ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

It never ceases to amaze me how the Garden can change so much from week to week

– Ecologist Colin Pope

VOLUME 22 NO. 2 AUTUMN 2015

Autumn/winter opening times and events

10am till dusk daily

For opening times, and for information about special events for adults or children in the Visitor Centre, *edulis* Restaurant and Plantation Room Café, and for Plant Sales and Greenhouse, please call the Garden on 855387 or check website, www.botanic.co.uk.

exhibitions/events

26 – 31 October Half-Term Halloween Fun. Fun, creativity and ghosts

26 October – 1 November Isle of Wight Milky Way Photography Exhibition by Chad Powell, 10am to 5pm in the Gallery.

30 October Ghostly Goings On. 9pm to 3am (fully booked)

31 October Saturday Ghost Walks with Marc Tuckey, 6pm & 8pm.

1 November to 21 March 2016 Autumn/Winter food and drink offers

- Mon to Sat 12 – 3pm Winter warming lunches, Plantation Room Café
- Sundays 12 – 3pm Lunches at Edulis with live music
- Daily, 10am - 4pm 'Teas of the World', Plantation Room Café
- Winter Wednesdays Special Garden Tour & Lunch Package. Garden entry from 10am, choice of lunch then Winter Highlights tour with Chris Kidd, followed by tea and biscuits. Roam the Garden till dusk. Cost: £19.50

6 November, 12 noon Design Walk. Join us for a topical walk through the Garden and have your say on changes we are making. With Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd.

7 November Natural dying workshop, all levels of experience.

12 November, 6.30pm to 9pm Climate Change Lecture Series. Screening of *This Changes Everything*

18 November, 6.30pm *Plant evolution in Dalechampia,* a lecture with Scott Armbruster.

21 November, 2.30pm Simon Goodenough Lecture. *The story of the National Botanic Garden of Wales.*

28 November, 7.30pm Botanical Roots with local music band Ohmz

4 December, 12 noon Design Walk. With Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd.

5 December, 10am – 4pm Christmas Wreath Making.

10 December, 12.30 for 1pm Friends' Christmas Lunch at *edulis*

February 2016 Launch of Photography Competition

14 April 2016, 7pm Friends' Annual General Meeting

Front cover: 'The shape of the Echium Pinninana resembles in some bizarre way the structure of our Milky Way galaxy as seen from earth': Chad Powell, Photographer

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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recycle

Curator's Notes

A trip to South Africa

In the coming months we're going to start sourcing new plants for the Garden, thanks to funds released by the Friend's Society, for some targeted areas. One of these is the South African Terrace. I'll be assisted by Dr Colin Pope in the search. Many of you will know Colin as the retired Ecology Officer for the Island, from his involvement in the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society, as co-author of *Isle of Wight Flora* . . . I'm delighted to have him here at the Garden, it's a dream come true to work with him. Colin has the luxury of the time to observe and curate both the collections and the wildlife in our special Garden (see Colin Pope, page 30).

Anisodontia capensis, by Rosemary Stewart

South Africa is a great zone for the diversification of the Compositae family – there must be 20,000 species. In year one of the "new" SA terraces we put in lots of composites we already had in the collection, but given space they looked like they were new and our plant sales rose in response. (The genera being Osteospermum, Gazania, Arctotis). In following years Jason picked up on this and sought out more cultivars; these tended to be the less hardy ones. They sold well too, but they are tricky to keep in cultivation and hard winters starting 2010 took a heavy toll. In the springs following these hard winters the terraces looked threadbare. We replaced like-for-like initially, but by 2013 it was becoming a routine, so we exchanged a large part with easy shrubby material, like Anisodontea and Euryops. This had led by spring 2015 to a very different looking terrace with mounds of shrubby plants. We judiciously cleared these and we've back-filled with existing accessions of mixed plants.

The SA Terraces still have some of the tougher pre-2008 composite accessions, and few of the riskier half hardies. Moving forward I think it would be worthwhile to explore more fully the Compositae family as it is very representative of the flora of SA. I'd like to move away from the unsustainable cultivars, because being clonal they will never naturalise, and a self-maintaining system won't develop. Commercially their time has clearly passed as you can buy them cheaper at B&Q.

There are 70 odd species of Osteospermum – we've only grown three, similarly of the 50 species of Arctotis we've grown three. We've never explored genera like Dimorphotheca. Amongst these alone I'd anticipate finding plants with commercial potential too, all important to support the Garden, though we must now be mindful of the Nagoya Protocol applying to all new accessions.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Photographic Competition

The Friends are delighted to announce plans for a photographic competition, with the title 'A Year in Ventnor Botanic Garden'. There will be various categories within the competition, and among the judges will be Julian Winslow.

Details will follow via email, the website and by announcements in the Garden. The competition is to be launched in February 2016.

Annual General Meeting 2016

The AGM will be held on 14th April 2016 at 7pm in the Visitor Centre, followed by the presentation of the Harold Hillier Award.

See emails and Spring *Ventnorensis* for further details and agenda.

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Give Friends' Membership for Christmas and get two day passes for yourself to treat your own friends.

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

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

Chairman's message

Volunteering, a British virtue - and haven't we done well!

Plaudits

Some time ago I made an urgent request for administrative assistance with Friends' education, propagation and fundraising projects. We needed to maintain momentum in key areas covered by our constitution to support the CIC over a difficult period. I believe now is a good time to record my thanks to certain Friends who stepped up to show what we are capable of. Thanks to: Carol Ann Eades and Phil Le May for encouraging art education. Julie Strevens and others for maintaining our Propagation programme Trish Brenchley, now our Friends' Horticulture trainer. Bridgette Sibbick, Lynda Davis and others for running plant sales. Jane Cooper and Jonyth Hill for adding value to the visitor experience. Caroline Peel, Kay Grist and Sally Peake for organising our flagship events at Eddington House and the County Show.

Grants and Propagation

Thanks to successful grant applications by Lucy DeVille, we can work towards refurbishment of the original outside hospital ward that serves as the potting shed. Colin Pope is doing such a wonderful job assisting Chris Kidd with the accessions and adding to everyone's appreciation of the Garden with his insightful observations and interpretation. I am having to pinch myself as I have just, at the instant of writing, received an email from Professor Scott Armbruster, He is offering to provide botany workshops at the Garden now that he has retired from lecturing at Portsmouth University.

Ambassadors and Enthusiasts

While we are on our plaudits, I think you will agree that Chris Kidd portrayed an excellent 'Indiana Jones' in the Tropical House in Carol Klein's BBC 'Plant Odyssey'! How rich, too, has been the input to the Garden from that indefatigable enthusiast and RHS Ambassador, the Liz Earle ethnobotanist, James Wong. Surely they are a botanical duo who will continue to influence and enhance the development of the Garden greatly in the future.

Education

It has been gratifying to see the fruits of the Friends Education Fund (to which we owe so much to the success of Caroline Peel's second Great Summer Party, see Page 17) being used to help the apprentice, Conrad Williams, on his way to Sparsholt and a career in arboriculture. He has our thanks for his unflagging commitment and our best wishes.

Students

The student in receipt of the first re-established Annual VBGFS Isle of Wight College Horticulture student of the year, Andrew Williams, is currently an apprentice at Quarr Abbey gardens. We are on the lookout for other promising horticulture apprentice and student attachments to sponsor and are gradually positioning VBG to offer high quality foundation training with our appointment of Trish Brenchley as Friends'

Horticulture trainer, and the CIC appointment of new Sparsholt graduate, Laura Deigan to the staff (see interview, Page 28).

Our 'Field Centre' link with Plant Sciences at Portsmouth University has led to some delightful and unexpected outcomes over the summer, (see Sally Peake, Page 10). To be selected by the Mario Vallejo-Marin Laboratory (www.plant-evolution.org) as the Southern site, paired with Da Gairdins i Sand Botanic Garden on Shetland, in a European Union funded project on important climate plant adaptation research was a significant recognition of VBG's current status. We can be proud of the support and hospitality given to this project and again Sally Peake and the CIC staff (not to mention Signal Point residents!) reacted brilliantly to the various exigencies as they arose.

This year Dr Rocio Perez-Barrales selected another student, George Llewellyn, to undertake a further undergraduate bee survey at the Garden and its environs. George (christened "Bee 2") began his project fully immersed in the flora, camping in the nursery area across the road until he was rather unsettled by a snake. We hope to feature the outcome of the surveys and research in the new Climate Science exhibition area at the front of the Tropical House in due course.

I believe we remain indebted to Joy Munro for the fact that we continue to have regular school educational visits.

Soiree

Although sadly the amount raised at the Soirée this year was only modest – around £700 – the CIC catering staff excelled themselves and with fine weather and woodwind and jazz accompaniment it proved a most enjoyable occasion, presenting the Garden and the Isle of Wight Music Centre in their very best colours and in a charitable cause (see report Page 21).

Future Events

We have a wide range of new talented CIC and Liz Earle staff headed up by Neil Clark with whom it is a pleasure to work at the Garden. Sally Peake and Rosemary Stewart are helping to schedule another full winter lecture series, generally on a Wednesday evening. We are really looking forward to welcoming Simon Goodenough back to present his unique National Botanic Garden of Wales odyssey (see announcement, Page 30).

Call to Arms

The Executive faces opportunities and challenges with the need to market FULL membership including annual subscription to the Garden, special levels of directed giving to the Garden and establishment of a Friends' Foundation Fund.

Finally there is the opportunity to sample some of Kirsty Lawrie's Festive fare at *edulis* and, as Bob Bowden showed us last year, to join her in promoting the Garden at the Ventnor Christmas Fayre. Please volunteer to help us with this. It is a most enjoyable way of raising our profile and winning hearts and minds in the town.

Chris Kershaw

Colletia

Colletia ulicina: shared by VBG with other gardens to ensure its safety, by Colin Pope

The genus Colletia holds about a dozen species, few of which are in cultivation in the UK. None are terribly familiar in parks and gardens; the RHS Plantfinder lists a handful sold by a few nurseries. Plants to be seen are usually quite stately specimens, remainders from the last renaissance of municipal parks of the 1970s. Occasionally a gallant plant will be found guarding an awkward place where it has been used as defensive planting – more of its vicious nature later. Based on these relics it would seem these are large shrubs, too big for the smaller garden.

The two species more commonly seen, if 'commonly' is really quite appropriate, are *C. hystrix* (syn. *C. armata*) and *C. paradoxa* (syn. *C. cruciata*). *C. paradoxa* is sometimes referred to as the Anchor Plant, as the peculiar flattened branches (they are cladodes, not phyllodes) which undertake photosynthesis in the absence of leaves, are formed in opposition, and shaped to resemble an anchor. The immediate branch above and below are 90° alternate to these to effect a sharply geometric shape.

In summer there are sprays of creamy white flowers. A specimen of *C. paradoxa* is a sight to behold – and one to be very wary of, as it is surely one of the most dangerous shrubs: you really wouldn't want to fall into one. Each angular "anchor" is tipped with a stocky spine, making the whole plant a spiky menace. There simply is not any flexibility and so the opportunity for injury is almost certain.

Every time I've ever been working with one of these plants it has drawn blood. Look out for a pool beneath our specimen in the America's Collection.

Slightly less obnoxious, though armed in the same way, is *C. hystrix*. This species has rounder branches that are also thinner. It is possible, for the very wary, to grasp the branch and, carefully, draw the hand upwards without causing yourself harm, as with a Monkey Puzzle. This is, of course, not unconditionally guaranteed, and any attempt at this is at the gardeners risk . . .

As a flowering shrub it is remarkably similar to *C. paradoxa,* as you would expect, but the flowers are more freely produced and scented. We have a specimen on our Arid Bank, wild collected from the summit of the Central Sierras in Chile, between

Salsipuede and La Fulva. Nearby in the Garden there is a cultivar, *C. hystrix* "Rosea", that appears no less frequently; this has pinky flowers.

W J Bean, in *Trees & Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*, mentions another species, *C. infausta* (syn. *C. spinosa*) which is very rarely seen and even then only in milder locations where it never flowers. It is also as spiky as hell. Perhaps unsurprisingly we had a specimen here as recently as 1986 dating to the Hillier collection; it had succumbed to fate unknown prior to 2000.

Our most talked about Colletia introduction is the spectacular *Colletia ulicina,* donated to this Garden in 2000 by Tony Hall from RBG Kew. The Kew accession was itself donated by another outstanding plantsman and horticulturist, Marshall Olbrich, who found it hardy where his famous garden of Western Hills was created at Occidental, north of San Francisco. Marshall was keen to establish this plant and assess its hardiness, hence its first landing in the UK at Kew. I first discovered this plant as a student whilst working in Tony Hall's Alpine Department. As it was an untested shrub, originating from the Mediterranean climates of Chilean cloudforest, and known only from San Francisco, Tony had planted it in his Alpine House. Here it had developed its characteristically ungainly shape; new annual growth develops from any part of the existing shrub's body, extending out to anything from a few centimetres to a huge metre long fox's brush of a branch. Unlike *C. infausta* it was very free to flower, and did so late in the season, November, under glass. Interestingly, in cultivation, its flowering period moved earlier into the season every year, until settling in August.

In the early 1990s the Alpine House at Kew was the very height of horticultural inscrutability. This was only matched by the supremely high expectations of perfection expected for plant presentation; higher still for special events. Notwithstanding, the Assistant Curator of the time announced his surprise to see me plucking dead flowers from the *C. ulicina* with tweezers, and queried whether I'd been asked to be so pernickety, to which my reply was that the dead flowers were letting the whole house down and someone should have noticed before I had. (My stock rose as a result, only to descend again the day I dropped *Iris postii* on the floor.) Shortly afterwards, having rooted a cutting, I planted the first *C. ulicina* out of doors on the east facing flank of the Alpine House. It grew away, surviving many frosts until expansion of the Jodrell Laboratory saw both plants, and Alpine House, disappear.

Since planting *C. ulicina* at VBG it has developed just like the ungainly Kew original. Slow in the first few years, then much quicker and in all directions. Several of us have propagated it – cuttings root surprisingly easily, but will often refuse to grow for a year or two. They could easily be discarded or grown over with liverworts. I've made several offers of material to several other gardens to ensure its safety in cultivation. Interestingly I've since bought material from other nurseries unconnected to our plant; quite what their provenance has been I can only guess. Therefore, established now within the trade, material from our commercially acquired plant is offered in Plantfinder. Our gifted plant remains unsold, as agreed with Kew.

Chris Kidd

JOHN CURTIS'S AUTUMN UPDATE

Not just new tyres for Johnny

The three year mark has just passed by. Discovering the trumpets of *Cantua buxifolia,* the Sacred flower of the Incas, basking furtively on the bank below the Plantation Room, is ample reward for the journey this far. Not to mention the arrival of the Cycad flower cone, the subtle blue-violet lace caps of the Hydrangea, the deep green turquoise of *Puya berteroniana,* or the rich, yet delicate, pinks of *Magnolia Cambellii* in spring.

Indeed it has been an eventful three years since the Garden was transferred from the Isle of Wight Council. In July 2012 we were effectively a start-up company that needed an accounting system, a phone system, a brand, a map, employment contracts, a VAT number, a company registration, and a chef. But, unlike most start-ups, we had 12 government employees, demanding local and tourist visitors, and losses of £250,000 per year to contend with at the same time.

So what have we achieved in 36 months?

- Extended the Olive Grove, renovated the Fountain area, planted out the northern acres, and filled out the half hardy *Puya* collection with the Friends' Society's support
- Supported six academic climate change research projects with help from Dr Chris Kershaw
- Provided training, experience and wages for thirteen apprentices
- Poured over £450,000 into derelict buildings, paint, furniture, glass, polycarbonate, kitchen equipment, toilets, flooring, solar panels, an air source heat pump, and LED lighting
- Added a new rental cottage, a new courtyard, a new Heritage Centre, a new studio, a new café, a new restaurant, a better gallery, a new office/library space, and a new Mushroom Fruiting Chamber
- Launched VBG@Home, a way for islanders to acquire our plants and plant know-how
- Welcomed Liz Earle Beauty Co. Ltd. as our corporate partner
- Held two summer fundraisers brilliantly helmed by Caroline Peel
- Repackaged and relaunched our seeds and our beer, Botanic Ale[SM]
- Launched a new brand, Dr. Hill Hassell's Botanics, and its Eucalyptus cordial and mixer
- Hosted the Hops Festival, the Ecology Festival, YogaVibe, the Healing Festival, the High Sheriff's Investiture, Wight in Bloom, Edana Mingella, the Ventnor Fringe Blind Mole's Ball, the Isle of Wight Car Club, Wedding Fayres, Volunteer Fayres, school visits, and a long list of artists, sculptors, musicians, and lecturers
- Repaired the lift repeatedly
- Put new front tyres for the John Deere tractor we call Johnny.

And right at the start, we put in an admission fee consistent with almost every botanic garden around the world. Without admissions fees, annual pass revenues,

and the Friends' support we would not be reporting progress like this. Behind the scenes we set up a registered Community Interest Company with departments and reports and target trading ratios.

'Most innovative': James Wong, ethnobiologist

When James Wong, the television personality and ethnobotanist, stood up at the announcement of our Liz Earle partnership in November 2014 and described Ventnor Botanic Garden as the one of the most innovative botanic gardens in the world, we realised that we must be making some progress. I even saw a flash of pride go across one gardener's face. We are certainly breaking new ground in defining how a botanic garden far from a major city can operate on a financially sustainable basis. Dividing total costs for the year ended 31 August 2015 by 365 derives a figure of £1,555.59, the average daily cost to operate the Garden. Every single day, rain or shine, winter or summer. That sobering figure means that we continue to have our work cut out for us.

As a modern botanic garden we are proud of the Ventnor Method[SM] which presents plants in association with each other as they would be found in the wild. The newly commissioned exhibition space in the front of the Tropical House will, by the coming Easter, describe how the Ventnor Method[SM] relates to climate change and plant conservation and will provide some much needed interpretation. Recognition for the Ventnor Method[SM] is beginning. We won our first contract with a landscape architect to create a public garden following the Method's principles last year.

While we have achieved a lot in three years, we have just gotten started. Thank you to all our Friends, Volunteers and Visitors for your continuing support.

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.

A Busy Summer . . .

Sally Peake has retired from paid work, so naturally is working harder than ever

Everyone tells you that you will be busier retired than working but I would not have believed how hectic this summer would become when I asked if the VBGFS committee would consider having me back; I'd felt unable to continue whilst still working.

The first thing that became obvious was how exciting an environment VBG has become; the frustrations of a much depleted permanent staff are inevitable but, as the CIC enters its third year the benefits of flexibility from greater numbers of part-time staff within the non-gardening staff are evident. The appointment of Neil Clark as General Manager should go a long way to alleviating the communications problems that Friends and Volunteers have experienced in the past.

And what activities the Friends and Volunteers are busy with! I shall only report on those I have been directly involved with, but regular visitors will have spotted David Kelly with bags of squirrel food under his arm or Colin Pope with a Kniphofia specimen helping our Curator validate the VBG collection.

I was aware of a major project involving post-doctoral students from the University of Stirling. Our Chairman, Chris Kershaw, was keen for Friends to alleviate the pressure on Curator Chris Kidd and his staff, so I volunteered to meet Jose Luis and Violeta to find out what was involved.

The Mimulus project has been a huge undertaking for the two Spanish botanists, involving setting up identical experiments here at VBG and on Shetland, a thousand miles to the north, and our help was evidently much valued. Setting up the temporary experimental pond in front of the Temperate House involved many trips to the Garden outdoor storage 'dump' to salvage concrete blocks and timbers to support the new pond liner, filling 360 2-litre pots with identical quantities of potting compost and potting on the little Mimulus plants, adding reference labels and setting them out in a grid within the pool. Finally, we needed to fill the pool with water and adjust the pot levels with more salvaged materials to balance out the differing water depths across the site.

No sooner had they finished here but Jose Luis and Violeta were returning to Stirling to collect the materials and plants needed for the Shetland experiment; at least we had good weather in Ventnor. Shetland was far less hospitable.

Whilst they were setting up the northern experiment, I undertook to keep an eye on the plants. The growth was extraordinary and, within a fortnight, I was sending information and photos north to show the first flowers. It would seem that the plants acclimatized to northern weather were very excited at finding themselves 'on holiday' and took rapid advantage of the lovely weather! As the whole experiment is designed to study how plants adapt to new conditions, we shall have to wait for the final results before reaching conclusions but it was an early and unexpected observation.

Violeta returned to VBG alone and without transport and I was grateful to Toni Rogers for answering my plea for local accommodation for a few days. By this time, the two

French students had arrived at our home for a month long work placement at VBG. Friends will remember that for several years now VBG has welcomed students in their last year at school from the French College near Le Mans, and my husband and I have looked after them *en famille* to make their stay as comfortable as possible. John Curtis entered into the spirit of their adventure and kindly took them to London for a sight-seeing visit and a morning at Kew, whilst we took them to Osborne House, Northcourt for one of John Harrison's Open Garden Days, and a day's sailing. It was a busy month: the boys were very active, cycling from our home to the Garden each day and consuming vast packed lunches to compensate. I had forgotten how much food two 17-year olds could eat.

During the last week of their stay, we welcomed Jose Luis back to the Island. Another mouth to feed seemed insignificant and, with his bike, Jose Louis was independent. The Mimulus were flowering prolifically by this time (mid-July) and Jose's days were spent noting flowering times and numbers along with measurements of nectar production in individual flowers, and lengths of branches and stolons.

Violeta, back in Shetland, was finding it difficult to understand the differences in their respective work load – the Shetland plants were barely starting to flower! She sent her friend Ana, on holiday from Spain, to help Jose Luis . . . and to stay with us! She was another Botany PhD working on pollinators, particularly bumblebees; as a beekeeper myself, I found our dinner table conversations fascinating. As she was on holiday, I was also able to persuade Jose Luis to take the odd hour off to visit Jan and Andy Wyers's home to see the day lilies.

As I write Jose Luis is at our dining table mounting stomata specimens on microscope slides, and dealing with questions of publishers who have just accepted his latest paper for the American Journal of Botany. Ana has just flown home to Madrid, and Violeta is about to return to Shetland where Jose Luis will join her to repeat the measurements taken here.

I shall take a breather for a few weeks before welcoming them both back to Ventnor in the early autumn to harvest the plants and return the site to the Garden. I hope to report on the first findings of the experiment.

Oh, I forgot to mention how much I have also enjoyed my tour guide duties at VBG on a Tuesday throughout the season. If you are considering volunteering I can thoroughly recommend it – visitors are so appreciative of the extra input we regulars can give to make the very most of their short time at our wonderful Garden. But this is not the only way to volunteer! The chances are that whatever skill you have VBG could benefit and I am sure you will enjoy yourself too. I've been having a wonderful summer . . .

[Volunteering, see Inside Back]

Photographs: Opposite page, French students at Osborne. Top right, Jose Luis enjoying the Hemerocallis nursery with Andy Wyers. Middle, Mimulus project set up: Sally, Violeta, Chris Kershaw and Jose Luis. Bottom, Mimulus mid-July.

Weather in the Garden

(March – August 2015) by Chris Watts

Average pressure, fairly high at around 1022mb, was the same for both March and April; it followed that the weather was broadly similar. It was bright, dry but cool, although with no air frosts. True, it might have felt warm in the direct rays of the sun and out of the wind, but into the shadows it was distinctly chilly. The top temperature over the two months was 19°C on April 15th, but this was the exception rather than the rule and no other day came near. The lack of warmth continued during May, and we had to wait another eight weeks before that temperature in April was exceeded, as it was eventually on June 11th with 23°C. Strong winds were often a feature of the weather, March 29th and 31st, May 5th, 6th and 29th, and June 1st and 2nd being noteworthy. Average pressure for May was lower at 1015mb, and consequently it was a bit wetter.

June was an average month with little to report; the gardeners amongst us needed, however, to keep on watering the plants since, although rainfall was about normal, it all fell over six days leaving 24 dry days, by which time the soil was getting a bit dusty! Towards the month end things began to warm up, and a plume of hot air from the south saw the temperature not falling below 19°C overnight on the 30th June/1st July, and then a really hot day ensued on which the maximum temperature soared to 27°C. It was the highest temperature since 24th July last year. The need for watering continued throughout July, for although rainfall was above average, that was courtesy of one day only which supplied 60% of the total: the 24th, when from midnight to midnight it rained for 15 hours and measured 38.3mm – the wettest day since 23rd December 2013! The highest temperature reached on that day was a very paltry 14.5°C.

August was a very different month. It was pleasantly summery for a while, but the 10th to the 14th saw some patchy rain around – maybe good for gardens but a poor few days for tourists. From the 19th onwards, however, wet weather with some extremely heavy falls of rain arrived, and the following twelve days brought 128mm, or 85% of the total for the month. Examples of heavier bursts came on the 24th, with 11mm in 30 minutes early in the morning, and 14mm in 20 minutes later. There was little surprise that the showers were accompanied by thunder. And so it was a very soggy end to the summer: 28mm of rain on the 23rd, and 24mm on the 24th helped a total just shy of 150mm – 260% of the 1916-50 average and the third wettest August since 1839, after 164mm in 1963 and 162mm in 1960!

	Mean Temp C	Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights)	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp C 1ft depth
March	*8.0+*	*0.0(0)*	*40.7—*	*8*	*8.1*
April	*10.2++*	*0.0(0)*	*23.3—*	*8*	*11.7*
May	*12.0–*	*0.0(0)*	*53.0+*	*8*	*14.1*
June	*14.9*	*0.0(0)*	*42.0*	*6*	*17.0*
July	*16.9*	*0.0(0)*	*64.1++*	*9*	*18.7*
August	*17.1*	*0.0(0)*	*149.4++*	*14*	*18.2*

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

Dear members …

If ever any Friends or members of staff (or owners) of the Garden feel it's all a bit much, that the task of keeping the Garden going, growing in its contribution to botanical knowledge and making the strides necessary to keep it in the public eye, they'll be encouraged by some of the people introduced in these pages.

Colin Pope is an ecologist who is helping Chris Kidd in curating the plants in the Garden, and clearly, from his piece on Page 31, is finding it fascinating. His efforts are thoroughly appreciated by Chris. In his Curator's Notes, Page 31, he describes having him working in the Garden as "a dream come true."

It was an absolute pleasure for me to meet Laura Deigan, who having worked here while studying at Sparsholt College is now a full time member of staff. She is enthusiastic to put Ventnor Botanic Garden on the map, and so full of ideas. She is clearly a great asset to the team. [See interview Page 28].

Somehow our front cover photograph by Chad Powell sums up Colin and Laura's approach to the Garden. The Echium reaching towards the Milky Way is so inspiring, and the pattern of stars seems to echo their shape as well as the myriad of tiny flowers that make up their whole. In Chad's picture Ventnor Botanic Garden is put firmly in its true place – as part of the greater universe!

Chad has been showing his remarkable night sky photographs at VBG during the summer. They and IW Milky Way merchandise are available for sale online at www.isleofwightmilkyway.com or in the shop, so if you want something to wrap along with giving Friends' membership for a year [see Page 3] that is your answer!

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please submit your ideas and articles for the Spring edition by 28th February 2016

Life beyond Cowes

Visitors to the Royal Yacht Squadron Bicentenary International Regatta find a new place on the Island to love - our Botanic Garden

On the Wednesday of the RYS Bicentenary International Regatta in August, 30 landlubbers made the trek over from Cowes to enjoy a delicious champagne breakfast and tour of the garden. Most of the visitors were American but there were also visitors from Australia and Hong Kong. It wasn't billed as a fundraiser, it was more of an awareness exercise to show that there is more to the Island than just Cowes.

John and Chris gave great talks and tours. The feedback was tremendous, and we will find ways of repeating the experience for visiting yachtsmen and women.

Caroline Peel

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION*/RENEWAL* *Delete as appropriate

Title:	First Name:	Surname:
Address:		
E-Mail:		Telephone:
Second Member at the same address:		
Junior Member/ (under 18) & dates/s of birth		

Membership Rates with effect from January 2016
Membership year runs from 1st Jan to 31st December

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior	Non UK
£15.00	£7.00	£2.00	£18.00
ANNUAL PASS Individual £22.50	2ND Person £18.50		
New Members joining after 1st July pay reduced rates			
£8.00	£4.00	£1.00	£10.00

Individual Membership	£
2nd Member at same address	£
Junior Member/s	£
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Annual Pass	£
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 Garden Friends' Society to claim tax back from the Government at no cost to yourself.

I/We would like Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society to reclaim tax on any eligible membership subscriptions

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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 (6rh 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 and address of Bank)
Pay to the account of **Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society** National Westminster Bank Ventnor Isle of Wight PO38 1RA Sort Code 54-41-031 Account No. 05441358 The sum of £_____ _____ Pounds AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS Immediately And the sum of £_____ _____ Pounds AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS Every 6th January hereafter 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

Membership Subscriptions

For those of you who pay by Direct Debit, this will be collected as normal on or around 6th January 2016. Those who pay by cheque please don't forget to renew! If you do not have a form then please contact me (Caroline Peel 01983 872375) and I will send you one. Please do not hesitate to complete and return now as then they can be processed before the end of the year. We have arranged with the Garden that annual passes can be paid together with your membership. You will receive a receipt with your membership card which you take to the Garden together with a passport size photograph of yourself. *The costs are as follows:*

Annual Membership	**£15.00 single**	**£22.00 Joint**
Annual Pass	**£22.50 single**	**£40.50 Joint** (normal pass prices are £29.00 and £54)
Total	**£37.50**	**£60.50**

The CIC has said that it will not put up the price for Annual Pass Holders. Any offers will be for new pass holders ONLY. *Benefits of membership are as follows:*

- Annual Pass Discount • Seasonal Offers from the Garden
- The Friends' aim is to improve the horticultural side of the Garden. The CIC is busy building up the business side to make it viable, without which there will be NO GARDEN.
- Volunteers in the Garden are wholly supported by the Friends.

THE MET
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The Met is your perfect venue. Open from 9.30am daily.

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VBG Summer Party

Caroline Peel on another sizzling success

After the success of last year's inaugural summer party I was very concerned that repeating the experience would be a step too far. I was wrong. Although the numbers were slightly down an excellent sum of money was raised towards the Education Fund and the Tropical House appeal – just over £7,000. The fact that the apprentice we funded last year, Conrad Williams, is now at Sparsholt College thanks to the Education Fund last year, it does make it all so worthwhile.

Owing to the unpredictability of the weather, pre-dinner drinks were served in *edulis*, and we had the great pleasure of being entertained by Cat Skellington with their Gipsy Jazz, then Kirsty and her team produced a delicious dinner in a marquee on the top lawn. Adrian Biddell kindly auctioned a varied selection of lots, from a plant you couldn't take home to a house in Italy, with one of the highlights being the midnight flowering of the waterlily.

However, events like this don't just happen and it was with a huge amount of help from Kay Grist, Sally Peake, Jan Wyers, Wendy Regina Pulley, Phil le May, Nick and Nicky Hayward, Ken and Sue Payne and Jessica Speare-Cole that it all ran so smoothly. Thank you all so much.

Friends, in Ventnor Botanic Garden: resident lizards on a hot August day, by Rosemary Stewart

Treacherous dispersal by sea

Seeds appearing as if from nowhere led to superstition and folklore, says **Chris Kidd** . . . and inspired an artist for a groundbreaking exhibition

Of all the strategies evolved by flowering plants to disperse their seed, the method with potential to spread furthest, yet most treacherously, must be by sea. The salinity of sea makes it a poison to plants, greater still to vulnerable seeds, so seed that is sea dispersed almost always has a bulky, fibrous or impenetrable coat. These large seed are released to the mercy of ocean currents and will travel the globe, eventually beaching in the unlikeliest of places. Easily spotted in the drift line some have led to the development of folklore to explain their mysterious origins.

Lodoicea maldivica, the Coco de mer, is a giant fruit containing four seeds. Its suggestive shape, resembling a woman's buttocks, held intrigue for centuries. Found on beaches, these hard husks were thought to be from trees that grew under water, they commanded high prices and were held as enigmatic treasures by royalty and nobility across the globe. It wasn't until their discovery in the Seychelles in the 18th century that their true origin, growing from giant palm trees lining the island beaches, was found.

Another palm, the familiar coconut or *Cocos nucifera,* grows in a similar niche in tropical regions across the globe. So successful is the coconut in using the sea as a dispersal mechanism that it is now quite unknown where the coconut originally came from. The habit of the coconut tree is strongly linked to its arrival and transport across sea; it germinates once deposited on the highest tide line after its fibrous coating has decayed. From this start point it grows with a distinctive leaning of its trunk towards the sea, ensuring that at maturity the ripe fruits fall directly into the sea to be carried away.

Fringing the tropical shoreline are tall trees that will use the sea to disperse their seeds. *Cerbera manghas,* or sea mango, is a reasonably large tree with an extensive canopy that extends out over the tide, its egg shaped fruit contain a seed ready for a voyage to pastures new.

The trees that inhabit the fringes of estuarine river systems in the tropics are cloaked with climbers or lianas. Many of these lianas use the ebbing and flowing sea beneath as the vector to spread its seed. The sea bean, *Entada gigas* and its related genus Mucuna share this habitat. Mucuna has many species, each with a very different shape; many are adapted to spending a long time floating in seawater. When seen hanging from huge pods dangling beneath the canopy it is quite clear where the seeds are intended to be delivered.

The legumes or beans are not the only climbing plant family to dangle their seed over water. The *Merremia discoidesperma* is related to our native convolvulus.

These distinctive seeds bear a cross on the underside, and this shape combined with the mystery of their origin gave rise to many superstitions. They were given as charms to ward off evil spirits or taken as cures for numerous ills.

Within the sea itself grow trees we know as mangroves. Some mangroves have developed seed to avoid the dispersal of the sea, falling like spears into the soft mud. *Heritiera littoralis,* though, is inclined to drop its seed into the calm yet tidally dominated brackish water to be carried perhaps just a short distance – or perhaps many miles.

Perdita Sinclair's 'Insula' was the first of a major series of exhibitions at Ventnor Botanic Garden that bring art never before seen on the Isle of Wight

Seapod by Perdita Sinclair: Art inspired by VBG

Perdita Sinclair describes her work as exploring what lies beneath the surface of ourselves, and for the art she presented in her exhibition *Insula* she even witnessed human dissection. "That was traumatic – but also exciting," she says. "My work has long been concerned with the conscious mind hidden within our bodily casings. I work from the inside out of a subject, showing studied and imagined interiors combined with forms and contours from the external world."

Being invited to exhibit at VBG was an opportunity to take further her explorations into the inner workings of life. The fact that the Garden is on the site of the old Royal Hospital for Diseases of the Chest was apt because dissections had taken place there in the treatment of tuberculosis. Beginning her touring exhibition on an island was the perfect metaphor for exploring the Insula Cortex of the brain because 'Insula' is the Latin word for 'island.' "I've interpreted the Insula Cortex as meaning an Island in the brain which links human consciousness with botany and the senses."

Perdita admits her knowledge of botany was limited, but was introduced to the Millenium Seedbank at VBG and became fascinated by seaborne seed, seeing a link between the human machine within the skeleton and the hard pod.

To her paintings, then, many of which use the female form as the archetypal human, Perdita added the medium of sculpture: "The seeds are a perfect metaphor for what I had been exploring through painting – a hard shell capable of surviving, yet hidden within is all the potential and ingredients for life."

21st November 2.30pm
Echium Room
Ventnor Botanic Garden

Tickets £10 (Friends £7.50)

Contact: Sally Peake Tel 731403
e: sallye.peake@btinternet.com

The Story of The National Garden of Wales

VBGFS present

Simon Goodenough

Small but successful Soirée

Tickets went very slowly for the Friends' Summer Soirée when the date had to be changed. We nearly cancelled but in the end we gathered up four tables of happy people on a lovely evening in July. We were trying to make money for the Friends and for the Isle of Wight Music Centre.

A big hand: Guests enjoy the evening entertainment

On Saturday mornings in term time any child learning a musical instrument – be it privately or through school – can go to Music Centre, currently held at Medina College, to play in orchestras and bands or sing in a choir. The IW Council had to cease funding for teaching music in schools so the core support for Music Centre was in danger. It is a long story but they need to draw in all the extra help they can get to keep going. The teachers have banded together as a group called Wight Music and are hiring themselves out to the schools, They will suggest their pupils to go along on Saturdays to play together and with a grant from the Arts Council to the new Music Hub the outlook could be encouraging for children's music on the Island.

Made on the Isle of Wight: Alana Spence was once a pupil, now a gifted teacher

Teacher Maggie Courtney offered to bring some young players to make music when the visitors first came in. Drinks were served in the Palm Garden and to the tune of Teddy Bears' Picnic they enjoyed relaxing after a busy day. Thank you Maggie and Neil, Samantha, Bethany and Isobel for giving us such lovely entertainment.

Our Curator, Chris Kidd, took everyone round the Garden regaling us with his stories about interesting and remarkable plants, then we helped ourselves to Chef Kirsty's delicious buffet spread out in *edulis*. We were pleased to welcome some Music Centre supporters. Later one of the young teachers, Alana Spence, came to entertain us with clarinet and saxophone while we finished our meal. From a young girl Alana had been right through the bands until achieving her BMus from Cardiff, but it would have been more of a struggle without her experience with the young groups.

We had a raffle and generous donations so we were able to give both charities a cheque for £360. We hope everyone enjoyed their evening and thank you for coming.

Rosemary Stewart

Recorder ensemble: Maggie and Neil Courtney with Samantha, Isobel and Bethany.

Penelope Hobhouse – Garden Designer

Caroline Peel introduces our new Patron

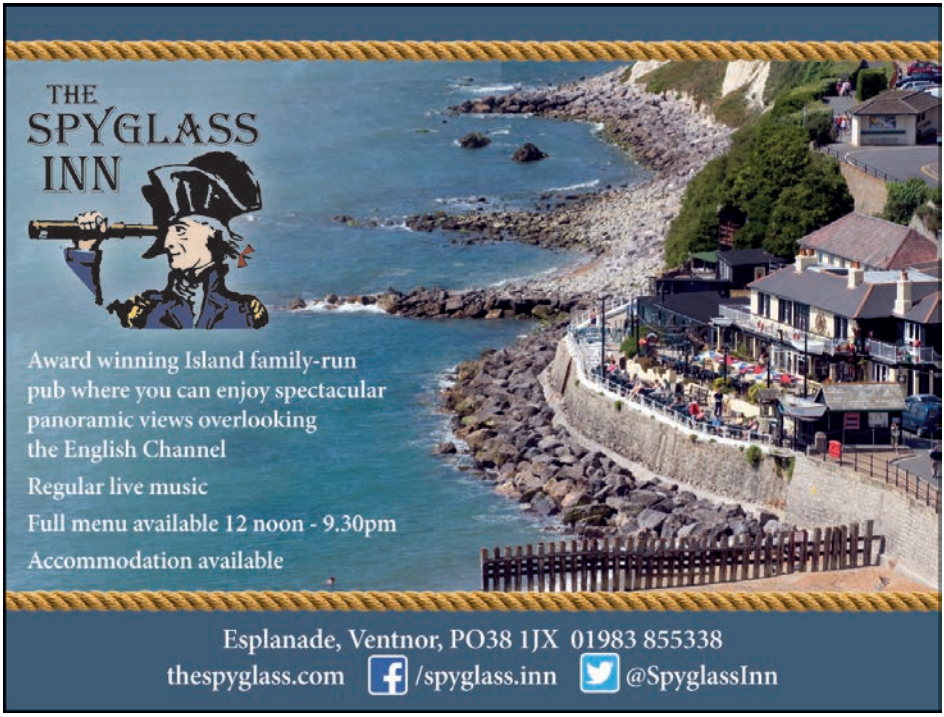
Not only has Penelope Hobhouse kindly consented to be a Patron of the Garden, but she also visited in May and gave a fascinating talk on her work as a garden designer. About 45 Friends and friends of Friends came, and we were treated to a wonderful display of photographs of gardens that she had designed, with huge variation of climate and terrain.

Without any formal training she and her husband transformed the garden at Hadspen House, which became a trial run for Tintinhull, both in Somerset. From Tintinhull the world beckoned, and she has written 17 books on garden design, she has designed for clients as varied as the Queen Mother and the late 'Apple' boss, Steve Jobs, and it was only after she had done nine trips to the US in one year that she decided it was time to concentrate on writing books – this at the age of 75, when most people would be contemplating an easier life. The latest is on the history of garden design.

Penelope's talk was wonderful, she is a very modest speaker and very keen to give credit to Rosemary Verey and Beth Chatto, both of whom had encouraged and inspired her in her projects.

Her latest project is her charming cottage garden in Somerset and the challenge is to plant the disused railway embankment at the end of her garden with Oxeye daisies *(leucanthemum vulgare)*.

It would be wonderful if she would visit us again as it was a real treat to entertain her.



Then and now

The Garden was virtually flattened by storms in 1987. In the Christmas 1990 edition of The Undercliff Society Newsletter, Simon Goodenough the then curator – and our guest speaker on November 21st – wrote about the progress made in its re-creation

Simon Goodenough today

"The garden at Ventnor is gradually taking on a new life force," he writes. "Much soul searching and difficult decision making lies behind us and the genesis of the ideas that form the re-development plans are well in hand."

There is certainly a sense of excitement as Simon sets out the progress and aims of the redevelopment:

"The main aim of the garden is to present a wide variety of plants in thematic displays and several methods are being employed to do this. Thus we are looking to group plants together for geographical reasons such as can be seen in our New Zealand collections to the east of the Garden tavern, or plants that grow in a particular climatic range, shown in the Mediterranean plantings that we are developing on the terrace immediately to the west of the Tavern." While the Tavern is long gone New Zealand and Mediterranean are firmly established.

There's a sense of daring, almost of trepidation in the next part as Simon describes the development of a 'hot spot', a 'historical garden of exotica in the Victorian tradition.' This exotica was a trend introduced by Prince Albert for using sub-tropical plants to create leaf foliage "in evocation of the tropical climes of the expanding empire." The planting was to include "the dramatic spiked leaves of YUCCA, the tropical vibrancy of CANNA and the leafy excesses of the Castor oil plant. Simon writes: "Where many of the plants used in this style of garden are truly tender even in the benevolent air of Ventnor and therefore have to be lifted each year, a range of plants that are more borderline and can be risked here have been planted out in some areas of the garden."

A great deal of hard landscaping was anticipated: "upgrading walls, building new stairs and paths and removing others to create new areas." It could be John Curtis speaking today. The opportunities set against resources is another feature shared today: "There are numerous other plans but for now we must consolidate on what we have and try to avoid having too many unfinished projects dotted about, all stretching the limited resources."

Roz Whistance

Simon Goodenough

Those of you who knew Simon Goodenough, previous Curator of VBG, will not want to miss his talk about his work at the National Botanic Garden of Wales on Saturday, 21st November at 2pm. Have a chat to Simon afterwards with a cup of tea. Don't delay in booking! See poster, Page 20. Rosemary Stewart

Noel Kingsbury at Ventnor

Sally Peake hosted the daffodil expert

The Workshop group enjoying the Garden

I had been excited when Noel Kingsbury had accepted the Friends' invitation to return to the Isle of Wight to give another lecture and workshop in May, so was delighted when he asked if he could extend his stay with us and bring his wife, Jo, in order to explore the Island more thoroughly.

After a long drive from their home in Herefordshire, we set about finalising their itinerary over supper at The Buddle Inn. Noel had previously suggested they would like to see some 'interesting' gardens and do some walking. Their visit happily coincided with the Spring Walking Festival so we had no problems finding Jo an interesting local walk with Roger Silsbury, exploring the Niton countryside 'From Sea to Summit' or St Catherine's Point to the Hoy Monument – this was going to keep Jo well occupied whilst Noel delivered his workshop.

For once, I had spent some time thinking about gardens that might appeal and had made some preliminary enquiries; the Harrisons at Northcourt were busy preparing for a NGS open weekend (plus awaiting the birth of a grandchild) but promised they could find time to show Noel and Jo their wonderful garden . . . and would I like to go too! So it was arranged that we would go to Northcourt in the morning; Noel and Jo would explore independently in the afternoon before returning to Ventnor for the evening lecture.

On arrival at Northcourt I enquired after the family; in his inimitable style and with a quiet smile, John Harrison responded – yes, Rose Harrison had arrived safely and what did Noel think of his *Euphorbia pasteurii!* There followed a couple of absorbing hours exploring, under John's expert guidance followed by coffee in the Gardener's Cottage enjoying the latest view of the Walled Garden – thank you James and Freddie. If any of you reading this have not yet visited Northcourt, do give yourselves a treat and look out for one of the Open Garden dates next year.

Noel and Jo spent the afternoon at Mottistone before returning to give his lecture to the Friends – The History of the Daffodil. No flower can compete with this universal harbinger of Spring in the UK and Noel's beautiful slides gave us a fascinating insight into the centuries-old development of original species through selection of traits to give the vast number of varieties available today. These are divided into the twelve distinct groups recognised by horticultural show judges, and Noel showed us examples

of each together with some 'family trees' showing their ancestry. Selecting a new variety to bulk up stocks to the level needed for garden centre sale production can take twenty years so it is not surprising that, in past centuries, these newcomers were a very precious commodity and highly prized amongst wealthy and competitive landowners. As a result of centuries of cross-breeding, Noel believes it is unlikely that there are any truly wild daffodils left in the UK; still, there can be few more uplifting sights than a Cornish field of cultivated blooms ready for market in early Spring.

Noel had been keen to renew his conversation with John Curtis, started during his last visit to VBG in 2013 shortly after the formation of the CIC. A breakfast meeting had been arranged and I arrived an hour or so later to find them deep in conversation with Chris Kidd on the 'Ventnor Method' while exchanging ideas and inspiration of modern botanic gardens worldwide.

Noel's workshop on the use of 'Structure and Foliage in Planting Design' was wonderful. He inspired us to think of 'looking' at each plant from a micro- and macro-perspective. In the Garden, he chose the Herbal Garden to examine close-up the foliage of individual plants to decide what attributes a plant might offer to an overall scheme: how big would it grow? What length of seasonal interest and what management it might require?

Particularly enlightening was Noel's use of black and white photography to focus on the way different types of foliage relate to each other when the distraction of colour is removed.

After a delicious lunch in *edulis,* we were out in the Mediterranean Garden to take a longer view of the planting relationship. There's no better lesson in the use of linear form (spiky leaves and blooming spires) than the forest of Echium pininana towering over the rounded humps of Cistus and Euphorbia. By teatime we were warmed and inspired by both garden and teacher, and eager to take our new insight home to our own gardens. Thank you Noel, thank you VBG.

What would you like to learn about? If you have any ideas on what you would like to learn more about – be it basic horticultural practice such as sowing seeds, taking cuttings or managing existing overgrown plants, do let me know. Or perhaps the chance to meet a famous TV gardener in our very special Garden?

Garrulous gathering!

Get into the swing of Christmas with a Friends' 3-course **Christmas Lunch on Thursday, 10th December - 12.30 for 1pm in *edulis* at a cost of £20 including coffee or tea afterwards.** Drinks not included.

It'll be a good chance for some of our old and new valued Friends and hard working volunteers to get together in a Christmas spirit like we used to do in the old days. ***Email or telephone Caroline to register your interest and she will give you more details about menu and payment. carolinepeel@aol.com Telephone: 872375***

Botany Club

The Club continued with its varied mix of fascinating trips this year. Academic visits and Open Gardens have featured in the programme as described on these pages.

Botany Club started in the spring with a return visit to Plant Sciences at the King Henry I Building in Portsmouth University, and the Institute of Naval Medicine Historical Library at Alverstoke, with three garden visits and lunch at the Anglesey Arms included.

Once again we were well received and Dr Rocio Perez-Barrales introduced us to the intriguing plant evolution research involving tropical Dalechampia vines and landmark diesel pollution research being undertaken by Ian Hendy. How prophetic was this latter: the diesel subsequently combusted and destroyed one of their research greenhouses, while the topic, relating to the effects of benzene and nitrate emissions, is proving a turning point in the history of European motor manufacturing.

A double presentation about plant climate adaptation from Chris Kidd, and by John Curtis about the imminent effects of human activity on the ecosystem has been followed by three of the most inspiring garden visits imaginable. Thanks to Phil and Lindy Le May, Julie Strevens and Louise Ness – and what fabulous cakes! So if you have not yet signed up to botanise with Botany Club you are certainly missing out.

Chris Kershaw

Botany Club's Visit to Phil Le May's garden:

Louise Ness said: 'The garden is fascinating; I haven't enjoyed a garden so much for a long time! Really interesting plants and garden history. I shall look forward very much to visiting again. And the scones and tea were quite delicious.'

Assailed by scent

Rosemary Stewart on visiting Louise Ness's open garden at Kingston

Botanising for all ages: Louise's lilies

In August Louise Ness invited us to her stunning garden at The Old Rectory, Kingston. She has planned it as several different 'rooms' with exuberant plants of all shapes and colours, with scents that assail you when you walk through a gap in the hedge from one to the other. Colourful zinnias, tithonias, dahlias and roses were still out for cutting. Clematis climb up and great lilies stand to be admired. Dramatic seed heads rise above the borders.

We walked to the small decorative lake planted to attract insects, then up the hill through the newly established wildflower meadow to the south, with the hedges colourful with red berries. Fruit and vegetables are in abundance too. They have designed the garden from scratch since they moved there when the children were small. It was necessary to wire the whole area against rabbits from the start but after years of planning and continual hard work it is now a very special garden open for the National Gardens Scheme and others.

The family love to picnic up the hill and the children have grown up to appreciate their natural surroundings. Daughter Ellie is a bird ringer and we were fascinated to watch her take the little migrant birds from the mist net to get weighed and have a ring put on a leg before they continued on their way. In the field a flock of an unusual variety of hens fuss around. Then we had tea with a choice of delicious cakes. Thank you Louise for a really lovely afternoon in your beautiful garden!

Propagating a vision for VBG

Roz Whistance talks to new VBG gardener Laura Deigan

"It would be nice to be at a stage where people see your CV and say, oh, you studied at Ventnor Botanic – we'll put you higher up the pile!"

Growing the Ventnor Botanic name: Laura at work

Laura Deigan is the newest recruit to the gardening team, and as well as being ambitious for VBG to become recognised as a serious teaching centre, she is positively ambassadorial in her enthusiasm for the Garden. She has just finished a two-year course at Sparsholt College, gaining her Level 3 Advanced Diploma in Horticulture, and during her time she spent weekends and holidays gaining experience at VBG. "In my last week in college I said 'Please can I stay on? It's very nice here!'"

She is quite a catch for the Garden. An Island girl, Laura had left school with no awareness that it was possible to study horticulture. Not wanting to work in the family business she went travelling. "I went through Cambodia and got lost, and there I got working for the Society for Environmental Exploration as a research assistant – which means you're a grunt for the fancy people," she grins. "If a doctor of biology says I need this camera trap put in this infested swamp, Muggins here is the one who goes!"

Predominantly Laura had been working with butterfly specialists so on returning to the Island she got work in Butterfly World. "I stayed three years, I loved it that much. And ironically, although I was working with butterflies, breeding them and telling the public about them, having to create their habitat meant that 90 per cent of what I was doing was horticulture."

She went on to work at the Falconry Centre. "Most people there study at the Animal Management part of Sparsholt, and they told me about the college. I looked it up and boom! – three years after I went into Butterfly World I was doing the course."

Her time at Sparsholt culminated in working on a garden for Chelsea Garden Show – clearly an inspirational experience. "We did a beer garden – perfect for students! Wadsworth Brewery wanted to raise their profile and we thought it was fantastic because we got funding to do the Chelsea Flower Show – win win!"

The garden, in the Discovery Area, told the story of how beer is created. At one end they had growing hops, another part showed how it was brewed and another section was a drinks garden in which all plants could be used for drinks. "Many people didn't know Silver Birch bark was used to make a drink."

Ideas kept developing and the students discovered the boss of the brewery loved cycling. "We found a real old penny-farthing, and one of the students made a wicker

Chelsea Gold: First of many?

hare to ride it. That became our 'pub sign'. We also made a dart board from succulents!"

The result – a gold medal, and their garden also won 'Best in [Discovery Area] Category'.

Laura has come away from her course with huge ambitions for Ventnor Botanic Garden. She sees her day to day work as part of the 'baby steps' that will 'get the Ventnor name out there'. "I love propagation, and I like getting plants in plant sales and trying to push the Ventnor Botanic name a little bit. I like the ideal of going to the shows a bit, starting with Island shows then big ones like RHS Hampton Court, then return to Chelsea!"

Show visitors would be "shocked" by the plants VBG grows. "Then they'd say 'Where's Ventnor then?"

She is immensely proud of achievements made since she's been at VBG. "We came second in the Island In Bloom contest, joint with Osborne House so for us that's brilliant. And it would be exciting to say we're a Chelsea gold-winning garden!"

Liz Earle Pops Up

Caroline Peel gets pampered

Pop up spa in 'New Zealand'

As part of the partnership between VBG and Liz Earle, the Island's plant-based skincare company, a pop up spa was erected in the newly restored Pavilion in the New Zealand Garden. Being Liz Earle aficionados my daughters and I were quick to book in to enjoy this experience.

Our wonderful therapist, Becky, met us in the shop, and escorted us to the beautiful and calm surroundings of this part of the Garden. The Pavilion had been painted in the signature Liz Earle blue, with lovely cushions, candles and flowers. Ensconced in a reclining chair, with the cosiest of white fluffy blankets to keep us warm, we soon drifted off, the only sounds being that of the collared doves in the trees above.

Such a brilliant idea and after a wonderful facial we all felt thoroughly restored. I do hope that this will be repeated next year since it is a very practical way to advertise the partnership between the two companies.

Treasurer Needed

The Friends urgently need a new treasurer starting in January 2016

The Treasurer must be computer literate and preferably have knowledge of the Sage system but this is not difficult to learn with some training.

We have six meetings a year at the Garden.

For family reasons Kay Grist is having to resign but would be happy to guide a new volunteer in the early stages.

Kay would be pleased to answer any questions on 852100 or 07990 724585 kay.grist@btinternet.com.

Please apply to Dr Chris Kershaw on 07973 989420 or 852409 christopher@kershaw39.orangehome.co.uk

Labelling and loving it

Ecologist **Colin Pope** on the rewards of curating plants

For the past few months, I have been helping Chris Kidd at the Garden with the curating of plants. I have always enjoyed Ventnor Botanic Garden, but coming here twice a week (I'm usually around on Mondays and Fridays) has been a revelation for me. I've seen so many plants that are new to me and, with Chris' help, been able to put names to most of them. It never ceases to amaze me how the Garden can change so much from week to week; some plants seem to look at their best in full flower for just a few days and then fade into the background for the rest of the year, whilst others go on for ages.

Being an ecologist by training, I am particularly attracted by the plant associations. I enjoy seeing plants growing in semi-natural conditions alongside other plants from the same corner of the world. Often, I am finding, these plants have other, often overlooked and sometimes weedy plants associated with them, which are also native to the same region and are making themselves at home in the Garden. This adds to richness and diversity, and creates the special distinctiveness of Ventnor Botanic Garden that singles it out from pretty much every other garden in the country.

I do get frustrated when I am unable to identify an unusual plant that I am drawn to: often these plants have fascinating stories to tell. To this end, although it would never be feasible to label every plant, I am starting to sort out the labels in the Garden to try and make sure that the correct label is in the right place, where one exists.

I have also started to write a monthly sheet on some of the more interesting and easily located plants in the Garden for those visitors who may wish to find out more about them. This is now available as a PDF to download from the website, under 'What's in flower this [month]?'

I think it is very important that interested visitors can get as much as possible from their visit and be encouraged to come back again, perhaps at a different time of year. After all, Ventnor Botanic Garden is a very special place, and you will see things here that you won't find anywhere else in this country.

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 your own hand tools.

For further information for Garden volunteers please ring Bridgette Sibbick - 867739

New members

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

Rowan Adams, Ventnor
Miss Christine Barringer and Mr Derek Ferguson, East Cowes
Mr David Baynes, Old Portsmouth
Mrs Rachel and Mr Colin Bradley, Totland Bay
Mrs Joanna Clark, Cowes
Mrs Patricia Dennis, Lake
Mrs Jacqueline Gardiner, Ryde
Mrs Jane and Mr Colin Hewlett, Llanfranches, Glam.
Mrs Caroline Musker, Bembridge
Mrs, Anne and Mr David Parry-Smith, Linton, Cambs
Ms M Pieri, London
Jane Ridgway, Ventnor
Mrs Fi Smith, London
Mr Antony Truckell, Niton
Miss Sarah and Minette Vickery, Margate

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse

Here is the Friends' plant stall at the Hops Festival. We used the table beyond as a recruiting station for Friends and Volunteers.

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

VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

Ventnor Botanic Garden needs more VOLUNTEERS!

- Could you help as a Voluntary Gardener?
- Could you be a Garden Guide?
- Would you like to help at our Information Point?
- Have you another practical skill?
- Would you help on a stall at public events?

Stripping off: Here we are pulling the leaves from young eucalyptus plants for Chef Kirsty to made into delicious cordial!

You don't need to know a lot about plants to help with the gardening – just a willingness to learn and help as part of a team to keep the Garden tidy through the seasons. Chris Kidd's team work on Wednesday morning from 10am-12.30pm – weeding, planting, clearing, cleaning seeds, potting up, etc. Others work with Trish Brenchley on Monday and Thursday mornings, mainly in the Long Border. Bridgette's team work in the greenhouse, propagating plants for the Garden and Friends' plant sales, mostly on Wednesday afternoons. But you can come at any time by arrangement. You could choose a small part of the Garden to look after as your own responsibility!

Jane Cooper and Jonyth Hill train and look after the guides and helpers at the Information Point. If you would like to show the visitors round the Garden you can start by shadowing one of the guides and refer to the comprehensive notes available to help learn about the plants and the history of the site.

It would be good to meet anyone with another skill which might be useful such as DIY, taking messages on the telephone when the staff are away, publicity, fund raising, education . . .

Go on, get in touch today!

Jane Cooper 861459
Jonyth Hill 730532
Bridgette Sibbick 867739
Rosemary Stewart 292107 (Secretary of VBG Friends' Society)

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