, had said in all of our training sessions – "Do it in your own way"– OK then! Here goes . . .

This first group was diverse, about 12 in all: a lady with a heart condition who was fine walking but not standing (where were all those benches situated?); a family with a teenager in a very big electric wheelchair (Kate had mentioned "we haven't had a anyone in a wheelchair yet"!); a couple who'd recently been to Madeira and delighted in comparing the VBG with a garden at Funchal (favourably I hasten to add); a critical lady who pointed out some dandelions – and a lovely lady who announced: "I know nothing about plants but I adore gardens." "You and me both," I muttered.

My very first experience as a Volunteer Tour Guide at VBG

We set off in the sunshine and they marvelled at the mosaics and enjoyed my brief history of the hospital and the Garden. They were amazed at the Arid Garden, especially the flowering prickly pears and the mention of Royalty! At the Mediterranean Olive Grove, lined with bright cistus flowers they imagined that they really were in Spain or the Canaries. In the Victorian Palm Garden they were so impressed with the Chusan Palms – "The OLDEST palms in the British Isles?"; and: "No", I said,"Queen Victoria didn't actually dig the holes herself but she did deign that they be planted here!" History and horticulture – what more could they want?

The enthusiasm of my happy band was building. The Hydrangea Dell was magical, the Australian Garden was, well, Australian! And the South African Terrace was truly stunning. We had more stops for photo opportunities than for my actual imparting of information but as Kate had repeated 'adaptability is key,' and hey! So far, no awkward questions! Finishing at the Herb and Medicinal Garden, I suggested they linger on their own to enjoy the sights and smells before giving in to the lure of the café and shop. The 'dandelion lady' asked where donations to the Garden could be made as she would like to contribute.

The overall response of the group was that the VBG Experience was unique, interesting and good value. They were very appreciative of my input and their comments instilled in me the confidence to go on to improve and modify my presentation as will be required by the exciting but demanding changes to come. I'm still not into Latin names but I've learnt so much and love every minute – so thanks Kate and thanks VBG!

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