ventnorensis

journal of the ventnor botanic garden friends' society

'By joining other gardens and achieving our first National Collection recognition we are contributing to a national register, but more importantly contributing to the conservation status of this enigmatic and difficult genus'
Chris Kidd, Curator

National Collection of Puya, Hardy & Half Hardy, Page 6

Volume 20 No. 3 Autumn 2013

autumn/winter opening times

10am till dusk daily
For opening times for Visitor Centre, *edulis* Restaurant and Plantation Room Café, Plant Sales and Greenhouse, please call the Garden on 855387 or check website, www.botanic.co.uk

exhibitions/events

Sunday 17th November 11am to 4pm

WIGHT WEDDING DAYS PRESENTS…
Isle of Wight Wedding Fayre
With over 50 suppliers confirmed already, come and find out everything you need to know to plan your perfect Wight wedding day. With free entry you can pick up a free goody bag and even enter a competition to win your 2014 wedding venue styling with Inspired Island Events.

Monday 11th November 7pm

VBG LECTURE SERIES:
The Herb Garden and Sustainable Medicine
Claire Hudson presents a brief discussion on the history of herb and medicinal gardens and a look at some of the herbs that are used medicinally at this time of year. The talk will include tea tastings.

This is a free event but booking is required. Please contact VBG on 855397, option 3.

Please note: Christmas Fair running 14th and 15th December has been cancelled.

Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th January (still to be confirmed) 11am to 4pm

VOLUNTEERING FAIR
Come along and find out all about the volunteering opportunities in the local area.

Whether you have free time, are looking to make a difference to your community, or aiming to boost your CV, this Volunteers Fair can help find the right opportunity for you.

Hoppy weekend: The October Hops Festival celebrated our harvest, its produce (see review, Inside Back Page), and raised money for the Ventnor Enhancement Fund and the VBG Friends' Society.

Hedychium gardnerianum "Kenneggy". Photograph by Rosemary Stewart

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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Curator's Notes

A kindness for generations

Whilst looking at the new Olive Grove at the Garden recently, someone asked me when it would be finished. The question brought to mind an incident from my childhood where I had, to my mind, finished my work on a small area of Dad's allotment. I stood looking at the little plot, neat lines of vegetables, plants watered and hoed between, path sheared and edged up. One of the men from the neighbouring plot asked me why I was standing looking and not doing anything. I replied: "I've finished." The man laughed and said: "Well make the most of it, it's the last time that'll ever happen."

To my seven-year-old mind that sneering and slightly sinister old man was quite upsetting. I'm sure I thought of peeing on his compost heap out of spite, but a seven-year-old wouldn't know he'd have thanked me for my trouble. That scene has stuck with me for years, but the old git was right: in gardening I've never finished anything since.

'Gardens are never finished, simply because they are alive'

I take relief from the fact that I'm in good company. No gardener that ever lived (and we can include all the greats in this company, as well as my silver haired boyhood nemesis) ever finished any garden either. Gardens never are finished, simply because they are alive. The moment gardeners stop their meddling the plants carry on with their genetic plans in the environment they've been given. These plans often are mostly quite different to ours, and so we tinker on steering the garden into the direction we want until we run out of time or patience. The biggest rewards come to the most patient.

Some gardens won't come to fruition for years, perhaps not even within our lifetime. Capability Brown never saw his landscapes become real. *"He that planteth a tree is a servant of God, he provideth a kindness for many generations, and faces that he hath not seen shall bless him."*

Chris Kidd, Curator

Stop Press!

As a result of an inspection of the Tropical House following the October Storm we have discovered to our dismay that the polycarbonate cladding is far more degraded than we imagined. The **cladding will fail** imminently and so we are launching an urgent appeal to ALL the Friends, please personally sponsor replacement panels. If we fail to replace these there will be **no alternative but to close the house.** We are negotiating hard for a price per panel. Please see the insert enclosed with this Ventnorensis.

A New Website for the Friends

Relaunch: Colin Smith

Soon after taking over the management of the site last year I realised just how difficult it was to produce content for the site and it became increasingly frustrating. After discussions with our friends at V-line Studios it quickly became apparent that the best solution would be a new content management system on which to rebuild the Friends' website, www.botanicfriends.co.uk.

V-line studios undertook the setting up of the new site and creating the initial content links and then it was over to me to transfer some content, test the site, agree some fine tuning and arrange the changeover.

So I am celebrating my first year with the relaunch of the website in a new modern format. It is easier to edit and will enable me to incorporate more content with more photographs and it opens up possibilities such as Ventnorensis online. All the regular features are there too; I do hope that you like it.

Colin Smith, Webmaster

Harvest time: Volunteers Sue, Jim and Peggy pick the squashes

Chairman's message

'A nest full of singing birds'

Our fantastic Garden has been through numerous transformations even since my welcome message in the last issue. Many of these have concerned its ecology and evolution. Serendipity, sadness and success – all have featured, but where to start? . . . Whoosh . . . Did you hear Botany Club take off ? I'll start with that.

In my first message I talked about 'botanising' – the coming together of like minded people to study with plants, and that just about sums up the new Botany Club. [See Page 23] CIC leader John Curtis' mission statement for the Garden includes expanding our academic links, and you may know that there are projects ongoing with Leicester, Nottingham and Texas Universities (see Climate Change on the Garden Website). What a delightful surprise then to discover that just over the water at Portsmouth University we have our very own Professor of Ecology and Evolution, Scott Armbruster. His research includes evolution of plant mating systems and the development of floral traits involved in attracting, rewarding, and manipulating pollinators. Wow, think Puya! What's more he is a Californian 'Caulkhead' who recognises that VBG is his nearest potential Botanic Garden partner. We have been invited to his department on our first Botany Club away day – report to follow!

Next, sadness – that's how we feel about the demise of David Green and his Eco-Island CIC initiative, and also the resignation of Irene Fletcher. Both leave us with huge voids.

Then success – let's all congratulate Chris Kidd on obtaining National Collection status (NCCPG*) for our more than 70 Puya taxa. I think the Friends should celebrate this early in the new year if not before. John Curtis accepted the Red Funnel tourists' vote of 'Best Garden award' for VBG, for which a huge debt is owed to the Volunteers. Against odds, John's team have really cracked on with Signal Point and energy saving projects. Phil Le May and Jonyth Hill have been successful in obtaining funds for volunteer recruitment and are hard at work on RNH heritage and history.

Now to the volunteers whose numbers have increased considerably thanks to successful recruiting endeavours at Wolverton Manor Fair and since. Despite initial hiccups they are now, in the inimitable words of Boris Johnson in Beijing, "a nest full of singing birds". Some have joined the ranks of meeters and greeters who have turned up in all weathers to greet seven or eight unscheduled buses. The visitor experience would without doubt have been diminished without them.

The proportion of Volunteers who are Friends remains high, and on the horizon there appear to be new avenues for those Friends who have yet to try volunteering. "Luke's groups" may, as well as gardeners, mature into specialist groups who work in 'schools and families education.' and 'renovation and support for propagation". Don't forget to complete your volunteer agreement or you may hear Luke Chap 1v1 - "There's always one!"

In the last issue we aired the introduction of a Patron Scheme, and directed giving: the details of these will be the focus of a future issue, but do consider taking a leaf out of the Greenleafs book (Page 27). In this edition we have concentrated on the new tariffs and the generous discounts for the Friends.

The Executive has worked with John to review our benefits of membership. The resulting new deal, (see Page 10) is something we need to make the most of, as well as to spread the word amongst our friends and colleagues so that we can achieve an increase in our combined membership to over 800 and then on to a target of 1% of the Island population. Amongst our new additional benefits you will see access to a new Friends library and meetings area which we hope to commission in 2014 and an invitation to the excellent monthly lecture series in the *edulis* restaurant which John has organised.

Finally, to those singing in the nest and indeed all Friends, CIC and volunteers, may I wish you seasonal good cheer and all the best for 2014.

Chris Kershaw, Chairman

Give a gift of VBGFS Membership for Christmas

Please contact Kay on 01983 852100 for further details

Offer closes 16 December 2013
(to allow time for posting)

National Collection of Puya, Hardy & Half Hardy

Chris Kidd explains what it means to hold a National Collection

Puya. Photograph by Julian Winslow

On 20th August 2013 we were officially recognised by Plant Heritage (formerly NCCPG) as the National Collection holders of Puya, Hardy & Half Hardy.

The road to this recognition was begun many years ago. The first Puya plants arrived here when former Curator Simon Goodenough brought some plants back from the Abbey Garden on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, in 1996. These original plants had their origins dating back many years to the original plants brought to England in 1848. Typically it takes ten years or more for the large Puya to flower, by which time we had already begun collecting more species. Since 2005 the original Puya clumps have flowered most years, and now the more recent introductions have begun to flower regularly too. In 2012 we had eight large flower spikes of Puya. Very quickly we had collected what amounted to be a very large collection of Puya in our benign microclimate.

When Ventnor Botanic Garden CIC came into existence one of the stated aims was for the Garden to establish three National Collections. Ostensibly this looks remarkably easy: we have very large numbers of a lot of rare plants here, but there are criteria that need to be met by Plant Heritage. The collection needs to be documented, curated and accessioned. Known provenance of the material is vital, as is verification of the material. Each taxa needs to be represented by as many different accessions as possible. There

has to be evidence that the collection is held in depth, representing over 70% of those available in cultivation. The collection has to be secure and invulnerable. It is preferred that the collection does not remain static but is actively increased wherever possible. Finally, a National Collection may not be bought, and there needs to be evidence that the collection has an appropriate depth of history at the proposed garden. Perhaps unsurprisingly, each of these criteria were more than amply met by VBG.

By joining other gardens and individuals with our first National Collection (we will have three) we are contributing to a national register, but perhaps more importantly contributing to the conservation status of this enigmatic and difficult genus. I have waxed lyrical here before about the plants themselves and their horticultural worthiness, but their scientific value cannot be underestimated. Our collection will contribute to a better understanding of the genus, and ultimately this could lead to a reorganisation of the taxonomy of the group. The way the plants are able to breed is somewhat at odds with the classification that traditional botany has described, and there is also a strong case being made that the original – or type-specimens – of some species are actually incorrect, or even hybrids. By growing these plants we can supply material for study to help resolve these questions.

Be proud and be committed

John Curtis describes the strides taken, the ongoing cost and the action needed to sustain the Garden

Much to be proud of, much yet to achieve. An end of summer letter from the Island's Lord Lieutenant read: "It is nice to see the Garden looking loved again." Hats off to the morning sweeps led by Garden Team Leader, Luke Gunner and his team. I will outline other recent accomplishments and end with a call to action.

The cumulative impact of the new entrance courtyard, the new restaurants, the extension of the Mediterranean Garden into the fountain area, the enlarged Olive Grove, the new path along the Top Lawn, and the opening up of the area in front of the Tropical House is starting to make a difference that is both felt and appreciated.

When the sub flora burst forth around the new olive trees in late summer one could sense a stage victory for what we are now calling *The Ventnor Method* – our way of growing plants in association with each other as they would be in the wild.

We aim to further consolidate our return as an Island destination all can take pride in with the creation of a "drive through botanic garden" on the slopes opposite the entrance to the Garden. The October Design Walk visualised a Garden to be viewed at 30 miles per hour, with large washes of colour and texture from VBG's star plants – a 'must see' on the Island.

In November 2011 we set out the strategy to achieve National Collection Status for two genera and one family. In September 2013 the formal plaque from Plant Heritage arrived at the Curator's announcing that our half hardy Puya collection had been accepted [see Page 6]. Soon we will begin planting out a Puya Garden to the east of Signal Point using The Ventnor Method. You can also find the Puya flower on our logo and on the label of Botanic Ale SM, our new cold filtered ale made from VBG grown hops [see Page 18].

The summer also saw the arrival of new Volunteers in the Garden, in Meet & Greet roles, and in education – a much needed oxygen for our patient. My personal thanks to all who contributed and who keep contributing week after week, day after day.

At last the 60 solar panels behind the Tropical House have been commissioned, so we are cutting both our carbon footprint and our power bills. The demise of EcoIsland has slowed our progress, but in no way thrown us off the path to running the Garden more sustainably. A set of solar thermal panels are going in to heat Signal Point despite the vanishing of the Government's Green Deal funding.

'Looking loved again': bromeliad fascicularia bicolor. Photograph by Rosemary Stewart

Soon Signal Point Cottage will be opened for students, visiting dignitaries, and holiday rentals.

An equally dramatic set of further improvements is required to save the Garden which continues to haemorrhage cash. While the Garden looks loved, visitor count is flat and less than 200 passes have been purchased since July 2012. To put this in context, the income from these passes would cover the cost of the Curator and gardening staff for just one month out of twelve. Total admissions including passes covers 29% of total operating cost, leaving a burden which plant sales, cuisine, and the shop cannot carry. So, the call to action:

We need a reciprocal effort between the members of the Friends and the CIC which has been funding the Garden. Therefore, we are asking Friends to consider what they each can do for the Garden whether it is a donation of 10 minutes of volunteer time, sponsoring an intern, making a financial donation, or leaving a legacy gift [see Page 27]. Concretely this means all Friends buying Annual Passes, plants and seeds, giving Annual Passes as Christmas gifts, becoming Patrons, bringing your Friends to the Garden, sponsoring an olive tree [see Page 16], buying gifts in the shop, hiring VBG@Home to transform your own garden, joining Botany Club, encouraging your friends to become Friends, and greeting the team at the Garden with a smile when you visit.

New Membership Benefits

Whether you become an active member or simply wish to support Ventnor Botanic Garden, your membership of Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society for a modest annual fee will help the Society in its work with the Garden.

As the Community Interest Company seeks to cover the costs of running the Garden with income from entry fees, we plan to focus more on education and propagation, while continuing to make grants for the purchase of plants and other projects approved by our Executive in accordance with our constitution.

Membership now entitles you to a 25% saving for the whole year on ALL Period Garden Passes, with NEW benefits.

You can select the pass that suits **your** visits to the Garden and apply this substantial saving to any of the following: -

ANNUAL PASS	Single or Joint – includes admission for up to 3 under-16s ***PLUS*** Friends who are Single Pass Holders can take a guest – Joint Pass Holders 2 guests – at **25%** off the standard admission tariff
SIX MONTH PASS	Single or Joint – includes admission for up to 3 under-16s. ***PLUS*** Friends who are Single Pass Holders can also take a guest – Joint Pass Holders 2 guests – at **25%** off the standard admission tariff
A GIFT PASS	10 Single Entry Passes valid for 2 years.
PASSBOOK	3 entries with 2 guests each time, valid for 2 years.

New shorter and longer term passes and special offers may be introduced next year.

Additional benefits include: -

Free magazine *Ventnorensis*, delivered to your home three times a year.
Discounts at Island nurseries.
10% discount on plant and seed purchases from the Garden Plant Shop

Join Us

The membership year runs from 1 January to 31 December. The current rates are:

Individual – £15 (joining after 1 July – £8)
Second member at same address – £7 (after 1 July – £4)
Junior (under 16) – £2 (after 1 July – £1)
Non-UK individual – £18 (after 2 July – £10)

This does not include entry to the Garden but Members benefit from a **25% discount** on ALL Period Garden Passes. See above and opposite page.

Want to visit Ventnor Botanic Garden more often and save money?

Looking for a Christmas gift that keeps on giving all year round?

Buy an Annual Pass for unlimited access to VBG!

Single Annual Pass (for 1 adult) *£30*
Joint Annual Pass (for 2 adults) *£54*
Family Annual Pass (for 1 adult and up to 3 children) *£72*
Family Annual Pass (for 2 adults and up to 3 children) *£96*

Don't forget, members of the VBG Friends' Society get 25% off all Annual Passes. *Plus,* buy before 20th December 2013 and receive a 10% off voucher to spend in the VBG Gift Shop.

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.

Please note: Ryde House Nursery, one of the nurseries which has kindly offered discount to members in the past, is closing this November. We wish the staff well. (There is currently 40% off plant sales.)

Weather in the Garden

(June to August 2013) by Chris Watts

The brightest weather in June came early in the month, but throughout it remained essentially dry, and temperatures were close to the seasonal norm. Thunder was recorded on one day only, the 7th, when a storm rumbled around for the best part of three hours in the morning.

At last July brought the stuff that summers are made of! The jet stream moved northwards, the Azores high pointed a finger to the UK, and it was dry, warm and sunny from the 5th to the 26th. For the record the warmest day was the 18th (27°C), the balmiest night the 21st/22nd (18.7°C) and the sunniest day the 9th (15 hours). Average daily sunshine over this period was 11.5 hours. A breakdown in the heatwave came in the final few days which saw some welcome rain – the only rain of the month to fall apart from a little on the 2nd.

August was a pretty good month too. It started with 26°C on the 1st, and although this high temperature was not repeated during the month, it stayed fairly dry, warm and sunny, just with a few minor hiccups. One of these was a violent but short lived thunderstorm on the evening of the 2nd; this caused a mishap at the weather station when, shortly after the thunder, a gust of wind took off the wind speed cups of the anemometer which were found on the ground the following morning, luckily undamaged and easily reinstalled! Rainfall of 8.5mm was recorded in an eight minute spell, a rate of over 60mm/hr. The Bank Holiday at the month end (26th) saw plenty of sunshine and a temperature of nearly 25°C, the second highest in August.

Yet the best was still to come. At the time of writing, we have just recorded the hottest day of the year, September 5th, with 27.1°C.

Just how good a summer was it? The figures show that the UK enjoyed the warmest, driest and sunniest for seven years (since 2006). Here, of the 2200 hours which make up the summer, it rained for 40 hours, or 2% of the time - and some of this fell at night! Temperatures exceeded 20°C in sunny conditions on most days in July and August, so yes, Ventnor followed the national picture.

Footnote: In the last issue of *Ventnorensis,* I omitted to report the very low humidities which occurred on the 2nd May. These fell to under 30% during the late morning and stayed below that value for about three hours, with the lowest humidity recorded, 26%, at 1145am.

	Mean Temp C	Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights)	Sun Hrs	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Rain Duration Hrs
June	*14.7*	*0.0(0)*	*190.3–*	*30.3—-*	*7*	*18.6*
July	*18.5++*	*0.0(0)*	*276.1+*	*25.8—-*	*5*	*16.0*
Aug	*18.0+*	*0.0(0)*	*215.9*	*23.8—-*	*5*	*7.8*

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

Dear members . . .

To quote Woody Allen, if you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans. This summer my friend (and VBG Friend) Belinda and I planned to take a combined total of eight boys, ranging in age from five to 14, to Cornwall. Boys need lots of activity, adults need coast and gardens. But just two weeks before the holiday Belinda broke her leg.

Thanks to an automatic car (no demands on the poorly left leg) the combined helpfulness of the older boys, and a supply of frozen peas for the swelling, Belinda made the brave decision to carry on as planned.

We had on our To Do list the Eden Project so the boys could try the longest zip wire in England (which also provided a great all-age activity, shelter building) and the spectacular sub-tropical garden of Trebah in Falmouth, which sweeps down to its own beach on the Helford River.

Clearly navigating gardens is not easy with a broken leg but Belinda had done her research and had arranged to borrow from both Eden and Trebah a mobility scooter.

It all worked perfectly. In both places a scooter awaited her, and at Trebah she was even given a bit of training while the boys rolled down a grassy bank, as well as a map showing the paths suitable for her sturdy vehicle. It really got me thinking about all the people who believe garden visiting is no longer an option because of infirmity. The controls – buttons depicting a tortoise and a hare – were pretty self explanatory.

And who says you can't have adventures when you're incapacitated? Finishing a languid afternoon on Trebah's beach the heavens suddenly opened: no Cornish drizzle this, but monsoon rain. Brainwave! The gunnara walk!

There aren't many occasions in life when your sense of scale is totally skewed but standing upright on a path covered by leaves the size of golfing umbrellas and watching as the knobbly stems direct the water in an orderly stream does make you feel like one of the famed Cornish piskies. While the Gunnara Walk was too narrow for the mobility scooter, by parking hard up against the leaves Belinda too was able to nestle until the rain eased enough for us to head for the exit.

And the moral of this tale? Don't assume you can't still visit places if you're less fit than you once were. Phone up or look online to see what facilities are available. Those favourite gardens aren't necessarily a closed world.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Deadline for Spring issue: 28 February 2014

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		
		Postcode
E- Mail		
Telephone		
Name of Second Member at the same address		
Name of Junior Member/s (under 16) & date/s of birth		

Membership Rates with effect from 1st January 2013

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

GIFT MEMBERSHIP AVAILABLE

For details see our web site www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

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

Signature Date

Membership Secretary: VBGFS Caroline Peel, Point Cottage, Beach Road, Bembridge PO35 5NQ.

giftaid it

By completing this Gift Aid declaration you enable Ventnor Botanic Gardens Friends' Society to claim tax back from the Government at no cost to yourself.

I/We would like Ventnor Botanic Gardens Friends' Society to reclaim tax on any eligible membership subscriptions or donations made by me/us until further notice.

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My/Our details are: First name.....Surname.....

First name.....Surname.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Please be aware that you must have paid an amount of income and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the amount of tax reclaimed by all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs on all your donations in the tax year (6th April one year to 5th April the next).

Standing Order Authority

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

To: The Manager (Name & Address of Bank)
Pay to the account of **Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society**, National Westminster Bank, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1RA Sort Code 54-41-31 Account No. 05441358 the sum of £..... .....Pounds AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS immediately and the sum of £..... .....Pounds AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS every 6 January thereafter 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
BANK SORT CODE ACCOUNT NUMBER

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 VBG Friends' Society

Hop Wars

Chris Kidd explains his choice of hops and, over the page, **Roz Whistance** follows them to the brewery

"Boadicea": strong against disease

The battle between pest and population is a well established principal in modern agriculture and horticulture. New varieties of crop plants have to be artificially developed to be able to cope with diseases which themselves continually develop. The commercial hops of industry are particularly plagued by disease: in years gone by the whole British industry was devastated by disease. To prevent this happening again there are plant breeders working towards bringing out new cultivars to replace the more vulnerable ones.

To the brewing industry a hop variety called "First Gold" is highly prized, but it is prone to mildew. Commercial growers spray fungicide as a matter of routine as a preventative measure against this disease. For us, the expense and impracticality of this regime, as well as the environmental impact, means we have taken the risk of disease instead. In 2012 we were hit with mildew and lost a lot of our crop as a result, so we decided to change varieties to more resistant ones. In 2013 we planted 200 "Boadicea" hops, doubling the number of plants we had of this hop. We also put in a single row of "Sovereign", a very attractive hop for garland growing.

Happy hop pickers: perfect weather for the volunteers

A new brew

This year VBG's hops have produced an additional beer. **Roz Whistance** followed them to Yates's Brewery in Newchurch

On that gloriously sunny October day we picked VBG's hops and by the following morning they were in Chris and Jason's van, being delivered to the mainland for drying, vacuum packing and analysis. But what happens next?

First, according to brewer David Yates, a discussion:

"I said to Chris and John Curtis that in certain circumstances – lunchtime, say – TropicAle [the cask conditioned ale first made last year] was, at 5%, too strong. So I suggested we brewed a new, cold filtered beer. John has called it BotanicAle."

At Yates's Brewery David leads me up the steep steps to where the hops are stored. If you were part of the picking party you'll know that they were sticky with a slightly oppressive pungent smell. Now, dried, they are crumbly and the scent is lighter and more fragrant.

David takes pale malt, which resembles oats, then adds crystal malt which is darker, and torrified wheat. This goes into the large, wooden clad hoppers. The next day the grains are let down into the 'mash ton', and sprayed with hot water. The resulting gritty porridge-like mix tastes sweet. "There's a lot of starch in there," explains David, "and for beer you need as much sugar as you can get. Over the next 1½ hours the starch is converted to fermentable sugars. Then we draw off the wort, a dark liquid, by 'sparging' the grains in the mash ton with hot waters to extract the rest of the sugars."

This is where the alchemy comes in, as David and his team will mix and check until they have the correct ABV (alcohol by volume) for the beer. And now it's time for the hops.

"Nobody wants a sweet beer so we add 'bittering hops' just as the liquid boils: this extracts all the oils from the hops. Then after an hour and ten minutes we add the second lot what I call 'aroma hops'.

After the boil, the wort goes into a fermentor, by passing it through a heat exchanger until the chilled water passing the other way cools it to a temperature acceptable to live yeast. "The beer [not wort] stays in there almost a week, and while fermenting it looks like lemon

meringue, and then collapses. It eats all the sugars and creates alcohol and Co^2, and we have to gauge how long it needs to keep Customs and Excise happy!"

Again you get a sense of the dark art of the alchemist. Its fermenting has to stop after three or four days or the beer is too strong and thin. "We cool it as quickly as possible to 10°C. Anything below 18 or 19° and the yeast stops working. Then, after two or three days it goes into containers and goes off to a company in Swindon for bottling."

For a week the beer is chilled to 4°C, the yeast settles and the beer is filtered and carbonated and bottled.

"There will always be purists who prefer the cask conditioned ale," says David, "but this has a longer shelf life and can be chilled, if that's your preference, without going cloudy."

So now VBG's hops are doing their bit to support the garden in two brews – hand picked by the Friends and hand crafted by the Island's Yates's Brewery.

Special Offer: Crates of Botanic Ale (12x500ml) are currently being sold at just £30 – offer running up to 1st January

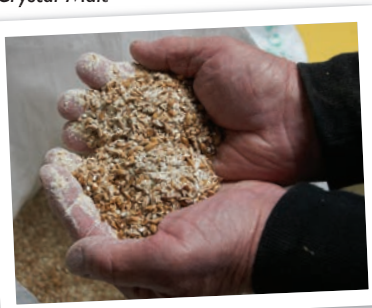
We sent a bottle of BotanicAle to the Beer Today website. Read how it was reviewed on www.beertoday.co.uk in Inside Back page.

Dried Hops

Pale Malt

Crystal Malt

David checks the wood-clad copper



Torrified Wheat

Oh, I do love to be beside the seaside . . . a Botanic Garden wedding

Sally Peake says her daughter wanted a reception venue that showed her friends from five continents the Island at its best

When, last autumn, our beautiful daughter announced her engagement to the rather nice young man we both liked, Steve and I assumed that, as Rosie had never actually lived on the Island, it would probably be a London-based wedding. So it was with great excitement, and not a little trepidation, that we received the news that she wanted to get married from 'HOME' and home was wherever we were, despite our gypsy-like tendency to frequent moves.

In love and in laws: Rosie and Jonathan with the Listers and the Peakes

Eventually it was agreed that nearly two hundred people, including twenty seven children, would come from all corners of the world (Yes! All five continents were represented!) to celebrate the marriage of Rosie Peake to Jonathan Lister in St John the Baptist Church at Niton on August 3rd 2013. To our relief, Rosie and Jonathan were keen to take on the logistics, asking that we be prepared to take on 'specific tasks'.

My 'specific task' was definitely horticultural – could I grow enough sweet peas to decorate the Church? There is always logic in always asking people to take on tasks that they already enjoy, and Rosie is a past master at project management – six years at the BBC doing just that!

So I trotted off to renew my acquaintance with Keith Brewer, retired VBG gardener and national sweet pea champion, who lives in Ventnor. Keith gave me surplus seedlings of his own magnificent plants and continued to mentor me as I sowed seed at monthly intervals throughout the cold days of spring and then struggled to nurture the young plants up their cane wigwams. As they started to flower in late June, I assiduously pinched out all the flower buds until mid-July when Keith said I could start picking flowers. He, by now National Champion once more, also promised I could supplement my flowers with whatever he had left to pick from his own plot. Imagine my horror when, apologetically, he said that his had gone to seed in the hot, dry weather and there would be no flowers from Ventnor.

Multitudes: Sweet peas in Niton Church

I should not have worried. Word had gone out around Niton village and buckets of sweet peas arrived to add to my own multitude. Niton Church was filled with the fantastic scent and colour of home-grown sweet peas. Thank you all!

Rosie and Jon both love good food so they took on the task of finding someone, somewhere, who could produce food for a reception that would showcase the best the Island had to offer. So it was that an open-top bus brought their guests to Ventnor beach for fish & chips (courtesy Ed Blake at Ventnor Fishery) and elderflower champagne (my home-made cordial diluted with sparkly) with ice cream for the children and young-at-heart. And the bridegroom and his brothers went swimming . . . but it was time for the bus to move on.

To our mind the most beautiful spot on the Island on a summer's evening is Ventnor Botanic Garden and in the New Zealand Garden we put up a lovely marquee. Friends and family lovingly decorated it with ivy and hydrangeas and, as early evening arrived, VBG's chef, Martyn Cutler, and his wonderful team arrived with delicacies to tempt the palate. Happy to work with Rosie's wishes (who would dare otherwise!), local produce was showcased and enjoyed, speeches were made and toasts offered. Timings lapsed as people lingered over their food and speeches and the dark walk from kitchens to marquee must have been a real headache for the kitchen staff – my heartfelt thanks.

Foodies' delight: Martyn Cutler's delicacies

As the night drew on guests retreated to *Edulis;* the daytime restaurant was cleared for the band and dancing whilst the heartiest of appetites could try cheese or paté, and wedding cakes of course. So the party danced and danced and danced . . .

There is a serious note behind this article. VBG-CIC have to make the Garden financially sustainable – if you, or anyone you know, is planning a wedding or other celebratory party, consider having it at the Garden. We all know that the venue is stunning and all the ancillary facilities are there to make such an occasion truly memorable. You would also, like us, feel that the not inconsiderable funds spent on such occasions are helping to maintain our beautiful Botanic Garden and all its associated employment. The Peake and Lister families will happily share our memories with you!

Photos by Joanna Brown Photography.
Email: joanna@browns-photography.co.uk Website: joannabrownphotography.com

How the Old Hospital still heals

Roz Whistance meets medical herbalist Claire Hudson

Claire Hudson, Medical Herbalist

If you were to wander through the herb garden at VBG you might notice a young lady taking more than a passing interest in what is growing there. Claire Hudson is a medical herbalist who is hoping to spread a bit of her own knowledge to visitors to the Garden. "Herbalism is about empowering the individual to look after their own health, rather than being a source of medication they can come and collect," says Claire. "I'd like to show people how they can collect things from their gardens or around the Isle of Wight: when are the best times and ways of picking and how to use what they find."

Claire operates her medical herbalist practice, Sage House, in Ryde and in Watchbell House, Newport, having recently moved from Southsea. "I trained for four years, three at the Scottish School of Herbal Medicine, then in Middlesex before getting a job as part of an NHS practice in Southsea. Being part of a busy practice gave me wonderful experience. But since coming to the Isle of Wight I wanted to work in a more holistic way, and Ventnor Botanic Garden seemed like somewhere I should get to know."

Medical herbalism, she explains, is the Western equivalent of Chinese Herbalism. The difference is that in the Western tradition prescriptions are produced on an individual basis. "We don't use pre-set formulas," she says. "I'll look at my patient and try to address various imbalances, so my prescriptions are a blend of herbs." It was the tremendous success of a Chinese herbalist in curing her own debilitating eczema which led to her own studies. "I can't disregard the Chinese tradition but having an individualised prescription for the person in front of me is invaluable."

Those 'imbalances' are, as anyone who has ever been to a Chinese or Western herbalist will know, winkled out by questions which might not seem relevant to the bad neck or skin complaint you came in with. "Yes," laughs Claire, "I do ask a lot of questions, about their respiratory system, their circulation etc. It's to get an overview of the whole person and to see what's going on with them physically and mentally."

The herbs can be taken in various ways. Looking out from the Plantation Room café to the gingko tree outside she explains that the leaves would be harvested as they turn from green to yellow, and thoroughly dried until they're crumbly and can be taken as a tea. "Gingko is associated with circulation problems. One of the things I'd like to do here is develop a selection of teas from the plants here. I have in mind a series of workshops so I can teach people the best way to use herbs for their health."

While many people still dismiss this and other alternative medicines as whacky she is finding more and more people are discovering its benefits. You may have come across Claire at the Hop where she was demonstrating teas, and she hopes to develop her relationship with the Garden's herbs and its visitors in the future. "With the history of this place as a hospital I find the medicinal connection very interesting," she says.

Hear Claire's talk "Sustainable Health Care and the Herb Garden, 11th Nov, 7pm.

Join the Friends' Botany Club

This September we have started a new group we are calling Botany Club. The club is aimed at anyone with an interest in gardens or gardening, botany, horticulture or the great outdoors. Although it is called Botany Club the range and scope of what we do is wide and varied and pitched at a level from basic to advanced, depending on what members want. We meet once a month, and you need to become a member so we can communicate . . . but after that you choose how involved you want to be. What would you like to do?

Our monthly meetings are held at VBG, on the second Wednesday of each month at 2pm, usually in the Echium Room. In between we have visits and workshops both on the Island and the mainland. Each month is different, with guests who are experts in their fields. You can join our meetings and trips out without being a member, though the price is higher. So it makes sense to join: £25 is the annual subscription.

Our first meeting was on October 9th 2013, and Chris Kidd gave an introduction to paleobotany, explaining how continental drift over millions of years and the cycle of ice ages has driven evolution and accounted for plant distribution around the globe, sometimes with fascinating consequences. This was followed by an hour visiting some of the Champion Trees at Ventnor Botanic Garden, not all of which are as large as you might imagine, and all of which are less than 40 years old.

Future subjects so far mooted are: Bench Grafting at a commercial nursery; special opening of private land to see Green Winged Orchids *Orchis morio;* Cridmore Bog (with permissions of landowners); Gardens of Cornish Riviera; Glasnevin Botanic Garden, Dublin with Jason; lichens; fungi; bluebells; herbalism; ethnobotany . . . .

So why not join our club?

Details are on our website or email sylvia.clare@btinternet.com

Socialising, botanising, learning: The Botany Club's first meeting

Voyage of discovery

Chris Kidd combines a hop drop with a plant buying expedition. He makes some exciting finds and names a cultivar

Having learned our lesson that storing hops over a weekend was difficult to manage, this year the annual hop picking took place on Tuesday 10th September. This enabled Jason and me to find ourselves at the ferry port at an ungodly hour in a van stinking like a brewery.

However, the task of taking the hops to Hereford afforded us an excellent opportunity to travel onwards and source new plants for the Garden, a debt owed once again to the Friends' Society for making this necessity possible. We were met as usual by Peter Davies at Claston and deposited the hops in the kiln. Then we went on to view Peter's private hop yard where, despite being formally retired, he is still involved with breeding new hop cultivars. These could be the disease-proof commercial varieties of the future, the battle between hops and disease being a major factor in commercial hop production.

We rummaged through his plants like a couple of LP collectors leafing through 12" vinyl in a backstreet junkshop

Our first nursery visit of the trip was Cotswold Garden Flowers near Evesham, run by Bob Brown. Bob was away at some low key gardening event at Harrogate run by the RHS (it'll never catch on) but nonetheless we rummaged through his plants like a couple of LP collectors leafing through 12" vinyl in a backstreet junkshop. Not that Bob's nursery is downmarket; he has barcodes on much of his stock these days, though the choicer material is found if not under the counter, certainly in places where the commercial eye of stock control cannot peer.

Jason headed straight to the Puya collection and I began at the Ochagavia and we met in the middle. Having Jason along means we work through nurseries twice as fast, so needn't cover each other's tracks. In some nurseries I will become trapped with the owner and Jason will head into the bowels of the place on his own. If I see him disappear into a green polytunnel with a wonky door and he quickly emerges shaking his head, it means there is nothing worth having and we need to leave fast. This is never the case at Cotswold Garden Flowers, the highlights here being new accessions of wild sourced Puya, arguably the most delightful cultivar of Acer, *A. palmatum* "Phoenix" and the extraordinarily spined *Solanum purpureum* from Brazil.

The following day started at Burncoose nursery, quite a haul down the charming pastoral lane that is the M5. Burncoose is one of the few nurseries that hold large quantities of Magnolia; I had a mind to augment our large deciduous Chinese tree collection. I'd struggle to think of another nursery that holds *Meliosma veitchiorum, Halimodendron halodendron* and *Hovenia dulcis* as a matter of course. A pleasant surprise was finding *Eriobotrya deflexa;* this magnificent plant will replace the progressively listing Hillier original in our Palm Garden. We added Hedychium species, three of each, to help make sense of our existing collections on what is rapidly becoming the Hedychium Bank behind the Palm Garden. Whilst totting up, one of Burncoose's staff recommended a wholesale nursery near Hayle. A phone call persuaded the owner to return after closing to reopen for us.

First, and in appalling mist we crossed the toe of Cornwall on B-roads to Cross Common Nursery on The Lizard, the southernmost nursery in the UK. This nursery specialises in conservatory plants and climbers but the owner has an eye for the esoteric too. We mopped up some *Puya spp.,* an extraordinarily large Agapanthus cultivar called A. "Queen Mum", *Gynostemma pentaphyllum, Erythrina xbidwillii* and several Hedychium species to add to the groups from Burncoose. Against the clock Jason repacked the van and we headed to Lower Kenneggy Nurseries, arguably the best nursery for plant nuts in Cornwall.

Stephen Mules' Lower Kenneggy sits unostentatiously just off the A394. You may have seen it featured in an article by Roy Lancaster in The Garden last year after it was recommended to him. Stephen is getting a rightly deserved reputation for top quality rare plants at frankly ridiculous prices. Most nurseries usually hide their best plants out the back in private collections, but at Lower Kenneggy they are out the front and for sale. Straightaway we found a species of Puya entirely new to us, the North West Argentian *P. Harmsii:* further in, some gorgeous new Correa species and varieties. The intriguing *Rumex flexuosus,* a tiny bronze leafed Dock from New Zealand was new to us. Where else does one find *Allocasuarina cunninghamii?*

Rare finds: Stephen Mules of Lower Kenneggy

Stephen is as unostentatious as his nursery and would be deeply embarrassed to have a plant named after him – but this isn't possible for a remarkable cultivar of Hedychium he has developed from seed, because there is already a cultivar called Stephen, named by Tony Schilling after his son.

A few years back Stephen collected seed from a notably dwarf *H. gardnerianum* and noticed amongst the offspring a number of seedlings which shared the diminutive size (*H. gardnerianum* is usually up to 2m, these plants closer to 80cm). These he selected and grew on to flowering size, where they flowered typically for the straight species; large broad spikes of yellow flowers with dark orange, almost red stamens – held on dwarfed plants. These he has been bulking up vegetatively since and selling as un-named cultivars. I feel they warrant a name, and suggest *Hedychium* "Kenneggy" is very appropriate.

A huge contrast was our final visit of the day, to the wholesale nursery near Hayle. By this time Jason and I were desperately fatigued and in half light we pored over acres of plug plants, 9cm Empot trays and one litre plants. This nursery is operating to a completely different agenda, supplying in bulk half-finished plants to commercial enterprises the length of the UK. Interestingly though, in amongst the monotony were three species of Puya. These are arguably the source of all the commercially available Puya in the UK. If these are wrongly named the current problems of cultivated Puya taxonomy could be corrected by us at VBG. In order to do this we need to work with the wholesaler, for whom it is in their best interests. We collected material of each and will grow it to flowering size for verification.

We say goodbye

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of three valuable members of the Friends' Society

Bill Kidson

Bill Kidson was Honorary Secretary of the Society almost from its beginning, a post he served until he retired in 2000. Thanks to their friendly and personal approach he and his wife Jean, who was Membership Secretary at the same time, built up the membership to over 1000. In those days, of course, all was painstakingly administered in long-hand and took hours of their time. Jean suffered for years from ill-health and was housebound but nevertheless their support never wavered.

Bill Kidston: never wavered

Jeanne Frost

It is with much sadness we have to announce the death of another of our oldest members of the Friends. Jeanne Frost passed away in October having suffered for many years from multiple sclerosis and in later years was in a wheelchair. However, she was always a passionate gardener and invited the Friends to her home, just across the road from Ventnor Botanic Garden, for coffee mornings for fund raising, and she attended many events.

In latter years Jeanne would often be seen in the Garden in her wheelchair with her daughter Debbie or her carer, and always looking out for plants at the various plant sales. She still had plants in her greenhouse in spite of her failing health, and these Debbie is kindly donating to the Friends. We send our condolences to Debbie and members of the family.

Betty Davis

Betty Davis was our oldest member at 99 years and even in her 80s was a staunch volunteer in the potting shed every Wednesday morning. Always cheerful and of an enquiring mind about all the plants she potted on, she was so happy to support the Friends in all their events. One of the highlights of her life was to be introduced to Alan Titchmarsh, when, as High Sheriff, he attended an event at Ventnor Botanic Garden to help raise funds for a new glasshouse – the present one which he opened in 1987.

Betty Davis: meeting Alan Titchmarsh

The Staff and Friends send their sincere condolences to each of the families.

Where there's a Will . . .
. . . there's a way to help the Garden

Audrey and Richard Greenleaf urge others to consider leaving a legacy to help secure the future of VBG

Like so many other regular visitors and Friends of the Ventnor Botanic Garden, we have come to love it and wish to secure its future. We want to nurture it and help it flourish. We also want to show our appreciation of VBG and our gratitude to the people who have done so much to create and preserve its beauty.

Because we live on the mainland, we are not able to join in with the volunteer work that is now even more vital to VBG's future, and being retired we are currently limited in any financial contribution we might make. Like many others, however, we do have property that will be left behind on our deaths. So we have arranged in our Wills to leave a substantial legacy to VBG. It will help to ensure that the efforts of both dedicated staff and volunteers are not wasted and that the Garden can continue to give pleasure and education to future generations, as well as maintaining its vital work of preserving endangered species.

It takes enduring vision and some greatness to create and develop such a significant garden. Perhaps you have enough greatness to help carry that vision into the future.

When arranging or updating your own Will – a simple task that everyone should undertake – do please consider including a bequest to the VBG to support its future. Thank you!

New members

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

Mrs S Beck.....Cirencester
Mr D & Mrs M Chiverton.....East Cowes
Mr. W De Marvell and Ms E Oldham.....Yarmouth
Mr D and Mrs J Finch.....Ventnor
Mr G and Mrs F Greenwood.....Bembridge
Mr J and Mrs J Jefferies.....Ventnor
Mr. C Lansley.....Newbury
Mrs A Moyers.....Ventnor
Mrs B Paton.....Whitwell
Mr A and Mrs J Rigby.....Bletchingly, Surrey
Mrs M Scholes.....London
Dr P and Dr K Thomas.....St Lawrence
Mr A and Dr M Moore.....Ventnor
Mr P Noon.....Nottingham
Mr J and Mrs A Munro.....Seaview

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh • Simon Goodenough • Brian Kidd

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. Ask for Luke.

And the experts say?

BotanicAle is tasted by beertoday.co.uk

Light golden with a small, off-white head, this effervesces beautifully when pouring. The hops on the nose are pungent and earthy and turn very piney and slightly spicy on the palate, but work well with the juicy malt. In a beer map dominated these days by citrusy, bitter New World hops, it's a pleasure to be drinking something with a distinctively British taste, yet a clearly artisan style. Shame it doesn't mention the hop variety.

Darren Norbury

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VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

. . . Worth ten pressed men

Many more volunteers are now supporting the Garden, says **Richard Smith**

Twice as good: Volunteers, here gardening in the Mediterranean Garden, have doubled in number
Photo by Rosemary Stewart.

Following advance publicity in the local media, experienced volunteers were delighted to welcome 20 budding new volunteers to a coffee morning held on 11th September. This gave the opportunity for prospective volunteers to learn about the opportunities open to them, including leading guided tours, meeting and greeting, and gardening.

It was a delight to see so many new faces wanting to help the Garden. Many have become regular volunteers, giving a real boost to the value that volunteers have in making the garden a success. The number of Wednesday morning gardeners has doubled and this is making a big impact on what we are able to achieve at these sessions.

There is plenty of opportunity to join our expanding band of volunteers and if, as a Friend, you are interested to know more, do contact us. We can always arrange for a volunteer to meet you at the Garden, discuss how volunteering works and explore the areas that might interest you. As well as the enjoyment of being part of a friendly and enthusiastic group, don't forget that committed volunteers have free entry to the garden!

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK 9AM - 5PM

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EAT at our restaurant where our renowned chef creates tasty garlic dishes and much more. **SHOP** in our unique farm shop where a treasure trove of unusual and gourmet treats await you. In our Education & Heritage Centres you can **LEARN** all about garlic and the history of the farm. At weekends **ENJOY** a ride around The Garlic Farm on our tractor trailer. **TASTE** our range of pickles & garlic.

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