ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'I was asked to put a name to this Abutilon. For the first and last time I have ignored convention . . .'

Chris Kidd, Curator. *See Page 6*

VOLUME 26 NO. 2 AUTUMN/WINTER 2019

Autumn/winter opening times

10am till 4pm 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

OCTOBER

30th 2pm. Botany Club in the Garden. Meet outside the Visitor Centre for Fungus Foray.

NOVEMBER

1st 12 noon. Design Walk. Join us for a topical walk through the Garden with CIC Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd. Have your say on changes being made in the Garden.

3rd 12 noon. Botanic Dream Wedding Fair. Volunteers needed to show couples the delights of the Garden.

21st 3.30pm – 6.30pm Christmas Shopping Event. Members, Friends and Volunteers can make a start on their Christmas Shopping and receive 20% off their bill at the till. Garden Guests will have 10% discount. Mulled wine, mince pies and music to get you in the festive spirit.

DECEMBER

1st 10.00am – 1.00pm. Christmas Wreath making workshop with artist Carol Ann Eades. Book your place. In *edulis*.

2.00pm – 5.00pm. Christmas Wreath making workshop with artist Carol Ann Eades. Book your place. In *edulis*.

6th 12 noon. Design Walk. Join us for a topical walk through the Garden with CIC Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd. Have your say on changes being made in the Garden.

11th. The Friends' Society Christmas Lunch. See details Page 23.

JANUARY

3rd 12 noon. Design Walk. Join us for a topical walk through the Garden with CIC Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd. Have your say on changes being made in the Garden.

FEBRUARY

7th 12 noon. Design Walk. Join us for a topical walk through the Garden with CIC Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd. Have your say on changes being made in the Garden.

Almost daily the Garden hosts classes such as Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi and Qigong. See the website for details: www.botanic.co.uk/whats-on/

Data protection

The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) mean that we cannot pass your details to the Garden marketing staff so, to hear ALL the Garden news and events taking place at VBG please go to the website and scroll down to the bottom of any page to find the SIGN ME UP box. You can also read their Privacy Policy. www.botanic.co.uk

Front Cover: Abutilon. Liza Roja. Photograph by Chris Kidd

All dates and booking correct at time of going to press

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

President
Brian Kidd

Chairman
John Bagshawe - 731799

Vice Chairman
Jane Clark - 533256

Treasurer
Tim Woodcock - 872519

Secretary
Jenny Parker - 730668

Membership Secretary
Caroline Peel - 872375

Publicity
Rosemary Stewart - 292107

Events
Caroline Peel - 872375

Editor Friends' Website
Colin Smith - 856578
Email: smith3c@hotmail.com
www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

***Ventnorensis* Editor**
Roz Whistance - 753090
rosalind.whistance@gmail.com

Gardening Volunteers
Wednesday mornings 10 am
Bridgette Sibbick - 867739

Curator
Chris Kidd

Garden Address
Ventnor Botanic Garden
Undercliff Drive, Ventnor
Isle of Wight. PO38 1UL
Telephone: 01983 855397
Fax: 01983 856756

Contents

Regulars

Curator's Notes ..... Page 2
Chairman's Message ..... Page 4
Plant Profile - Abutilon ..... Page 6
John Curtis's Autumn Update ..... Page 8
Weather in the Garden ..... Page 14
Editor's Letter ..... Page 15
Pope's Plants – Juniper ..... Page 16
Botany Club ..... Page 18

Notice board

Dates for your Diary ..... Facing Page
Book Emma Tennant film ..... Page 3
Christmas Wreath Making ..... Page 13
Volunteering ..... Page 15 and Inside Back
Calendar for 2020 ..... Page 17
AGM and Harold Hillier Award .. Page 21
Members' Discounts & Benefits ..... Page 22 and 25
Christmas Lunch ..... Page 23
New Members ..... Page 32
Honorary Members/Patrons ..... Page 32
Fees and Foundation Fund ..... Page 32

Special Features

Award to Chris Kidd ..... Page 5
Emma Tennant interview ..... Page 10
New Species Spotted ..... Page 23
Secret Art ..... Page 24
Meet Dr Peter Coleman ..... Page 26
Hop Picking ..... Page 28
Health and Wellbeing ..... Page 31

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recycle

VBG makes history

The rare event of a bloom on our Cycads, *Cycas revoluta* has gained national attention and proves the globe is warming, says **Chris Kidd**

It has been very interesting to see how much attention has been given in the media to the second time we have had cones produced on our Cycads, *Cycas revoluta,* at VBG. The second happening of any event usually doesn't grab much attention, but as soon as *The Guardian* picked up our story the rest of the world seemed to be following close behind. Of course, *The Guardian* is strongly positioning climate change stories, its editorial stance long established, referring to the unfolding extinction catastrophe as a climate emergency. This is an escalation of magnitude amongst a media still not unified by facts in an alt-truth era. I answered inquiries from three continents at all hours with well-rehearsed lines about the plants showing us changes in climate more clearly and inalienably than statistics, which are open to debate and interpretation.

Media storm: Cycas revolute blooms again. Male flower

Our third cone appearing simultaneously with the second, and being female to its male, gave us opportunity anew to hand pollinate these extraordinary plants. As I was carrying out this act with Max Silvers, our intern from Texas, Max answered a question from a visitor as to what we were doing, saying: "It is the first time in human history that this has happened". I found this extraordinary statement quite bold, as did the open-jawed visitor, as Max furtled in the male cone with secateurs. I've mused on the statement since, and its power, and conclude it is appropriate to the situation we are in locally and globally.

'It is the first time in human history that this has happened'

It's a statement that could have been used when I pollinated *Iris collettii* at Kew in the 1990s, but the truth is that particular pollination could have been undertaken at any time. *Iris collettii* could have been pollinated by hand quite easily, were it cultivated in a protected glasshouse situation where all conditions are mastered by man. It was simply

Female plant. Photographs by Rosemary Stewart

new to cultivation; hence anything anyone did with it was a first, from watering to deadheading. The difference with our Cycads is that they are now growing, and potentially reproducing, in the UK – albeit at the forefront of the future in our Ventnor microclimate, for the first time in 60 million years. There are fossil Cycads in the cliffs at Blackgang, bearing stony, irrevocable evidence of primitive cones from a CO^2-rich prehistory.

This happening is as a result of changes to the climate which we can argue and prove. Before Simon Goodenough's tenure, Hillier tried unsuccessfully to establish Cycads, which died in 1986. Simon tried again, and these plants didn't succeed. We both tried again in 2005 and those plants are still with us. It's a pattern we have established with a number of genera, and people are taking notice.

Aside from our media theatrics, our story has attracted a group of students from Longwood Botanic Garden in the USA who chose Ventnor to study the evolution of a modern botanic garden that is leading the way with sustainability. The Longwood visitors' purpose: an opportunity to explore traditional and contemporary garden design, significant plant collections, natural history, and sustainable production techniques of the UK. I hope they are enlightened by our Garden and its story.

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY! BOOK NOW!

Meet Emma Tennant at Ventnor Botanic Garden

A very special event will take place on **Wednesday 18th March,** when renowned botanical artist, Emma Tennant, will talk about her meticulous and much lauded paintings.

She will bring a pop-up exhibition of some of her wonderful paintings, and Ben Wood, Isle of Wight resident, photographer and film maker, will be screening his recently-made documentary film, *Emma Tennant, Artist and Gardener.*

Emma has generously waived her expenses to support the Friends – and will make a donation for sold paintings.

The evening begins at 6pm and will finish at 8.30pm. Tickets can be reserved at £20, to include a glass of wine and canapés, from Sally Peake, Tel 731403, or email sallye.peake@btinternet.com

Book now before the event is opened to non-members! *See interview, Page 12*

Chairman's Message

Staff and volunteers have made the Garden gorgeous, says **John Bagshawe,** and visitors are appreciating their efforts

Looking back over the summer, I feel that the Garden itself has gone forward, and in a really positive way. There has been so much effort put in by the Garden staff, and what with additional numbers of staff, together with an increasing number of volunteers, I don't think the Garden has looked better since I have been volunteering.

I have been told by some volunteers that comments they have received from visitors have been really positive and one of them who has been volunteering since before John C took over the reins says he has never seen the Garden looking so good. I can only thank all those concerned who have helped to make it a wonderful summer.

There have also been the other volunteers behind the scenes who have done a wonderful job. You do not always see their efforts but without those volunteers the Garden wouldn't be as it is.

In other news, there may be hope concerning the Visitor Centre's lift. We have a new volunteer with an engineering background who is looking into seeing if the lift can be repaired. Fingers crossed.

Licensed to drill

Apprentice Adam (left) and George display their tractor-driver certificates, surrounded by some of our gardening volunteers. If you'd like to weed, plant and learn about growing why not volunteer at VBG?

Kew accolades for Chris

Many congratulations to **Chris Kidd,** our curator, who has been awarded the Kew Guild's George Brown Memorial Award

Awarded for his work: Chris propagating the Giant Lily

With gratitude to **Allan Hart** for the following information.

The Kew Guild is an organisation of nearly 130 years standing which set out originally to act as a link between current and former staff and students of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Over this time it has become a wider alumnus which not only includes all former Directors of Kew, her staff and her students that have moved on to fame and fortune, but other leaders in the wide industry of plant based sciences. The Kew Guild carries out works for charity and operates an Award Scheme which meets twice a year to make judgements on applications for financial grants, and to make other awards to students as well as honouring skills of its members and wider community. The Kew Guild has a body of Honorary Fellows including Sir David Attenborough, Sir Tim Smit and the Island's very own Mike Fitt OBE.

VBG Curator Chris Kidd has been involved in the Kew Guild for over thirty years, first as a student, then for a long time as a member of the Awards Scheme, including a period as secretary. He has previously been granted awards that enabled foreign travel, and were used to support the plant sciences at VBG. For some years he has been Chair of the Awards Scheme. When the Kew Guild evolved from a charity to a CIO, Chris became one if its founder Trustees, and has been chosen as President of the Kew Guild CIO for the year 2020 – 2021, serving the current year as President Elect.

At the Kew Guild AGM in September 2019 it was announced that Chris has been Awarded the George Brown Memorial Award in recognition of his work. This was an unexpected honour for which Chris confesses he felt less than worthy, with what he considers a greater contribution ahead of him. Nonetheless he has accepted the award, which will be presented by the current President, David Simpson, former Keeper of the Herbarium at Kew, at the annual dinner in 2020.

This Award was inaugurated in 1981 in recognition of George Brown – Assistant Curator of the Arboretum, Kew, from 1958-77, who taught and counselled many generations of students and staff. George Brown wrote the standard work *The Pruning of Trees, Shrubs and Conifers*.

The Award is presented annually to a member of the Guild who is considered to have best furthered communication and diplomacy in the true spirit of the Kew Guild.

A lectern was commissioned in 1982, paid for by members' donations. The names of the recipients are inscribed on the Lectern Roll of Honour. In 2003 a gavel to commemorate Theo Dumont, President 1997-98 was presented to the Guild by his widow, Maureen Dumont.

The Presentation is usually made at the Annual Dinner or at the Annual General Meeting when a certificate is presented, the name(s) having been inscribed on the George Brown Memorial Lectern.

Abutilon

Chris Kidd's tale of loss and discovery – with a touch of romance

The genus Abutilon in the Mallow family is a treasure house of plants for Ventnor Botanic Garden. Although among the 150-plus species spread over four continents many are tropical, there is a group of hardy and half-hardy plants we can consider strong growers, and glimpses of potential just beyond the hardiness horizon. Hybridisation, both natural and artificial, has produced a large range of plants suitable for many warm gardens, sitting under an umbrella name A. X *hybridum.*

Ventnor Gold: Propagated by Deb Goodenough, named by Simon

Among this group of hybrids we find the hotter colours, red represented by A. "Ashford Red", A. "Red Bells" and A. "Nabob" all of which have been grown at VBG. Plants of A. "Red Bells" were bought from a nursery in Cornwall. These were planted by the Palm Garden and much admired. Amongst the batch was a plant without a label, which was much propagated. These propagules eventually replaced the originals.

This plant is a truly original red, not dark like A. "Nabob" nor orangey like A. "Ashford Red", and the flowers are single, in twos or in clusters. The foliage is magnificent too, large, dark green and toothed. The plant is very upright in its habit. As is expected, though something I've generally avoided, I've been asked to put a name to the plant. Custom has been for people to name plants after all kinds of things. There are a bucketful of plants with the prefix Ventnor already, so for the first (and last) time I've ignored convention: - this one is A. "Liza Roja" (Liz's Red) after my partner Liz.

I'm not the only Curator of VBG to have named Abutilons. When Simon and Deb Goodenough arrived at the Garden in the late 1980s they had the great joy of discovering what plants could be grown here. In the Walled Garden was an extraordinarily large specimen of A. *megapotanicum* which inspired them to begin a collection of Abutilon, scouring nurseries until they had a specimen of "everything that was available in the UK", according to Simon. These were planted in the Walled Garden, the area at the time considered the most protected. The Garden, following the storm of 1987, was very airy compared to today, and swept with salt laden gales in winter.

Amongst the collection was a hybrid specimen of A. x *milleri* accessioned in 1988. By 1995 there had developed an interesting sport. Horticulturally, a sport is a more (or less) interesting growth that is clearly divergent from the originating plant. These result from a genetic mutation and become evident in a sector that can stand out to the eye as different. Interesting sports are propagated and become clones of the original, which is

how very many plant cultivars have arisen. This particular sport had significantly different flowers, frequently produced, as in the original yellowy calyces and goldeny yellow flowers, redder inside without the distinctive red veining of the original plant. Deb propagated this distinctive sport and it was soon included among the collection in its own right, planted in the Americas section of the Garden against a wall. It was then given a cultivar name by Simon: A. "Ventnor Gold".

Abutilon Liza Roja: Named after Chris's partner Liz

The fledgling commercial nursery that Deb began soon had staff, Jan Wyers and Tina Brockwell, with assistance from volunteer Alex Gilby. These three scoured the plant collections at VBG for plants that could be commercialised, and so were responsible for many of the "Ventnor" cultivars we have today. Simon and Deb's Abutilon find was sold as small plants to plant collectors and visitors to the Garden. Sadly, the original plant died in the cold winter of 2005 when much of the Walled Garden chilled. The Garden focus was on planting the new Southern Hemisphere garden of South Africa and Australia, so replanting A. "Ventnor Gold" didn't happen. Commercial stocks sold out and from that point the plant was officially missing.

By 2014, The National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Garden put A. "Ventnor Gold" on a list of threatened cultivars. Searches could not find any surviving plants, and neither Jan or Alex, quite a plant collector himself, had one. One lead in Holland revealed the plant had been grown there in 2002 but since died. Another lead in 2016 turned out to be another plant entirely.

Then, out of the blue, we received a phone message from a Mrs McKay from Inglewood Park: that in her garden was an Abutilon she had bought from VBG 20 years ago. She thought it was called Ventnor Yellow and wanted to know if we could take some cuttings, six of them, for her friends. I asked if I could go and see it there and then. I could see the plant immediately I opened the gate, and my heart gave one of those little jumps as it does when I go to a nursery and find something amazing tucked away. About 3m tall, sharing a south facing wall with A. *megaptanicum* was a quite glorious Abutilon in full flower.

I sent puctures to Jan Wyers who replied: "Yes, it is. I was amazed when I saw this. I really do think this is it! So pleased!" To be quite sure I then took Trish Brenchley to take some cuttings. Trish thought it was likely correct, agreeing it was a magnificent plant, and I took more pictures. For 100% certainty I sent these to Simon. His reply: "Hi Chris, Yes definitely Ventnor "Gold". Brilliant to see it again. Deb clearly remembers it."

The cuttings are now in our mist unit in the nursery, and Plant Heritage has been updated on the rediscovery. We will of course be honouring our debt to the owner of what could have been the last "Abutilon "Ventnor Gold" by giving her six rooted cuttings. We will then repopulate our stocks and replant in this Garden. Subsequently we will again sell the plants, and keep a watchful eye in future over A. "Ventnor Gold" and A. "Liza Roja".

JOHN CURTIS'S AUTUMN UPDATE 2019

Place of solace

The dedication of staff, volunteers, gardeners and academic experts has injected oxygen into the Garden says VBG's director

The Garden had more visitors this summer, which was a much needed salve after the landslip and a so-so visitor count in 2018. So we are entering the winter doldrums with a little more oxygen (aka bank balance) than last year when VBG@Home happily came to the Garden's rescue.

In June we welcomed a new member of gardening team, Steve Ousby, who quickly made his mark, and the spate of negative Trip Advisor comments dutifully receded. At the end of August we graduated our apprentice, George Tyler, who sees an Army career ahead. His sign off is why we do apprenticeships:

'I have grown to care a lot about the Garden, which is why in my free time I will be trying my best to come back to volunteer. I consider the people I have worked with to be good friends, and I wish to stay involved with them and the Garden as best I can.'

I saw George stuck in with the volunteers this Wednesday, making good on his promise. As with many of us, the Garden for George became a place of solace, meaning and personal growth.

Max Silvers, our favourite American botanist, returned and livened up the *edulis* restaurant kitchen with Garden ingredients and he graced several Design Walks. Our Shopkeeper par excellence, Laura Jennings, became quite concerned about Max: "He seems to live on berries and leaves from the Garden." Little did she know he is one of the more talented foragers we have run across. Max was also the first to spot the female Cycad bursting into cone (See Chris Kidd's article on the Cycads at VBG, Page 2).

Greenhouse Cabin: For American Max, now used by Artist Sarah

We commissioned the Greenhouse Cabin for Max, now inhabited by Artist in Residence, Sarah Desormais, who does a fine line in traditional Japanese printed fabrics. From a zero start we now have four accommodation options at VBG: Signal Point, the Potting Shed, The Cabin, and the Greenhouse Cabin (see photo). Five, if you include the tipi. To be accurate, it was a less than zero start, given that Signal Point was utterly derelict and hidden behind Eucalyptus trees and Heras fencing: someone had even stolen all the copper pipes and fireplaces. All these facilities represent a significant investment in the future of VBG. Income from these assets will produce much needed oxygen for the Garden over time.

Just for fun: Charming al fresco lunch in the Olive Grove

Sometimes we do things just for fun. That would explain the charming al fresco lunch in the Olive Grove this August following our Design Walk. We were pleased to be joined by John David, the leading taxonomist at the RHS. When you have Chris Kidd, Dr Colin Pope, Max Silvers, and John David leading a Design Walk you have a pocket of expertise to be proud of. I am never sure if the assembled see the duck's (my) legs churning below the waterline to deliver these moments.

We have achieved much, yet we seem to be just getting started or restarted. It has proven easier to grow plants than people over the years. Staff turnover, some of it welcome, some not, makes us start again nearly every year in our efforts to rescue the Garden for future generations. I am pleased I avoided mentioning theft, fraudulent sickness claims, substance abuse, vandalism, falsified timesheets, unauthorised leave and sabotage. Colourful stories, but not for this publication . . .

I remain convinced that our climate messaging which springs from "Britain's Hottest Garden" is more relevant than ever. The rapid advance of weather catastrophes and species loss together with the arrival of Extinction Rebellion (XR) has upped the general public's awareness of environmental degradation and made the role of botanic gardens that little bit more important. The Climate Wall[SM] in The Hub at the front of the Tropical House spells it all out. History will likely push Brexit into the shadows and see the decisions, or lack thereof, regarding the transition to a zero carbon economy as the main story.

The art of gardening

Renowned artist, gardener and botanist **Emma Tennant** will visit VBG in March. She talks to Roz Whistance

Auriculas

There are botanical paintings that are admirable for their detailed, near-photographic portrayal of a flower. Then there are the watercolours of Emma Tennant, who captures not only the accuracy of her subject but its movement, its freedom, somehow its soul.

"Because I know plants so well, I know they grow at different angles," she says. "They're not neat and tidy like they are in illustrations, they go all over the place."

Emma Tennant is a gardener, an amateur botanist and an artist, and the combination of the three forms the essence of her botanical watercolours. "I started as a gardener and have been drawing flowers since I was five," she says. "It's a bit like horse artists. The best ones are those who ride and really know horses' moods and how their muscles work."

The film, *Emma Tennant, Artist and Gardener,* made by Island photographer Ben Wood, to be shown at VBG in March, follows her painting year and her early and ongoing influences. The film draws out contrasts – the exquisite praise heaped on her work with her down-to-earth approach to her subject matter; and not least her love of vibrant

Telling the story: Emma Tennant at work

colour in the often grey climate of the Scottish Borders, where she lives. "Ben wanted to subtitle the film 'A film About Rain'," she laughs.

Emma barely remembers a time before she began gardening. She and her brother grew up near to the family estate of Chatsworth, where, under the guidance of an inspiring nanny who took them out in all weathers, they were largely home educated using the Parents' National Education Union syllabus. "It was a remarkably good system, developed in the 1920s originally for children whose parents worked abroad in the old Empire. Exams were posted back to London and properly marked. What it did was encourage you to get out and observe for yourself, and for someone like me, who liked working with my hands, and drawing, it was brilliant."

Emma studied history at Oxford where she met her husband, Toby, and in the film he describes walks to find plants that he'd never even heard of. Indeed the desire to find out everything about a plant is all part of Emma's art. The catalogues for her exhibitions are far from the usual name, date and number: Emma's are mini botany lessons, written with the infectious enthusiasm that is at the very heart of what she does.

Most of what she paints she grows herself in a particularly weather-resistant greenhouse. ("I splashed out and got a sturdy one made by Alitex. I love it!") She laughs when asked if she doesn't find Scotland a bit of a challenge: "Yes, and I've long since given up struggling to grow things that aren't happy here. Lots of things *are* happy here but it is difficult with a very short growing season. It's a small price to pay for living in a beautiful place."

When Emma and Toby first married they lived in the tropics. She didn't enjoy the predictability of the light. "There were no real seasons. Seasonal progression – spring colours, fruit to taste in summer, autumn colours and fungi – is very stimulating to an artist."

Now farming in the Scottish Borders, he breeds cattle and she grows flowers and vegetables. "I grow a lot of peas and broad beans," she says, "partly because I like eating them but they often fruit and flower at the same time, and when the flowers and pod all twist round a bit of hazel stick that really does appeal to me."

There is no rhyme or reason as to what she chooses to paint, just things that take her fancy. "I sometimes put the bulb in my pictures, or the seed." She admits the seedpod of a magnolia isn't strictly beautiful – but an intriguing, twisted pod would be the thing she might choose to paint from a particular garden.

"My subject matter is everything from a wildflower 200 yards from my house to exotic things I've found on some trip to the other side of the world – or sometimes in my own greenhouse."

For that reason she doesn't paint flowers from flower shops. "I like the story of the flower – who grew it, where they grew it, why, whether they brought it back from holiday, or grew it from seed, or was it a special plant that has been growing for hundreds of years in the same place like the orchids at Chatsworth.

Acacia dealbata

Tulip

If you buy something from a shop the story is it was grown in a factory greenhouse in Holland – and that's not much of a story."

It is that need to tell the whole story, from the colour, the shape, the very life of a plant, that has shaped and honed her method.

Wishy-washy colours are what give watercolour painting a bad name, she says. Emma uses a highly absorbent Japanese paper, enabling great depth of hue: "The other day I painted a chanterelle mushroom and thought I'd finished it but when it dried it was less vibrant. I thought crikey, that looks like the ghost of a chanterelle! So I put on more orangey-yellow paint."

Her paper also enables colour to flow beyond the boundary of the line, so capturing the wonderful freedom that distinguishes her art. "There is a lot of tightly controlled, rather pedantic botanical illustration around. I knew I could do that, but it was boring," she says.

Seeing the work of Scottish artist Elizabeth Blackadder was a turning point. "She paints big, bold life-size flowers. Illustrating for a book, you have to make the flowers smaller than life size to fit the paper. But she does big splashy things, and doesn't mind making mistakes. That was an inspiration to me."

So Emma's flowers "wander about, they're not tied to the traditional page with all its restrictions." She works in natural, never artificial, light, by a window. Nor can she work with photographs, but sits at her desk often holding the subject in her free hand. "I have worked in all sorts of places such as airports – but I like silence best."

Gentiana sino-ornata

When she comes to the Botanic Garden in March Emma Tennant is hoping to paint something that flowers because of our micro-climate. "Ventnor is super sheltered with the Undercliff, like somewhere in France. It's a fascinating place. If the citrus are in flower I shall certainly want to paint them."

To view more paintings visit www.katiepertwee.com

Emma Tennant on film

Ben Wood has been photographing Emma Tennant's art work for 15 or 20 years, but it was when her put dealer/ agent, Katie Pertwee, saw a film Ben had made that the idea of a documentary about Emma came into being. The result is *Emma Tennant, Artist and Gardener,* and the film was launched in London last year.

"It was a good idea because she's an interesting woman, "says Ben. "It was photographed in the Scottish Borders, where she lives; in Chatsworth in Derbyshire where she was brought up; and in a place called Great Glemham in Suffolk where she goes to paint every year in this amazing walled garden. We also did some work in London and on the Isle of Wight."

It took three years to film, though the illusion is that it covers a year of her life.

"The point of the film is to give an insight into Emma's life as a gardener and a painter. She's an experienced gardener, as well as an extraordinary painter. It's a potent combination," says Ben.

CHRISTMAS WREATH MAKING

VENTNOR BOTANICAL GARDENS

SUNDAY 1 DECEMBER 10.00am - 1.00pm or 2.00pm - 5.00pm- £25.00 per session

Explore your creativity using seasonal foliage from the Gardens to make your own Christmas Wreath with Artist in Residence Carol Ann Eades.

All materials will be provided but please bring along secateurs or sharp scissors and gloves

Lunch and refreshments will be available to purchase from the restaurant

Booking essential 12 places per session Please contact 01983 855397 or email info@botanic.co.uk

Weather in the Garden

(April to August 2019) **by Chris Watts**

The most noteworthy weather event in April was the glorious Easter weekend. There was dawn to dusk sunshine over the four day period, and the thermometer responded as if it was summer. The highest maximum came on Easter Saturday (20th) with 23.6°C, and this remained the top temperature of the year for almost 10 weeks until finally overtaken on the 26th June. Shortly afterwards storm Hannah visited over 26th/27th April, and although it did not bring much rain it was fairly windy for a while.

May was a mostly quiet, dry month with little to report. Although not directly affecting gardens and gardeners, pressure rose to over 1040mb on the 13th, which is high for the time of year. For the first three weeks or so June remained unsettled until a semblance of summer weather arrived for the last week.

July was a fine summer month. Most days saw the temperature peaking in the low twenties Celsius, and then came the forecast of a record breaker for the UK on the 25th – would it translate to the highest as well for Ventnor? It would need to get into the low thirties Celsius to do this, and though the day started full of promise with 24.6°C at the morning observation, alas! it could only stagger a bit higher to a maximum of 26.1°C later on. In fact two days previously (23rd) the top temperature had reached 27.0°C, itself not especially of note. Rainfall was about 70% of the average measured against the 1915-50 figure for the Royal National Hospital, and the table below shows that 70% of the total came on one day (19th). On the 23rd there was a grand display of lightning over the sea, and at the height of the storm the rate of flashes reached about 30 per minute. The thunder, however, was muted.

If we can conveniently forget an autumnal spell of weather through the middle of the month, August was another fine summer month. However, the memory of cancellations of outdoor events over the second week will be hard to dispel, not the least that of the town's carnival and firework display. Some reparation came later by way of a sunny and warm Bank Holiday weekend, and on Tuesday 27th the temperature peaked at 28°C which probably will end up being the highest of this year.

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
April	*11.1++*	*27.4--*	*6*	*11.7*	*3*	*9.0*	*7*
May	*12.8+*	*15.2--*	*4*	*14.8*	*3*	*7.5*	*10*
June	*15.8+*	*60.8++*	*10*	*17.5*	*9*	*14.7*	*6*
July	*18.4++*	*40.4--*	*6*	*20.7*	*27*	*27.8*	*9*
August	*18.3++*	*55.1*	*9*	*19.7*	*24*	*12.1*	*9*

[1] No. of days over 20°C [2] Wettest day rain total in mm [3] Longest spell (in days) without rain

Dear members . . .

Turn of the season

Somehow, when you stop to think about it there's always a sense that this little Garden punches above its weight, and that is reflected in the pages of this issue of *Ventnorensis.* In what is still affectionately known to some as 'the park' we are surrounded by talent and eminence as much as by beauty and rarity.

To begin with, we are proud to congratulate Chris Kidd on his recognition from his alma mater, Kew Gardens (see Page 5). Then we have Colin Pope who, as well as writing Pope's Plants for this magazine (Page 16), keeps visitors informed about what to look for each month via his Botanical Highlights on the VBG website. He also takes groups out and about in the Friends' Botany Club. Do keep an eye out for Botany Club fixtures – for a fiver in the hat they are an absolute steal. (See Pages 18–21)

We are incredibly lucky to have Dr Peter Coleman on the Friends' Committee. He brings his medical and community knowledge not only to benefit us but also the larger community with his special interest in the health benefits the Garden can give. (See Pages 26 & 31).

Talking of expertise, we are excited to welcome artist and horticulturalist Emma Tennant in March, when a film will be shown about her life and art. Art plays a big part in the Garden, of course. Sally Peake and Jenny Parker did a splendid job with Secret Art, in aid of our apprenticeship scheme (Page 21); and John Curtis reports that a new Greenhouse Cabin is available for our artists in residence, or our gardeners (Page 8). The talent of our photographers shouldn't be overlooked either: Rosemary Stewart never fails to capture the Friends' special moments, whatever the weather. And on that subject, Chris Watts's authoritative scrutiny of the months since our last edition is always fascinating.

Enjoy the Garden however you use it, whether to volunteer (See Phil Le May, Inside Back) or simply to relish being there.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please can I have contributions for the Spring edition by March 21st to rosalind.whistance@gmail.com

Gardening Volunteers

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

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

Wild Juniper at the Garden

Colin Pope tells the ups and downs story of this ancient species on the Island – and VBG's part in coming to its rescue

Wild Juniper *(Juniperus communis)* is a rather special wild plant in this country. It was one of the first tree species to colonise the UK after the last Ice Age and it is still here today. Indeed, examination of pollen preserved in rare peat deposits on the Island near Gatcombe and Godshill, by Professor Rob Scaife, has established that it was present with us in the late Devensian cold stage (11,000 – 10,000 BP).

Thriving: Juniper cutting growing in the Garden, with male cones

Although Juniper is still present in this country today, it is rather local and restricted to two very different habitats, on acidic soils in pine woods and moors in upland Britain and on hot, dry calcium-rich soils in the south. Individual bushes can be very long lived but as Juniper is dioecious, both male and female plants need to be found close together in order for juniper berries to be formed. In the south, populations are generally small and declining. Indeed, nearly a quarter of sites support only a single bush!

Its decline in this country is partly attributed to poor reproductive capacity and competition with other plants. In northern England, some populations have been seriously affected by the pathogen, *Phyophthora austrocedrae.*

The form of individual bushes varies greatly from being low and prostrate at one extreme to being upright, cylindrical and conical at the other.

On the Island, Juniper has always been rare and known from just one or two bushes on chalk downland. The first record we have is of a single bush, on the down above Nunwell. It was recorded by Dr Bromfield in 1845. Apparently this bush occasionally bore berries, which suggests that there may have been another male bush somewhere in the vicinity. The bush was still present in 1900 but is not recorded subsequently. There was also a single specimen growing on St Boniface down in 1893. The only modern record we have is of two well-spaced, wind pruned bushes on Compton Down, first found by Ventnor botanist Thelma White in 1968. They were still present in 2005 but they were very small specimens (the larger is just over 30cm) and not known to bear fruit. By 2008, one of these plants was dying.

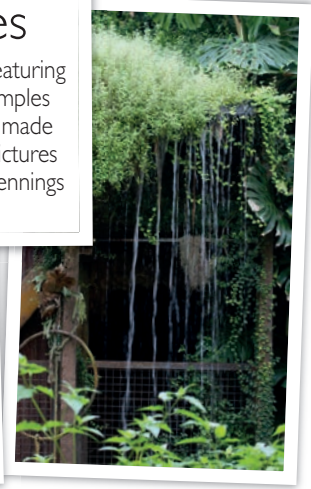
Paul Coleman at the Isle of Wight College had offered to propagate material for me but when I visited the site on Compton Down in 2010, I found that only one plant was left surviving. I collected shoots from this plant, which provided material for Paul to successfully root many cuttings using mist propagation. The plan, working with the National Trust, was to return some of these plants to Afton Down but it would take a few years for the young cuttings to develop into strong enough plants to be set out in the wild.

Last remaining: Wild 'bush', Compton Down

Then disaster struck, and the young plants were attacked by *Phytophora,* and almost all were lost. In the end, only a single plant survived. It was too risky to take its chances out in the wild, so the decision was taken to grow it at the Botanic Garden. It was planted in the Mediterranean Garden in 2015 and it has done well. The wild plant from which it came is dwarfed and wind-blown but growing at Ventnor, in more sheltered conditions, the plant is starting to grow erect and exhibiting a much different habit from the wild plant. Moreover, it is producing male cones, which it never does in the wild, so we now know that this is a male plant. So now we have a reserve plant for our single wild Juniper bush. Over time, it may be possible to propagate from this plant and, in due course, return some of the progeny to the downs at Freshwater.

A year in pictures

The VBG 2020 Calendar is in the shop, featuring beautiful photographs by Ian Pratt (examples here) and Dave Trevan. Greetings cards made from both this and last year's calendar pictures are also available. Many thanks to Laura Jennings for putting the calendar together.



Botany Club

We had one or two disappointments but some lovely outings too

Our first outing was carefully planned by Dave and Hazel Trevan to take us up through Pelham Woods and along the cliff path, but unfortunately the heavens opened and we had to cancel at the last minute. We hope we can plan this walk again next year to see the spring flowers.

Then in September we were all ready for our visit to see the planting at the Zoo when I had a message from Laura, our guide, to say that her mother had been taken ill and she could not be there. I made hasty calls to try and stop people from leaving home but one or two arrived and went round the Zoo anyway! Next year we shall try again. Meanwhile we look forward to another fungus foray with Colin Pope.

Some of us were enthralled by the two fascinating talks the Friends had arranged for Café Botanique during the year – about the importance of bryophytes with George Greiff; and on the co-evolution of bees and flowers with Prof Scott Armbruster. Look out for more of these in the coming year.

Rosemary Stewart

Sandown Meadows was our first adventure. Val Pitts reports:

A Ramble through the Reed Beds

My first outing with the Friends' Botany Group was in early June to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's reserve at Sandown Meadows. As the threatening rain clouds moved off towards Newport, we set out on our walk under the friendly and knowledgeable guidance of Wetlands Officer Steve Egerton-Read. Steve told us he would be starting an exciting new job the next week - looking after the wonderful white-tailed eagles which are now settling in on the Island!

The path to the Reserve crosses meadows that are not owned by the Trust. These are currently unmanaged and, despite encroaching scrub, abound with flowers. We soon acquired a long list of species, but the stars of the show were undoubtedly the Southern Marsh Orchid and the Corky-fruited Water Dropwort (what a wonderful name).

We then entered the Reserve proper, where we added to our list and Steve described the programme of active management they are undertaking to increase biodiversity, including the sometimes conflicting factors to be taken into consideration. Their work is aided in the summer by a small herd of Highland Cattle

Corky-Fruited Water Dropwort orchid

Marsh Orchid

Sandown Meadows adventurers: led by Steve Egerton-Read

Hoof-operated drinking devise for cattle (and dogs)

who munch and trample their way through the reed beds, opening them up for other species to find a home. We were intrigued by the hoof-operated device that gives the cattle access to drinking water. Dogs like it too!

Steve went on to talk about further plans (now approved by IOW Council) to 're-wet' the area by creating a series of pools of various shapes, sizes and depths and to use the extracted earth to build banks, thereby creating yet more habitats and nest sites. How lovely to have future walks there, accompanied by the more frequent plop of a water vole and the flash of a kingfisher.

It was a relaxed, enjoyable and informative afternoon exploring another corner of our lovely Island and I look forward to many more.

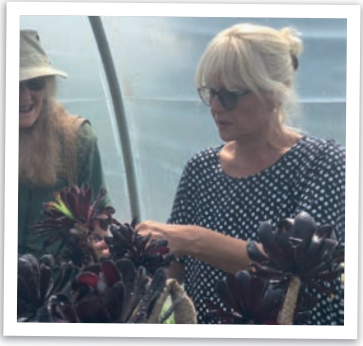
A trip to next-door-neighbours Kingston Smallholding and Tall Trees arboretum made for a fascinating outing in July.

Simone Dickens is a graphic designer – OUR graphic designer for Ventnorensis – but with her husband David Yates for the past five years she has also owned and run Kingston Smallholding, six acres where they breed sheep, goats, hens and sometimes pigs. Simone also grows plants in her well-stocked polytunnel, which are sold by the roadside, and that is where our trip began.

It was, of course, the goats that stole the show. Simone introduced us to her Golden Guernsey dairy goats, which she milks daily; to the cute Pygmy goats; and to some British Boer goats, bred for meat.

I'll eat your hat: Roz

It soon became clear that every one of the animals has a distinct personality: one male brought in for meat, Simone said, was unable to go for slaughter because he has learning difficulties, and another was held back because of a damaged horn. Both were being dominated by the females and even the kids so she had separated them.



Blooms in the polytunnel: Simone

Simone's love for her animals came across strongly. An old and rather scruffy British Guernsey she described as a retired old lady. "We lost her daughter last winter and she's been a lost soul since." They took in a couple of lively goats in need of a home and had to fence a paddock over night so they didn't leap out, and then built a big climbing area for them to play.

She explained that while goats can live on hay and water the breeding animals are fed on a concentrate mix to allow for a high yield. They go to market at between six and 18 months, as both young and mature meat is in demand. Simone and David also buy in surplus male goats from the Green Barn Dairy Goat Farm in Bouldnor, a family run commercial goat farm, producing a range of fresh, artisan cheese, fudge and goats milk.

The British Boers are good mothers and very docile, Simone explained, which is why they are allowed to keep their horns. (She added that she is covered in bruises nonetheless from being in the way at feeding time.)

We were all struck by the scale of Simone and David's little smallholding, particularly when we were told it was only five years since they began. "We decided to get goats, and I told David we were collecting five goats in two weeks' time. So he had to build a house and a paddock over a weekend and a bit. He's like superman, he asks how I want it and puts it up!"

Inevitably somebody asked if David had a brother.

While we then went next door for the second part of our trip, Simone prepared a lovely tea. Many of us left carrying plants and frozen goat meat.

Kingston Arboretum

Our trip to Helen Keats's arboretum was a tremendous surprise. Her beautiful farmhouse surrounded by mature trees is a living story.

First she explained that the house had originally been a collection of L-shaped cottages for workers on Bucks Farm. There had also been an asbestos-built garage. Now Helen is able to give her B&B guests a wonderful stay in their own private wood – which, when she and her husband moved in, didn't exist. "The only tree was the willow and some awful leylandii. There were no birds, no wildlife. We had more wildlife in London!"

Helen explained that her husband had started to grow trees because he brought a pinecone home for their elder daughter Holly to draw. "And overnight it opened and

all the seeds came out, so he planted them and they grew. So he started planting and growing from seed, and selling the trees by the door.''

They bought an adjacent field when the opportunity arose, and Bob hatched a plan: that if he planted a different species of tree every fortnight he'd have a thousand species by the time he was 80. Very sadly, Bob died from motor neurone disease in 2016, aged just 61. Helen has carried on, though claims she hasn't the patience to work from seed so buys in whips.

She has eight acres in total and because the trees are mostly native they attract stoats, barn owls, little owls, jays, Greater Spotted and Green woodpeckers, goldfinches and birds of prey, and with no pesticides used there are lots of moths. The birdsong is magnificent. There are squirrels too, so Helen has constructed a squirrel box and a rope and named two of the squirrels Wilma and Fred. Her free range chickens, which provide eggs for her guests, are called Beryl. All of them.

With every turn of the path there were new areas and vistas. We loved the eucalyptus dell, which has some trees at the back that the squirrels planted. Fallen trees are left as homes for insects. Bob had been a pine and fir enthusiast and there are magnificent Scots pines and incense cedar, which smelt deeply pungent when rubbed.

Helen said that while she can't name all the trees her daughter Holly can. It was a lovely thought that the girl who inspired the planting grew up still loving the trees.

Roz Whistance

TO ALL MEMBERS

Notice of Annual General Meeting

of Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

To be held on Wednesday 15 April 2020 at 7pm
in the Echium Room Ventnor Botanic Garden

A copy of the Agenda, including details of voting to take place at the meeting, will be on our website at the end of March 2020. To be posted a copy please contact Hon Sec Jenny Parker at jenniferparker126@hotmail.co.uk, or 01983 730668.

If you wish to put forward any resolutions to the AGM, please notify the chairman, John Bagshawe, at bagshawej@yahoo.co.uk, or 01983 731799, no later than Wednesday 1 April 2020.

Apologies can be sent to Jenny Parker via email or phone as above

Following the meeting, the annual HAROLD HILLIER AWARD for Services to Horticulture on the Isle of Wight will be presented to a person who has given significant service to horticulture. If you would like to nominate somebody to receive the award please email Rosemary Stewart on rosemarystewart@icloud.com

Also, Curator Chris Kidd will update us with Garden news.

The Plantation Café will be open on the evening from 6.30pm

DISCOUNTS for members

Friends should always carry their membership card. The Garden has agreed that VBGFS members are allowed two free entries per year.

Look out for other benefits, such as 10% discount from Deacons Nursery, Godshill, on showing your Friends' Membership Card.

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, Jenny Parker.

Another first for the Garden

I have written previously about some of the strange insects and other invertebrates that have inadvertently found their way to the Garden and set up home. This has made Ventnor Botanic Garden something of a mecca for invertebrate specialists.

Relatively long-legged: harvestman Dicranopalpus larvatus

Well, it has happened again. Visiting specialist Mark Telfer came to the Garden in February and saw a harvestman, a relative of the spiders, which he did not recognise. Harvestmen have extremely long legs, giving them the nickname of daddy-longlegs, and a small body that looks as though it is made of just one portion. They were called harvestmen because they most often appeared during the autumn, at harvest time. This particular one was unusual in being boldly coloured and fully mature and active in winter, and Mark was able to get it identified as *Dicranopalpus larvatus,* otherwise only known from Sardinia, Sicily and parts of mainland Italy.

At the time of discovery, it was thought to be the first British record of this harvestman. Remarkably, at around the same time and quite independently of each other, the same harvestman had been found for the first time on Tresco, on the Isles of Scilly, and in two locations on Guernsey. Now that it has turned up in three quite separate places along the southern British coasts, other experts will be out looking for it.

It is most likely that this creature arrived at the Garden accidentally via plant material imported from Italy, and found conditions to its liking. It has probably been around, undetected, for several years. Harvestmen are harmless creatures and the arrival of this new species, whilst interesting, is unlikely to adversely impact upon our biodiversity. However, it does highlight the inadequacy of biosecurity measures and the ease by which species can accidentally be imported from other countries.

Colin Pope

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Wednesday 11th December

Once again we are planning a Christmas lunch for all Friends and Volunteers on Wednesday 11th December. This will be three courses, which will include wine and VBG Beer. The cost will be £20 - £22 a head – and do bring your friends – everyone is welcome.

The menu hasn't been finalised yet, but if you would like to be kept informed, please contact Caroline on 07836 573814 or carolinepeel@aol.com.

SECRET ART 2019

Drawing out generosity

Sally Peake on how the Island's artists rallied, again, to support our apprentice programme – by remaining anonymous

Following our first venture, two years ago, into using the generosity and talent of the artistic community to raise funds to support our Horticultural Apprenticeship programme, Jenny Parker and I embarked on this year's event with much enthusiasm. So many people had participated in 2017 and offered so much support and constructive suggestions that we felt able to expand our ideas.

Ryde Academy art student Daniel (Centre) Orme - the youngest contributor to Secret Art - with, (on his left) VBG Apprentices Adam Cooke, George Tyler, Indie Walters. On his right: David Firmstone, and Sally Peake

The professional experience of our local artists, in particular the Binnel Studio community, prompted us to engage with younger talent and we were delighted when Jarrod Butler, Head of Art at Ryde Academy, expressed an interest in involving his pupils. It was a real highlight of this year's exhibition to be able to display their work alongside that of well-known professionals. For many of the young people who attended the Preview evening, it was the first time they had seen their work in a public space and several also derived much pleasure on learning that our discerning buyers chose their pieces to add to personal collections. Maybe VBGFS will be able to say that we launched the career of a star!

Most of those who came to the Preview came prepared, looking for their favourite celebrity artist's work; inevitably, most were disappointed as these pieces were quickly snapped up. Jenny and I have been inundated with ideas to make the event even more exciting. Take note, Secret Art will be back in 2021!

One of this year's challenges was a change of venue, from the Gallery to the Canna Room. Canna offered a wonderful space to exhibit but it was quite an effort to persuade visitors to enter the building during one of the hottest, sunniest weeks of the summer. However, the lovely weather also encouraged visitors to this year's Ventnor Fringe to come and find us. We were delighted to meet some veteran Fringe tourists,

Americans from California who plan their international travels around Fringe festivals around the world. It would be some months before they returned home but two pieces of Secret Art will be waiting for them in California.

It'll be some months before the Californian tourists return home but two pieces of Secret Art will await them

All in all, it was a most successful event. Supper after the Preview was well-attended and most convivial – thank you Caroline for taking on this aspect. Sales achieved a profit in excess of £3000, a welcome boost to our funds. Jenny and I are indebted to a number of individuals whose support over the two events has been crucial: Robin McInnes was so generous with his time and skill in preparing the donations for mounting and also by lending us his exhibition boards which allowed us to take full advantage of the space. Toby Beardsall, owner of Beardsall's in Shanklin and The Arty Card Co, produced all of our promotional material and allocated us space on his website which, via links to our own website, gave us a window for the world to engage with our event: his sponsorship meant that our costs were kept to an absolute minimum. We would also like to thank Colin Smith, who manages our website, for his extra time in ensuring the links between the two sites were seamless, and for then appearing on set up day with his magic screwdriver which made erecting the boards so much easier. Also thanks to my dear husband Steve, who quietly appeared and, with great curatorial skill, made sure that each piece of artwork was mounted straight and true.

Beyond these are the many, many people who donated artwork, and then cajoled their friends to come and buy. The winners are our young people engaged in Horticulture at the Garden – so thank you all.

Did you know?

VBGFS is an Affiliated Society of the RHS And there are benefits available

Free monthly copy of The Garden Magazine and the **Plant Review** both available to read in the gardeners' room.

30% entry discount at all RHS Gardens
VBGFS has TWO CARDS AVAILABLE for members to visit RHS Wisley, Surrey: RHS Rosemoor, Devon: RHS Hyde Hall, Essex: RHS Harlow Carr, Yorkshire. Also, RHS Bridgewater, to open in September 2020. TWO adults per card, 30% entry discount. Group discount tickets available for Hampton Court, Chatsworth, and Tatton flower shows.

Ask Jenny Parker, Hon Sec, if you are planning a visit: she can get the cards to you.

Free Group Visit
The RHS offers a free group visit (max 55 visitors) annually to all Affiliated Societies. This year they offered a £5 voucher for each member of the group for use in the retail outlet as well.

Reduced rate group tickets for RHS Flower Shows (except Chelsea) with a Welcome Talk are also available.

If you are interested in being part of a group, please contact Jenny Parker. Depending on demand, this could be organised.

Peter makes his mark

We meet **Peter Coleman,** the newest recruit to the Friends' Exec

Had Peter not missed a train he might never have been the latest recruit to the VBGFS Executive Committee.

Dr Peter Coleman is recently retired from General Practice in Ventnor. He sensibly took several months before committing to any of the many organisations queuing up to use his expertise, having seen people retire and become embroiled in something that becomes burdensome. "So I did absolutely nothing," he says.

The more you talk to Peter the clearer it becomes that we are extremely lucky to have him on the Friends' committee. He hasn't spent his career solely as a family practitioner, though he is proud and fulfilled by that role. For many years he took on 'extra curricular activities' in the wider scope of the NHS, and it is that experience, those connections that have quickly enabled him to make his mark for the Friends.

But first, let's return to that missed train . . .

Peter was born in Leicester but moved to the Island when he was six. "We had a flat over my father's office equipment business in Newport, then my parents built a house in Woodside in Wootton." His teenage years were at Fishbourne, with boats at the bottom of the garden.

He went to medical school back in "the family stomping ground" in Leicester, where he did his hospital training. "I was planning to be a gynaecologist," he says, "but I came back to the Island for a weekend, accidently got on a slow train back to Leicester, so I read the BMJ magazine from cover to cover. There was an ad for a General Practice training scheme on the Island, so I thought I wonder what would happen if I applied . . ."

What happened was that Peter has been a family GP here ever since. He met his wife-to-be, Rebecca, at medical school, and they married in 1989, and had two children. "After our second child was born, Rebecca came and joined the practice, as Dr Ashton, and we worked together for the best part of 20 years," he says, explaining that she was forced to retire early due to back problems and he has had a slipped disc since retirement. "And this isn't an ideal house for anyone who isn't physically fit," he smiles.

It is a beautiful family home, greatly enhanced by Rebecca's talent at interior design – but like most Victorian houses, not exactly low maintenance.

Their garden gives them both tremendous pleasure – though it is even more demanding of their time than the house. When their daughter was young she kept a horse, and the loose boxes are still there, as are the paddocks, now used a couple of times a year by a local farmer who grazes his sheep. "I'm happy to help out a farmer. It's a hard enough life these days." Nearer the house is a beautifully shaped pond in which live koi and goldfish. "It was a scrubby little pond but Rebecca had it re-landscaped for me for our 25th wedding anniversary."

There is also a wooded area, full of huge old oaks, that has recently been thinned out to allow light through to encourage the hundreds of bluebells Peter planted to bloom.

Demands on his time: Peter in his own garden

Rebecca left sculptural roots and stumps for their architectural grace, and there is even a Victorian dog graveyard. You wonder when Peter ever found time for his career.

For more than 20 years he also worked in NHS management and as a GP he was one of the founder members of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the equivalent to the local health authority, responsible for buying services for the Island. A formal half day off a week for such tasks was clearly far from enough, and "I had to learn to say no," he says. But knowing how to weave through the complexities of the NHS has enabled him to put into practice an idea VBG Director John Curtis had, to extend the Garden's culture of wellbeing into the community.

"John had been trying to organise 'wellbeing passes' for people who are being discharged from hospital, and was frustrated because he was getting nowhere. I suggested going through the Hospice for people with cancer, and through Sevenacres for people with mental health problems." He adds: " I think we've got that pretty much sorted now."

Peter thoroughly enjoyed his life as a GP. "I was really lucky because throughout I was able to be a family doctor: I knew people, looked after them over a long period of time, got to know different generations, and go through their lives with them. Which is a very fulfilling way of practicing medicine. But even if you want to do that nowadays I'm not sure you can, it's getting increasingly difficult."

Having that knowledge meant that, when, at his very first VBGFS committee meeting he was asked to find families who would enjoy visiting the Garden he knew exactly what to do, and now four families from Ventnor are benefitting from family passes. (See Peter's report, Health & Wellbeing, Page bla).

Peter is perhaps more aware than most about the effects of transitioning from work to retirement, and he seems to be doing it rather well. He and Rebecca love to travel, and when home give time to their house, garden, family and, thankfully, to the Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden. Thanks to the role Peter has taken on with the Committee, the wider community is also benefitting.

See Health & Wellbeing, Page 31

Roz Whistance

Hoppy memories

The annual hop pick at VBG is a great time to get together and chat, and sometimes share stories. For **Ann Barnes** the VBG Hop Pick was a time to reminisce

When I was a young girl I lived in the Weald of Kent and used to go and pick hops. All the local farmers had hop gardens and the pickers used to come down from London and stay in 'opperuts' as they called them – hopper huts – and they were quite basic, a shed with slatted with bits for beds, and palliasses and open fires to cook by. And the families loved it because it was like a holiday, the children could play in the countryside.

Ann Barnes: Memories of the Weald of Kent

The hop picking meant I earned enough money to put toward my first bike. You picked the hops and dropped them into hessian bins. The hops were a lot taller than the ones at the Botanic Garden, and to string the hops people used to walk on stilts. When we were picking, they'd pull down the strings, which were called bines, and we'd pick them into the bins. Your hands were always black! But you slept well because of the hops.

The hop picking went on for a week or ten days, and school holidays went into September in Kent so families could pick hops – otherwise the children just wouldn't be at school. It was a good earner for families.

Post-pick beer: John Curtis and volunteer pickers

In the oasthouse, the hops would be be dried in the floor upstairs and once dried they'd go into these big pokes, really tall, and packed in really tightly. When you think how many hops were in there, it's amazing to think it's only the flavour they want.

My father was an electrician so he was quite involved with the first hop picking machines in the sheds in the late 1950s – the beginning of the end of hand-picked hops I suppose, and now the whole era has gone. It's a shame that we never took photographs of the hop picking, though there were Baby Brownies about. The local shops in our village used to put barriers up, I don't know why, they must have been worried that things would be stolen by the Londoners who came down. On the counter they put the money in something, bowls of vinegar I think, to get the sticky black off.

I remember it as a really happy time. All the people from the local pubs would be there singing, and we locals would make a few friends with the Londoners. They had such wit! And at the end the week they used to try and get you into the hop bins!

Anthony Blest is a retired third-generation hop grower and somehow can't keep away …

I was a hop grower years ago: my father was, and my grandfather, in Wateringbury in Kent. My great grandfather was involved in brewing there, so became involved in that way.

John [Curtis] asked me to come have a look at the crop here two years ago, when there was a problem at VBG with mites. I'd taken some hops and grown in my garden, and I'd taken a cutting, which we planted here. So I came to look at what they'd achieved and help them improve.

Yard of ale: Stilts being used in Wateringbury, Kent

Anthony Blest: Hop grower and advisor

Weighty: Curtis carries the keg

Pumpkin Harvest 2019 – coffee break

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Health and Wellbeing Activities at Ventnor Botanic Gardens

Following my retirement as a GP in Ventnor, of 30 years, I was invited to meet the committee of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends Society; I was subsequently co-opted onto the committee with a brief to raise awareness of the potential health and wellbeing opportunities which the Garden could offer. My appointment to the committee was then confirmed at the AGM in February 2019.

At my first formal meeting of the committee, having discussed some of my ideas, I was delighted that the committee voted me funds to buy four annual family passes for families in Ventnor. Having worked in the management of the NHS for part of my working week I was surprised and impressed that the committee came to an immediate decision, with no further formalities to go through, allowing me to proceed without delay.

I decided that a good way of allocating these tickets was to enlist the aid of St Francis School in Ventnor and was very happy to liaise with the staff there. The four passes were distributed and I hope that they were able to give these families some happy times over the summer school holidays.

Whilst walking in the Garden with John Curtis, Director of Ventnor Botanic Garden, our membership secretary, Caroline Peel, had a conversation about John's wish to offer access to certain groups of people with health problems, who might benefit from the peace and tranquillity of the Garden. I liaised with John to establish his intention and we agreed to undertake a project to offer free three month 'wellbeing passes' to people under the care of the Mountbatten Hospice and also to people attending Sevenacres Hospital. John generously agreed to offer up to forty passes to each group for this trial and I have asked each organisation to undertake a feedback exercise with those who were given the passes, to help evaluate the benefits, which resulted.

The hospice began issuing invitation letters in July and Sevenacres started the process at the end of August.

Following a discussion with the occupational therapy team leader at Sevenacres, it was further agreed to issue a group pass and parking pass so that small groups of inpatients could be taken on trips to help with their recovery.

It has been very exciting and fulfilling to be able to be involved in these activities, and I very much look forward to seeing the feedback from those who benefit from these initiatives, which I am sure will support the further continuation of these schemes.

There is much scope to widen access to the health and wellbeing benefits that the Garden can offer, and I feel that these early schemes are a great first step.

I cannot close without mentioning the long established volunteering programme, which is available at the Garden and can offer the pleasure of gardening, 'green exercise' and social encounter to those who attend.

Peter Coleman

Membership News

We are delighted to welcome the following new members as Friends:

Andrew Middleton, St.Lawrence
Hugh Rock and Julia Ashton, Henley on Thames.

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse

A further gentle reminder . . .

Several of you have not updated your Standing Order to reflect the increase in membership fee, which came into being at the beginning of last year. Those who have failed to do so will have a special slip with this copy of Ventnorensis. Those who have updated to the new fees (£20.00 for a single member and £30.00 for joint) will receive free admission passes to the Garden – those who haven't wont!

Eucalyptus au naturelle

Each Wednesday throughout the winter months Carol Ann Eades will be working in the Studio, developing botanical prints on natural fabrics using the Eucalyptus from the Garden

The Friends' Foundation Fund

They say many hands make light work.

The Friends' Foundation Fund is a way of supporting our core education projects. If lots of us give a little, regularly, we will have a bedrock that can be used to pay for our apprentices' education – maybe to bring in a third apprentice, which would benefit the Garden and set another young person on a life in horticulture. By setting up a standing order for just £3 a month, or an amount of your choosing, this could be achieved.

The bank details are as follows: ***Nat West, Shanklin 54-41-31***
Account Number: 49648292
Account Name: VBGFS – Foundation Fund

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

VOLUNTEERING IN THE GARDEN

My Patch

Phil Le May has taken on his own area of the Garden to keep tidy – and seeing unexpected benefits

Action Man: Phil Le May

I'm lucky enough to live near the Garden so I can visit it at all times of the year and hours of the day. If you ever get the chance, visit it early in the morning and be astounded by the birdsong. It really is loud. I'd been going with my dogs over a winter as one can get out of the wind and avoid the worst of the rain, and as I climbed up the slope towards the lower nursery I kept saying to myself: "That needs tidying up. And if I think so then the visitors must think the same."

So a year ago I started volunteering, but in a different way to the Wednesday Volunteers, who do such a magnificent job of clearing an area at a time under the direction of Trish or Chris. I wanted my own patch, and with Chris's guidance I've been bringing the western end of the Olive Grove back to life after the 'wilding' areas of naturalised seeds and grasses had got steadily out of hand.

I go in when I feel the need to do a few hours and I've enjoyed every minute, even though hard graft is required now and then, while at the other end of the scale hand weeding helps sort out the not wanted from the wanted.

As a sideline I've found that I am part ambassador, guide (not many can get their heads round the map), plant identifier, and explainer that we are a Garden of staff, apprentices and volunteers. In the whole of this year I've not had one major complaint. In fact, most people 'get' what we are doing once it's explained, or are there with us already. Especially the pre-50 age group.

If, like me and a couple of others you'd like to volunteer in the same way, the Japanese Garden is ready for a single or perhaps a couple of volunteers. You'll get stacks of help and advice, you'll gain lots of plant knowledge, find that you are looking things up and making suggestions – and that you leave for home each time thinking "that looks so much better".

If you would like to volunteer, whether you prefer to be in or out, meeting and greeting, propagating or even if you'd like to tackle your own patch, contact Jane Cooper 861459, Jonyth Hill 730532, Bridgette Sibbick 867739 or Rosemary Stewart 292107.

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