ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

"The Garden has a different character from morning to evening. I like the shapes, the scents and the fact it's not terribly pristine, it's anarchic."

– Guy Eades, Artist in Residence

VOLUME 23 NO. 3 SPRING/SUMMER 2017

Spring/Summer opening times

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

MARCH

22nd, 2pm. Botany Club. The World of Bryophytes, a walk and talk around VBG by George Greiff. Details Page 23.

26th, Mothering Sunday. Lunch in the *edulis* restaurant.

29th, 7pm. Café Botanique 'Out of darkness and into the light: a journey of risk and reward for a plant seedling' with Professor Matthew Terry. Echium Room.

APRIL

2nd, 10am – 4pm. Spring Abundance Workshop with Julie Cole.

7th, 12 noon. April 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.

Easter Half Term Activities.

7th – 23rd April. Children's activities in the Garden and Easter roasts every Sunday in *edulis* restaurant.

20th, 7pm. Annual General Meeting. Election of officers, presentation of 2017 Harold Hillier Award and address by Chris Kidd on the Japanese Garden.

MAY

5th, 12 noon. May Design Walk.

21st. Friends' Plant Sale.

28th. Safari Supper Summer Party. Look out for further details.

JUNE

2nd, 12 noon. June Design Walk

19th – 23rd. Through the Garden Gate. Talks, events, history, activities to celebrate 45 years of VBG. Full programme, see Page 27-28

23rd – 25th Yoga Vibe 2017. A festival of the wealth of great teachers, diverse classes, treatments and healing foods.

JULY

14th – 24th, Secret Message Art Exhibition and Sale in the Garden Gallery. In aid of the Horticultural Apprentice Scheme.

SEPTEMBER

24th Hops Festival 2017. Now in its eighth year, the Hops Festival celebrates the harvest of the hops grown on site at VBG as well as the continuation of the tradition of picking them by hand. Look out for further details.

All dates and booking correct at time of going to press

Front cover: Front Cover: Ash Tree - early Summer by Guy Eades

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Registered Charity No. 1080835

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

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Curator's Notes

How the pier ended up here

In 1870 the Ventnor Pier & Esplanade Co. was formed, and a new 478ft pier was completed in 1873. A landing stage was added in 1881 but this was destroyed by storms, along with 40ft of pier-neck, later the same year. A 650ft, £12,000 replacement pier was opened on 19th July 1887. A £980 pavilion was added in 1906. As the Guyanean tropical hardwoods were bolted into place, little did anyone realise the future these precious timbers would have. By 1981, £750,000 was needed to repair the pier, but fire damaged the structure in 1985 and the pier was demolished in 1992. At this point a new fire raged on Ventnor seafront as the waste timber was being burned. Fortunately the plume of smoke was noticed, and the remaining baulks of timber were rescued, brought to Ventnor Botanic Garden to be reborn as the structural body of the Japanese Terraces.

There is no such thing as rubbish. Sooner or later we will find a use for discarded items, whether it is plywood, rocks or indeed Victorian piers

Groups of Camellia thrive from Phase 1

So far there have been three phases of development in our Japanese Terraces. Simon Goodenough's 1992 terraces were built by a team of disadvantaged adults, who were on a Government scheme. Turning difficult north facing slopes into graded terraces containing acidic soil gave rise to what have now become a dense glade of bamboo and some large groups of Camellia.

The second phase in 2000, to the east, used the remaining Green Heart timber to create a stylised Japanese garden, with architectural features of faux bridges, a false gateway and dry garden pool. Plants in this area were of new introductions from the Far East including Vietnam, Korea and Taiwan.

The third phase began in the winter of 2016/17, more of which you will find further into this issue of Ventnorensis. (See Page 24)
In each chapter of the story of our Japanese Terraces we see some of

the familiar themes that, combined, spell out the essence of Ventnor Botanic Garden: The use of recycled materials – there is no such thing as rubbish. Sooner or later we will find a use for discarded items, whether it is plywood, rocks or indeed Victorian piers.

Volunteer labour – beginning 2017 we have new volunteers helping us rejuvenate the Japanese Terraces [see Volunteering, Inside Back pages]
Plants new to cultivation – pushing the boundaries of what can be grown out of doors in the UK. We have exciting new collections of plants arriving in 2017 from Nagaland, North Vietnam and China.

Ripe for restoration: Opened in 1992

Support of the Friends' Society – once again the Friends have contributed to the development and rejuvenation, just as in 1992, 2000 and every year in between and beyond. This assistance is crucial, but generating the funds is not easy, every pound is hard fought for. The number of our Friends needs to climb, so in 2017 bring someone new to the Society. There is plenty of work to be done; Phase 4 is just round the corner.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will take place on 20th April, at 7pm in The Visitor Centre. After the business of electing officers, our President will present the 2017 Harold Hillier Award. This will be followed by an address by Chris Kidd on growing the Japanese Garden.

Please read Objects, Page 15, and make any response before the AGM.

See Agenda, Page 22.

IoW Rare Plant Fair

Our friends at Eddington House Nursery are holding their Rare Plant Fair on 28th May. This is more than just a chance to wander round the wide selection of locally grown rare plants – including perennials, alpines and shrubs. You will also have the opportunity to hear guest speakers Bob Brown and Marina Christopher on growing the lesser known varieties.

The stunning display gardens are a lovely setting in which to speak to expert local plant specialists – and to partake of the yummy homemade cakes, snacks and light refreshments.

Eddington House Nursery, Eddington Road, Seaview, PO34 5EF.
www.eddingtonhousenursery.co.uk

Chairman's message

As I collect my thoughts for this Spring issue of Ventnorensis, I am hoping (praying!) that the storms forecast for this first weekend of February will not damage our 'about to emerge' magnolia blossom. Members will recall that this event is truly the beginning of the new season at VBG and a herald of miracles to come.

Updating the Constitution In our last issue, you will have read about the Vision of the Friends' Society to work towards modernising our charitable constitution so that we can take on greater responsibility for the Garden in the future. Your Committee has spent considerable time drafting a new set of 'Objects' that will form the framework of our future activities as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and we will be bringing these changes to the AGM for your decision. [See Objects, Page 15]

Thanks to Friends' Funding . . . More exciting than constitutional issues are the improvements that the Friends have been able to finance in the Garden. The Hop Yard project, funded by the Tesco Bags of Help scheme, is nearing completion – the Yard looks smart with neatly mown paths, and the new interpretation boards along the coastal footpath invite passers-by to understand more about our work and, we hope, to venture into VBG and be amazed.

Liz Earle updates Japan Chris and his team of gardeners and volunteers have spent the winter clearing the area at the western end of the Garden in order to revitalise the Japanese Terraces [See Curator's Notes, Page 2 and Japanese Terraces Page 24]. Initially, the Friends authorised half of the £10K expenditure but we are delighted that a £10,000 gift from Liz Earle has enabled us to finance this project in its entirety. Liz Earle has supported the Garden for a number of years but decided this year to channel their charitable giving through the Friends. Other smaller projects will further enhance different areas of the Garden thanks to this Liz Earle donation.

Crocuses: Not so much a carpet as a rug, thanks to squirrel greed. Photo by Roz Whistance

Photograph the furry thieves? The crocuses donated by Rotary and planted under the Scots Pine in the centre of the Garden are a delight, but I was dismayed to see that the squirrels (yes, the dear little families of red squirrels that give such delight) have ransacked the area. Ten thousand bulbs may prove too much for their tiny tummies. Anyone caught capturing the little rascals on their cameras may have the winning photo for the Photographic Competition – don't forget to send in your entry by the end of March. See www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk/photographic-competition/

Australia rocks Those of us who give guided tours of the Australian Garden always enjoy telling the story of the 'coaches under the rock face'. This spring further 'rock creation' will include aboriginal-inspired artwork telling the

story of their flora and fauna, together with the coming of the Europeans. Artecology (previously Ecclestone George) has been contracted to undertake this work, funded by the Friends. 'Dreamtime' will add a new dimension to the Australian immersive experience and add much to the educational value of the area: once again the use of recycled material follows our policy of sustainable development. [See Dreamtime in Australia, Page 31]

Granting Activities for all 'Through the Garden Gate' is a week-long programme of activities designed to draw in the local community to discover how much VBG has to offer everyone. See the programme on Page 27. It is not to be missed!

Secret Art Show Sshhh - Secret Art is coming to The Gallery. This is going to be a very exciting first for VBG. Celebrities and well-known artists have been persuaded to donate original artwork for an anonymous Exhibition and Sale at VBG from 14th - 24th July. I am very grateful to Robin McInnes, Phil le May and Jennifer Parker who are helping me to organise this event. Thanks also to Toby Beardsall and The Arty Card Co who are sponsoring the publicity material. If you would like more information please get in touch with me. [See Page 23]

Sun Recorder Revamp And then there is the 'Sun Recorder' project. Long forgotten, tucked away in an overgrown corner behind the Japanese Terraces, stands an obelisk in its own iron railing. Here stood the Sun Recorder in the hospital era, maintained daily by the Hospital Pharmacist to provide proof of the sunshine hours at Ventnor. The area has been cleared, the railings await their new coat of paint and a beautiful model has been made for us by Rod Williams – and there is an interpretation board to come. Phase 2 of this project will see a digital recorder on the Temperate House roof with a live feed to a display in the Hub.

Some day my plinth will come: The restored Sun Recorder

Volunteers With so much happening, I find myself marvelling at how much time and passion our wonderful volunteers give to support our ventures. To those of you who 'sweepupweedpullbindweedcleanandpackseedshelpvisitorsstick labelsonjarspricebeerbottlestaketoursfeedsquirrelsmendchairsetcetc' a huge Thank You - if you have yet to discover the fun to be had volunteering at VBG we would love to welcome you – there is a job for everyone, young and fit, or older-with-dodgy-knees like me! [See Volunteers, Page 32 and Inside Back Page]

Thank you . . . I would like to thank two people in particular who have made my role even more rewarding. Dean who patiently lets me 'help' him when the job I have taken on really needs a 'Dean', and Chloe whose meticulous record-keeping makes Gift Aid collection a joy and enables the Friends to support Trish and David in their work for VBG.

Get well soon Finally, on behalf of the Friends, welcome back John Curtis. [See Spring Update, Page 8]

Sally Peake, Chairman

Cherries

Choices for the Japanese Garden

The Japanese Terraces envisaged by Simon Goodenough were to become a collection of plants from the Japanese islands that shared the same climatic conditions as Ventnor, in the same style as the New Zealand garden and infant Australian and South African collections.

Flowering cherries: very significant in Japanese culture

With the latter gardens, there is little expectation from most visitors of what these gardens will actually look like. With naming this part of the Garden Japanese Terraces, the visitor has distinct expectations of a garden style. People can conjure a vision in their minds of what a Japanese garden will resemble. The Japanese tradition of gardening has some very distinctive, memorable features. To stray away from these expectations and deliver only the ecological plant display would have been foolhardy, therefore, and a continuous disappointment to our visitors. Consequently we have developed some of the architectural features of the Japanese tradition into this area, as well as some of the plants one might expect to see, for example flowering cherries, which are very significant in Japanese culture.

Not only did the culture of the Far East develop a gardening style that is unique, the Japanese developed their own plant classification too. In Japan the cherries are known colloquially as *zakura (sakura),* and each different cherry has its own prefix, for example *Prunus buergeriana* is known as *Inu-zakura, Prunus incisa* is *Mame-zakura.* Cherries are also classified by their characteristics, for example *Shidare-zakura* – weeping cherry, Yaye-zakura – double cherry. Within species and forms are the cultivars. These were often the common names by which cultivated cherries had been known for centuries, but brought into the accepted botanical horticultural style regulated by the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (ICNCP).

With limited space and hundreds of cherry cultivars to choose from, we have had to, excuse the phrase – cherry pick – which to grow.

Our choice of cherries has been led by three desires: to have a wide flowering period; to represent classic Japanese cherries; and to present the best of these cultivars.

Prunus x subhirtella has to be one of the loveliest flowering cherries. It is unknown in the wild despite parents being from close regions. Its origins are almost certainly from some long forgotten Japanese horticultural master, though crossed in modernity also. It is a small flowering tree that will bloom early in the spring from a graceful, slightly pendulous, habit. It has some gorgeous cultivars. "Autumnalis", as the name suggests, flowers at a time of year one wouldn't expect, the autumn – though true to say there is barely a day of winter that blooms will not be present. The cultivar "Fukubana" deserves special mention as probably the most colourful of the spring flowering cherries, rose-madder in colour and semi double, flowering profusely.

Prunus x subhirtella is a parent to P. "Shidare-yoshino", the other being P. "yedoensis". Raised in Japan in the early 20th century, it has been known by several names in the west, it is notable for its very, very pendulous habit. Branches will often weep all the way to the ground.

Probably the most recognisable of our new cherries to most gardeners is Prunus "Kiku-shidare Sakura", which means Kiku's weeping cherry. It is often confused with another, called Cheal's weeping cherry, which is similar. It has weeping branches covered in very large double pink flowers of a type that were popular on all manner of huge cherry trees in the 1960s onwards. These were often grafted onto a tall "leg" in an unholy horticultural practice called "top working". This creates quite ugly trees of a kind that I always associate with crematoria gardens. You've almost certainly seen them too, the trunk looking outlandishly fat, surface roots pushing up tarmac, or hindering a mower in a lawn. Mercifully, these monsters have all but vanished now. The wood is damn fine burning should you get the opportunity. Indeed do cut one of these down should you find it, the world is better without.

Prunus "Taihaku" is best described by Roy Lancaster in "The Hillier Manual of Trees & Shrubs" (1972). "Great White Cherry. A superb, robust tree up to 12m. Flowers very large, single, dazzling white, enhanced by the rich coppery-red of the young leaves. One of the finest cherries for general planting and perhaps the best of the whites. It is one of the many lovely cherries that owe their popularity to Captain Collingwood Ingram. It was lost to cultivation in Japan, but in 1923, he located a plant, which had been introduced from Japan in 1900, in a Sussex garden. It was reintroduced to Japan in 1932."

Another of Captain Ingram's cultivars is *P.* "Taoyama". This is very floriferous, making a spreading tree over time; it has shell pink semi-double flowers that, though small, are held in sprays that last a long time. Notable in this cultivar is the scent, often absent in flowering cherries, where more petals have been the gains against the loss of fragrance that anyway has always been slight. Finally, *P.* "Shogetsu" is a very distinctive small tree with a broad crown. Its petals are fimbriated (fringed); individual flowers are in clusters on long stalks, much like the cherries of the plate.

Our new cherry plantings can be seen as matched pairs either side of the red Japanese bridge and its decussated riverbed. [See Picture, Page 25]

Chris Kidd

JOHN CURTIS'S SPRING UPDATE 2017

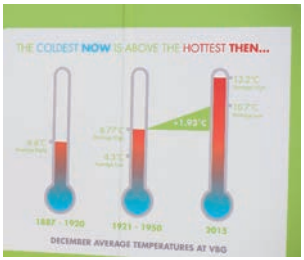
Pushing the boundaries

VBG's Spanish ants and half-hardy survival show botanic gardens teach vital lessons in dealing with global warming

Our New Year's Day Outdoor Flower count was 209, lower than 2016, but dramatically higher than any other UK garden. It is all down to our unique microclimate. The climate conditions we have in Ventnor today will likely be the climate conditions for mainland UK in future under all but the most severe climate change scenarios – the one where the Gulf Stream shuts down and the UK gets colder.

After a heart bypass operation in December 2016 gifted me more time to reflect, I not only missed the microclimate, but I rediscovered its importance in the emerging story of VBG. I will therefore use this update, not to describe the renovation of the Japanese Garden or the new iconic lantern windows in the main building, but rather to revisit the role that VBG, and botanic gardens in general, play in the context of a changing climate.

At the simplest level, VBG is 5°C hotter than the rest of the Isle of Wight and mainland UK. 5°C of warming is increasingly likely as we have already hit 1°C of warming and atmospheric CO2 concentrations of 407.46 parts per million as measured at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii. And that does not factor in the current bluster coming from the new US President backpedalling on the Paris Agreement, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the halt of the Dakota Access Pipeline.



The long term temperature record at VBG stretching back to 1870 and maintained today by Chris Watts [our resident weatherman, see Page 12] shows how much warming has already occurred at VBG. For example, the December average low temperature in 2015 is 1.93°C hotter than December average high temperature in the 1921 to 1950 period. What does this mean for VBG and its plant collection and what does it mean for other ecosystems around the world?

Britain's hottest garden – but the world is catching up

At VBG the microclimate has underpinned the key component of our botanic direction – pushing the boundaries of half-hardiness. We have experimented with not lifting Canna rhizomes and overwintering them in situ, as penetrating ground frosts receded. It worked so well that we moved on to Hedychium gardnerianum just as a virus ravaged Canna nationally. Progressively our attention has shifted to the South American Brugmansia x suaveolens. So what once could not survive the winter, now can. For our gardeners this is climate change in action.

On a global level this means many species will migrate or be displaced. This migration is in rude evidence near us on St. Boniface Down where the chalk grassland replete with lovely orchids has given way to Holm Oaks when land use changed from grazing. Holm Oaks represent invasive climax vegetation whose heavy leaf litter suppresses most floral interlopers in the understory. Alas the orchids are gone. As climate change compels species migration invasive plants like the Holm Oak, Japanese Knotweed and Calystegia sepium (Hedge Bindweed) are gaining footholds and dominating local ecosystems. In the Seychelles the arrival of Philodendron creepers has changed the landscape, literally smothering endemic trees. In a similar way Acacia mearnsii (Black wattle) has invaded South Africa, devouring grassland and gulping scarce water resources. These invaders outcompete the endemic or native plants, irrevocably tipping ecosystems and driving up extinction rates.

So when Science Magazine reported in May 2014: 'The current extinction rate is 1,000 times faster than the average pace in earth's history,' we began to realise that human and climate impacts are not some future unproven hypothesis, but rather observed and alarming existing changes. Because of the plant collection at VBG and how we manage it, some invaders establish their initial UK beachhead at VBG. Dr Colin Pope, our resident biologist, got curious about the seemingly endless narrow trails of ants visible in the northwest corner of the Garden. So he sent some to Germany for formal identification. Their conclusion: VBG has the first known sighting of a Spanish super colony of ants in the UK. And by the way these Spaniards are warring types likely to destroy all other UK ant species. So there it is – species loss right in front of our eyes. We have also studied bees and moths at VBG and the decline in species and numbers are alarming, because they play a key role in pollination.

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), a global initiative, aims to put values on nature so that we make better decisions. For example, no bees means no honey and no pollination and no apple harvest. If we look at the aggregate value of honey and of apples then we can better determine what to spend on protecting the bees. World Biodiversity Day is coming up on 22 May and we shall be participating. As the only UK botanic garden to have a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) inside its boundaries, home to the nationally rare Hoary Stock, we are one of few botanic gardens with a functioning in situ conservation role and as opposed to a programme in a forest in Madagascar. On the Isle of Wight we can also find a few remaining examples of Field Cow-Wheat now largely wiped out by modern agricultural practice and pesticides, creating a local case of inbreeding depression, the ultimate culprit in many extinctions. Inbreeding depression occurs as populations reduce and recessive deleterious traits progressively reduce fitness. Imagine a future where values are put on the elements of biodiversity that can only be protected by botanic gardens. Then botanic gardens will be invaluable.

That is why the Chinese are building four or five new botanic gardens a year. That is why I believe the work we do at VBG is worthwhile and warrants our sometimes extraordinary efforts. When the trials of trying to secure the future of a botanic garden wear me down, I am sustained by this future when botanic gardens and their importance is widely appreciated.

Strobilanthes at Ventnor Botanic Garden

Tracking the origins of a clump growing wild led **Dr Colin Pope** to clarify some confusion arising from misspelled names

Splendid show: Strobilanthes pentastemonoides in the Long Border

Strobilanthes is a showy genus of garden-worthy plants which never fails to attract the attention of visitors to the Long Border during the autumn. There are over 300 species restricted to hill country in tropical and subtropical Asia. However, only a few species are cultivated in this country and they all originate from the Northwest Himalayas. All the species are perennial herbs or sub-shrubs and have blue, purple, yellow or white flowers with five petals joined to form a long, curving tube. They are pollinated by bees or sometimes by moths. Those that can be grown in this country will flower during the autumn. In the wild they grow in scrub and grassland or they carpet the woodland floor.

My story starts with my interest in the native flora of the Island. Dave Trevan, who lives in St Lawrence, contacted me about a clump of *Strobilanthes* which had become established in the wild at Charles Wood, close to his house. I thought that it must be *Strobilanthes atropurpurea* and, as this was an unusual record, I published it in the Botanical Society of the British Isles News journal. It generated interest from Clive Stace, who is the author of the definitive *New Flora of the British Isles* and is working on a new edition, and from John Wood of the Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford, who is an authority on plants in the family Acanthaceae. It would appear that this was the first record of *Strobilanthes* establishing itself in the wild in this country but John Wood was of the opinion that the name of the plant was incorrect; the commercially used names for these plants are frequently misapplied. When the plant came into flower in October, Dave sent him fresh material and he was able to confirm that the plant was in fact *Strobilanthes penstemonoides* var. *dalhousieana.* This is a Himalayan species. The type variety with glabrous leaves is from Nepal and the var. dalhousieana is from North India, and was first collected at Simla by Lady Dalhousie, after whom it is named. This variety is distinguished by its pubescent leaves and is the form most commonly seen in this country.

So far, so good. However, Clive Stace, who wishes to include it in the next edition of the Flora, considered that there was a problem regarding the spelling of the specific epithet. Three versions of the spelling of penstemonoides have been used at different times but, by the International Code of Nomenclature, the original spelling takes precedent. The spelling

of *pentastemonoides* was first used by the original author, Nees, in the 1830s. He was a very prolific writer and as a result, many slips entered into his work. It is considered that Nees made a spelling mistake when he named the plant after the genus *Penstemon.*

This showy plant is grown quite frequently in private gardens in St Lawrence where the conditions seem to suit it, but is not grown widely on the Island. Some years ago, material propagated from plants in the Botanic Garden was sold at the visitor centre and it is likely that this is the origin of many of the plants grown locally as well as the clump that has now established in Charles Wood.

Several species of *Strobilanthes* have been grown in the Long Border in the Garden for many years but their naming has been confused. Three species are listed by Roy Dore of South Wight Borough Council as growing here in October 1986. He lists *Strobilanthes penstemoides, Strobilanthes atropurpureum* and *Strobilanthes isophyllus*, all growing in the Long Border. Our digital Ventnor Living Collections Database has entries for *Strobilanthes penstemoides, Strobilanthes atropurpurea* and an unidentified species growing on the South African Terrace. Because of the confusion with names, I thought that it would be a good opportunity to clarify the situation with John Wood and he has been very helpful. Here then, is the final result as currently interpreted.

Strobilanthes attenuata (Nees) Nees. This is the first one to flower in the Garden, generally in August/September. It forms very showy purple mounds of flowers in the Long Border close to the Walled Garden and the leaves are distinctly corrugated. It has been grown here for over 35 years. This is the one that is usually (incorrectly) sold in this country as *Strobilanthes atropurpurea.* It originates from northern India and Nepal. It self-seeds fairly easily.

Strobilanthes penstemonoides (Nees) T. Anderson var. *dalhousieana* (Nees) Kuntze. This one, also long grown in the Garden, takes over the flowering succession in October/November. This is the one that is starting to establish itself in Charles Wood. It originates from the forests of the Himalayas.

There is also a pale flowered plant grown in the Long Border, as yet unnamed. This may be *Strobilanthes isophyllus,* as listed by Roy Dore.

Winter flowering: Strobilanthes glutinosa on the South Africa terraces

Strobilanthes glutinosa Nees. This is the most unusual of the species grown here and was previously unnamed. It is winter flowering providing welcome and unusual colour in the winter but never in the abundance shown by the other species. It is growing on the South African Terrace but it is actually a plant of the North Indian Himalaya extending into Nepal. Recently, much of it has been cleared from here and propagated to be grown elsewhere in the Garden. It is not hardy in this country and is generally killed back by frosts before it has a chance to flower. However, like so many of our special plants, it grows well here in the Garden.

Weather in the Garden

(October 2016 – February 2017) **by Chris Watts**

In contrast to recent stormy winters, the weather this time round has been mostly quiet and settled. With high pressure persisting, winds have often fallen light: last year, the named storms had reached letter 'I' (Imogen) by early February; this year at the time of writing (late February) we have only got as far as storm 'E' (Ewan). Storm Doris gave a little cause for concern; the rest, storms A, B, C and E passed virtually unnoticed. Rainfall has also been generally light, and although it might seem from the table below, that January was wet, most of the total (80%) fell on five days. Temperatures overall were down on those of a year ago, but nevertheless remained at or above average. To date there has been no air frost: 3rd January and 11th February just escaped, both with 0.1°C.

Easterly winds dominated October, a reasonably dry direction: rainfall equalled that of October 2007, both being the driest Octobers since 1995. The amount falling was just less than a third of the long term average. However there was little to report in November, a month where both temperatures and rainfall were about the norm. Pressure in December was astonishingly high (see table), and reached up to 1045mb on the 28th. Rainfall was only around 40% of the long term average, the driest December since 2001. Temperatures, although not as mild as in 2015, were still well above the average, and this was reflected in the count of plants in bloom (206) taken on New Year's Day.

To look just at the rain total of January, 140% of average, and conclude that it was a very wet month would be to miss half the story. There was in fact a good deal of dry weather around, with dry days outnumbering rainy ones by 18:13. Thirteen rain days is four short of the norm. Of the 18 dry days, 10 came in a block, from the 17th to the 26th. The wettest days were New Year's Day with 25mm, and the 12th with 34mm. This latter day saw an hour of snow falling during the late afternoon, leaving a thin covering on the ground the following morning. A little snow also fell in February during a cold spell (9th-11th) when daytime temperatures struggled to between 3°C and 4°C, and hail showers featured late in the month as the weather turned somewhat more unsettled.

		Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]
2016	*Oct*	*13.2+*	*28.5—*	*5*	*14.3*	*6.9*	*1022mb (+ 8mb)*
	Nov	*8.9*	*95.2*	*10*	*10.1*	*1.4*	*1015mb (+ 1mb)*
	Dec	*8.9++*	*33.9—*	*9*	*8.6*	*3.1*	*1029mb (+16mb)*
	Year	*12.1++*	*790.7*	*112*	*13.0*	*-0.1*	
2017	*Jan*	*6.1*	*124.0++*	*11*	*6.2*	*0.1*	*1024mb (+ 6mb)*
	Feb	*7.4++*	*71.0++*	*13*	*7.4*	*0.1*	*1014mb (- 1mb)*

[1] Lowest temperature °C
[2] Average pressure at 9am and (difference from average)

Preparing the Giant Lily Pond

Rosemary Stewart writes: A couple of weeks ago we were clearing in the Tropical House while Chris was preparing the lily beds with Dean. He had drained the pond, cleaned and swept then filled the planting pots with new compost. Then I was asked to ceremoniously turn on the water again – it takes two days to fill.

Chris Kidd writes: What happens next is essentially we sweat it out. There are a lot of things that have to be done though. The water, once in, has to become hospitable to growth. It is tap water and is too clean, if you will. A few weeks sees it turn more like pond water: we call this conditioning. We know it's worked because algae start to grow and the water gets a green tinge, but this is held in check by the powerful UV filters that sterilise the water every few hours. The planter itself has to settle and get into an anaerobic state, ready to accept the plant. We expect to see some methane bubbling up in a few weeks. We also make sure all the systems are working, replace UV equipment etc. Once we have the plant ready to arrive, we turn the heating on.

The sweating part comes from hoping we have a lily to put in! 2017 is a year when I would hope to be making a new hybrid, so I need both parents. The alternative is to be dependent on other botanic gardens for a spare one from them. If I grow the parents and am successful in making the hybrid, we can be independent for some years. The route to this independence is more tricky, as I have to get both parents.

At the time of writing, I have no lily – full stop. No parents, no hybrid. As per usual, everyone apart from Kew is in the same boat, depending on Kew, and they are having a bad time germinating any. Right now, they only have one and they need two, so all the rest of us are left hanging.

My backstop is that I've shared some F2 seed with my friend at the Staunton Estate and hopefully he'll get some of those to come up. These F2 plants are somewhat variable and have some interesting genetics going on inside . . .

Dear members . . .

The Garden has a strange habit of taking and making local history – see Curator's notes where Chris Kidd describes how the loss of Ventnor's pier was the Garden's gain. Now we're seeing the next phase of both the Japanese Terraces – with thanks to Liz Earle for sponsoring its revitalization – and the Australian Garden. There is so much going on.

This issue of Ventnorensis really shines a light on all aspects of what the Friends are about – growing plants, yes, but also growing friendships and education. It was lovely to chat to the Garden's Apprentice, David Pearce, to sense his enthusiasm for the Garden and for taking what he's learning here to further study. [See Page 19]

He is surrounded by enthusiasts of course, not least his mentor in the Garden, Trish Brenchley. But he's taking cues about Kew from Chris Kidd, and doubtless Dr Colin Pope's insights are inspirational too. See Pope's Plants, page 10.

Of course much of the education remit of the Friends is informal – you might even say by stealth. At 'Café Botanique, speakers talk of all manner of subjects and are as entertaining as they are informative. Rosemary Stewart's fascinating tale of her trip to St Helena is reproduced on pages 16-18.

People seem to fall in love with the Garden, and when I met the Artists in Residence, Carol Ann and Guy Eades, they were brimming over with enthusiasm and excitement as they looked forward to their six months here. Don't miss out on their workshops – see Rosemary's What's On emails – and if you see them in the Garden or in the studio, do have a chat. They won't mind.

I wish them, and you all, a happy and relaxed spring and summer, and look forward to your contributions to the Autumn Edition of Ventnorensis. **Contributions by September 20th please.**

Thanks to Rosemary Stewart as ever for her photographs and editorial guidance, and to Simone Dickens for her beautiful design of this magazine.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Friends' Plant Sale

One of the every-popular Friends' Plant Sales is planned for May 21st. It's a great opportunity to pick up something you've admired from somebody else's garden! Look out for Rosemary's emails which will confirm the date.

The Sale will take place outside the Visitor Centre.

Plant and sow and cut and divide NOW to be ready with your donations.
See Photos, Page 32.

The Proposal to Modernise our Constitution

You will all recall that modernising our Constitution to allow the pursuit of the Vision published last summer was one of the key events required. I have to admit that this aspect of my role as Chairman has been a tough call but I am most grateful to the kind souls who have helped steer your Committee through this period of intense scrutiny.

It is universally agreed that a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) is the way forward and the Charity Commission offers excellent guidance on this that your Committee has considered carefully. It is the 'association' model that we hope to pursue. I commend the Charity Commission website to you for further information.

As with all charities, key to our provision are our 'Objects' and it is these that have required updating in an effort to 'crystal ball gaze' into the future, so we are prepared, in terms of legal status, to take on future challenges should we wish to do so at the time. And herein lies the rub; we need to be prepared to take on 'the management of the Garden' at some future time with all the legal and financial obligations that that would entail but not to be **obliged** to do so.

Are you still with me? Thank you! What follows below is the document describing both current and proposed 'Objects' for your ease of comparison. Within the new 'objects', (a) - (e) have minor amendments to reflect more closely our current activities; clause (f) gives us the freedom to choose an as yet undecided future pathway.

Please let us know your thoughts BEFORE the AGM.

At the AGM, the Committee intends to ask for your approval to pursue an application to move to a CIO using these new Objects. We would wish for the widest possible consultation on this issue. **To this end I am asking if you could send, in writing, any questions arising to our Hon Sec Mrs Rosemary Stewart (rosemarystewart@icloud.com) by Friday 7th April. Hopefully, this will allow time for proper research to make satisfactory answers at the meeting on April 20th.**

Sally Peake, Chairman

VBGFS Objects - new Constitution Discussion

Current: 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 Ventnor Botanic Garden under the direction and with the agreement of the Curator*
- *raising funds for specific projects within Ventnor Botanic Garden*

New: To advance public education in botany, horticulture, ecology and environmental science at Ventnor Botanic Garden, and in furtherance of the objects by:

a) holding lectures, discussions, demonstrations, workshops and seminars
b) maintaining and developing a reference library of horticultural books and journals
c) promoting and encouraging school visits and guided tours to further the education of all age groups
d) giving practical assistance to all the staff of Ventnor Botanic Garden through volunteering opportunities for people with all levels of skills and knowledge
e) raising funds for specific projects within Ventnor Botanic Garden
f) taking over the management of Ventnor Botanic Garden should the opportunity arise

Draft/4a 12th February 2017

Shopping challenge: Looking down The Ladder to Jamestown

ST HELENA - Secret of the South Atlantic

When **Rosemary Stewart** visited the world's remotest inhabited island last year she climbed a challenging ladder, planted a Gumwood tree and found a name familiar to the Friends being fondly discussed

St Helena lies in the South Atlantic – the most remote inhabited island in the world, 1200 miles from Angola and 800 miles from Ascension. Formed by two shield volcanoes 12 million years ago this semi-tropical island measures about 6 x 10 miles. The coast is entirely sheer cliffs and steep valleys, only one of which is wide enough for a small town. The hilly interior is 5°C cooler, rich with semi-tropical vegetation, grassland and forests, dominated by a ridge topped by Diana's Peak at 2,680ft, often covered with cloud, with an annual rainfall of 39 inches as opposed to the coast with five inches.

It was discovered in 1502 by a Portuguese navigator and kept secret for 86 years, used as a supply stop for their trading ships to the Far East. In 1659 the British East India Company finally claimed it, building a fort and a small settlement called Jamestown. Slave trading ships called and the people were joined by many nationalities. In 1815 Napoleon arrived. In 1834 it was taken over by the Crown. In the 1840s many freed sickly slaves were dumped there. In 1900, 6,000 Boer prisoners-of-war were set up in camps.

I sailed there on the Royal Mail Ship St Helena – five days from Cape Town. 'The RMS' is the only way to get there – a much loved, iconic ship bringing everyone, all their supplies and the precious mail. A controversial new airport has been built costing us millions, but problems with a cliff updraft on landing for big jets has put everything on hold and the ship has been recommissioned until 2018. A long ongoing story.

Life on board was relaxed, happy, and entertaining with caring local staff and wonderful food. The Purser organised gentle games or you sat on deck with a book.

Jamestown boasts elegant Georgian residences and cosy terraces built by early settlers, with important buildings like the courtroom and the exotic Castle Garden tucked in beside the Fort. Dating from 1774, St James' is the oldest Anglican Church in the southern hemisphere. New houses are now built on open land at the top of the cliffside, reached by a twisting road or on foot up The Ladder – a flight of 699 steep 11-inch steps built by the military in 1871. The ladder is a 'challenge' for visitors - not so the locals.

A 'challenge' for visitors but the locals climb up with their shopping! The record is just over five minutes. It took me 50!

The people are called Saints, have their own dialect and are 'more British than the British'. Many descend from eastern settlers, from white to all shades of brown and showed a delightful old-fashioned politeness. They love sport, carnivals and bright clothes.

The Suez Canal in 1869 badly affected trade for decades but then from 1907-1966 they grew *phormium tenax,* New Zealand flax, to make rope and twine, particularly to tie up GPO mailbags. It soon covered up to 3,000 acres and destroyed many endemic plants. Inevitably, the plants escaped and still cover hillsides and roadsides.

The Diana's Peak area is now a National Park, the last natural stronghold of the endemic plants. Trees, shrubs and tree ferns thrive, providing microclimates for lichens and mosses. Walking is popular all over the dramatic cliffs but some are pretty vertiginous and you need a guide.

In the 1980s a local, George Benjamin, spotted two bushes of the rare endemic St Helena Ebony on a ridge below a steep cliff. Lowered down on ropes, he took cuttings and now it is the national flower and he is a legend! At Kew he learned to set up a nursery to propagate other endemics and the young trainee sent to help him was none other than Simon Goodenough, previous Curator at Ventnor Botanic Garden!

Simon is still revered at the busy Nursery where they are preparing endemic varieties for landscaping the airport and growing trees for the nearby Millennium Forest. Gumwood trees and ebonies were planted by the local people on a hillside and I paid £10 to plant one too (and one for Simon). Other endemic plants have strange names like He Cabbage, She Cabbage and Babies' Toes!

Sweeping views: From the Millennium Wood towards the Airport

Their National Trust works hard to protect the environment and heritage. There are no indigenous terrestrial mammals, reptiles or amphibians but the 455 endemic invertebrates have unique names such as the Spiky Yellow Woodlouse, the Golden Sail Spider and the Blushing Snail! Sadly the 8cm-long Giant Earwig is now extinct.

The fiercely-protected dainty plover – a wirebird – is the only endemic bird left and lays its eggs on open grassland. Otherwise the noisy imported mynah birds, the peaceful dove, Java sparrows and the snow white fairy terns dominate.

Simon's legacy: VBG's former curator helped establish this Nursery for endemic plants

Mailbag leftovers: Acres of Phormium tenax

What's in a name?: A She Cabbage tree in the George Benjamin Arboretum

The brown noddy, a large tern, makes a cliff nest along with red-billed tropicbirds with their elegant long tails.

Longwood House with its beautiful garden is where Napoleon was imprisoned from 1815-1821. He arrived with his retinue and 2,000 soldiers to ensure he did not escape. He spent his time dictating his memoires and riding out, and, in full uniform, dining on huge amounts of food. His first burial, within four elaborate coffins, was in a most beautiful sheltered valley. In 1840 the British allowed him to be taken to Paris and laid in the great tomb in Les Invalides. All Napoleon sites are owned now by the French Government.

In 1733, seeds of the Green Tipped Bourbon Coffee were imported from Mocha in the Yemen and thrived in one of the purest environments in the world. Napoleon said it was the only good thing about St Helena! The coffee won top prizes at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition. Production is now revived and on sale for £7.25 for 125gm bag but at Harrods it sells at £600 the kilo! Luckily, at the Coffee Bar on the seafront we only paid the normal price for this really delicious drink.

A Welshman married a Saint and set up the most remote Distillery in the world, making a wonderful spirit called Tungi from the prickly pear fruit, sold in bottles 'stepped' in the shape of The Ladder. There are coffee and lemon liqueurs and a 43 per cent gin made from a rare Bermuda juniper, which grows well here.

The Governor lives in a Georgian mansion three miles out of town. Its most famous resident is Jonathan, the giant Seychelles tortoise. At 185 years he is probably the world's oldest living land mammal.

The staple diet here is tuna, tuna fish cake being the residents' special comfort food. On our boat trip 300 pan-tropical dolphins leapt into the air around us and we saw, beneath the waves, a wonderful whale shark.

We also saw the Boer Cemetery, the dramatic High Knoll Fort, and visited the High School. The children take our exams and come to our universities and are tempted to stay, and so the 4,000 population is dwindling. This is why it is so important to offer an air service to increase tourism and give the young Saints an incentive to stay or return more often. Otherwise the island might be in trouble …

For lots more information see http://sainthelenaisland.info/visitors.htm

David Pearce: Planting - fun. Propagating - not so much

The Apprentice

Meet David Pearce, VBG's Friend-financed apprentice. He spoke to **Roz Whistance**

"I've been working here for about 10 months. I work at the Garden five days a week, and one Sunday every three weeks on a rota basis with Chris and Dean.

I'm studying at IW College, but I don't go into College, my tutor comes to me every month. She sets me work to do for the next month, and recently she's been giving me worksheets for the modules I have to complete.

The format would be different if I were just studying at College – they have loads of coursework. I just get test papers and my tutor marks them and brings them back. That's because I'm getting hands on experience, and because I'm at the Garden so much. They really can't afford to have me gone for a day. They thought I'd be ok with studying in this way because I've already been to University so I have quite a good attitude to studying.

I did environmental science at Bangor University. I only stayed for a year, because I didn't feel I was getting anything out of it. I decided to come home and do this instead.

My favourite jobs in the Garden are arranging planting. It's about imagining what the plants are going to look like in the future, and colour arrangements as well. How they fit in, and their heights too. Trish [Brenchley] does a lot of that so I can learn a lot from her.

One of my least favourite jobs is propagating 3000 eucalyptus plants. Propagating in bulk, doing the same thing for three days in a row, is understandably boring. Some people seem to enjoy it! I just let my imagination go into its own zone and whizz away into the clouds when I'm doing propagating.

Because we only have three full time staff, I get to do a lot of jobs you wouldn't expect to be doing as an apprentice. I sometimes take on jobs like the sales area, the mushroom caves and the tours. I think it is a lot better here than it would be anywhere else. A lot more experience.

The Garden is very special because there are very specific types of plants – though if I went to a different garden I probably wouldn't know half the plants there! We really specialise in exotic plants – Chris's idea is why grow a plant you can grow everywhere else when we can grow all these special ones. So we've got all the fancy stuff and not a lot of simple stuff.

For the future, I'm not 100 per cent sure but think I'd like to go to Kew or Wisley to do the Level 4 Diploma in horticulture or botany. I think I'd like that because I like the science side of it, and I'd like to go into it in more depth. So that would give me the qualifications to do something really good in horticulture as well. I keep hearing about Kew from Chris.

My course here could be done in a few months, but then there's a plan to do the RHS qualification as well, which could take a year. Typically an apprenticeship takes two years.

While I don't have much time for the written work it's good to feel a sense of responsibility – I'm here to learn, but at the same time I feel I'm quite key to the running of the business. In that way it's very different to lots of apprenticeships. Better."

Artists in Residence

On the eve of their tenure as resident artists **Carol Ann** and **Guy Eades** are brimming with anticipation and excitement, finds Roz Whistance

From April Carol Ann and Guy Eades will be Ventnor Botanic Garden's official Artists in Residence. They will be making art both in the studio and around the Garden, holding workshops and displaying their work in the gallery. Some of the work they produce will be on sale, too.

Carol Ann is infectiously excited as she and husband Guy prepare to begin their six-month tenure. "I go to the Garden and it's just brimming with creativity. Everywhere you look you think 'I could to that, I could do that . . .'

All around her in her home studio are examples of the sort of work she will be doing. A textile artist, she will be working in particular with indigo dye and shibori, a traditional Japanese technique. "I'm going to produce a natural indigo vat which I will try to keep going for six months. I've heard that indigo has been grown near to the Botanic Garden so there's a tenuous link! And I do a lot of shibori stitching and dyeing which I'll develop over the six months."

Guy adds: "There's a natural affinity between the Garden and the whole making of textiles and dyeing because most textiles come from plant fibres anyway, and also dyes were of plant origin."

As for Guy, his time in the Garden will be spent painting and drawing. A watercolourist and oil painter, Guy is the Director of Healing Arts at St Mary's Hospital where he introduces the arts to patients to promote health. Couldn't spending his weekends in this way be seen as something of a busman's holiday?

"No, I've always wanted to spend time in the Garden making paintings and drawings, but life takes over. It will be my opportunity to be disciplined and paint what I see. In return I will produce a large oil on canvas to give to the Garden. I don't know yet what the paintings will be – other than broadly of flowers and trees. They may be figurative, and they'll be about colour and pattern."

They each plan to run two workshops during their time to allow visitors the chance to share the Garden's inspiration. "One of my workshops will be exploring art through trees, and the other will be about colour and flowers," explains Guy. His paintings capture the essence of a detail or a landscape by use of bold strident colour and freeflowing movement and share space with Carol Ann's textile art in their home and studio.

Carol Ann is an experienced teacher, having recently retired from teaching art at St Georges School, but it was a recent trip to Japan

Guy Eades's Paintings from top left: Arreton Valley Towards Sandown Bay
Apple Tree in Blossom
Ash Tree, Early Summer

that inspired her current love for indigo dyeing and shibori. "Shibori is a method of stitching, folding, binding and clamping of fabric to create pattern, and then resist dyeing.

"When it's dipped in the vat – it's so magical – it comes out iridescent green. And in the sunshine it gradually changes from green to the deepest blue. It is so exciting!"

Her excitement is contagious, particularly when she opens a pot of the raw dye, an almost living black-blue substance that shines like coal. The results, bundles of fabric having been stitched and dyed, are picked open to reveal extraordinary patterns.

Some stitched works, she can't bear to pick open "because they're like sculpture" and indeed seeing the effects of traditional stitching and folding into cotton and silk opens the mind to all sorts of possibilities. "I'm thinking of giving everyone at the workshops a scarf-shaped fabric for them to pleat or stitch," she says.

A particularly striking piece creates the movement of the sea by its undulating shades where the dye has been resisted by folding or wrapping. It was finally hand stitched with a running stitch called sashiko. Other pieces are wrapped round rusty objects to create a different affect.

Carol Ann will also use what the Garden offers to experiment with natural dyeing. "I'm going to be working with the beautiful old fig tree, I don't know how yet, and with Eucalyptus. That's going to be my direct link with the Gardens."

Carol Ann and Guy won't be in the Garden every day but will make it known when they'll be about, and both look forward to meeting visitors, showing what they're up to and explaining their particular activity. "It was the Open Studio workshops we did last year that gave us the idea to talk to John [Curtis] about the residency," says Carol Ann. "That was such a huge success. We had so many people who came to paint and draw and do textiles."

She may also use photosensitized fabric to transpose the shapes of actual leaves and flowers. "I can't imagine anyone who goes through the Garden and isn't inspired by it," she says, and Guy adds: "It has a different character from morning to evening. I like the shapes, the scents and the fact that it's not terribly pristine, it's anarchic. Not everything is labelled which I like – it's a mystery."

Neither of them are making set-in-stone plans for their six months' residency, beyond gathering the practical materials. "The point is being there and letting the environment influence what we do. Even if it rains it won't be a disaster – it'll be like being in a rainforest," says Carol Ann. "Sometimes I go to the Garden and think 'It's not going to happen today and suddenly it is as if it has grasped you and you can't explain it."

Carol Ann Eades's work, top, from left: Photosensitised fabric leaf images: 'Blue Storm': Studies in indigo

AGENDA for the AGM of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

to be held on Thursday, 20th April 2017 at 7.00pm
in The Visitor Centre, Ventnor Botanic Garden

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th April 2016
4. Report of the Executive Committee
5. Financial Report and Accounts for 2016
6. Subscriptions for 2018
7. Membership Report
8. Application to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation
9. Election of Officers: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer
10. Election of Executive Committee (not more than 10 members)

Rosemary Stewart, Hon Secretary

DISCOUNTS for members

The following supplier has 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.**

Deacons Nursery — Moor View, Godshill: 10% discount.

Data protection

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

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

Shh!! You don't know who

You love it, you buy it and then you find out who created it. It's a Secret Message Art Exhibition run by the Friends' Society.

You might pick up a beautiful pen and ink drawing, a watercolour, a collage or even an original poem. Each work will be A5-sized and will be signed on the reverse. That's when you'll discover who has created your original piece of art – it may well be a celebrity who has Island connections. All pieces will be sold for £50.

Original art in any medium and of any subject will appear in the Secret Message Art Exhibition, which will run from 14th to 24th July in the new gallery at Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Proceeds from the sale will support the Horticultural Apprentice Scheme. The current Apprentice, David Pearce, is well on his way towards a career in horticulture, thanks to funding from the Friends, which has as one of its core functions the promotion and support of horticultural education in both children and adults. [See The Apprentice, Page 19]

Secret Message Art Exhibition, 14th – 24th July

Botany Club *Hurry to put the first date in your diary!*

Just turn up, donate a fiver and enjoy a relaxing and informative afternoon. Our first Botany Club is on Wednesday, 22nd March at 2pm at the Visitor Centre.

George Greiff, a student who is extremely interested in the fascinating world of bryophytes - mosses, hornworts and liverworts – will give us a talk and a walk around VBG to find the specimens on our home ground.

He says: "I would aim for an introductory walk not to be too taxing taxonomically. Mainly, the excursion will open people's eyes to the world of these small plants. Hand lenses or magnifying glasses would really help to see the true beauty of these plants."

If you have a spare hand lens it would be useful to lend to those who do not own one.

We could finish the afternoon with tea and cake in the Plantation Room! We hope to see you there.

Other Outings

At the time of going to press we are still planning the rest of the programme for this summer. So far we have arranged a Chalk Downland walk on Afton Down with Andy Butler (June) and an afternoon identifying grasses and reeds with Colin Pope (July). We also hope to have an outing to a site on the mainland.

The Friends are also planning another Moth Night at VBG open to all.

Rosemary Stewart and Chris Kershaw

Restoring the Japanese Terraces

Storms, serendipity, hard work and Friends' funding have enabled **Chris Kidd** and his team to finish a plan begun long ago

In Curator's Notes [Page 2] I mentioned three phases of development (so far) in our Japanese Terraces. As we start 2017 it is heartening to see we are well into Phase 3. Back in 2000 we ground to a halt with our development as the reclaimed hardwood from Ventnor Pier ran out, funds ran out and the shade of Sir Harold Hillier's windbreak blocked the sun out. In the intervening years we've not had any new piers donated to the Garden, but the Friends have generated some funds and Sir Harold's windbreak has all but gone thanks to successional storms.

Replace and repair: Original faux bridge

The gradual demise of the *Cupressus macrocarpa* windbreak saw us struggle to remove all the trees in a timely manner. It seemed that most of the winter 2015/16 was spent chain sawing and wood chipping on precarious slopes. Once the most windward tree falls, the leeward trees are more vulnerable to new storms; we saw an infernal conifer domino topple in action. The last blow of 2016 caused mayhem that we couldn't fully deal with until now, by which time it was clear that a great opportunity was to be had after the clear up.

Since funding was agreed by the Friends to enable this phase to begin, we have tidied the remnant windbreak using a hydraulic cherry picker. Twisted, torn, broken or dead wood has been removed. We have felled remaining badly damaged trees, and removed their stumps. To the south of the terraces we have removed all the antiquated, non-Japanese or far eastern plants dating back to Hillier days. We have removed advancing aggressive shrubs and weeds, and cleared ground for planting and re-establishment of lawn. It was good to see Simon Goodenough here in November and show him the completion of a mission we had begun long ago.

Of the two Japanese bridges, only the eastern zig-zagged bridge functioned as a bridge since it was completed. Over time the softwood handrails had made us close it down as unsafe. Regular visitors will know well the serpentine Wisteria that corkscrews around it and upwards to the trees above. We have now begun repairs to this bridge, removing decayed timbers and replacing with new. An initiative from Dean was realised when, by removing a short length of path behind the bridge, we have slowed the footfall through this area, so now the visitor passes over the bridge as part of the journey.

In Japanese mythology, evil spirits pass only in straight lines, so a zig-zag bridge prevents all but the pure having access through to the next plants.

The Western bridge was fake, made to look like a bridge with a dry stream underneath, and it only had one side, the other simply a continuation of the existing path from 1992. From the outset of Phase 3 it has been the intention to correct this forgery. Once the windbreak was removed, we continued the dry steam bed upwards to the top of the bank and filled it with pebbles. These now flow beneath the bridge, which has been fully recreated and is now functional: we removed broken handrails for replacement with treated hardwood (oak), and a complete new deck. We are painting the bridge a lacquered red, and have maintained the handrail overhanging detail from the original.

Twists: serpentine Wisteria corkscrews around original bridges

We have created a flight of steps descending from one end of this bridge to improve access. Atop £1000 worth of Cornish cobbles completing the riverbed, we have created a rustic bridge. This new and third bridge utilises the felled tree trunks from the windbreak. Serendipity played its hand after we spent time clearing the area around the Victorian sun recorder. [See Chairman's Message Page 4] This was outside of the scope of works for which the Friends committed funds, but in doing so we found it lines perfectly with the dry riverbed and will form a destination at the end of the axis.

There is a large area to be planted amongst the remaining specimens after rationalisation. We have the return of some re-propagated plants, as well as new introductions collated in 2016. Many are new to cultivation or new collections from the wild. Since 2000 the Japanese Terrace has been open to accepting plants outside of strict geographical boundaries, so we have plants from parts of the Far East that share our climate type, from areas such as Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam. It's exciting to consider these will be the champions of the future. We are also introducing plants that are familiar to the Japanese gardening style, so there will be flowering cherries along the banks, planted in symmetry.

Still waters: River of Cornish pebbles beneath the newly-built bridge – zig-zagged to prevent evil spirits crossing. New cherry trees have been planted behind

The sum of money requested from the Friends for this project has now been exceeded, a total of £10,000 has now been agreed in support to finish this phase of development.

Photographs by Roz Whistance

STAY IN LUXURY ON VENTNOR BEACH

Ventnor Seafront Beach Houses consist of three luxury beach houses, each with four bedrooms sleeping up to ten people. With stunning views across the English Channel and your own private parking space, it is the ideal place to enjoy your break. New apartments available from June 2017!

To keep up-to-date on our special offers and to book, contact us on:
VENTNORSEAFRONT.CO.UK | 01983 855010

Through the Garden Gate

A celebration of 45 years of VBG

Last autumn, the Friends applied for a Big Lottery grant to celebrate an event in our community that would draw people together who haven't visited the Garden since changes and improvements, and showcase all the good things that have inspired us over the last few years writes Sally Peake.

We called our project 'Through the Garden Gate' and then set about planning a series of events for the midsummer week leading up to the successful YogaVibe weekend – the aim being to attract a new audience to try out a range of (mostly free) activities at VBG whilst not affecting the income stream that VBG depends on for its very existence.

The following programme of events, fully funded by the **Big Lottery Fund,** should appeal to a wide cross-section of our Island community - so Celebrate!!

Monday 19th June: An evening of talks, **VBG Then & Now** gives a brief history of the Garden, and **Restoration and Future** tells the story of the past five years and plans on the horizon. Plenty of time during the interval to sample the VBG Ales and perhaps a light supper*

Tuesday 20th June: Another **talk** but this time **on the hoof;** curator Chris Kidd will tell us some of his wonderful stories highlighting, in particular, the huge **diversity of sexual and asexual reproduction** employed by members of the Plant Kingdom. As he talks he will leads us on a tour of the Garden – a summer delight. Supper can be pre-booked in edulis to conclude the evening*

Wednesday 21st June: **VBG's 45th Birthday.** On this very day in 1972 Lord Louis Mountbatten officially opened 'Steephill Pleasure Gardens with special botanic interest'.

We are delighted to have our very own **Lord Lieutenant, Major General Martin White to 'cut the cake' at a tea party** to reunite individuals and families from the past. Please keep an eye out for the Friends' invitation* to join us.

To celebrate this momentous day we plan to **greet the sunrise** on this longest day of the year with **meditation,** sound immersion and a **community choir (A Dawn Chorus)** followed by a healthy **breakfast*** before getting on with our day.

Greet the sun: Celebrate the longest day

Thursday 22nd June: An early evening event for the **children** with their families. We have an art installation planned for the campsis arbour and a **storytelling trail** with Island authors reading their own books to children, followed by a **Teddy Bears' picnic** (first 50 children free).

Friday 23rd June: As a lead-in to the YogaVibe weekend we hope to

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have a series of **taster exercise classes** run by regular tutors to VBG plus the opportunity to join our Gardening Volunteers to **'Buddy with the Bindweed'** – an activity that we all recognise as being part of June at VBG!

And to finish the week we shall have some free places to offer for the **YogaVibe** weekend plus a free **crèche** to give those constrained by small children or other dependants the chance to join in the sense of well-being that is at the centre of the spirit of VBG.

For more details of YogaVibe contact Sian Austin at VBG. **Watch out for email updates from Rosemary and VBG so that you don't miss anything.** Has Rosemary got your email address? And, if you would like to help please get in touch with Sally Peake.

** Items marked will have an additional cost*

Stock up now! Find something new at the Friends' Plant Sale

Summer Party Winner *VBG@Home*

One of the items up for auction at the Friends' Big Summer Party last year was VBG@Home, and Susan Dobbs put in the winning bid. Here's what she says:

'I was delighted to make the winning bid for VBG@Home at the summer party in May last year. My husband's face was a picture! However, it was money very well spent. Trisha and her enthusiastic team of secateur-brandishing apprentices and interns arrived in force on a lovely sunny October day – all seven of them. I had listed and photographed the plants that mattered, and under Trisha's eagle eye no mistakes were made. We had a convivial lunch in the garden and by 4 o'clock we had all had a very instructive gardening learning experience and my over stocked and over grown garden could breathe again.'

Wildlife Trail Clear

Good news! The wildlife trail is now clear from the bottom of the Hop Yard following a good session with the flail mower. This concludes the work funded by Tesco Bags of Help. See next page for other Bags of Help news.

Success story

Conrad Williams has been offered a full-time post as Junior Arborist with Sir Harold Hillier Gardens at Romsey. He visited us at VBG to tell us the good news and thank his friends for all the support and advice they have given him over the past couple of years. Friends will recall that Conrad was a stalwart volunteer at VBG who was then funded by the Friends to continue working at the Garden prior to gaining a place on a 1 year Arboriculture course at Sparsholt. We wish him every success in his new post.

Sally Peake

Wreathed in smiles

The annual pre-Christmas wreath making workshop was enjoyed by Friends and their friends.

Future Events

The annual **Summer Party** will be on Sunday 28th May, with a slightly different theme this year. A Safari Supper!

To be confirmed: **An evening with Dillie Keane** in October. Dillie is the brains behind the satirical musical trio 'Fascinating Aida', and she has kindly and generously said that she will come and entertain us.

There will be a VBGFS presence at the Eddington House Fair on Sunday 28th May and also the Eastcliff Garden opening in Bembridge on 4th June. (Date to be confirmed).

If you would like to know more, or would like to help with any of these events please contact Caroline on 872375/carolinepeel@aol.com

Information Boards

With part of the Friends' grant from the Tesco Bags of Help award to improve the Hop Garden there are now **shiny new information boards** installed - one at the gate to the coastal path at the top of the Japanese Terrace steps, one at the top of the Hop Garden and one giving information about wildlife, overlooking the site under some magnificent trees on the footpath itself, a little east of the gate.

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Dreamtime in Australia

Plans are afoot to take the original bold and innovative conception of the Australia Garden to the next stage. **Chris Kidd** outlines the vision

When the Southern Hemisphere Garden was developed with matched funding from the ODPM and VBGFS the vision was to use artificial rocks to landscape the south-facing flank. These were to be much larger, coloured red, and featuring Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' artwork to explain the ecological story of Australia. The shortsightedness of the Isle of Wight Council curtailed this.

The artificial rocks that were created are now glimpsed through a naturalistic stand of Eucalyptus, as hoped. This area is a particularly successful immersive experience, but the lower part of the bank is now too shady for plants to succeed. The result is a hiatus in display, and will only continue to become shadier. Removal of trees is not an option: their success is the success of this part of the Garden.

The plan now is to partially restore the original vision in the shady area, and build new, smaller, rock faces upon which to include the Aboriginal artwork and tell the story of Australia's native ecology, and how it was originally in balance with man, but not so now.

Every effort will be made by Island-based firm Artecology (formerly Eccleston George) to maintain the accuracy of the geological detail and Aboriginal artworks and to make the as aesthetically close to the real article as possible. The artwork will include ships, people, animals and abstract 'dreamtime' designs, all depicting the arrival of the first Europeans to Australia.

The finished work will give purpose to what has become a difficult area to cultivate, it will be a new feature, and will act as an educational pause point in the journey through the Garden. Photographs courtesy of Artecology

New members

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

Susyn Andrews, Tiverton
Jane Clark and Will Ambrosini, Carisbrooke
Mrs Patricia Lockwood, Chale Green
Dr Roger and Mrs Jules Matthews, Shanklin
Mrs Belinda and Mr Geoff Walters, Brook
Mrs Annette Wilkinson, Ventnor

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse

Volunteers are raking it in!

Potting up in the Greenhouse

Volunteers and gardening staff saying goodbye to popular gardener Laura (centre, in black) last September, wishing her well in her new job at the IW Zoo.

Welcome: Jonyth Hill and Patricia Smith at the Volunteer Fair in January

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

VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

WHERE ARE YOU HIDING?

We need YOU to VOLUNTEER!

Hoppy times: Meet and mingle when you give time to the Garden

"It's lovely having a big garden to 'play' in!" one of our regular volunteers was heard to say. "Then when I've finished I can pack up and leave it to somebody else!"

People volunteer for all sorts of reasons – a passion for gardening, exercise, companionship – and in all sorts of areas – be it potting up, sweeping up or rounding up a group of visitors to tell them about the Garden's history. Volunteering isn't just about getting your hands dirty!

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, kjanecooper@yahoo.co.uk or Jonyth Hill on jonyth.hill@mypostoffice.co.uk. For seed cleaning, potting and other gardening jobs contact Bridgette Sibbick on 867739 or just turn up on Wednesday mornings at 10am.

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