ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'We have a thriving Garden under the curatorship of a skilled and experienced horticulturalist with a dedicated team of gardeners and volunteers' – ***Sally Peake, Chairman***

VOLUME 23 NO. 2 AUTUMN 2016

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

All dates and booking correct at time of going to press

NOVEMBER

4th, Midday Design Walk through the Garden. Have your say on changes being made. With Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd.

6th, 11am-4pm Wedding Fayre. Free entry and free parking all day.

9th, 7pm CAFE BOTANIQUE - A TALK BY MARK EARP. The current IW Amphibian population and what is being done to stop their decline using innovative monitoring.

12th, 9am-12pm Yoga Workshop with Nickie Short, for all abilities. £12

19th, 10am-4pm A New Leaf Making workshop with Chris Lines.

DECEMBER

2nd, Midday December Design Walk Join us for a topical walk through the Garden. With John Curtis and Chris Kidd.

3rd, 9am-12pm Yoga Workshop with Nickie Short, suitable for all abilities. £12.

Wed 7th Friends and Volunteers' Christmas Lunch, followed by the evening talk by Rosemary Stewart.

Wed 7th, 7pm CAFE BOTANIQUE - A TALK BY ROSEMARY STEWART. St Helena - Secret of the South Atlantic. A voyage with the Royal Mail Ship from Cape Town to this unique and dramatic volcanic island with its special plants, history and friendly people.

10th - 11th Christmas Wreath Making. In this workshop with Guy and Carol Ann Eades you will learn how to incorporate the fallen treasures of the Gardens to create your unique wreath. This drop in workshop is free with a donation to the Garden appreciated and there will be a cost to cover materials. Contact Carol Ann on 07881677761 caeades@btinternet.com for more details. Booking is essential as this will be very popular.

JANUARY 2017

14th, 11am-3pm Volunteers' Fair. Step up to help at VBG or explore other ways and places to volunteer. Free entry and parking.

Wed 28th, 7pm CAFE BOTANIQUE. A TALK BY DR PAUL BINGHAM. The Undercliff at the cutting edge of Science: Cholera, and measuring sunlight and ultra-violet.

FEBRUARY

14th St Valentine's Day. Watch for event details.

MARCH

5th, 11am-4pm VBG Wedding Fayer. Free entry and parking.

26th Mothering Sunday. Watch for event details.

MAY

Daily: Gallery display of Photographic Competition winning entries.

Front cover: aechmaea recurvata 'Paraguay'. Photo by Rosemary Stewart

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Curator's Notes

Cultivating a natural world by reducing horticulture

Immersed: Simon Goodenough planned 'New Zealand' to reflect and sustain the original habitat. Photographs by Julian Winslow

Botanic gardens have, for over a century, presented their living collections in themes, mostly reflecting the nature of their parent organisation. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for example, has collections to show economic botany as the British Empire traded botanical commodity throughout the world. Or Oxford Botanic Garden's Order Beds show plants in relationship to each other from a systematic botany viewpoint. A recurring theme common to many has been to show plants from geographical regions of the world, originally political geographic lines, the purpose being to show the spectacle and diversity of the plant kingdom. These collections were, for the main part, specimens of individual taxa grown in isolation, the better to highlight their unique selves, the skill of the horticulturist and prestige of the host garden.

As the role of botanic gardens changed through the 20th century, the display of living collections changed to reflect these roles.

Conservation became an increasingly important role: the appreciation of the role, and threat, of habitat and its loss may have been a factor in the development of living collection designs that aimed to closely imitate natural habitat.

A widely recognised example of this style of planting was created by Tony Schilling at Wakehurst Place in West Sussex. Using many plants from his own collection trips, Schilling set out in Westwood Valley to recreate a landscape with the floristic composition of a Himalayan valley. The mature planting from the 1960s and 1970s became widely recognised, notably by plant collector Roy Lancaster, as the closest representation of a Himalayan Valley outside the Himalaya. Critical to the success of this landscape was the close match of the topography and climate between Wakehurst and the Himalaya, described as "near-ideal" by F N Hepper. This led to natural regeneration, observable seedlings of Rhododendrons including *R. falconeri, R. sinogrande, R. fictolacteum, R. hypoglaucum, R. niveum, R. neriiflorum* and *R. glischroides.*

At VBG, the influence of the Westwood Valley on Simon Goodenough with his New Zealand Garden has to be recognised. Our New Zealand Garden's woody components have given fascinating portraits of the niche flora from the originating habitat. In developing our next generation gardens we have learned from Schilling and Goodenough, also introducing the philosophy of Peter Thoday. His concept is that there are three inputs that influence the success of an artificial landscape, horticulture, genetics and environment. Examples of the landscapes which can arise from each of the three inputs having a dominating presence could be:

Forestry monoculture; where the genes of the plant make the largest contribution to the final landscape. The tropical display glasshouse; where the environment makes the largest contribution to the final landscape. And, the topiary garden; where the applied horticultural input makes the largest contribution to the final landscape.

When we look at the unmanaged natural world there are only two inputs, the genetics of the plants and the environment they live in, as the horticulture is absent.

Therefore to mimic the wild, the horticulture has to be reduced and we rely on the genes of the plants and their environment. Our Mediterranean, South African and Australian gardens are increasingly self-managed. These give tantalising glimpses of what artificial habitats could be created here, and to a greater degree, overseas.

Chris Kidd, Curator

AGM Advanced Notice

The VBG Friends' Society Annual General Meeting will be on Thursday, 20th April 2017 at 7pm. Details to follow.

Gardening Volunteers

See Inside Back Page

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

Chairman's message

In her first report as Chairman, **Sally Peake** reflects on progress made, and looks forward to exciting times to come

Happy Hopping: Sally Peake

It has been an amazing summer for me. I feel I have started my new role within the Friends at a time of great promise and hope for our Society.

The past four years had been a time of transition; none of us could have fully anticipated what the release of the Garden from IoW Council control to a Community Interest Company under the guidance of the Curtis Family might mean. Now we know! We have a thriving Garden under the curatorship of a skilled and experienced horticulturalist with a dedicated team of gardeners and volunteers, and we have the commercial structures to sustain and augment the Garden for an appreciative paying visitor: - the Plantation Room café, the edulis restaurant, the Shop, the Gallery and Signal Point. All of these have been transformed to create an income stream that can support our precious Botanic Garden.

There is still much to do. The whole world of the 21st century is one of constant change and if we are to stay ahead of the game we need constantly to adapt to changing visitor expectations. We are fortunate indeed that we have had the support of John Curtis through these past tempestuous years – he has shown us a way forward along a bumpy and pot-holed road – which is not a bad metaphor for our dear Isle of Wight!

So, what has your Committee achieved this summer?

We successfully introduced a Gift Aid donation as part of the general admission fee on 1st May. This £1 attracts a refund from HMRC (to a maximum of £2000). The sum generated comes directly to the Friends and allows us to make a regular donation back to the CIC for use in the Garden; in practice this means that we are able to cover the costs incurred for Trish Brenchley for four sessions per week. (See Page 18).

Trish's return to the Garden means that we are able to train and direct young people more effectively and we have been able to recruit a Horticultural Apprentice who is able to meet his College attainment targets under her able tutelage. Those of us who have ever worked alongside Trish know how valuable this time is and it is enormously helpful to Chris Kidd. As you know, our Summer Party (see Page 14) raises funds to support our Apprentice programme, and the Gift Aid donations complement this by providing the essential training support. The net gain is two extra pairs of skilled hands in the Garden and the fulfilling of one of your Society's key objectives – education.

At our AGM in April John Curtis formally asked for a 'Vision' for the Friends' Society. This seemed to us a rather vague idea but, in getting to grips with what members really wished for the Garden's future, we have been able to distill our thoughts into a document to focus the minds and actions. This Vision is presented on Page 14 – please read . . . and read again! VBGFS is moving forward in a planned, deliberate and very exciting way.

There has been much other activity within the Garden for you all to see and enjoy. The long-running project to reclad the Temperate House is finally complete. It looks wonderful and will enable plans to continue the upgrading of the Hub information centre as funds allow. The Hop Yard project, funded by a £10K Tesco 'Bags of Help' grant (see Spring Ventnorensis) continues: during this season the hop poles and wires have been renewed and a huge effort by staff and volunteers has kept the hops weed-free and the rows neatly mown. New interpretative signage is being designed and the fencing work and other landscaping will take place over the winter. 10,000 purple crocuses have been planted under the big Scots pine in the centre of the Garden (see Page 28) these were donated by the Rotary Club as part of a Royal Horticultural Society scheme to celebrate the ending of its long-running campaign to eradicate polio. We hope the crocuses will be an additional delight to welcome visitors in the spring. Arts workshops have continued throughout the year and have been a delightful inspiration to all who attend.

Beyond its borders, the Friends have also been busy promoting our Garden – at Ventnor Day where the town buzzed with the excitement of the BBC battle-bus; at Chale Show where our volunteers put on a wonderful display to celebrate (more than!) 90 years of that illustrious horticultural show; and at Wolverton Garden Show where Laura designed a stand we'll be able to use for future displays, showcasing four of our geographic gardens.

Plans for next year are afoot. There will be the culmination of the Photographic Competition, a Secret Postcard exhibition and sale, a Summer Party, and much more. We have applied for another grant under a 'Celebrate' banner: our community will have much to celebrate next summer with the 45th anniversary of the opening of 'Steephill Pleasure Gardens with special botanic interest', and we hope to celebrate in style. As we approach Christmas, we shall again be supporting the Garden at Ventnorville – a day for all the family to enjoy, plus many other Christmas fairs and markets.

Your Society is proud to be forging ever closer ties with the Garden CIC – our support has never been more vital. There are so many ways YOU can help us. Volunteering in the Garden, volunteering to help run the shop through the winter, visiting regularly with your annual pass, buying your gifts and cards in the Shop, your coffees and treats in the Plantation Room and encouraging your friends to become our Friends. I look forward to seeing you all – do come and say hello! (See Volunteering, inside back page.)

Before I sign off, there are a couple of people I wish to pay tribute to. These are people who work behind the scenes, they are both Committee members but not those who ever claim the spotlight, but whose tireless work is of direct benefit to the Curator. Thank you Colin and Jan.

Sally Peake

Arbutus at VBG

Fruits of Sir Harold's honeymoon

The genus Arbutus is a member of the Erica family, so related to heathers and heaths, Enkianthus and Rhododendron. This family are classically lovers of acidic soil, therefore are largely absent at VBG. It'll be no surprise though, that just as in human families where we find the odd auburn uncle sitting at the Christmas table of blondes, we also find the odd Erica who will live on chalk. Arbutus are odd uncles.

Sir Harold Hillier, the great plantsman who initially populated VBG in his inimitable style, introduced Arbutus in the knowledge of their safety in our remarkable microclimate. He included the cast-iron candidates such as *A. unedo,* the Killarney Strawberry Tree; long serving Friends will remember the late lamented specimen that clung to rocks before making way for our Visitor Centre, built in 2000. Gladly he also included the more tender species, in line with his ethos of transferring the riskier half hardy species from Ampfield to the benign valley at Ventnor.

Browsing through the handwritten list that represents the paucity of documentation supporting Hillier's work here, compiled by Roy Dore (the Garden's first supervisor), we see many Arbutus. Most of these are now recognised as synonyms, *Arbutus texana* being a disavowed name for *A. xalapensis; A. integrifolia, A. lucida* and *A. serrulata* all being the horticulturally tricky *A. andranche.* The lovely *hybrid A. x andrachnoide*s was included of course, the difficulty of its mentioned parent ameliorated by its other, tougher, father – *A. unedo.*

Present day champions: A. xalapensis and A. menziesii (above) Arbutus Tree

The remaining plants have been fascinating. I've covered before the adventures surrounding a plant listed as *Arctostaphylos glandulosa* that turned out to be *A. xalapensis,* but it's worth repeating the story of our *A. xalapensis* for posterity. The legend states that Sir Harold, enjoying his honeymoon in Mexico with his new wife, found a specimen of *A. xalapensis* and brought its seed back to Winchester. The resultant seedlings struggled in the damp, cold climate of Hampshire and only became the specimens their genetic destiny promised once planted years later at Ventnor.

In the present day Hillier's *A. xalapensis* is recognised as a champion, the largest recorded in the UK, along with *A. menziesii,* planted close by. Both these trees have remarkable

bark. *A. xalapensis* is a moulter in the fashion of a snake; it sheds in entirety its paper thin bark in strips every autumn. Having grown to a rich fuscous brown over summer, the new skin is pinky-green with a white bloom. *A. menziesii* doesn't fully shed its bark; thicker rolls peel away, resembling cinnamon sticks clinging to the trunk and branches. A splendid specimen once stood near King Williams Temple at Kew until blown over in the Great Storm of '87. Its loss was Ventnor's gain; our specimen probably ascended the throne as Britain's biggest at that point.

Subsequent to the storms and freezes that bookend the 1980s, the Garden added to the collection. Seeds were collected from the remarkable tree still then known as *Arctostaphylos glandulosa,* and these intriguing and variable trees are now coming to the end of their lives having given insights into the probable hybrid nature of their parent; though none can hold a flame to its raging red bark. Some large leaved specimens arch over the path behind the New Zealand garden, their origins unrecorded during a quiet time for plant records at VBG. Reimagining the Mediterranean Garden with the Friends' help post 2000 saw introductions of *A. unedo* as large specimens. None fared as well as the naturally regenerated seedlings standing proudly above the bank crowned by a giant Holm Oak. These fruit plentifully, though as their epithet foretells "eat only one", the pips inside will get under your plate.

More recent success has come from growing *A. canariensis* from seed. This species is another striking large shrub or small tree. It shares the statuesque but wild profile of its American relatives, different to the rounder European and Asia Minor species. Coloured bark, though not dramatic, is still arresting beneath effusive flower clusters and shiny light green leaves. Native to the Canaries, it likes to be kept very dry. Once planted amongst rocks about half of our seedlings succumbed. A single plant was donated to the National Collection holders in Gloucestershire (quite how it fares in such northern climes, we don't know). Our remaining two are still young; the darling for the future could be the thin, solitary trunked plant arising from the top of the serpentine steps into the Mediterranean Garden. Or the branched and more vigorous one beginning to shade the nursery glasshouse. I'd personally prefer the former, if only because of its more dramatic perch, and it reminds me of the first *A. canariensis* I ever saw.

At a famous nursery in Cornwall, owned by a curious couple whose extensive collection is hidden from view, in the main, sat a large tree specimen, perhaps three meters high. Its single stem reached the apex of the glasshouse it lived in. Like most of its surrounding rarities, it was emerging from a burst open five litre pot, having "rooted through" years, perhaps decades, before. Immoveable, this specimen steadfastly refused to yield cuttings, a characteristic shared by many Arbutus species. Having originated from Tresco, whose plant had since vanished, it may have represented the only *A. canariensis* in Britain. It was indeed for sale, though to reliably have moved it would have proven to be such a task that would surely have been impossible. Indeed, this proved to be the case as I saw it later, dead, still fixed to its pot but without a root in sight.

Of the 14 species described we have but a third, plus the inevitable cultivars, amounting to 23 accessions. It's time we sought out some more.

Chris Kidd

JOHN CURTIS'S AUTUMN UPDATE

Working hard for tranquillity

Wellbeing appeals to more people than rare subtropical plants, so combining the two is key for the Garden's future

In October 2011 I first walked the Garden with Friend's Chairman Phil Le May to understand the situation that led the Council to seek Expressions of Interest from third parties. Obviously an extraordinary personal journey followed that walk. I continue to believe what I believed that day – Ventnor Botanic Garden is a jewel and that it would have been the wrong answer for the Island and for society at large to let it go to a developer. We continue to take our role as custodians of the open space, the legacy of healing and the Living Collection seriously.

One is never finished developing and presenting a garden, especially a botanic garden. We have been investing Gift Aid monies into extra staff to improve the presentation of Mixed Border initially, then the Palm Garden and now the balance of the Garden. We are still misunderstood by visitors in our wilder areas – The Australian and The Med where we practice the Ventnor Method℠, growing plants in association with each other as they would be in the wild (see Curator's Notes, Page 2). I have watched with interest as plant science has turned toward the ecosystem and mycorrhizal relationships we nurture at VBG through the Ventnor Method℠. For example, our biologist, Dr Colin Pope, found that the Tasmanian Tree Ferns are now reproducing to the west of the dell in part because we do not overgarden that section (see Wonderful Tree Ferns, Page 10)

YogaVibe's closing ceremony: Palpable appreciation of VBG's spirituality

'For those who took part in YogaVibe and The Healing Festival this summer there was a palpable appreciation of the spirituality of our setting'

Our five year scorecard has some spectacular victories and some losses. As change maker I serve as a lightning rod for any nearby spark or complaint – a role that all change makers accept comes with the territory. Initially sparks flew over the introduction of entry fees, which are charged at all UK botanic gardens save one. Currently sparks are flying around the incline lift, a real albatross of a design. I fear we will have to hold a memorial service for the current lift as repairs appear difficult and replacement financially out of reach. This risk was of course visible in 2011, just not the timing, or the long term solution. What was less visible was Undercliff Drive falling into the sea. In the short term we will allow parking for the mobility impaired on the Garden's lower level.

Designs for a Quiet or Contemplative Garden are underway. As I read more about the pursuit of silence and wellbeing, it is clear that this is an important and appropriate direction for us at VBG. The September Design Walk gave us several themes for such a garden – water to attract wildlife, covered spaces to escape the rain, maintenance and extension of our Living Collection. Please forward your design input to info@botanic.co.uk.

As many of you are aware we have begun to build up The Wellbeing Experience℠ which combines classes or treatments with healthy foods and the tranquillity of the Garden. We know wellbeing appeals to more people than rare subtropical plants, so we also aim to increase our visitor numbers with this strategy. Many of you have spoken to me about the rise in your wellbeing from time spent in the Garden. At times these stories border on spiritual. For those who took part in YogaVibe and The Healing Festival this summer there was a palpable appreciation of the spirituality of our setting.

This time of year we remain in flower and welcome your visits. Come for lunch, bring a friend or two, celebrate a birthday, try a class in art, gentle yoga or music, to support us through the winter months. With more winter visits we might even squirrel a few pennies away to address the lift issue.

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.

The wonderful world of tree ferns

The tree fern gully with an epiphytic mint bush visible in the centre of the picture

To me, one of the most intriguing parts of the Garden is the Tree Fern Gully in the Australia section. It was created in 2005 using large trunks and small *Dicksonia antarctica* plants from a variety of sources. The large trunks, varying in length from 1 to 3 metres, were shipped over under licence from Tasmania, and young, spontaneously generated plants were brought back from Logan Botanic Garden in Galloway. They clearly enjoy their own company and have settled into the new home and grown well. Moreover, the Tree Fern Gully is developing into a fascinating mini ecosystem.

Dicksonia antarctica is the most abundant tree-fern in south-eastern Australia and Tasmania. In its native habitat it often dominates wet, shady gullies and frequently grows in extensive stands. However, collection from the wild and land clearance for farming from the end of the 19th Century onwards have contributed to the decline of this species in many parts of Australia. Its slow growth means that most of the commercially available Australian tree ferns are harvested from the wild. The majority of these are exported to Europe, Japan and the United States for the horticultural trade. Currently, most supplies of mature ferns sourced from the wild are salvaged from old-growth forest areas about to undergo a significant land-use change, such as clear-fell logging and conversion from native forest to plantation.

Australian Tree-ferns are slow-growing – between 1-10 cm per year depending on conditions – and do not reach maturity until they are about 23 years old. When reproductively mature, spore production is prolific, occurring mainly in late summer. *Dicksonia antartica* now propagates itself by spores in humid woodland outside gardens in Cornwall and County Kerry. It has been observed that young tree-ferns developing beneath the crowns of large plants rarely grow to maturity, indicating that germination, development and maturation of immature tree-ferns is inhibited by the close proximity of a mature plant. In Ventnor, young plants are now regenerating a short distance from the parent plants on a mossy hillock dominated by self-sown divaricate Coprosma species.

The trunk of *Dicksonia* tree ferns is rough and fibrous as it is covered with coarse ginger-brown hairs as well as the old frond stem bases and a mat of fibrous adventitious roots that causes the stem to thicken toward the base. The old stem bases eventually crumble and become hidden under a mat of adventitious roots. It is these rootlets that enable tree ferns to survive without a subterranean root system and allow them to easily re-establish and grow if they fall over or are cut off at the base.

The structure of the trunk has good moisture-retaining properties and also has considerable longevity and stability as a substrate. It provides a suitable shaggy substratum for the germination and growth of mosses and liverworts and smaller ferns, as well as

some flowering plants, epiphytes which can almost entirely clothe the trunk. The importance of *Dicksonia* as a substrate for ferns and fern allies, in particular the Filmy Ferns *(Hymenophyllaceae)* and Fork Ferns *(Tmesipteris spp.),* is well documented in both Victorian and Tasmanian forests. It has been found that soft tree fern trunks are the main substrate for 12 epiphytic fern species in Tasmania. However, to support a healthy population of epiphytes, the trunks need to be a least 1.5m high (approximately 40 years old). It is thought that this is because the skirt of dead fronds tends to suppress growth of epiphytes, which tend to cover most of the trunk until the trunk reaches this height.

When tree-fern trunks are imported into this country today, they are generally vigorously cleansed of all epiphytes. However, that was not the case with the Tasmanian trunks used to create the Tree Fern Gully and some of the epiphytes which were growing on the trunks survived and have flourished in their new home. Today, you can see two sorts of epiphytic ferns, the Kangaroo Fern, *Phymatosorus diversifolius* and the Leathery Shield-fern, *Rumhora adiantiformis* growing on some of the older trunks, an association which is common on tree ferns in Tasmania. There is even a flowering plant, a Mint Bush or *Prostanthera,* which must have been imported as a seedling on one of the trunks and has now grown several metres high and produced flowers. Its roots have grown down within the spongy trunk of the fern to reach the ground below.

The most remarkable epiphytic plant to have survived is a Fork Fern or *Tmesipteris*. These are a small genus of very primitive fern allies related to the Whisk Ferns, *Psilotum.* The fleshy branching rhizome is embedded in the fibrous mat formed by the aerial roots of the tree-fern trunk. The rhizome is not photosynthetic but is covered with minute golden-brown hairs or 'rhizoids' and harbours a fungus within its tissues from which it is thought to receive supplementary nutrition. Short, spiky dark-green fronds (10–15 cm long), emerge directly from the fibrous root-mats and recently we have noticed that some of these have produced two-lobed, spindle shaped fruiting structures, technically termed synangia, on lateral branches.

Andrew Leonard and Tim Pyner from the British Pteridological Society came down to Ventnor expressly to see this plant. Tim said: "I have occasionally noticed *Tmesipteris* on trunks of tree-ferns grown undercover and once on a Dicksonia in a Cornish garden. I have also been notified of plants in an Irish garden but usually they do not seem to persist for long. At Ventnor, the *Tmesipteris* were seen on four trunks of the Tasmanian specimens and around 30 'fronds' were present. Most of the fronds seemed healthy and the colony seems to be thriving. Two fronds bore 'sporangia', correctly termed synangia, and I was able to identify them as probable *Tmesipteris obliqua* which is endemic to South-east Australia. It is of great interest that this colony has been noticed and can be monitored for signs of decline or increase in the future."

Our climate is not damp enough to permit mosses and liverworts to grow over the trunks of the tree ferns, as can happen in Country Kerry, but nevertheless, a close look at our Tree Fern Gully has revealed a remarkable little ecosystem thriving in the Ventnor microclimate. Even the land hoppers, jumping about in the leaf litter under the ferns, are Australian natives.

Colin Pope

Weather in the Garden

(February – September 2016) **by Chris Watts**

The start of this eight month spell of weather saw the battle of the sexes. I refer, of course, not to any domestics, but named storms, where the ladies won hands down! The gentlemen weren't nearly so troublesome as Imogen (6th – 8th February) or Katie (28th March); although brief, this last storm in particular caused much detritus, damage to a panel of the tropical house and to escallonia shrubs in the Garden, as well as causing problems along the seafront to beach huts and other associated items. Otherwise, spring didn't bring anything too dramatic, just a mix of weather – sunshine and showers, some of which were of sleet and hail. This mix caused the temperatures to yo-yo, not unusual at this time of year, but the magnolias survived as did the geranium *maderense;* there was only one very slight air frost, -0.1°C on the 7th March, the first since 4th February 2015. A little sleet fell as late as the 30th April.

A good example of temperature difference came in May. It just shows how influential the origin of the air can be: on the 13th, in full sunshine, the highest temperature was 21.6°C; the following day, again in full sun, only a high of 13.7°C was recorded. Then came June – somewhat disappointing as it was very wet with little sun, but this was followed by a complete contrast with a lovely summer. July and August were fine and dry; over these two months, just one wet day stood out from the rest, the 1st August having 37.4mm of rain and the wettest day since 23rd December 2013. July especially was dry, one of the driest on record with just 3mm of rain. Days of drought spanned the 11th to the 23rd July and the 3rd to the 16th August. Hot spots came from the 16th to the 22nd July peaking at 26.1°C on the 19th, and from the 23rd to the 27th August, peaking at 27.8°C on the 24th.

For the most part, despite a few autumnal days, the summery weather was maintained throughout September; it was pleasantly warm with the thermometer peaking at 24.4°C on the 13th, and note from the table that September's mean temperature was above that for July. But rain was never far away, although mostly in small amounts. However, by the time you read this, autumn will be well under way, and you may well have met Angus, Barbara, Conor, Doris et al. Watch this space!

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]
2016 Feb	*7.3++*	*68.0++*	*13*	*7.3*	*0*	*4*
March	*7.4*	*75.3++*	*11*	*7.8*	*0*	*14*
April	*9.3*	*47.9*	*9*	*11.0*	*0*	*5*
May	*13.4+*	*50.7*	*8*	*14.9*	*4*	*5*
June	*15.6+*	*112.0++*	*14*	*17.3*	*6*	*8*
July	*17.3+*	*3.0—-*	*0*	*19.1*	*12*	*13*
August	*18.2+*	*54.2*	*5*	*19.4*	*22*	*14*
Sept	*17.6++*	*50.5—-*	*10*	*18.2*	*13*	*4*

[1] No of days with max temp over 20°C
[2] Longest spell (in days) without rain

Our Vision for VBGFS

Under our Constitution (April 2000), the Objects of VBGFS are to 'advance public education in botany and horticulture, in particular at Ventnor Botanic Garden, and in furtherance of the objects by:

Holding lectures, discussions, demonstrations, workshops and seminars

Maintaining a reference library of horticultural books and journals

Promoting and encouraging school visits and guided tours to further the education of all age groups

Giving practical assistance in VBG under the direction and with the agreement of the Curator

Raising funds for specific projects within VBG

Current position:

It is our belief that, in the four years since transfer from the Council to the CIC of VBG, VBGFS has met its obligations under all sections of this Constitution.

However, it would be also true to state that the needs of VBG have changed materially during those four years and that a document setting out a new vision – a list of ambitions to work towards – could be inspirational.

It is a fact that our current membership numbers remain static along with income from subscriptions. There are many reasons for this, not least the uncertainty created by the needs of the CIC in introducing admission charges and 'annual pass structures'. After four years, the effects of these uncertainties become less evident so I believe we can go forward with confidence in our ambitions.

The Community Interest Company (CIC) is here to stay with John and Mylene Curtis as 100% shareholders; the CIC holds a 125 year lease on VBG with an option to renew.

A Vision for the Friends:

To take over the management of VBG with a democratically elected Board

To change our Constitution to allow greater freedom to support the Garden in all its ambitions for long-term economic viability

To attract skills and finance commensurate to the national importance of the Garden

To create a hub of learning excellence where horticulturalists at all levels can meet, learn and develop

There is no timescale. It would be my intention to work within the Friends' Society to develop a realistic plan to move forward whilst maintaining a close working relationship with the current management.

Sally Peake, Chairman VBGFS

Summer Party

Photographs by Rosemary Stewart

This year the Summer Party, our third, was held in the New Zealand Garden. Jane Bland and Zarnie Coad did the most amazing job in organising a hundred people who enjoyed a perfect evening. We started outside *edulis* with Moscow Mules and musical offerings from Ric and Brad. then sauntered through to an eye catching Moroccan tent, which looked wonderfully romantic in the Garden. Kirsty and her team had organised a Moroccan themed menu to continue the theme.

Again we were very spoilt not only in our very capable auctioneer, Adrian Biddell, but also in the fantastic diversity of the lots that had been so generously donated to the evening. Chris Kidd produced some amazing plants, which were as always the stars of the show. The sum raised towards the education fund topped £8,000 which is a fantastic boost.

Huge thanks go to Jane and Zarnie, and to all the other helpers, Phil Le May, Sally Peake, Ken and Sue Payne, Judith Bland for the loan (again) of her lovely candelabra, and all the staff at the Garden for ensuing that yet again it all ran like clockwork.

Caroline Peel

Dear members . . .

Sometimes when you see the familiar through somebody else's eyes you appreciate it all the more, and anyone who saw Ventnor Botanic Garden – and much more of the Island – portrayed by the BBC's Countryfile team will have felt an extraordinary pride. Unlike the reporter, we might have known that the lush growth of 'Australia' is only 10 years old but you can't help mentally stepping back in amazement. And when Jonyth Hill described the Garden's origins and showed photographs of the Old Hospital patients tilling the soil you again feel that sense of legacy.

Chris was describing to the reporter a plant entirely self-planted, and in his Curator's Notes [Page 2] he explains how VBG is increasingly mimicking the unmanaged natural world. The tree fern glade is Dr Colin Pope's topic this time and there is a true sense of walking in the wild here.

We all know that our own curator's work is never done, so it was interesting to come across others in charge of important gardens. The burly tweed-jacketed John Harris in charge of Tresillian House garden in Cornwall works according to the lunar cycle – and fixes the boiler and does elaborate flower arranging. See Page 22.

And talking of hard workers, our new chairman Sally Peake has been like a human dynamo since being elected at the AGM in April. Asked by John Curtis to distill the thoughts of The Friends into a 'vision' for VBG she spearheaded something ambitious, intelligent and dynamic. Do give it a read on Page 13.

Preserving the Garden for future generations may be the motivation behind our volunteers or it may be love of gardening or meeting people, but as Bridgette Sibbick found, you don't need specialist knowledge and you can gain a lot. See inside Back Page.

The success of the Summer Party [Facing Page] has added to the Friends' Education Fund. We fund Trish Brenchley to supervise the apprentice, volunteers and interns and meeting her at work is an inspiration. See Page 18. As Sally says in her first Chairman's Message, these are exciting times.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Copy date for Spring edition: March 17th 2017

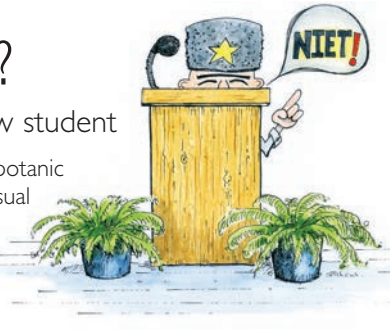
Christmas Lunch for Friends and Volunteers

Last year's Christmas lunch was such fun, we will be holding another on ***Wednesday 7th December.*** *The price will be the same as last year - £20.00, to include a glass or two of wine. Please contact Diana Sichel to reserve a space – 07764 310244 or diana.sichel@btinternet.com. To avoid confusion with addresses, cheques should be sent to Caroline Peel, Point Cottage, Beach Road, Bembridge PO35 5NQ.*

We look forward to seeing you all there.

Who the heck is Gladys?

Chris Kidd recalls an excruciating event as a Kew student



Whist talking to students at Ventnor recently I was asked how botanic gardens are laid out, what was the method? I trotted out the usual dismal information on how we all obey the will of the dead on such matters, that such decisions were taken decades if not centuries before, by men in tights and wigs who, still, are not to be argued with. But, there is an exception.

There was (recently) a living man with a knowledge so profound on such matters that his ideas reshape the layout of botanic gardens today. There follows my account of actually being in the same room as that man. It's a story more interesting and amusing to you, gentle reader, than the classification of flowering plants that he purveys.

Armen Takhtajan of the Komarov Institute in Leningrad - Godfather of systematic botany, living legend and taxonomic deity - was visiting Kew. The Director of Kew, Charles Stirton, was beside himself with excitement and desperate that everyone else should be too. Even scuzzy gardeners and, Lord preserve us, students.

And so it was arranged that the whole Jodrell Lecture Theatre would be an open house for everyone to listen to the man speak. It didn't matter that you didn't know who he was, (let alone pronounce his name) you just had to go and hear the Russian Bloke because he was really important or something. Soon even the lamest of supervisors had mastered the name Takhtajan, and some even purported to know what 'cladistics' was. I began to detect a distinct air of "The Emperor's New Clothes" about the whole affair, and more importantly so did my mate John Smith.

John had very blonde eyebrows that made him look like he was perpetually on the brink of a sniggering fit. And quite often he was. He also had the wonderful ability to see through hazes of balderdash, and had a damning, damning laugh you wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of. He was already laughing when I saw him about going to hear Armen Takhtajan. "Who is he anyhow? What's his name? I ain't got a clue mate!" (long drawn out laugh). It was a glorious summer day and as typical students we were dressed in rags as we walked to the lecture theatre.

The place is filling fast and the lower dregs of management are wearing suits – ties even. Jeff Smith, the Assistant Curator in charge of bins and squirrels even has a notebook and pen, for heaven's sake! John and I were almost behind him; you could hear John's laugh through the general hubbub. Charles Stirton, Director, looks fit to wet himself dancing from foot to foot. From behind the lectern he glares at us until we stop the nervous chatter. Looking around he can see botanists with scientists, chemists and managers, students and gardeners, and he launches into a tirade on how unworthy we all are of this divine visitation - and that Professor Takhtajan has poor English and so will use a translator.

I can see the afternoon stretching out ahead of us, as can Jeff Smith who loosens his tie. John is suspiciously and dangerously quiet and I'm trying not to catch his eye. The great moment arrives, the doors open and accompanied by a gaggle of sycophants and a translator in walks a small grey raisin of a man with a stern looking bulky wife. Several

eulogies preceded the Man Himself taking the dais, and announcing he wasn't going to be translated: he'd decided to plough on in heavily accented, quiet English.

The whole audience leaned forward to hear. Ten minutes later most were leaning back again and investigating the walls, ceiling, fingernails etc, because this man was not only very quiet, his English was terrible and he was talking on a subject we couldn't begin to comprehend. The only word that seemed to have some kind of identity for itself from the rambling monotone was the word "cladists", referring to those who practice cladistics. Unfortunately it sounded like "Gladys". I knew this, and John sure as hell knew this. He leaned over to me and hissed in my ear, dry as sandpaper: "Who the heck is Gladys?"

Thus began the most horrific battle against the giggles. My skin was cold though sweaty; I struggled to turn snorting bursts of giggle into coughs. I made the huge mistake of looking at Rob; he was scarlet and looked ready to pop. He half turned to me and in doing so I glimpsed an eyebrow that made me snort so loudly that Takhtajan himself broke stride for an instant. I wanted to run laughing from the theatre, my career in shreds but free at least. When I momentarily regained composure, I would sense John vibrating like a E string on my left and be cruelly back where I began.

And I needed the toilet.

We weren't the only ones suffering, Jeff Smith was now lolling forward with closed eyes. His mouth was working away at mumbling in dreamy slumber and drool dropped from his lips onto his empty notebook. Around the audience the familiar and non-familiar had glazed eyes. Dr Stirton was engrossed, nodding periodically and chortling at what I hoped were jokes, albeit veiled from the rest of us by the hideous monotone.

Then, just when we all least expected it, Takhtajan stopped and sat down, only the top of his head visible from behind the lecturn. There was a stunned silence (those not paying full attention probably wondered where the little guy had gone). Then, Dr Stirton, his head shaking in awe, stood up and began an ovation. The idea caught on like wildfire, soon John and I were applauding, tears rolling down our faces. Jeff Smith lurched awake and looked left to right before half rising and wiping his mouth. John wolf whistled (greeted with daggers looks as Stirton looked for the culprit) and said, "Where's Gladys". Little did we know there was more to come.

After the applause Takhtajan stood up again and the other Director's wife (there were three Directors then, you can never have enough Directors) presented Mrs Takhtajan with flowers. She looked like she had been handed a bucket of kippers. Then Dr Stirton asked if anyone had any questions.

Most people were half rising to leave, surely thinking: "You must be joking, mate - only two people understood a word, and you're one of them." "I could see a few scientists practicing the old "No, I think you've summed it all up wonderfully" lie, should they be pressed. Alarmed, Dr Stirton began launching into a question himself. Takhtajan, clearly tired by the exertion of the afternoon, stopped Stirton halfway through, wanting now to use his translator. Stirton began re-composing his question, which needed to be broken up and laboriously translated in parts.

We all watched with baited breath. I had serious giggles coming on again, and John had noticed "Gladys" being translated into Russian. Takhtajan stood there looking thoughtful and nodding, until the longest question ever was finally finished. Even before it was translated, the reply brought the house down – "Niet". No.

Top tip: get a Trish

Roz Whistance meets **Trish Brenchley,** who the Friends' Society funds to supervise volunteers, interns and apprentices

If you want tangible evidence of the way the Friends' Society supports the Garden look no further than gardener Trish Brenchley. Trish, who was employed at VBG until the swathing cuts made by its then-Council owners, was brought back in by the Friends to supervise the volunteers and interns. But, like the plants she tends, Trish's work tends to spread beyond its original remit.

"It started as two mornings a week and now it's four," she says cheerfully. "Initially it was to do the mixed borders but now because of the extra time the Friends are funding I can extend to other areas of the Garden." She grins: "I'm everywhere now."

Mixed bag: Trish on tractor with apprentice David and interns

'Visitors want zing': The mixed borders

When we meet in mid-September she is supervising planting in the Mediterranean garden, leading David, the latest apprentice (who is also funded by the Friends) and a collection of interns in pulling out and replacing plants there. "It's a really mixed bag," she says, referring not to the plants but to the people. "Some have no horticultural experience and others, like a lady from Austria who arrived today, is a qualified gardener who wants teaching experience."

The plants that she and her disparate team are putting in have been propagated by them, or by their predecessors. "We do propagation for plant sales and propagate to go back into the Garden, as well as seed collecting." She pauses. "I'm back to doing what I used to do, but in four mornings a week!"

She is clearly not a clock-watcher, admitting that she won't leave on her appointed hour if a job isn't finished. "I love teaching. It's about trying to find a balance where the students don't feel downhearted as they learn. I like to get them up to what I call horticultural speed, because if you want to go on and work in this business you need to do things well, but quicker.

When it comes to supervising an apprentice there is more than passing on her practical skills. Every job David is given needs to be logged, photographed and his proficiency vouched for by 'witness statements', which are passed to the Isle of Wight College. "I try to do as little paperwork as possible," she grins, "but it is all part of ensuring the apprentice gains his qualification. We need to do Plant Identity and learning about weeds, but with so few of us it's a question of sorting out the time." She admits that thoughts of how much there is to do buzz around her head at night.

'I love teaching. It's about trying to find a balance where the students don't feel downhearted as they learn'

She clearly has a good, easy relationship with the students and volunteers. Even as she fends off some gentle joshing from David a young man comes over to remind her that she taught him when he came with his school for a day's experience. Trish is delighted to hear he is now at college studying horticulture, and even more so when he says he wants to volunteer at the Garden.

Trish works with Chris Kidd on planning so as many jobs as possible get done, but her own 'baby' is the mixed border. "The idea is that it's a main attraction while the kids are on holiday and most visitors come. Visitors want banks of colour. They get that in 'South Africa' but when they get to the bottom of the Garden they want zing. A mixed border means that we can blend shrubs, herbaceous perennials and annuals in a different combination each year. That way it doesn't become staid, and the visitors who come back won't think they've seen it all before."

The far end of the borders contain the Salvia collection that will keep the colour going into the winter. Next on her list is the herb garden, which needs a bit of a revival.

Trish is pleased that there is a cabin available for foreign students to stay on site. "We need to build up the manpower: that's why the volunteers are important."

All in all there could be no better way to fulfill the Friends' Society's remits to propagate horticultural education than to employ the energetic, inspirational and passionate gardener that is Trish Brenchley. Surely money well spent.

Spread the word and you might win a prize!

Enclosed with this issue is a Membership Leaflet. Huge thanks to John Curtis for allowing us to use Alex Williams' marvellous painting of the Garden as the cover. The leaflet does not do justice to the painting so when you next visit the garden you should find it.

If you pay by Standing Order you need do nothing about your subscription. Those who pay by cheque should find two leaflets in their envelope. However you subscribe, PLEASE pass on your spare leaflet to a friend, ask them to join and return the leaflet and payment to Caroline with your name on it (the best place is probably at the top where it says 'renewal'), we will then put all the new members' leaflets into a Draw and you, the existing member, could win an annual pass for two to the Garden.

Geranium maderense

A truly spectacular, and possibly unprecedented display of Geranium maderense delighted visitors to the almost-drive-thru garden. The planting of Giant Cranesbill or Giant Herb Robert was probably the largest in the world. There's certainly no doubt that it was by the hundreds if not millions that the volunteers (see above left) potted them on.

G. maderense are frost tender so had to be cossetted with fleece during the unexpectedly cold spring. But what a result!

VBG Photographic Competition

As the light is getting lower and shadows more intense, as raindrops sit on leaves or frost even visits the Garden, it is the ideal time to be out with your camera and enter the photographic competition "A Year in Ventnor Botanic Garden".

Photographs for the competition must be taken in Ventnor Botanic Garden and should be submitted under the following five categories:

Plant portrait
Landscape
Abstract
Wildlife
Young photographer

Each entry will cost £10 - for three photos and an entry form will be available for download from the Friends' website – www.botanicfriends.org.uk

Competition judges will be Julian Winslow and his photographic partner, Steve Blamire, both successful Island photographers, together with Dr Rachel Flynn who is Exhibition and Collections Coordinator at Dimbola Museum and Galleries, the photography museum and house of the pioneer Victorian photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron.

The winner and two runners-up in each category will have their images professionally printed, mounted and hung in an exhibition at The Gallery in the Garden: any additional prizes are still being finalised. The Exhibition will be publicised on both the Garden and Friends websites, as well as the local newspaper, The Isle of Wight County Press. The images will also, naturally, be featured in Ventnorensis.

In addition the Friends intend to use a selection of the images in a calendar which will be available for sale at The Garden Shop.

Full terms and conditions will be available on the entry form.

Details of prizes will be published on the Friends website as and when they are finalised.

Listening to the moon

The duties of a head gardener are many and varied. At Tresillian House in Cornwall veteran gardener **John Harris** does everything from fixing the five boilers to flower arranging. And that's on top of his strict regime of organic and lunar gardening. He was interviewed at a head gardeners' forum by the BBC's **Tim Hubbard**

Digging for victory: John Harris
Photo by Charles Francis

Tim Hubbard: I'm sure you don't mind me saying, John, let's start back in the late 17th century when you were a lad! Tell us about your initial garden aspirations.

John Harris: I started back in the mid 1950s, doing a five-year apprenticeship. Then the head gardener, a brilliant man, said 'I think you ought to do another 18 months on trees,' which I did, then I moved on to market gardening, finishing as manager of one of the biggest market gardens in Cornwall, 350 acres, 27 greenhouses, supplying all the big stores. In between that, I did a course in grass management for two or three years, and then the chance came up to take over Tresillian, which had been lying derelict for a long, long time, and we turned it round to what it is today.

TH: Does the apprenticeship scheme exist in the same way now?

JH: Sadly no. Then you had five years' apprenticeship, you started at the bottom, you had the mundane tasks like scrubbing flowerpots – no things in your ears listening to music! Gardening is all about starting at the bottom, learning to know the soil. I don't know in the future where that will come from.

TH: Tell us about Tresillian.

JH: The estate, right in the middle of Cornwall, covers 100s acres but there's thirty acre of woodlands, ornamental lakes, fruit gardens, and the centerpiece, the walled garden. It is open for organised visits, but is a private estate. We're constantly introducing new trees, we've added bluebell walks, daffodil walks and the biggest orchard in Cornwall, with over 100 varieties of apples.

TH: The centerpiece of Tresillian House Garden is the walled garden, and it is gardened according to principles you've followed for many years?

JH: Just before he died, the head gardener who taught me said: "John, study the influence of the moon on growing aspects." Well, when you're young and you've just done an apprenticeship, the last thing you want to do is more studying! But I said yes, and after he died I thought I owed it to him – he was a brilliant man, he had to be to teach me! – and I started to do all sorts of research. We had no computers back then, but I found out how the Maoris, the Aborigines, the Chinese, the Greeks, Romans did their cultivation, and everything was built round the moon.

TH: So what does 'moon gardening' mean on a day-to-day basis?

JH: We don't water the walled garden at all; we use the water table. The gravity

pull of the moon affects everything in this planet, it don't matter where you're to, seas, ocean, rivers, it affects the rise and fall of the water within the ground, within the plant. And this is the way we operate.

We dig, introduce compost, manoeuvre the soil when the water has dropped to its lowest given point, because the moisture in the soil is being pulled down. So Tresillian is built around the principles of lunar gardening and organic gardening and all the ways of yesteryear.

TH: How are the tasks divided at Tresillian?

JH: We've had princes to prime ministers visit, and if somebody's coming then the main drive's got to be clean, and all the lawns cut and straight. The first thing they see is the impression they'll remember.

On top of that I do all the flower arranging in the house. There's one lady who comes every year to stay and insists on a display of 400 sweet peas in an arrangement. Last weekend I had to do seven big flower arrangements, because the owner was there with his family.

At Christmas it takes a day to do the garlands and table decorations, and bringing in a 22ft tree.

TH: What are some frustrations of your job?

JH: We've got five big boilers. Only takes the housekeeper to say 'Boiler's broke down John, no hot water.' and that's me busy. But basically I was taught to get these [hands] dirty and work with these, and then you've got to keep records of every single thing – staff, sickness, holidays, anything that goes wrong – it takes time.

TH: Tell us about the history of the house

JH: The first house was built in 1300, the walled garden in 1794. Years ago we were tying back some pear trees and somebody pulled out an old 10-shilling note rolled up in the tree. You can imagine somebody had got paid and put it there for safekeeping.

We're custodians, only on a short lifetime. We've got to leave something behind for our ancestors to inherit. This is why I've created Cornish Orchards and laid out the walled garden in true Victorian style so if I drop dead tomorrow we've left it behind, it was battered when we came in and we moved it on.

TH: And what of the future?

JH: We're developing the Cornish Orchard stock. And underneath there's ancient Cornish daffodils. There's a beautiful daffodil called Summercourt that was virtually extinct, but I'm also looking to bring in new, because what's new now will be ancient in 60 years time.

Vegetables are a massive thing, so we're restoring old varieties and incorporating new with them. We use companion planting: being organic we can work with two in harmony. Soft fruits, peaches, nectarines, I want to build up a big selection of quinces, soft fruit. It's a mammoth task always looking to think not for yourself but what will benefit future generations.

Trends change, but big trees will always be there. What is little today is tomorrow's big focal point. So it's making sure it's not in the wrong place.

TH: So what does the job of Head Gardener at Tresillian House mean to you?

JH: I'm a very lucky man to be paid to do a job I love doing. Titles don't mean anything, you enjoy what you're doing and leave something behind. Yes, in years to come you'll be remembered for the legacy you leave behind for others.

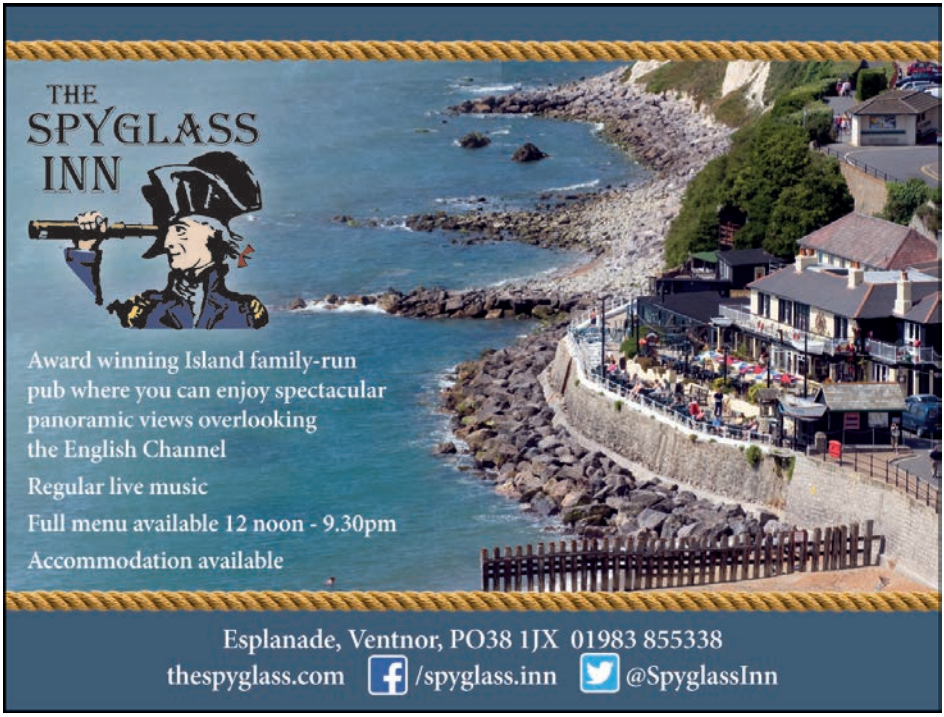
Report of the Annual General Meeting, 2016

The AGM was held on 14th April in the Echium Room. The Chairman's Report for 2015/16 celebrated the success of the Society and thanked those who had worked hard again this year. Grants were obtained by Lucy DeVille and Phil Le May from the John Spedan Lewis Foundation and the Hobson Charity for refurbishing the propagation unit. Sally Peake won £10,000 from the Tesco Bags of Help scheme for a major development of the Hop Garden. Caroline Peel and her committee raised £7,000 at the Summer Party to be shared between the Education Fund and the Tropical House Cladding. We donated funds to buy new plants, to further the Apprentice Scheme and educational support, to refurbish the Potting Shed, recover the poly tunnels and decorate the gardeners' Nammet Room. A programme of talks and workshops, guided tours and voluntary gardening filled our year. Further special thanks were due to Jonyth Hill, Jane Cooper, Rosemary Stewart, Jan Caunt, Jan Morris, David Kelley, David Grist, Colin Smith, Trish Brenchley and to Ros Whistance for her first class editing of our journal, *Ventnorensis*.

David Grist thanked the Chairman, Dr Chris Kershaw, who was not present, for his successful three years as our Chairman and the equally valued retiring Treasurer, Kay Grist. He welcomed new Treasurer, Tim Woodcock, and new Chairman Sally Peake, who outlined her ambitions for the future of the Society and launched the Friends' Foundation Fund. Our President, Brian Kidd, presented Mrs Rosemary Stewart with the Harold Hillier Award for her many years as Hon Secretary.

The meeting was concluded by a presentation by Mr John Curtis about progress in the Garden.

Rosemary Stewart



Claudia Roberts of Glanvilles

The Benefits of a Bequest

Each legacy to the Friends' Society will sow a seed from which a mighty tree may grow, says solicitor and longstanding Friend herself, **Claudia Roberts**

Would you leave your bank account in control of a stranger or make a voluntary payment of tax to HMRC? I am sure not! Yet a vast percentage of people have no (or an outdated) Will, which is equivalent to leaving all your wealth in unknown hands and a big chunk of your wealth to HMRC. This can be avoided by having an up-to-date and well prepared Will.

Furthermore, your Will not only allows you to make sure that your estate passes in accordance with your wishes and in the most tax efficient way, but it also allows you to leave a potentially small, yet very valuable and everlasting gift, by including a charitable bequest to a chosen charity / charities. During a lifetime, a sum like £500 can be a significant amount as, nowadays, there are so many demands on our incomes – rising costs of living, no return on savings, children's and grandchildren's needs, to name just a few. However, on death, a sum of £500 represents a small fraction of most people's estates. Ventnor Botanic Garden (VBG) costs around £1,645 per day to run and the VBG Friends' Society meets some of these costs through their many fundraising activities. With a legacy to the Friends' Society your 'last gift' could help VBG continue to flourish and grow for future generations to enjoy.

When it comes to charitable giving there is, of course, a lot of choice ranging from multinational to very local, and all charities need funds. However in the case of local charities you can be sure that every penny of your bequest goes to your chosen cause. The Friends' Society, like many local organisations, is exclusively staffed by volunteers with no significant costs of administration. So even a small bequest can go a very long way!

Making a charitable bequest has other benefits in that a gift to charity is exempt from Inheritance Tax (IHT) and accordingly for anyone with a taxable estate, 40% of the gift is funded by HMRC. Say your estate is taxable a gift of £1,000 to charity would only cost your beneficiaries £600.

It is also often overlooked that a gift to charity of 10% of the net estate (after Nil Rate Allowances – currently £325,000 per individual and £650,000 per married / civilly partnered couple) will reduce the rate of IHT on the rest of the estate to 36%. This is in addition to the gift to charity being 100% tax exempt.

For example: Mr Liketogive has an estate of £500,000. His tax free allowance is £325,000. Without a gift to charity IHT on his estate would be £70,000. If his Will were to leave 10% net to charity the charity would receive £17,500 and IHT due would be reduced to £56,700 after allowing for charity exemption and the reduced rate of IHT. Consequently the cost of the £17,500 legacy is in real terms only £4,200 to the estate – the rest of the legacy is funded by HMRC.

If you would like to make a Will or review or update your current Will or add a legacy to the Friends' Society contact Claudia Roberts at Glanvilles Claudia.roberts@glanvilles.co.uk or tel. 01983 527878. If you bring a copy of this article and your Friend's Society membership card to your meeting we will give you 20% off our usual fees for preparing your Will/s or updating the same for you. We review Wills free of charge.

See Our Vision, Page 13

BOTANY CLUB

Happy outings for all

For a fiver in the hat, anyone can come along, says **Rosemary Stewart,** as she reports on a year of varied visits

Fresh oak trees in East Knighton Wood

This summer's outings have been varied and full of interest, starting in early May with Knighton East Wood by kind permission of Iain and Nicky Eaton. We were led by Colin Pope through this wonderful, unspoilt Island wood with its swathes of bluebells, fresh green oak trees and delicate spring flowers such as the wood sorrel with its heart shaped leaves. A red squirrel delighted us, high up in a flowering gean tree.

Total contrast was our blustery walk along Bonchurch seafront with Andy Butler to look for Glanville fritillary butterflies and hear some of the problems of the vegetation growing on the cliffside.

Val Gwynn warmly welcomed us to her Wildlife Farm at Shalfleet to see her preserved native woodland and sumptuous wild flower meadows, all planted for pollinators. She told us about the problems of modern farming practice and directives.

On a return visit to Louise Ness at Kingston Old Vicarage we compared her two meadows, one sowed five years ago, and the other sowed a year ago. We discussed the importance of including Yellow Rattle in the mix to help control the vigorous grasses (and we shook some of the dry seed heads to hear them rattle!). Then we walked round her beautiful garden before a delicious tea.

Val Gwynn's meadow

Ian Chadwick and Rob had invited us to tea to hear about the aims and achievements which have led to the success of Eddington House Nursery at St Helens, and we had a comprehensive look at the colourful borders planted with samples of some of the wide variety of the plants they sell.

For our final outing this summer we had a chance to take a last look at Phil Le May's cliff garden before he and Lindy move. After a short steep climb up the steps you come to a wonderland of little areas full of surprises nestling into the Cliffside, with plants spilling down over the rocks. We toasted Phil's special birthday with tea and cake, feeling sad that we should not be visiting again.

Anyone can join in our happy visits. We pay £5 each time to the Friends and have abolished the joining fee since we gave up our link with the CIC. Mainland visits are being discussed for next year too. We usually meet on a Wednesday afternoon but this is flexible. Please let me know if you would like to be included on the mailing list. rosemarystewart@icloud.com or 292107.

Eddington House nursery

Bonchurch cliffs

Red squirrel in a gean tree at East Knighton Wood - courtesy of Colin Pope

Drama in Phil Le May's cliff garden

Eddington House nursery

Crocus planting

Ten thousand Ruby Giant purple crocuses have been planted under the big Scots pine in the centre of the Garden. They were donated by the Rotary Club as part of a Royal Horticultural Society scheme to celebrate the ending of their long-running campaign to eradicate polio. We hope the crocuses will be an additional delight to welcome visitors, and we look forward to saying thank you to Rotary at a Presentation ceremony in the spring when the flowers are blooming. An enthusiastic young gardener came to help Celia and Rosemary finish the planting!

Growing the future

- the VBGFS Award for Horticulture

Just rewards: Caroline Peel with Jaiden Carroll who won the VBGFS Award for Horticulture at Isle of Wight College

Hop picking

Photos by Roz Whistance

Capability Brown at VBG

The Isle of Wight Garden Trust held a 'Capability' Brown Festival study day at the Garden on October 6th. The previous evening, Steffie Shields gave a fascinating talk, illustrated with marvellous photographs from her latest book, *Moving Heaven and Earth* which was published in conjunction with the tercentenary of Brown's birth. Steffie is a very gifted speaker and taught us all how to look for Brown's punctuation of the landscape.*

Wednesday started cold and wet, and after a rather roundabout journey, thanks to Island roads, we mustered in the wind at Appuldurcombe for a short walk round the grounds. Led by Vicky Basford and Philip Masters we were encouraged to use our imagination to conjecture how wonderful the house and garden would have been in Worsley's heyday. The elements soon got the better of us so we repaired back to the warmth and comfort of the Echium room and hot coffee and delicious cake.

Susan Dobbs, the Chairman of IWGT, and Gilly Drummond, the Chairman of Capability Brown 300th Anniversary Festival Steering Group and Patron of VBG, welcomed us to a very packed programme for the day.

Kate Harwood kicked the proceedings off with a marvellous lecture; not only highly informative but also very amusing. All delegates were astounded by how much the landowners at the time had spent on improving and extending their estates.

After an excellent lunch. Steffie Shields then spoke more specifically on Brown's influence at Appuldurcombe and how he had completely changed the landscape and enlarged the estate to make the outlook more aesthetically pleasing. This, of course, included a mandatory Brown folly, Cook's Castle.

Vicky Basford and Philip Masters enlarged on this theme with Vicky's virtual tour, and Philip's talk examining what might have survived of Brown's landscape through the break up of the Appuldurcombe estate in the 19th Century and intensive farming in the 20th.

Caroline Peel

**There are some copies of the book available in the Garden Bookshop.*

Exclusive Christmas Offer for VBG's Friends!

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Harold Hillier Award 2016

The worst kept secret!

It was billed as the worst kept secret, but it's hard to keep anything from the secretary of any organisation – especially one so good at her job.

Richly deserved: Rosemary Stewart receives the Harold Hillier Award from Hon Sec Brian Kidd

Rosemary Stewart, 78, received the Sir Harold Hillier award, the trophy awarded annually to a person considered to have made significant contribution to horticulture on the Island. It was presented by VBGFS president, Brian Kidd, horticultural writer and broadcaster.

Rosemary has been Honorary Secretary of the VBGFS since 2000. "I calculate I have written the Minutes for nearly 150 meetings!" she said in her acceptance speech. "After 17 years as Chairman of the IW Music Centre Friends, I wanted something active with no other responsibilities. But, oh dear, I was soon put on the Friends' Committee and by 2000 I had taken on the secretarial duties."

She has, she said, "seen off" four Chairmen, and seen vast physical changes to the Garden – a grant application resulting in the South African Terraces and the Arid Garden required many hours of typing of plans and figures. The Garden's ownership move from the IW Council to the current CIC has been another change she has embraced, along with new technology – in ways that put younger Friends to shame. Incoming chairman Sally Peake said: "Her self-appointed role as our IT magician means she has made the digital age our friend by ensuring that the rapidly changing world of VBG is communicated to Friends and Volunteers in a friendly and appealing way."

The fact Rosemary is herself a stalwart gardening volunteer means her invitations to get involved are all the more enticing.

One of her many duties had been editing *Ventnorensis,* when it was still printed at Albany Prison. These days it is her photography that enhances its pages, something the current editor is constantly grateful for.

During her acceptance speech Rosemary recalled in 1995 seeing an appeal in the County Press by the then-curator, Simon Goodenough, asking for volunteers to work at VBG. "My husband was going on a sailing holiday so I came to join several others one morning, hoping to be of help and maybe learn something . . . and I'm still here!

Roz Whistance

New members

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

Mr Douglas & Mrs Susan Adams, Windsor
Ms Ama Boisard, Ventnor
Mr Jocelyn & Mrs Alexandra Coad, Bembridge
Mrs Linda & Mr Chris Davis, Shanklin
Mr John & Mrs Tina Dennis, Bembridge
Mrs Dawn & Mr Alex Haig-Thomas, Lotte, Edward and Samuel, East Cowes
Mrs Rosanna Hammond, Freshwater
Ms Fanny Oglander, Brading
Mrs Jenny & Mr Chris Parker, Chale
Mrs Mavis Patterson, Cowes
Dr Colin Pope, Ryde
Miss Elaine Rice, Whitwell
Mrs Caroline Sheldon Blest, Thorley
Mr Chris & Mrs Carol Taylor, Brading
Miss June Victor, Bonchurch
Mr Timothy & Mrs Jacqueline Woodcock, St. Helens.

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse

Chale Show at 90

Even the caterpillars vouched for the quality of Botanic Garden produce, says **Bridgette Sibbick**

It was Sally Peake's idea to enter a stand to celebrate 90 years of the Chale Show. She wanted to show off the Garden produce such as beer and chutneys, and we felt we could extend it to include fresh salads, seeds and mushrooms. There were at least four criteria we had to include so we showed handicrafts in the form of a hop cushion and a piece made from driftwood on which we displayed the seed packets. A neighbour of Sally's kindly made us a Victorian posy; we made bread in flowerpots, packed lunch in glass jars. A beautiful watercolour artwork showed the pond and building with a few visitors!

Growing the salad was a challenge as we didn't have long to experiment and on the morning of collection we discovered a good many small caterpillars feasting on our endeavours!

The standard of entries was pretty high and although we won no prizes we were pleased with the result and thought it did the job we set out to do . . . promote the Garden.

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

Horticulture knowledge not required

Bridgette Sibbick on the unexpected benefits of helping in the Garden

I started volunteering not long after we moved to the island. A friend in Bath where we lived told me about the wonderful garden and gave me lots of information, and when I discovered horticultural knowledge was not required I was delighted – it provided something to do in a new environment, to meet new people and work in an exceptionally beautiful garden.

Working among sheer beauty: iponemea, and the sweep of the Magnolia

A group of us get together on a Wednesday morning to weed, sort seeds, propagate cuttings, pot on established plants and generally help out with whatever tasks need doing. As every gardener knows stuff grows, dies, sulks or spreads – it's a constant learning curve and what a privilege it is to be a small part of a team working in a unique garden.

This year we held a seed swap in February and will do so again next year so I would encourage you to save whatever seeds you can – flowers and vegetables – and come along. We can never tell what excitements will turn up, and it is an opportunity to try growing something new.

Our plant sales in May and recently at the Hops Festival are gradually gaining momentum and we always need more stock, so remember us when dividing, renovating or removing.

Bridgette Sibbick

If you would like to spend some time meeting, greeting and helping visitors to really enjoy their visit to VBG, contact Jane Cooper at 01983 861459 (or kjanecooper@yahoo.co.uk) or Jonyth Hill on jonyth.hill@mypostoffice.co.uk

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