ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

We made this amazing thing. Everybody who comes to see it says it's amazing. So why doesn't everybody come?' – *Chris Kidd, Curator*

VOLUME 22 NO. 1 SPRING 2015

spring/summer opening times

Open daily from 10am
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

April
Tuesdays/Thursdays – School Holiday DISCOVERY DAYS
Good Friday 3rd and Easter Monday, 6th – EASTER EGG HUNT
Friday 3rd and Sat 4th – EASTER PLANT HUNTERS FAYRE – Nurseries open
Friday 3rd to Thursday 9th – CAROLYN PAVEY ART EXHIB – Free entry to Garden Gallery. Daily from 10am
Sunday 19th – IW Car Club AUTOTEST CHAMPIONSHIP, Rnd 2
Friday 24th to Friday 1st May – ST LAWRENCE ART SOCIETY EXHIB to Garden Gallery. Daily from 10am

May
Sunday 17th – FRIENDS' PLANT SALE
Wednesday 27th – DONATION DAY. Donate to enter Garden
Friday 22nd to Monday 25th – ISOBEL EVANS ART EXHIB – Free entry to Garden Gallery. Daily from 10am
Sunday 24th – Friends' SUMMER PARTY

June
Sunday 7th – BOOK, STAMP, EPHEMERA FAYRE
Sunday 21st – VBG 43rd BIRTHDAY – Come celebrate!
Wednesday 24th – PENELOPE HOBHOUSE lunch and interview
Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th – YOGA FESTIVAL
Friday 26th – MIDSUMMER SOIRÉE

July
Friday 17th to Monday 27th – INSPIRED BY WIGHT ART EXHIBITION Free entry to Garden Gallery. Daily from 10am

August
Friday 7th – QUANTUM THEATRE – Peter Rabbit 2.30pm, Midsummer Night's Dream 7pm
15th and 16th – HEALING FESTIVAL – Opens 10am

September
Sunday 20th – HOPS FESTIVAL
Monday 28th Sept – Thurs 22nd Oct – PERDITA SINCLAIR EXHIB
Sunday 27th – BOOK, STAMP, EPHEMERA FAYRE

October
Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th – POP UP OPERA
Saturday 24th – WORLD RENOWNED ARTISTS EXHIB
Saturday 31st – HALLOWEEN WALK

Sign of spring: Oriental Poppy, Papaver orientale and Amsonia orientalis by Rosemary Stewart

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recycle

Curator's Notes

The value of the nursery

Make no mistake, I smell that smell, it's that time of year again. I can taste the air of spring. Winter is always loathsome at this Garden and I'm hard pressed to think of a worse one than that just behind us, but we've slammed the door on it at last. I'd love to stamp out winter altogether: alas it serves a purpose, however irritating that may be.

Spring has sprung: Giant Fennel. Photograph by Rosemary Stewart

Changes in climate are far from being as predictable as expected in some quarters. It's not going to be as simple as a temperature shift upwards over the whole year, which has been shown by our cold snaps. Quite when spring will be has always been something for conjecture, and that seems ever more the case now. Spring may in future become less of a defined event but instead a vague timeframe between wet and dry seasons.

In spring the Garden is recharged through many sources other than the increase in sunlight or changes in rainfall. In a recent discussion about a grant application to uplift our nursery, we talked about the role of the nursery, the driving force behind what goes into the Garden in spring. We answered the where, the what and the who with a ping pong of emails. As to the value, that came easily.

Some have described the nursery of a garden to be its beating heart. The truth is that the etymology of the word resounds as strongly in the garden context as its use in human development; the nursery suckles, grooms and teaches the young, before sending it out into the world.

The nursery offers close care and a level of intense horticulture that the wider garden will never offer. Every new plant in this Garden has passed through the nursery, and still must. It serves as a locus for phytosanitation – measures requiring removal or destruction of infected plant material which could reinfect – accession and observation, which may last a day through to many years.

Plants can be nurtured and evaluated in a very personal way. The process of accessioning, where the individual plant becomes documented for the whole of its life and past death, begins in the nursery. This documentation underpins the Botanic Garden, it is what makes a garden botanic, and what gives the collection value both internally and (through the collaboration of botanic gardens, governments and conservation groups) in a global arena.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Annual General Meeting 2015

The AGM will take place on Thursday, 16th April at 7pm in The Visitor Centre. It will be followed by the presentation of the Harold Hillier Award, and by a talk by Chris Kidd about the filming of the Giant Waterlily, including the BBC footage.

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 24th April 2014
4. Report of the Executive Committee
5. Financial Report and Accounts for 2014
6. Subscriptions for 2016
7. Membership Report
8. Election of Officers: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer
9. Election of Executive Committee (not more than 10 members)

Rosemary Stewart, Hon Secretary

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.

Stop Press!

We are delighted that our Patron, renowned Garden Designer and author, Penelope Hobhouse, will be coming to the Garden on Wed 24th June. A lunch and interview with Penelope is being planned for that date as we go to press. Further information on both these events from Caroline Peel – carolinepeel@aol.com or 01983 872375.

Future Events: An Amazing Exhibition of Loaned Art by world renowned artists is planned for the week beginning 24th October. Please put this date in your diaries and more information will follow. *See other future events, Page 31.*

Chairman's message

Renewed energy

Whilst it has been a time of change in the Garden, there have been some busy beavers about and a new arrival in marketing and administration at the CIC office, Lisa Wallis, for us all to welcome.

Breath of spring!: Camellia, Blood of China. Photograph by Rosemary Stewart

Outreach

During the closed season we've welcomed Bob Bowden, an energetic new volunteer in event presentation and marketing. Bob was chiefly instrumental in enabling the Friends to feature prominently at "Christmas in Ventnorville", organised annually by the Ventnor Business Association. This proved an excellent means of projecting the Garden and Friends directly into the town centre, increasing membership and commodity sales on the day. This happy joint Friends/CIC venture is very likely to become one of our regular events along with the Wolverton Manor Garden Fair and, starting this year also, the County Show at Northwood.

Art

Bob, and our other very welcome new volunteer, Carol Ann Eades (the only brave person to answer my call for help with Education administration!) have been busy with our Resident Artist, Judy Rodrigues, launching a programme of Art Education in the Garden, starting with full day master-class workshops. Could it be the beginning of the Island's answer to the nationally renowned week long courses held at West Dean, in Hampshire? If so it would echo the link we have with Portsmouth University Plant Sciences department, whose other field station is also at West Dean.

Friends' Library

Rosemary Stewart, David Grist, Phil Le May and others have been busily painting the former gardeners' 'nammet' (Wightish for packed lunch) room which is to be the static home of our Friends' Library at last. Amongst some of the delightful surprises we have in store for you following the AGM, we hope to have an unofficial opening of our library in the refurbished area. Perhaps a more official opening in the spring?

Fond Farewell

Sadly we say farewell to Colin Smith from the Executive, but are grateful that he remains our webmaster.

Education Matters

Other milestones to note are Caroline Peel's great fundraising success of 2014. The Summer Party provided our first horticulture student bursary. (We anticipate a repeat success this year: book your ticket for May 24th.) Also the happy return of Sally Peake

to the Executive, advising on education events. She has wasted no time in organising the Noel Kingsbury lecture and workshops, (6th and 7th May). Well done Sally.

Continuing our link with the Isle of Wight College, we've decided to reinstate an annual Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society 'Horticulture Student of the year' prize, a £50 book token, which will be presented at the College on 9th July.

At Botany Club the winter blues were chased away by Rosemary Stewart's presentation of her epic visit to Greenland. By popular acclaim, we are reprising the Botany Club 'Kershaw Awayday' to Portsmouth University Gardens and the Institute of Naval Medicine Alverstoke on 18th March, in which we attempt to fit in as many gardens and places of botanical study as possible in one day without ever losing site of the Isle of Wight – for those prone to missing home. On our visit we will be developing our ideas of collaboration with the delightful lecturer in botanical science, Rocio Borrales, who has recently written:

"*Dr Joy Watts [a microbiology lecturer at UoP] and I are considering the possibility of running a project to link the bacteria community in the nectar of flowers with bee behaviour and seed production. I think this could be an interesting avenue of research in the Garden, as it has implications in Urban Ecology: the quality of nectars in a semi urban environment and how does it affect the bee community?*

This project can take different angles, one of which could be to continue with the survey of bees. I think this could help us to generate data to illustrate the value of Botanic Gardens not only in scientific research, but also in Conservation Biology."

What a breath of spring!

Volunteer!

Finally, if you can spare even a little time, consider the following: assisting Chris Kidd as a volunteer gardener or plant propagator (meet 10am at the Nammet Room); helping Jonyth Hill with visitors' information and tour-guiding; giving any assistance you can with education or CIC activities to your Chairman or John Curtis directly. Volunteering in the Garden this spring is good for your health: and remember that the Garden needs YOU more than ever just now.

Chris Kershaw

Botany Club

Launched in September 2013 the VBG Botany 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, from basic to advanced, depending on what members want. We generally meet at VBG, on the second Wednesday of each month at 2pm but meetings may be visits both on the Island and the mainland. Each month is different, with guest experts of their fields.

You can join our meetings or trips out without being a member, though the price is higher. So it makes sense to join, £25 is the annual subscription.

The Palms at VBG

Trachycarpus at VBG from the 19th Century

The Palm Garden at VBG is a great example of the style adopted in Victorian times for adventurous new arrivals of exciting plants from overseas. This is, of course, tempered by the fact that during the times of the Royal Hospital for Diseases of the Chest there was little garden to speak of. The Garden we see today was consolidated and given form over a hundred years later, but the cramped and nervous huddle of palms speaks volumes and is a real insight into how these scary new foreigners were treated. These were among the first palms to be planted outside in the UK: there is no historical documented evidence of the family out of doors previously.

The Chusan Palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei,* is a native of China, though it is widespread in cultivation in antiquity and well known in Japan. Improved relations between Britain and China resulting from the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 saw plant collectors enter China for the first time. The Horticultural Society of London – the forerunner of The Royal Horticultural Society – sent Robert Fortune to collect plants far and wide, sending seedlings back to Kew. From these earliest collections distributions were made, including to the Prince Consort at Osborne.

Uncertainty plagued the early plantings of the Chusan Palm. To the English gardener's eye these highly exotic plants required great heat, so were put into glasshouses where they quickly perished. In fact these palms require cooler, temperate conditions, and prefer to grow as understorey palms in mottled shade beneath a leafy canopy. The prestige of ownership, coupled with an inappropriate expectancy of habit resulted in the first palms in England being grown as specimens in the open. The early accounts note their slow growth and untidy habit, and a century or more later they are diminutive compared to younger but taller palms grown in the more overcast south west of Cornwall.

Albert, Prince Consort, selected a single specimen for Osborne, where it grew, alas, until recently. The Osborne palm had an ungainly appearance resulting from an early decision to remove the fibrous leaf bases that cover the trunk. Its earliest companions were directed onwards to the new Chest Hospital at Ventnor with its warm microclimate.

Gardens of the 20th Century are awash with *Trachycarpus fortunei.* Its hardiness is now fully understood and modern imports from the Italian masters of horticultural commerce have flooded northern Europe. *Trachycarpus fortunei* has surely replaced *Cordyline australis* as the plant to hint at tropicality, going from haute horticulture to fait accompli. As new species of Trachycarpus have emerged, and new genera and species are tested, the temptation at VBG was to add to the Palm Garden: I'm glad now we resisted, and under cloak of stealth created a Palm Garden for the 21st century in the Arid Garden.

New Arrivals: Mike Whitewood, Roy Cummins and Jason Melia putting in one of the large Washingtonia

There was already an old *Trachycarpus fortunei* in this area, next to Signal Point. This remains the sole one, a nod to the past. The first "new" palms we put in were *Washingtonia robusta,* natives of temperate southern states of North America. This was a bold move, not only because of their financial cost, but as a tapered avenue in the middle of the empty space. They lead to three pre-existing Washingtonias, the focal point of the avenue being a *Jubaea chilensis* seedling from the giant tree in Kew's Temperate House. Between these Washingtonias we planted the palms that will truly inherit the site, more *Jubaea chilensis.* These are very slow to mature, so the Washingtonias will race ahead, succumbing to old age by 2050, by which time the Jubaea will be juveniles, creating what will be the first, and hence oldest, Chilean Wine Palm avenue in the UK.

Not content with one avenue, we planted another further down below the road through the Arid Garden. This one is far less obvious, and so far hasn't been noticed by anyone, so here is a *Ventnorensis* exclusive! The palms here are Date Palms, *Phoenix canariensis,* rapidly becoming more widespread along the south coast. The first wave here were ex-dot plants from Osborne House (another nod to the past) that my predecessor Simon Goodenough stole in the back of his car and planted hurriedly one autumn day.

The second side to the avenue arrived four years later as a long run of smaller plants imported by us from Holland as a job lot of houseplants. These run along the left of the road, higher above the first row. The focal points to this avenue are yet to be established, there are all sorts of ephemeral plantings and remnant trees that need to reach maturity and be swept away before this scheme will achieve its goal.

Amongst the two avenues are dotted several other Genera and species of palm that fill the roles of most experimental tests. Here we can see a new species of Trachycarpus recently collected from China. We acquired it from a good friend, one of the few plant collectors still active, who noted the speed of growth compared to traditional *T. fortunei.* This is certainly true: since Jason planted it in 2010 it has put on a metre of trunk. There are also new plantings of the higher risk species of *Washingtonia filifera,* distinguishable from *W. robusta* by its fine wisps of fibre along the leaf margins. Slowest of all are examples of such palms that surely will be dwarfs for many, many years: *Sabal mauritiiformis,* which can be 24m in its native Colombia, but less than a foot tall since 2005, and the insanely risky *Sabal bermudana* from Bermuda of all places.

Perhaps this second Palm garden will one day be viewed as the midpoint, a snapshot of how palms were treated in the UK in the early 21st century. The original Palm Garden may, by that time, have become an item of history, replaced by its own offspring? The original Trachycarpus have already begun to naturalise in its vicinity. The truly fascinating sight will be the nature of the third Palm Garden, some 100 years from now.

Chris Kidd, Curator

JOHN CURTIS'S SPRING UPDATE

Reaping rewards from sustainability

Our Tree Magnolia opened on 9 January 2015. The numbers of plants in flower – the flower count – was over 100 that day. Our task is to get the message out that visiting gardens and VBG in particular is rewarding all year, even during the short days of winter.

Our sustainability drive continues with the installation of an air source heat pump and underfloor heating in the Gallery to replace the inefficient electric heaters. We are very grateful to Jim Fawcett at the Isle of Wight Council for helping us recover this project after the designated DECC grant was lost with EcoIsland.

Unfurling rewards: Tree magnolia. Photograph by Julian Winslow

You may ask what sustainability has to do with a botanic garden. Firstly, energy costs are the largest cost after wages and insurance. Secondly, the Ventnor Method allows us to run our plant collection with little watering and few plants under glass. This capacity to run operations – be it a garden, a house or a restaurant – with fewer resources is the major challenge faced by society in the 21st Century. This is why we focus on sustainability at VBG. Running a modern botanic garden any other way would be to ignore this duty.

The planting of the northern acres, the Signal Point garden, and the Puya Collection continued this winter, so we have more to offer visitors this season.

We have started to get to grips with our cost structure after understanding our revenues and financial performance in 2014. We continue to need support to secure the future of the Garden. This means buying Annual Passes, VBG products, shopping and eating at VBG as well as bringing your celebrations like birthdays and anniversaries to VBG.

We have made great progress in creating a Garden to be proud of: however, the work continues.

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.

Renew Now!

Friends' Society membership rates remain at £15 for an individual, £7 for a second person at the same address, £2 for under 16s and £18 for non-UK residents.

Just a gentle reminder that Membership Renewal was due on 1st January. If you have forgotten, contact Caroline Peel, The Point Cottage, Beach Road, Bembridge, PO35 5NQ for a membership form. Tel: 01983 872375. Or complete the form online – www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

NO NEED TO DO ANYTHING IF YOU'VE ALREADY RENEWED FOR 2015

Walk the talk

Design Walks happen on the first FRIDAY of every month. Meet at the Visitor Centre at noon to learn about a new aspect of the Garden and to share your own ideas on how it should develop.

Gardening Volunteers

Help is always required in the garden and we warmly welcome new recruits to work with the Garden staff and dedicated volunteers, either in a friendly group on a Wednesday morning or at other times to be arranged. No qualifications or previous experience is required and apart from sensible clothing and a flask of refreshments, bring our own hand tools.

For further information for Garden volunteers please ring Jean Kelley 853221

Things that go botanical in the night

We're on the site of the Old Hospital – so why wouldn't there be ghosts in the Garden? **Chris Kidd** knows what's he's seen

It was February 2003; I was locking the Visitor Centre following one of the gardening clubs. The time was a little before 9 o'clock: I remember because Geraldine from Bonchurch had been showing me her jar of slime that we hoped may contain a baby tree fern. The car park was deserted except for my car; the air still and a moonless sky cloaked the pines. I set the alarm, locked the door and counted down the beeps until they stopped.

Spectral contact: the six-fingered hand that visited Barry the Cleaner

As I turned I saw it: a phosphorescent glow shimmering in the car park where the Old Hospital once stood. Its intensity grew and I realised it was moving toward me. The hair stood up on the back of my neck and the cold night air dropped several degrees till I could see my own breath. The shape came closer, it glided down the steps and I could make out human form, albeit strangely dressed. I stepped back and found myself pressed against the Visitor Centre doors.

The figure was now clear, uniformly grey but glowing from inside. It was wearing a surgeon's gown with a mask. The eyes were simply holes where eyes should have been but with a flickering light like some distant candle burning darkly within. The figure stood there for some moments then thin bony fingers pulled down the mask and its voice spoke. It sounded like a hundred rushed whispers through dry cracked lips, and it said: "How much is the entrance fee for the undead?"

Cynical? I'll tell you what, I've seen some funny old stuff in my time that I have trouble compromising with the usual world, but as soon as I hear of headless horsemen and the like I tend to put on the most cynical of my cynical hats. There are rational explanations for everything and there is no need to invoke Lucifer and his legion of sulphurous henchmen to explain tricks of the light etc. There are darned good reasons for ghost stories and their ilk, who in their right mind would go to Loch Ness otherwise? And for further spin, who would go to a garden called Heligan that wasn't prefixed with "Lost Garden's Of"?

But back to the plot. Ventnor Botanic Garden has its share of ghosts and regularly crops up in the books by Gay Baldwin on the Island's spirit population. I remember well lying in mortal fear at my great aunt's house in Lowtherville, terrorised by Gay's mellifluous prose on the hauntings of the Old Hospital. Marc Tuckey has taken on the mantle with his Ghost Walks at the Garden, scaring new generations out of their wits. Yet, in working here you'd expected all kinds of spooky goings on, but I've been disappointed in the subtlety of it all.

There are meant to be ghosts at the Garden, but the most sinister activity I've seen has been carried out by people still very much alive. The more you think of it the more some of these people seem to be ghostly! They arrive at times that can't be predicted. They are attired in clothes from a previous century. They wail and moan, then vanish into thin air! But the other ghostly goings on at the Garden tend to be quite different to the stereotypes, and it's a crying shame. A browse through our Unsolved Mysteries File discovers we have seen Alison lose her keys, Simon smelling cinnamon, odd lights in the playground, and the curious six fingered handprint found by Barry the Cleaner. Curious, but hardly a spectral coach and six driven through the car park by a ghoul with a pumpkin head.

We had a lot of weird experiences in the Visitor Centre. We had all noticed problems associated with electricity: bulbs pop with alarming regularity. Computer problems, printer problems, photocopier problems, and of course The Lift From Hell. So we called in the services of a local medium who dealt with errant entities, who sat looking uncomfortably serious whilst contacting the dead. Far from witnessing the ectoplasm, the spinning heads and the blood seeping from the walls we all were hoping for, what we got was Ted.

Margo made contact with a spirit called Ted. Later she wrote the following transcript:

"…Am trapped by my own stupidity. My name is Ted and I was a patient at the hospital. They were so strict, but kind. I was a joker and when I started to recover from that terrible illness, I played tricks.

Before I was ill I was an apprentice to an electrician. I never became a real electrician. Why me? I used to say. Why me, being taken so ill?

I never recovered, got a chill and it all started again. Blood, oh the blood! I had one operation but died.

I decided I would have my revenge and played jokes on the nurses and doctors. They never knew it was me. One man and one cleaner got the sack through my jokes. Then I had a little rest until this place was built. Oh the fun playing tricks!

The lights were so easy. I got them that's here worried but suppose I had better stop playing tricks. Never meant harm, would not hurt anyone. You seem to hear me, the others do not. Oh well, never mind. I will go on to where I may be judged, not harshly I hope.

Goodbye. Sorry for the troubles caused. Could not stop myself. Goodbye."

And with that all the problems stopped. Except they didn't. That would have been the ideal ending to the story, but the lift broke again, the printer didn't print this essay, and this wordprocessing software won't save properly.

Whether or not Ted is, or ever was, real is up to you as much as up to me, but I would beg you believe my following story for it really happened. Honest.

It was during the world cup in 2002; we had arranged to come in early to see England play. I opened up and Ian (Miller) went downstairs to persuade the data projector it'd be a good idea to work. I opened the library and put the kettle on. Idly I walked towards Della's desk waiting for the kettle to boil and saw what I've christened the Grey Misty Thing. The Grey Misty Thing was exactly like its name, like a lump of fog about 30 inches high hovering next to the printer. It seemed preoccupied by whatever it was doing, and didn't realise I'd seen it. Then it did realise and was startled initially, then annoyed at having been "caught". As soon as it felt this it slipped behind the desk so I couldn't see it. I glibly followed and was surprised when it wasn't there. No temperature drops, rattling chains, screams or wails, it just happened. I was not at all fearful but rather bemused and didn't tell anyone till some time afterwards, because . . . these things happen all the time.

Marc Tuckey will be leading Ghost Walks throughout the season

Weather in the Garden

(October 2014 – February 2015) by Chris Watts

At the time of writing this column – late February – winter is almost over, Spring is beckoning, so maybe it is not too early to compare this winter with the last one, that of 2013/14. Briefly, it has been much more moderate; there were similarities in that on occasion it was quite wet and windy, but not on the same scale. The frequency and intensity of Atlantic depressions sweeping in from the south west was not repeated; thankfully as a consequence gale force winds were not so prevalent. It was a bit colder this time round, however, with a few night time frosts.

October may well be remembered not for the rains of the 6th (24mm) or the 12th (28mm), but for the warm settled final week. School half term coincided with the end of summer time but nobody told the weather, and it was sunny with temperatures of 19°C on the 30th and 31st. What a pity that the Garden Donation Day (Wednesday 29th) was the worst day of that week!

November was unsettled, rain on the 2nd (20mm) was followed by the wettest day of 2014, the 17th (29mm). In between there had been a good mix of showers with hail and thunder on the 3rd, 9th and 10th. December though was much drier but cooler, easily the coolest month of the year.

January became a little milder for a while, and heavy rain was recorded on the 7th (24mm) and the 12th (26mm). Then came a cold sting in its tail; the 22-month spell of frost free weather was broken on the 23rd when an overnight minimum of minus 0.1°C was just enough to bring the first air frost since 28th March 2013. As time went on it was perhaps inevitable that more frost and precipitation of a wintry nature would occur, and sleet/snow was observed towards the end of January and the beginning of February. Fortunately all occurrences were short lived, amounted to very little and did not cover the ground. The lowest temperature during this spell came on the 2nd February, minus 1.0°C.

For a while February remained mostly dry, with the second half of the month much wetter, and rainfall on the 19th amounted to 21mm. Temperatures remained roughly at the seasonal norm.

	Mean Temp C	Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights)	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp C 1ft depth
Oct	*14.8++*	*0.0(0)*	*125.3++*	*15*	*15.4*
Nov	*11.1++*	*0.0(0)*	*189.1++*	*22*	*11.9*
Dec	*7.6+*	*0.0(0)*	*64.2—-*	*9*	*8.4*
Year 2014	*12.7++*	*0.0(0)*	*1065.9++*	*149*	*13.7*
Jan	*7.1++*	*1.0(1)*	*117.9++*	*13*	*7.0*
Feb	*5.7*	*9.5(3)*	*73.7++*	*12*	*5.5*

Note: Cols 2, 4, 5 No sign: about average

++/—- : significantly above/below average +/– : modestly above/below average

Dear members . . .

A year ago we asked for your views about this magazine. Did you think, because of rising costs, we should abandon the printed version in favour of posting it entirely online?

This letter was typical of the sentiment of many:

> *"Just a line to say thank you for Ventnorensis. Yet another year has gone by and I have been unable to return to visit the Garden. As I have no access to the internet, should the paper form have to be axed I should no longer hear about the Garden and the great work going on there. As someone who can contribute so little, it is unreasonable of me to ask you to spend funds in producing such an attractive journal. I can only say how grateful I am for the pleasure of sharing something so positive, hopeful and beautiful.*
>
> *Long may you all prosper – With thanks,*
> *Mary Arnold"*

The majority of members wanted to keep the printed version, so we've affected a compromise. We are reducing the issues to two a year: that way we can keep the cost of membership of the Friends' Society the same.

This, our larger Spring issue reflects the energy and activity that is going on in the Garden. Alongside the success of the first Artist In Residence, the Garden has long been the inspiration for Botanic Artists to meet – see Pages 24-25 – and a series of exhibitions by prestigious and sought-after artists is planned in the new year.

I had the great privilege of interviewing two people I greatly admire – James Wong, TV ethnobiologist (Page 16 and our own Chris Kidd. Page 28). I hope you find their enthusiasm and belief in the Garden as uplifting as I did.

Chris as ever has plenty to tell us about the things that grow in the Garden, but also the way the Garden works – see Plant Profile and the value of the nursery. And have you ever forgotten what you planted? See Caroline Graham's discovery of the Polylepis *australis,* Page 23.

This is a wonderful place and the Executive Committee works tirelessly towards supporting those who keep it that way. Caroline Peel is once again organizing a sumptuous Summer Party and suggests you Save the Date – Page 22.

Finally can I draw your attention to our very own Friends' Logo. The sister design to the VBG logo but with our own special touch.

Sit back and enjoy the magazine – and then, maybe you'd like to join Jonyth's happy band of volunteers – see Page 33.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please send ideas and contributions for the Autumn edition by July 31st.

Friends' Plant Sale

The Friends' Plant Sale will take place on Sunday, 17th May at 2pm.

Anyone who has plants to donate can either bring them in in the morning (preferably labelled and priced) or if they cannot bring them they could contact me - Bridgette on 867739 and I could collect or arrange collection.

Photographs by Rosemary Stewart

THE MET

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Welcome to our Patrons

We are delighted to welcome two new Patrons to the Friends of Ventnor Botanic Gardens.

Campaigner: Gilly Drummond

Gilly Drummond OBE is a distinguished gardener and campaigner for the conservation of historic landscapes. She is Chairman of the English Heritage Historic Parks and Gardens Panel, and President of the Association of Gardens Trusts. She was awarded the RHS Gold Veitch Memorial Medal in 1996, given for outstanding contribution to the advancement of the science and practice of horticulture. Indeed, the list of her interests and achievements runs on and on.

She has become very involved in preparing for the tercentenary of Capability Brown: the devastation of the grounds of her home, just across the water, by the storm of 1997 revealed his original design which had been forgotten for over a century.

Penelope Hobhouse has been described as the doyenne of English garden designers. She is also a garden writer, garden historian, lecturer and gardener. For fourteen years until 1993 with her husband, Professor John Malins, she was in charge of the National Trust Gardens at Tintinhull House in Somerset. Today she lives in Dorset and travels in Europe, Australia and the United States lecturing and designing gardens. She is an Associate Editor of the magazine *Gardens Illustrated.*

She has designed gardens in England, Scotland, France, Italy, Spain and Germany. They include a garden for Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, at Walmer Castle in Kent, 'The Country Garden' for the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley, a renaissance-style garden in Italy and a garden for the fashion designer, Jil Sander, in Germany. In the US her gardens include a herb garden for the New York Botanical Garden.

Doyenne: Penelope Hobhouse

Meet James Wong

"Usually I don't like gossip – people talking about you – but in Ventnor Botanic Garden's case it's all positive," says James Wong, ethnobiologist, bestselling author, TV presenter and now designer of the Liz Earle garden to be created within VBG.

James Wong is a familiar sight on our screens, having featured regularly on BBC1's *Countryfile,* and on his own programme, with accompanying books, called *Grow Your Own Drugs* in which he showed how plants can be used to treat ailments. On a domestic scale it clearly illustrated the job of the ethnobiologist, which straddles the two worlds of horticulture and medicine.

He had heard a lot about VBG before he ever came here. "I don't think you at Ventnor Botanic Garden realise how many people are talking about you," he says. "I'm really excited about the stuff you're doing. I've heard of Ventnor through my work with botanic gardens all over the world. I wanted to go to the Garden but never had the opportunity. Then when Liz Earle mentioned it I said: "I'm going right now!"

He has been working with the Island's hugely successful upmarket cosmetics company for just a few months and it is clearly a perfect partnership. His role is to do with researching the science behind responsibly sourced botanicals, which fits with Liz Earle's philosophy of harnessing the potency of plant ingredients.

"I don't know how the team does it on a site that size with the resources they have. It's frankly like witchcraft!"

"Ethnobiology is a subset of botany, and a really small subset of anthropology: its about how these plants are used by people, how their knowledge is passed down, how they're used in different places."

He points out that the perceived pitched battle between conventional medicine and what are derogatively known as 'alternative' treatments is a red herring. "What people don't appreciate is that up to 50% of what you get from Boots and on the NHS either originally derived from plants or are still derived from plants."

His plan is therefore to return to the original function of a botanic garden: "It's very early days to commit to any plans at Ventnor, but the original function of botanic gardens is different to what it is today. It wasn't education and conservation, botanic gardens were seen as vital resources, sentinel points where plants would come in and be tested: 'Will this plant survive in our climate, can we produce the same amazing substance that we produce on the other side of the world?"

Which is where VBG comes in.

"We may have – off the top of my head – a citrus plantation, because with the climate of the Isle of Wight, in theory there are other citrus you can grow. There

are plants you can grow you might never imagine: tea, for example, can be grown in the UK. But it hasn't been widely tested. It has a tropical image but comes from a climate similar to Ventnor. So it would be fun to experiment with a few things, see how they work, and on the basis of that maybe a plantation could be set up on the Isle of Wight, used in Liz Earle products. It's all a little bit of a play at the moment."

One thing that struck him, after his initial thought that 'they're growing some crazy things here!' was the sheer scale of the task of the VBG gardeners.

"I don't know how the team does it on a site that size with the resources they have. It's frankly like witchcraft!"

He had spent the previous day doing a photo shoot at Chelsea Physic Garden, and the comparison was stark: "It's probably a quarter the size of VBG and we couldn't do photos well because every time we'd set up something there'd be a gardener at back of shot! VBG would need 40 full time staff to compete with that."

The hope is that the association between Liz Earle, himself and Ventnor Botanic Garden will make a difference all round:

"Let's hope we can start to get more people through the door, and more resources in."

Naturally active: James Wong is excited about designing the Liz Earle garden

Kniphofia bruceae to flower at VBG

In 2014 a rare *Kniphofia bruceae,* a Red Hot Poker, flowered at VBG. This plant was first collected in South Africa as a poor herbarium specimen in 1894. It wasn't collected again until 1954, this time by Miss Eileen Bruce from the National Herbarium of Pretoria, this material became the type specimen (the pressing the species description was based on) and was named in her honour in 1968.

Kniphofia bruceae

Apart from one other collection in 1959, that is the entire story of man's knowledge of this species until 1964 when it finally was brought into cultivation by J C Mc Master as seed from a lone plant. The cultivated offspring steadfastly refused to produce viable seed until another plant was found in 1998. This second wild specimen was growing in an area being taken over by imported alien Pine trees, so almost certainly it has now died. This illustrates just how easily a plant species can be lost forever. The McMaster's have built up stocks of their plants and we were fortunate to have seed sent to us in 2009.

We've been growing it since, but it wasn't until new stock was planted out by our apprentice

Aaron Cousins that it started to flower, commencing 29th May 2014. Apocryphal accounts suggest this species may be self-incompatible, so some hand pollination undertaken by volunteer David Kelley, who looked into possible protandry or protogyny, and to ensure cross pollination between specimens. However, the plants in flower really did not resemble the descriptions of *K. bruceae,* far closer to *K. praecox.* To resolve this we sent material to the RHS' Kniphofia expert, Chris Whitehouse, who commented "Thanks for sending this through. I agree that it does not look quite right for *K. bruceae* as the stamens are only just exserted and appear to retract after flowering, whereas in K. bruceae the stamens are long-exserted and remain so as the flowers die. On the other hand, its general shape and size fit with *K. bruceae,* so one could be more forgiving regarding the stamens as one knows where it came from. Your plants look quite new into the ground and Kniphofia often behave differently from year to year.

Kniphofia praecox

"However, I would be happier calling it a garden hybrid. *K. praecox* was a garden hybrid, but the name *K. praecox* is probably best ignored as it is not entirely clear what it referred to. I intend to lump all these large garden hybrids under Grandiflora Group."

Later in the year, on 16th October 2014, 11 new specimens began to flower, looking more like *K. bruceae.* Further communication with C. Whitehouse was made, with this follow up comment: "These are exactly like what I would expect for *K. bruceae* - especially Cameron's accession of it. Very odd about the earlier ones but Kniphofia are notorious hybridizers and so if Cameron is growing other Kniphofia in his garden it would not surprise me to find that we had hybrid plants cropping up from the same seed. Definitely worth propagating these vegetatively from now on. The June ones can probably be discarded unless they are notably impressive and worth naming as a cultivar."

We have marked up the two different groups and will be segregating them very shortly. The spring flowering plants are quite garden worthy, and we will very likely be giving them a cultivar name.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Noel Kingsbury

The Daffodil Story

Noel Kingsbury, author, lecturer and gardener returns by popular demand

Wednesday 6th May 7.30pm
The Echium Room
Ventnor Botanic Garden
£15 (£10 for VBGFS members)

Reserve tickets by e-mail to sallye.peake@btinternet.com

Structure and Foliage in Planting Design

A Noel Kingsbury Workshop hosted by VBGFS

A workshop with well-known plantsman Noel Kingsbury exploring this topic through presentations and using the Botanic Garden as illustration. To include coffee, a light lunch and afternoon tea.

VBFS Members: £45
Non-members: £50

Maximum 20 places

Ventnor Botanic Garden
7th May 2015 10am–4pm
Contact: sallye.peake@btinternet.com

Art from Elsewhere

'Through the Flesh' by Perdita Sinclair

A new initiative to invite young mainland artists to exhibit in the Garden Gallery will begin with an exhibition this autumn by Perdita Sinclair. Perdita has exhibited frequently at the National Portrait Gallery.

For further details about the artist see www.perditasinclair.com

Ryde station in bloom

A taste of our Botanic Garden will await all passengers arriving on Ryde Esplanade Station, thanks to an idea hatched by Mike Fitt OBE, former Director of Parks for London's Royal Parks.

Influenced by the seaside garden of artist Derek Jarman, Mike teamed up with the Community Rail Partnership and Chris Kidd, Curator at Ventnor Botanic Garden, to design and implement a sustainable planting scheme which will feature some of the plants grown at the Botanic Garden, whilst greatly improving the look of closed Platform 2.

The first phase has begun with the construction of the planting beds made out of railway sleepers kindly provided by Island Line and the IOW Steam Railway. The construction work is being carried out by volunteers, including young people from the 'Green Army' (Spectrum Housing Group), along with supporters of Ryde in Bloom and Ventnor Botanic Garden. Staff are provided from contractor John O'Conner and Arc Consulting, assisted by several Ryde Town Councillors and the CRP Community Co-ordinator Bobby Lock.

Phase 2 will see the beds being planted up by volunteers and children from a local school, with plants supplied by Ventnor Botanic Garden. Phase 3 will include redecoration of the adjacent station building and surrounds.

Maintenance of the garden will be undertaken by volunteers, including Island Line staff. Sponsorship and support has come from:- IOW Community Rail Partnership, Ryde North Community Panel, Ryde Town Council, Island Line, Southwest Trains, IOW Steam Railway, Hovertravel, John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance, Ventnor Botanic Garden and Ryde in Bloom.

VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN
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SUMMER PARTY AT THE GARDEN
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Polylepis *australis*

A mystery plant from a forgotten seed packet fed **Caroline Graham's** interest in the gnarled tree from the Andes

Twisted branches: the cinnamon-coloured bark peels off in rolls

For the keen gardener a gift of packets of seeds from a botanic garden is always welcome. Small envelopes labelled with perhaps nothing more than a Latin name always represents an interesting challenge. Mine were from Logan Gardens, an outstation of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. This wonderful subtropical garden in the far south west of Scotland is warmed by the Gulf Stream and many of the plants that are grown there are familiar including giant Echiums, Palms and Cordylines.

My seeds were sown, potted on, planted out – and forgotten. Several years later there was a small unknown tree growing in my garden. Fortunately the Scottish Alpine Plants Society had posted a picture of Polylepis *australis* on the internet after their visit to Dundee University Botanic Garden.

Native to Argentina, Polylepis *australis* is an evergreen tree that grows in the Andes mountains at 1,000 to 3,000m; in fact the genus includes the highest altitude flowering woody plants. In this extreme environment the long winters are cold with little rain and summers are warm. The forest ecosystem of the high Andes is threatened as a result of overgrazing, logging and fire, probably since the time of the Incas. Now research to find the best conditions for seedling survival is underway, so that reforestation can take place.

Polylepis is part of the Rose family, but opinions differ on the number of species in the genus, either about 20 or just one, since they all hybridise. The flowers are insignificant as they are wind pollinated. The tree itself has a twisted gnarled appearance, as what seems to be the trunks is actually a series of branches. The delicate pinnate leaves are bright green at first, sometimes tinged with yellow later, and the three-winged seeds hang on the tree throughout the year. Without doubt its most attractive feature is the cinnamon-coloured bark, which peels off in rolls, rivaling Acer *griseum*.

Although these trees are grown in several mainland botanic gardens, a thriving example of Polylepis *australis* can be seen just in front of Signal Point Cottage in Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Midsummer Soirée Friday 26th June, 6–11pm

A canapé and drinks reception will take place in the Palm Garden with music by young members of the Isle of Wight Music Centre, followed by a tour of the Garden and Buffet by chef Kirsty Lawrie. Tickets £35 paid in advance.
In aid of the IW Music Centre and the VBG Friends' Society.

Ventnor Botanic Artists

You may have spotted a group of people paying rather close attention to the details of the plants in the Garden. Every month, says **Sally Whibley,** Ventnor Botanical Artists meet for inspiration and to share knowledge …

It started as a botanical art course and it evolved into a self help group with a once a month meeting (first Friday of the month usually). 9.30–12.30. There are currently about 17 members but typically we have around 10 at each session. One or two of us who are a bit more experienced give advice and encouragement to new members, but we don't teach from absolute beginnings. You have to be able to paint and draw accurately: the whole point of the work is that you should be able to identify individual plants from the paintings and vice versa.

Made in VBG: Boston Ivy leaf, on vellum, by Gill Thomas, painted in the Garden last October

We sometimes use material from the Garden if there is something of note out, and there is enough to allow us to pick. Mostly members use materials from their own gardens as they need to get fresh samples throughout the painting process. The trick is to paint the flowers first, as there will always be leaves to do later. Many good flowers are let down by poor leaves, which is all very frustrating.

We are looking for new members. Bring your work along to one of our meetings and we would be happy to see if you're ready to fit in. Or come to see what we do: our first exhibition of the year is at Quarr Abbey Thursday 9th April – Tuesday 14th April daily, 10am–4pm.

At our second exhibition, we plan to exhibit paintings of plants that were either brought in by the Romans or used by them for cooking, medicine or for decorative purposes. Cannabis just happens to be one of those plants introduced but I don't know where I can get a specimen to paint! Any ideas? There will also be some more of our usual pictures, all this in the café or the entrance shop. (Brading Roman Villa Weds 17th June – Tuesday 30th June open daily 10–5pm.)

We are hoping to have a "home" exhibition in September. More news later if this happens. *If you'd like to get involved, contact Sally on 296525.*

. . . **and Marion Brettell** shows some of the results of the Painting on Vellum course at VBG last year, describing the process and the joys of the medium

I buy my vellum from William Cowley, makers of vellum since 1870. It is hand crafted using methods largely unchanged for centuries, and can last for hundreds of years.

I used Natural Calfskin vellum for my Horse Chestnut watercolour [below]. In the past, renowned flower painters such as Pierre Joseph Redoute used vellum as their everyday painting surface. Because it is not porous, the paint sits on top rather than being absorbed, so the image appears brighter than on paper, and glows. The natural veining establishes a pattern within which the study can be adapted. I used this for my Japanese Horse Chestnut.

There is a 'hair' side and a 'fat' side. I paint on the hair side, which has more colour and a satin finish. The surface of the vellum has to be prepared first using pumice powder, which you work in with your fingers. This removes grease and provides a clean surface to take the paint. This is then fixed to a piece of board using low tack masking tape, which prevents the vellum from cockling. Having decided on the colours for your subject, mix them with a little water and allow to dry on the palette. The paint sits on the surface so each wash must be dry before applying more paint: you tend to have to work with much drier paint than if painting on paper. Unlike paper, mistakes can be washed out with clean water.

While the end result is lovely to look at, I think the main reward is for the artist in being able to create an art form which has been practiced for thousands of years and which, if treated with respect, will last and last.

Made in VBG: Japanese Horse Chestnut, on vellum, by Marion Brettell

Greenland Adventure

For *Ventnorensis,* **Rosemary Stewart** reprises her talk to the Botany Club about a dream-come-true trip.

When I was a little girl I was fascinated by pictures of the tundra, the icy peaks and the Land of the Midnight Sun, so in July 1999 I was excited to join a group camping for two weeks in East Greenland.

Broadleaved willowherb (chamaenerion latifolium), Greenland's national flower

From the tiny airbase at Mesters Vig in East Greenland our Sea Otter flew past the snowy peaks north over the icy sea, the muddy deltas, small glaciers and beside great basalt cliffs to Clavering Island, *Lat 74.2N.* We landed on the beach and pitched our tents by a river. 1823 was the last time the Inuit people had camped here and since then it is only visited occasionally by the coast patrol with their husky dogs, and some scientists.

By day we could wander alone or in a group to look for flowers, birds and animals or perhaps climb a nearby mountain. A walk along the shore allowed us to find old Eskimo camps with primitive fox traps, and marvel at the great cliffs with huge stone avalanches falling into the fjord. All night long the sun shone down giving a wonderful golden glow over the mountains and still water.

During the summer, the tundra permafrost thaws just enough to let plants grow and reproduce, and the vegetation is dominated by grasses and low growing ericaceous shrubs. All the flowers were very small, hugging the ground to keep out of the wind but shining bright with colour. Dwarf birch trees *(betula nana)* with glistening red bark grew a few inches high and spread over the ground instead of upwards. Colourful mosses enlivened the streams. The broadleaved willowherb *(chamaenerion latifolium),* Greenland's national flower, was unforgettable, spreading in big purple swathes in the sand. We found dwarf rhododendrons, lousewort, potentilla, saxifrage, harebells, the prolific Arctic marsh willow and many of the *vaccinium* berries.

The tallest flowers around grew on a south-facing bank near our camp – the 15cm-high hairy stemmed big yellow daisy, *arnica angustifolia*. Big patches of fluffy white cottongrass stretched across the marshes. Arctic sorrel, sandwort and, of course, yellow Arctic poppies appeared in patches. Later when the weather changed, another of my

favourites, the common primrose-like mountain avens *(dryas integrifolia)* had started to twist together the glossy feathery hairs of their seed heads.

Meeting a herd of musk ox for the first time was awesome. They are huge hairy prehistoric beasts in the sheep family, likely to charge if you upset them, so we did not get too close! Their carcasses provided good nutrients and the plants grew quite tall around the skeletons. They feed off grasses, shrubs and mosses, digging for them in winter. I could get really close to arctic hares for photographs, and a crow came looking for food in my bag! Wolves and foxes were seen in the area. Many birds come to nest in the Arctic, especially Arctic tern which dive-bombed me when I got too near the nest. I also saw fearless ptarmigan, snow buntings, eiders and ringed plover with great northern divers on the little lake.

A great trek to a glacier, wading across an icy stream in bare feet, was one of the highlights. We watched the rocks dropping off the side as it slowly melted and moved.

What a wonderful memory it all is for me!

The Sir Harold Hillier Award

Sir Harold Hillier was an internationally respected plantsman and also a major supporter of the development of our Botanic Garden.

This trophy is awarded annually to a person who is considered to have made significant contributions to horticulture on the Island. It was presented by the late Sir Harold Hillier some time ago. Last year, 2014, it was won by Susan Dobbs and the winner for 2015 will be announced at the AGM in April.

Nominations are once again being sought either from individuals or from organisations.

Please return this form to the Ventnor Botanic Garden Visitor Centre marked Hillier Award no later than 1st July 2015.

Nomination for the Sir Harold Hillier Award 2016

I/We: .....

Address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

Propose (name of nominee): .....

Address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

Reason for Nomination: .....

.....

.....

..... Continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Curator's creation

This is a special place to Chris Kidd because he was instrumental in creating it as a modern Botanic Garden. It also has profound effects on other people, he tells **Roz Whistance**

"I remember it as a dark place, really boring, like a park," says Chris Kidd, now Curator of Ventnor Botanic Garden but then a school boy. "I didn't come again for many years because, well, why would you?"

Artistic freedom: Chris and Simon created the Garden

The boy became a horticultural student and the Garden, thanks to the storm of 1987 became transformed. Those evergreen oaks and macrocarpa trees that had made the Garden so dark were gone. "Just by walking round it struck me what huge potential there was in this place. It was a great opportunity to make a botanic garden as it should be in the late 20th Century – instead of being encumbered by history."

Everyone who comes to see it says it's amazing – so why doesn't anybody come?!"

From then on the young Kew student wanted to come to Ventnor and be the curator – it was the only way to influence the way a garden developed. "But in this business you usually have to wait for curators to die or retire." A pause. "Well, they don't retire so you have to wait for them to die."

Simon Goodenough was unlikely to do either of the above, but Chris couldn't believe his luck when he saw the post of Head Gardener advertised. "I umm'd and ahh'd, because it was just a huge cut in money. But I knew I'd always regret it if I didn't go for it."

"When I got here with Simon, we had the opportunity to do just that, create a Botanic Garden exactly as it should be in the late 20th Century. We had complete artistic freedom and we controlled the budget. For probably a nine year period, we played, and had fun and looked forward to coming to work. There's no other garden like it, and I can't describe how personal it was to me and was to him. It was just the most amazing time, for me and Simon but also the guys that were here at the time, the volunteers, the Friends – we made this amazing amazing thing. Everyone who comes to see it says it's amazing – so why doesn't anybody come?!"

Chris has taken many people round the Garden, people, he says with the "hardest of hearts" who by the time they get to 'Australia' they're starting to understand: "And

Deep water: Chris talks on the Giant Waterlily

that's the most amazing thing to see how the light comes on inside of them, and they see something that was right under their noses all the time but they didn't get. It's quite an experience."

As a gardener, the satisfaction is in growing things that shouldn't grow – while creating a beautiful landscape. But there is an added satisfaction of knowing how it affects others:

"When the IW Council wanted to get rid of the Garden, people filled in our Save the Garden forms. A guy wrote saying that to him the Garden was very special because when his parents died their remains were put here, and he came here often to feel close to his family. Then his son has been killed, doing service in the army. He felt suicidal, and he came here to be close to his parents, and being here in the garden stopped him from killing himself. And that's the most amazingly profound thing. To think that what you love doing has that effect on someone makes it all worthwhile – and the pounds signs mean nothing."

Our former curator, **Simon Goodenough,** was made an RHS Associate of Honour on 26th February, an award presented to British citizens who have rendered distinguished service to the practice of horticulture either as employers or employees throughout their career.

Congratulations Simon!

Goodenough? Associate of Honour awarded by RHS President Nicholas Bacon

Echium inspiration

Sculptors **Frances Doherty** and **Alan Williams** couldn't get VBG's Echium out of their minds. So they made their own.

Ceramic study: Doherty and Williams' Echium

A couple of years ago I exhibited in the Botanic Gardens with Alan Williams, where we came across these amazing, huge blue flowers called Echiums. They are enormous and towered above us. We fell in love with them and decided to see if we could make one.

This proved to be a bit of a mission as Alan lives in Brighton and my workshop is in Normandy . . . and I was not quite sure how he was going to build his bit, and he wasn't quite sure what size pieces he needed from me . . . and so on. So I threw hundreds of pieces, as did several of my students – a great thing to practice their skills on – and every time I had another glazed box of components I cycled them back over to Alan's workshop.

At one point there was a huge glaze melt down in my kiln, and I lost around 60 pieces and three kiln shelves! However, finally in the last week of February, everything was finished and so we all went down to the beach with our photographer Royston to see what it looked like once it was all put together.

Alan made the armature in two pieces for ease of handling and transport. Each flower part had to be assembled onto a rod with two nuts and washers, and to fix them in place he devised a system by using a ratchetty thing on the end of a drill to tighten the nuts. After an hour or so we were able to lift the top on. This was all happening in a gale force wind, and we had to take a break to warm our fingers up. But two hours later we finished.

Alan constructed the leaves from copper cut from a water tank. This had a verdigris coating on one side where the water has been sitting, and the other side is varnished copper. He has devised stands for both parts so that they do not have to be un-assembled each time they are transported. Genius.

Photography by Royston from RJM photography

I love working large, and if this sculpture is a success, Alan and I will be able to continue our collaboration . . . there is already another in the pipeline and I have plenty of ideas for more.

Future fundraising efforts being organised by the Friends

Our Fundraising programme for 2015 is gaining momentum.

We kick off on **6th May** with a talk by Noel Kingsbury at the Garden on the **'History of the Daffodil'** followed the next day by a workshop on **'Structure and Form in the Garden'.** Places will be limited for the workshop and the cost will be £45 for Members of the Friends' and £50 for non-members'.

The cost of the talk will be £10 for Members of the Friends' and £15 for non-members.

Please contact Sally Peake 731403 to put your names down.

The Summer Party will be on **Sunday 24th May.** This will more than likely follow the same format as last year, with tickets at £55.00 each. This will include a welcome drink, supper and half a bottle of wine per person with supper.

This year we are hoping to raise funds to complete the Tropical House Appeal and to increase the Education Fund.

For more information and to reserve space/table please contact Caroline Peel, 872375, or carolinepeel@aol.com.

Look out for news of our **Soirée, on 26th June,** following the success of last year's evening.

It is hoped to have some **evening openings**, when you will be able to come and walk through the garden, with a glass of wine, and enjoy its peace and tranquillity. These will hopefully be in June, July, August and culminating in the Last of the Summer Wine in September.

Our last, but by no means least, event will be an **Art Exhibition** over the weekend of **24th and 25th October.** This is building into a very exciting exhibition with works by renowned artists of the 20th Century being loaned by supporters and Friends of the Garden. This will be by ticket only and more information will be circulated nearer the time.

New members

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

Mr Simon Creed – Kew
Mrs Cherrill West – Ventnor
Ms Frances Noctor – Ventnor
Mr Mel and Mrs Daphne Ellman – Ventnor
Mr Ronnie and Mrs Imogen Hogan

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse

Exhibition opening: the Artist in Residence, Judy Rodrigues, presented a show of her VBG-inspired work

Design by Simone Dickens Yates, Coco Design Co. Tel: 07530 867318 / 01983 551527 simone.dickens@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

Discover that rewarding feeling

There is more and more for visitors to see, so volunteers to guide, help and garden are always wanted, says **Jonyth Hill**

Are you fascinated by plants and enjoying meeting new people? If so, Ventnor Botanic Garden is the lovely setting where you could satisfy both these interests. Volunteers are most welcome to sample any of the three positions below and so help to maintain the beauty of this exotic Island attraction and give our visitors a warm and helpful experience. An introductory walk around the 22 acres can be arranged to gauge how you feel about joining our friendly group of volunteers.

Garden Tour Guides

After an introduction to Ventnor Botanic Garden and being given an information folder, interested volunteers will work closely with other Garden Tour Guides until they feel comfortable undertaking either introductory, general or special interest tours. This is a most satisfying position, one in which you gain inspiration and knowledge, on top of the privilege of showing people around our beautiful Garden.

Information Kiosk

The Information Kiosk is situated in the centre of Ventnor Botanic Garden and is manned to help visitors with general information or to follow up any questions of specialised interest. Training and support is given by a long-standing volunteer. Volunteering can be done in conjunction with another person and at a time which suits you. Meeting the public can be very enjoyable and fun, as the majority appreciate that Ventnor Botanic Garden is a unique place to visit.

For further information for the above please ring Jonyth 730532

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK 9AM - 5PM*

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* 9am -6pm during school summer holidays.
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