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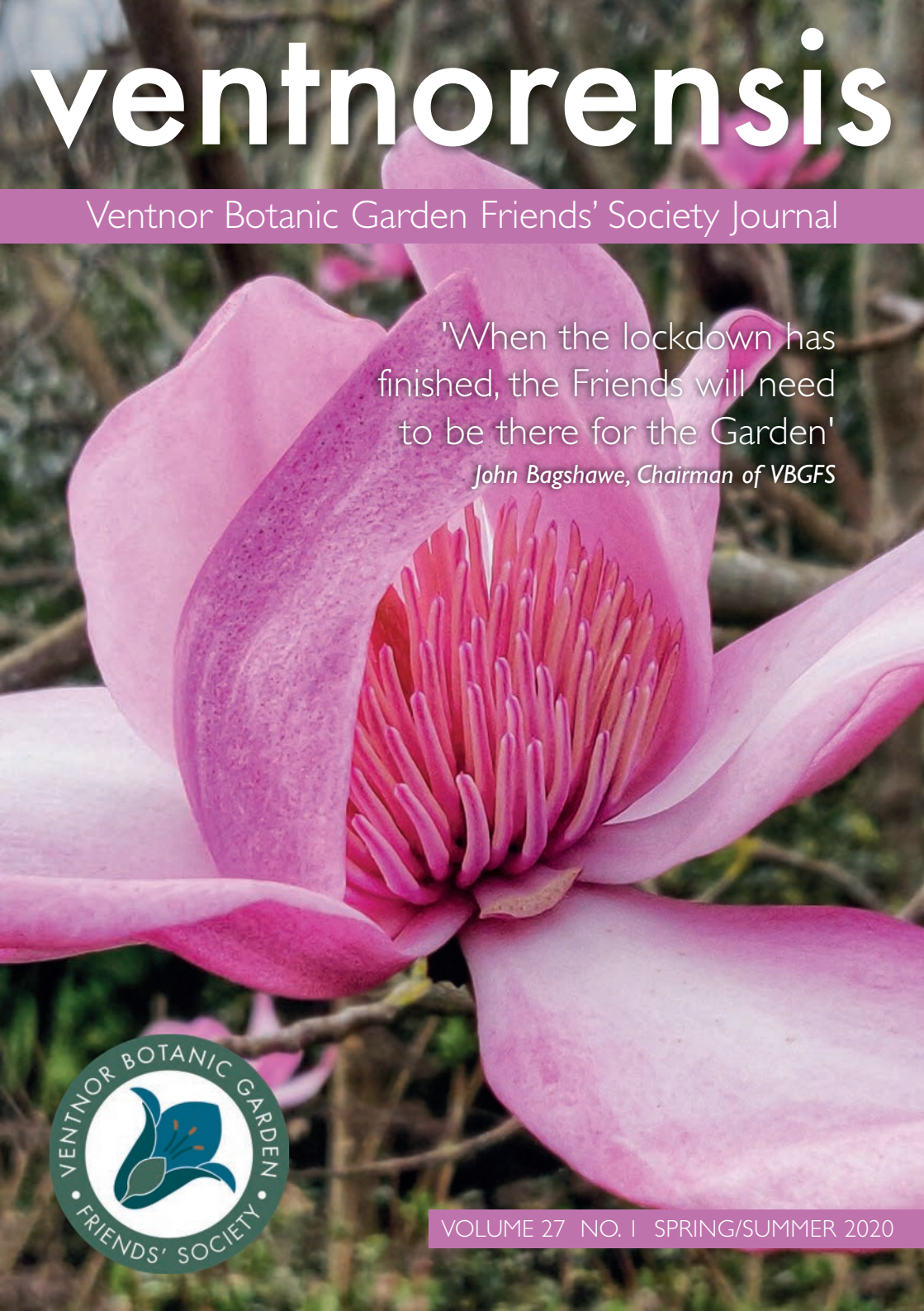
Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal



'When the lockdown has finished, the Friends will need to be there for the Garden'

John Bagshawe, Chairman of VBGFS

VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN • FRIENDS' SOCIETY •

VOLUME 27 NO. 1 SPRING/SUMMER 2020

Spring/summer 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.

What's not on? (yet)

Normally we list all the events that are happening in the Garden that are planned for the coming months. However, in this time of uncertainty, when, at the time of publication, the Government has issued no date for the easing of restrictions arising from the coronavirus pandemic, we can plan nothing.

Normally there would be dates for Botany Club meetings, when for just a fiver in the hat, Friends are led by an expert on a tour of a garden, a marshland, a bit of coast. Or Café Botanique, where fascinating talks by experts have ranged over a huge range of topics: we were lucky enough to have squeezed in Colin Pope on Tasmania just before the lockdown, and this is revisited on Page 4.

Looking at the broader picture, our apprentices would have been given the opportunity to take part in a summer competition devised by Mike Fitt, staged at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. This would have taken place in June.

However, life will return to normal and we'll be able to drive over to the Garden without fear of being stopped by police checking we're not breaching social distancing laws. Look out for plans to celebrate 10 years of producing our own hops, with the biggest, most musical and most fun Hop Fest in September.

The wellbeing classes, such as yoga, Pilates, qi gong and mindfulness, will resume when they can, with an extended timetable and possibly to include dance. Plans for children's events, such as story readings by characters from stories, as well as incentives to become young gardeners, will be resurrected when the time is right, and it is hoped edulis restaurant will be open later with live music.

All things to look forward to. In the meantime, if you can, do keep coming to the Garden.

Front Cover: Magnolia. Photography by John Curtis

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Dear Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden,

At the time of writing you are aware of a global crisis resulting from Covid-19, which will affect millions around the world. It is said that true friends show their worth in times of crisis. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank so many Friends who have shown great resolve so far, without being asked. The temptation to name you individually is very great. You know who you are.

The impact of Covid-19 in all our lives will be unprecedented. Ventnor Botanic Garden is not immune and faces a greater threat than ever in its 50 years. Currently a skeleton crew is keeping the Garden together: Trish and two apprentices, Indi and Adam. These positions are funded by the Friends, mostly via Gift Aid charged by the CIC at admission. Other staff are furloughed. This could continue into June or July 2020. Once visitors return, it gives us only three months to earn enough money to run the Garden through the 20/21 winter.

The Curtis family should not be expected to finance this gap alone. If ever there was a time for the Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden to help out, it is now. The money from the Friends will ultimately run out unless we act now on emergency fundraising. The Kew Guild, where I serve as a Trustee, is facing a similar challenge to fulfil its aims and we have embarked on a fundraising drive in earnest, which is already being effective. Including a consideration for the Friends as part of a legacy could be a considerable contribution. If all of the Friends' members were able to make a standing order of £10 a month we could sustain Trish, Indi and Adam without draining the Friends' reserves. We will need further initiatives, and we will need volunteering on extraordinary levels once safe to do so. [See 'Giving' appeal, Page 11].

Lush borders. Photograph by John Bagshawe

In 2007 we undertook a risk assessment for the Garden in a global pandemic scenario, as part of a wider preparation within the Local Authority. It has been sobering in retrieving this version and its revisions, to realise how unprepared we were, all of us, for a pandemic that was inevitable. At Kew in the days immediately prior to the lockdown I'd commented to a colleague how the unfolding situation was forecast in science fiction. He swiftly reminded me to vary my reading matter.* There may not be triffids and gene spliced pigs roaming the countryside, but I expect Pandora's box may still have set free consequences none of us have yet imagined.

During this time of furlough I have been volunteering within the Garden. Keeping the living collection alive is recognised as essential work. The limits of social distancing have been adhered to by the other volunteers, Trish and the apprentices. Even so, we've had to conduct discussions by shouting across the car park at each other, disinfecting keys and sitting in our cars for lunch. It has been an eerie experience to see the Garden so empty of visitors, something shared by colleagues from other gardens. In practice we have been gardening on the separate principal, just as the patients of the former hospital on the site were treated by separation. Whether we'll be introducing graduated labour or not is still an option for discussion, but we're growing food on site and our Members are taking walks within the grounds (where they are able under government advice).

Hebe News, magazine of the Hebe Society has just arrived. In uncertain times everyone needs something comforting to cling to. No coronavirus mention until Page 4.

Chris Kidd, Curator

The Book of the Garden

Ventnor Botanic Garden Today takes the stunning photography of Julian Winslow, with that of Rosemary Stewart, Ian Pratt, Jonyth Hill and Colin Pope and melds the horticulture and history of the Garden in a beautiful keepsake.

It explains why we grow the plants we do: why indeed they grow at all. It takes us through our mini worlds of Australia, New Zealand and Japan, and describes the planting in the arid garden. It describes how our medical history is reflected in today's wellbeing ventures.

The book will be available for sale via the website. See John Curtis, Page 10

A visit to Tasmania

Colin Pope seeks out some of VBG's plants in their original habitat

Familiar sight: Fork fern (Tmesipteris spp.) which grows unusually on some of our tree ferns at Ventnor, having survived the journey from Tasmania where the tree ferns were harvested

Ventnor Botanic Garden grows quite a number of plants from Tasmania so when my wife and I were fortunate enough to visit the island last April (2019), I was interested to see some of the plants I was familiar with in the Garden growing to their full potential in the wild. We spent nearly three weeks travelling, enjoying the landscape, people and wildlife. Although the state of Tasmania is small by Australian standards, it is nevertheless a large island (nearly as large as the island of Ireland) and we only had time to explore parts.

Our visit coincided with the start of autumn and although many introduced trees planted around towns and settlements were showing fine autumn colours, the native bush was drab by comparison. Virtually all of the native trees and shrubs are evergreen and look predominantly grey-green throughout the year. There is one exception, a single deciduous native tree. This is a Southern Beech *(Nothofagus gunnii)* and it is confined to Tasmania where it grows in the higher mountains and rarely grows taller than 2 metres. Nevertheless, for a few weeks the spectacle of autumn colour of the foliage attracts visitors from all over Australia. When we were there, the leaves were just starting to turn but we met a number of hikers trekking to the mountain slopes to admire the display. Despite the general lack of autumn colour in the native bush, I was interested to see that many of the smaller bushes and herbaceous plants were producing colourful fruits. Brightly coloured berries were produced in abundance on a wide range of species with colours ranging from white, orange, red and blue, all designed to attract particular species of feeding birds in order to effect dispersal.

One native tree which was commonplace in the Tasmanian landscape was the Blackwood *(Acacia melanoxylon)*. This is a plant that we grow in the Australian garden and it is covered with creamy fluffy flowers in the spring. In Australia the tree is highly valued for its decorative timber which is used in cabinets, musical instruments and boat building. At the time of our visit, Blackwood was very striking because of the

bunches of elongated, flattened and twisted seed pods bearing very distinctive black seeds each encircled by a large pinkish red fleshy structure known as an aril. This is oil rich, encouraging insects and birds to eat it and hence aid dispersal. Perhaps it is fortunate that our tree at Ventnor does not produce these showy fruits because Blackwood has become highly invasive when introduced into some countries because it can give rise to a persistent and prolific seed bank.

Marsupials have fared well in Tasmania compared with much of mainland Australia, a fact put down to the absence of predatory dingoes and introduced foxes. Some coastal areas of native bush are kept free of trees as a result of grazing marsupials and where 'marsupial lawns' occur they are good places for observing the native fauna. At one such site on the north coast of the island, I knelt down to photograph grazing wallabies and kangaroos and immediately leapt up in pain! My hands were full of embedded sharp spines. I had not noticed a tiny plant hugging the ground with spiny leaves and fruits. This proved to be a tiny prostrate species of Sea Holly, *Eryngium vesiculosum*. That evening, when I removed my boots, they were full of spiny fruits. Clearly, this is a very effective means of seed dispersals and wallabies and wombats must spend a lot of time removing the thorns from their fur.

Perhaps the most distinctive vegetation type in Tasmania is the temperate rain forest found particularly along the western coasts where rainfall can be high. Tree ferns grow in abundance beneath the eucalyptus tree canopy and the wettest areas of rainforest are virtually impenetrable, densely packed with fallen trees and spiny shrubs growing on very wet ground. The high humidity promotes a rich growth of epiphytic plants, particularly mosses, liverworts, lichens and ferns. In some ways, the tree fern forests resemble our tree fern dell in the Garden but the most noticeable difference is the rich velvety growth of ferns and mosses enveloping the trunks. This micro-forest of tiny plants is highly attractive and diverse and makes a fascinating study. One plant I was particularly interested to see was the fork fern *(Tmesipteris spp.)* which grows unusually on some of our tree ferns at Ventnor, having survived the journey from Tasmania where the tree ferns were harvested. In their native habitat, the Fork Ferns were lush and prolific but I only saw them in the wetter areas of tree fern forests. They appeared to be absent from remnant pockets of tree fern gullies in the drier east of the island.

Tasmania has a fascinating flora. We missed many of the interesting flowers which come out during the spring but there was still plenty to keep us occupied and enthralled. I can thoroughly recommend Tasmania as a peaceful scenic and historic island with a rich and interesting fauna and flora. Maybe one day it will no longer be off limits for visitors.

Bellendena montana, Mount Field

Tangled taxonomy of *Echium*

Pride of Madeira: Mixed genetic wares

Chris Kidd looks at the keenness to hybridise of our most acclaimed plants

The genus Echium in the Borage family is one we know very well at VBG. Our famous *E. pininana* is the most acclaimed of our plants in spring; new visitors ask their names daily. Hillier certainly would have grown *E. pininana*, and gone to great trouble to do so in a garden that was in essence an extension of his nursery where Echium would have to vie for space, muscling in alongside his more greatly prized trees and shrubs.

E. pininana became more firmly established by introductions from Simon Goodenough. Plants were sourced from the Canaries' botanic garden and produced a stable population that was remarkably pure, so much so that they were the group of study for Mike Maunder's PhD in the 1990s. I have previously covered it here in 2014, but this edition is a good opportunity to look more closely at one or two plants we have, and see the tangled taxonomy within them.

Echiums like to hybridise, and at VBG, as I observed in *Ventnorensis* in 2014: "Sadly, from a purist's point of view, it wasn't long before a tom got in with the pedigrees". This keenness to hybridise is innate to all the Echiums from the Atlantic islands, as declared by Dr Rachael Graham who defended her PhD on "The genomics of parallel adaptation in Macronesian *Echium* (Boraginaceae)". Graham's research agreed with earlier suggestions of migration of precursor Echium species from European origins. Graham suggested there were at least two waves. Rather than look at the evidence deep within the genetic sequences of these plants, imagine the journey taken by a single Echium, almost certainly as seed, from a part of mainland Europe across the Atlantic to the Macronesian group of islands – the Canaries, Verdes, Maderias etc. On arrival it would have grown as its inherent genetic blueprint dictated, identical to its parents far away. However, in this new island context its place within the ecosystem would be new. This would be a threat to success for certain, but, as we often find in island floras and faunas globally, the new isolation gave opportunity to adapt over time through natural selection, ultimately forming an entirely new species. This process happened twice with Echium. In the modern day, there are now distinct species, often endemic to single volcanic cones within an island group.

As a new plant in these islands, a distinct advantage would be the ability to hybridise, drawing in new DNA combinations the better to produce variety less vulnerable to mortal threat. A plant unable to do this could only defend its species existence with the same combinations of DNA repeatedly, therefore would be easily overcome. The

present day Echium species in Macronesia retain this hybridability. We refer to them as outbreeders, though their relative natural isolation means their makeup remains relatively static. However, brought together in cultivation the plants take full advantage of the possibilities offered, and through the agency of enthusiastic bee pollination, hybridise merrily.

"Pearce's Grey": Muted colour

Taxonomists classifying plants have made good cases for Echium species in Macronesia. The plants that have become cultivated are where the problems begin; these will be hybrids if they have had any opportunity at all. In gardens are a group of Echiums with the common name "Pride of Madeira". If you try to find their botanical name, you will find several offers; usually *E. fastuosum* and *E. candicans.* Both these names are good for real plants in Macronesia. In reality, and rather cryptically, neither and both could be "Pride of Madeira", as could their hybrids. For clarity, it is unlikely that either *E. fastuosum* or *E. candicans* are true in cultivation, except in rare circumstances where they have been wild sourced and maintained by vegetative means. However, nurseries have for years sold plants and seeds labelled *E. fastuosum* and *E. candicans.* If one were to collate all the trade stock of each and line them all up, the conclusion would be obvious.

So what, then, of Pride of Madeira? Well, it is a magnificent plant whichever one ends up with. Expect a shrubby, rounded, silver leafed hummock that will increase over four to five years depending on frost. During this time it may flower not at all, or as a sector within the hummock, or quite spectacularly as a whole, each branch terminating in a comparatively short spike of quite tightly held flowers, usually bright blue, but as we will see, not always.

Our Pride of Madeira offer their mixed genetic wares in the Mediterranean Garden at VBG. 2020 looks a good year; some clumps have been pushing flower spikes through January and February for a late spring display. These are the result of past hybridisations going back several generations, and a real soup of characteristics show up in sometimes bizarre combination. Where the genes of *E. pininana* or *E. gentianoides* have been introduced, all kinds of wonderful freaks have had their time with us.

Three years ago, growing out of rubble in the compost yard, one of these hybrids came to our attention. David Pearce, at the time an apprentice, suggested this plant should be named Pearce's Perfection. We propagated this plant as it was indeed quite novel, a tight clump with the silvery pointedness of leaf inherited from *E. candicans* combined with the leaf length of *E. fastuosum.* Its flower spike is a melt of both parents in terms of shape. Scorpioid whorls of flower process in spiral tightly to the stem in a uniform way rather than wider at the base. It is the colour, though, that is the defining feature. Far from claiming the title of perfection, the colour on close inspection looks rather washed out. The individual flower has pink pistil and stamen within a mostly white corolla, the upper petals of which blush light blue. The overall effect, especially from a distance on a bright sunny day, is rather muted – hence *Echium* "Pearce's Grey" as it has become known.

Chairman's Message

The world has changed and VBG needs our help, says **John Bagshawe**

Jack with plants for sale: Staff, volunteers and apprentices are rallying to keep VBG going

I can't believe what a change has occurred in a short space of time at VBG and everywhere else.

2020 was looking so positive: the Garden was looking good, an extra gardening member of staff was taken on (thank you, John), more work was being completed, the pond was being repaired and all due to work by the gardening staff and a good number of regular volunteers. We had a wonderful talk from Colin Pope on Tasmania on the 26th February, what a lovely experience for him and for us [see Page 4].

Then the world changed. We were so looking forward to Emma Tennant's event on the 18th March and this had to be postponed; many of the gardening staff including Chris Kidd were furloughed (a word I didn't know before); tourists couldn't come to the Island; people over 70 had to be in lockdown; then the postponement of the AGM, and with the directions of the Government people couldn't, or felt they couldn't, come to the Garden.

In fact the Garden is still very much open and a small number of people have been enjoying the open space whilst self-distancing. The weather has also been very kind.

VBG is thinking of really positive ways to keep an income coming in – for example, half price Annual Membership passes, selling and delivering plants and seeds anywhere on the Island, seeds being sent anywhere in the UK by post (thank you for the volunteer seed ladies for all the hard work you had put in to enable the seeds to be there to be sold), salad growing trays (Chris, good to see in the video how sowing is done by an expert); food, beer and wine deliveries. Jack and Darren have worked so hard on this.

Luckily for VBG there has been Trish. I can't say how much she has done, but it is over and above what would be expected of her. She has kept the Garden going in this difficult time. Trish is so passionate about the Garden and for that we are so very grateful, as we are to the apprentices Adam and Indi, who have also been great with their hard work and dedication as the only other full time gardeners. VBG has also had a couple of volunteers who have helped with the mowing, and the Garden is looking cared for.

When the lockdown has finished, the Friends will need to be there for the Garden. There will be much gardening to do, from planting (if it is not too late) to weed clearing and general maintenance.

I know the future will be very different to what we have been used to, but I hope knowing the passion is there, VBG will survive and thrive.

Risky: Abutilon Ventnor Gold

Plant Heritage

Picking up the trail of *Abutilon* "Ventnor Gold", **Chris Kidd** describes how an organisation evolved to prevent the risk of losing cultivated plants

Following the article on *Abutilon* "Ventnor Gold' in the last issue of *Ventnorensis,* which told the tale of the discovery, naming and disappearance from the Garden of *A.* 'Ventnor Gold' I was forwarded an email from Brian and Mary Morris from Wanstead in London:

"Browsing through this month's magazine, we were intrigued by the article on abutilons, especially since, like Mrs McKay, we too bought a 'Ventnor Gold' about 20 years ago from the plant sales area at VBG. It has survived and is thriving and I am attaching a photo taken a few hours ago. It is planted on the north side of our garden, has several stems, and to my mind looks a little 'leggy'. We have made very few approaches with the secateurs over the years as we're not too sure about pruning it. Its label has long since disappeared. We'd like to know how best to take cuttings, please."

I've since replied with a few tips on propagation. It's pleasing that more than one plant has survived, though the story really highlights how so many cultivated plants are at risk of simply being "lost". This risk was appreciated some time ago, and the organisation Plant Heritage evolved in response.

Plant Heritage was set up by a group of passionate plant lovers in the 1970s, many of whom have remained involved over the years, while new members have shaped the charity into the thriving organisation of today. In 2020 Plant Heritage celebrated its 42nd anniversary. It has achieved a great deal during these decades. Formerly known as the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG), it adopted the name of Plant Heritage in 2009 as a punchier title that still reflects its purpose.

It was founded as a registered charity in 1978 to combine the talents of botanists, horticulturalists and conservationists with the help of keen amateur and professional gardeners, all of whom are dedicated to fulfilling Plant Heritage's aims. Through their membership, the National Collection Holders and Plant Guardian Scheme, Plant Heritage seeks to rediscover and reintroduce cultivated plants into popular use by encouraging their propagation and distribution, so that they are grown as widely as possible. Plant Heritage works closely with other conservation bodies as well as botanic gardens, *National Trust, The National Trust for Scotland, English Heritage, The Royal Horticultural Society* and many specialist horticultural societies.

A slower crisis to unfold

In our approach to climate change we should learn from the response to the coronavirus, says **John Curtis**

We have long been connecting the global long-term themes of climate change to what is happening now to the Living Collection at Ventnor Botanic Garden. We believe this is the role of a modern botanic garden – to highlight the impact of the changing climate on the world's flora. However, unlike the coronavirus, the climate crisis unfolds slowly and gradually.

The extraordinary response we have witnessed to the coronavirus is close to what is needed to move to a low carbon economy:

- Rapid deployment of £330 billion in UK Government loans (15% of GDP)
- Overnight construction of required assets (e.g. Nightingale Hospitals)
- Accelerated R&D across large corporates, start-ups and universities (identify a vaccine)
- Abrupt lifestyle changes for all citizens – homeworking, no travel, no meals out
- A burst of commercial creativity to pursue new markets (online services)

These same steps could nationalise and gradually mothball the coal and gas power generation, rapidly scale renewable energy generation, support displaced employees and radically cut carbon emissions. The challenge is that getting onto a war footing requires an enemy and an urgent threat – the virus and high mortality rates. With climate change there is no single enemy or urgent threat. We can only hope that the clarion call from the world's flora will be heard. One can even connect the recent waves of zoonotic viruses to loss of habitat. In other words, as man crowds into virgin forests, previously unknown viruses make the leap to humans. At least the coronavirus has shown what can be achieved in the face of a global crisis.

On a local level, this winter in Ventnor was very wet and mild, punctuated by three named storms: Dennis, Chiara and Jorge. The winter weather displayed two simple climate trends rather neatly: an increase in storm frequency/severity and wetter wet periods. The summer of 2019 had already demonstrated the flipside – dryer dry periods. Since 2012 14 trees have been pulled out of our windbreak by windstorms, so we would not classify the 2020 storms as one-offs. [See Weather, Page 12].

As spring came we saw the Echium hybrids' flower heads emerging in early March, nearly a month early. All the magnolias came into flower at once above the Hydrangea Dell. The magnolias' flowering sequence is usually white *Magnolia campbellii var. alba* followed closely by the showy pink *Magnolia campbellii 'Charles Raffill'* with *Magnolia campbellii var. mollicomata* bringing up the rear three to four weeks later, as it is thought to be the least frost tolerant. Yet in 2020 they flowered simultaneously for the first time, yet another indication that the microclimate at Ventnor is becoming milder. The message from the extraordinary 'flowering' of both a male and female cycad last summer was the same. Equally the magnolias' first flowering dates are fluctuating between late

Simultaneous: all the Magnolias flowered at the same time

December and late February, nodding to the variability of our weather patterns.

Just when we thought we had muddled through the incline lift failing and the road slipping into the sea, along comes Covid-19. The Garden remains open on a limited basis, but most of our revenue streams have ground to a halt. Although most staff are furloughed, fixed costs carry on for insurance, utilities, and service fees.

To help us get through this, please order a VBG Salad Kit, some seeds, a plant to add to your garden, a meal or a gift for a friend by phone or online. We even deliver Botanic Ale by the case across the Island. Many winter hours have gone into *Ventnor Botanic Garden Today*, a 43-page book loaded with excellent photographs and stories about the Garden. (See Page 3). With one final edit it is off to print this month. We hope it will create some pride amongst our staff, volunteers, Friends and visitors. And yes, you are expected by buy at least one! Your Garden needs your support now more than ever.

COVID-19 APPEAL

We certainly appreciate that VBG Friends' Society is not a front-line charity, and those charities that are deserve all the help they can get, but we do need to keep our finances in a sound order. Much of our income comes from those visiting the Garden through the Gift Aid scheme and this source of income has now ceased until the Garden reopens – and we just don't know when this will be and how many visitors will come. Other fund raising events have also been postponed.

We are still looking to raise funds in these difficult times and if anyone can spare a donation or set up a standing order of any amount it would be most appreciated.

Payments can be made by the following methods:

Bank Transfer into the VBGFS - Foundation Fund
Branch code: 54-41-31 Account No: 49648292 Reference: COVID-19 Appeal
Standing Order: Details as above
Cheque to: VBGFS or Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society
Send to: T W Woodcock, The Old Cottage, Upper Green Road,
St Helens, RYDE, Isle of Wight PO33 1UQ

Online Giving

This has been set up with 'Memory Giving' as we have been a recipient of them before. You can donate via their website and enter Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society. This is via: www.memorygiving.com/vbgfscovid19appeal

Thank you! John Bagshawe - Chairman

Weather in the Garden

(September 2019 to March 2020) **by Chris Watts**

What a turbulent few months this has been! Interesting meteorologically maybe, but otherwise?

Let us take the good news first, although even 'good' may be tempered by thoughts of climate change. Overall it was very mild; there was no air frost and little in the way of wintry precipitation. The bloom count on New Year's Day was a healthy 217, and as I write the days are lengthening and the magnolias are magnificent.

Now for the not so good news. Wave after wave of low pressure areas brought about by a very active jet stream combined with an equally active polar vortex. It was wet. I don't mean just wet, I mean very, very wet. The rain seemed relentless. Gardens became soaked with water. The wind blew. But of course you probably don't need reminding! However some of the headlines have been over the top, claiming that the period from October to February, and February in particular, was the wettest ever recorded. Not so here in Ventnor; looking back only six years to the same period in 2013/14 we find that it was even wetter with 745mm of rain as against 610mm this time round. February 2014 itself was also wetter than this February, 147mm compared with 134mm. But the month was truly awful, as we had to contend with two named storms, Ciara (9th) and Dennis (16th), sleet was observed to fall on two days, hail on one, and thunder on three – including a terrific clap of thunder in the early hours (4.44am) on the 13th. Interestingly the high rainfall totals were achieved without exceeding 25mm on a single day.

Leaving aside September and March, there were very few dry spells, the longest of these occurring in January (18th to the 24th) as pressure rose to its highest since 1957, near to 1050mb. This brought light winds for a change, a welcome respite indeed coming in the middle of some wild weather – although I understand that the Garden hasn't suffered too badly over this autumn and winter. Then March brought some welcome relief – the second half of the month being dry and sunny. What a sudden change!

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
September	*16.2+*	*84.1++*	*12*	*17.6*	*7.4*	*0*	*23.7*
October	*13.0*	*133.5++*	*21*	*14.0*	*5.3*	*0*	*16.8*
November	*8.8*	*115.6++*	*18*	*9.8*	*2.1*	*0*	*16.0*
December	*8.2++*	*141.7++*	*20*	*8.0*	*0.4*	*0*	*17.4*
Year 2019	*12.2++*	*822.5+*	*134*	*13.0*	*-1.6*	*1*	*27.8*
January	*7.9++*	*84.9*	*12*	*7.6*	*1.1*	*0*	*21.3*
February	*8.4++*	*134.4++*	*19*	*7.9*	*2.0*	*0*	*18.3*
March	*8.4*	*59.0*	*7*	*8.8*	*1.5*	*0*	*21.3*

[1] Lowest temperature °C [2] No of air frosts [3] Wettest day rain total in mm

Dear members . . .

Few of us have managed to get to the Garden during the coronavirus lockdown, but, thanks to our very local Chairman, John Bagshawe, we at least have a glimpse of how the Garden has looked. Much smarter, indeed, if he hadn't spent a huge amount of time cutting the grass. His photos, taken while he took a much needed break from mowing – and there's a lot of grass at VBG – are scattered throughout this Issue.

Expanding Edulis: for summer evenings

The crisis has brought to the fore the vital presence the Friends have. While the gardeners are furloughed, Trish, Adam and Indi, who are funded by the Friends, are still working with a passion. Do take a look at the appeal for funds on Page 11, so that we can keep them keeping on.

It was great to chat, albeit at a distance, to two mainstays of the Garden – apprentice Indi, and this year's Harold Hillier Award winner Colin Pope. If one thing could be said to unite student and ecology veteran it would be passion for the Garden. See Pages 14 and 17.

Many of us have found time to get in touch with old friends, and Friends have taken the time to contact us. Joanna Millar now lives in France but thanks to seeds from VBG planted long ago has a little bit of Ventnor in her Provence home. See Val Pitts's feature, Page 22.

The tireless work of our Committee members can easily go unrecognised, so I asked Sally Peake to document the grants, larger and smaller, which she with Lucy de Ville and Rosemary Stewart, have acquired over time and how they have benefitted the Garden. As one who hates form filling with a passion I am particularly in awe. See Page 28.

We are proud, too, of our Vice Chairman, Peter Coleman, who has returned to the medical work from which he had retired, and of course we are very happy to claim kin with the High Sheriff – our very own Caroline Peel. See interview, Page 18. We are extremely lucky that Val Pitts has taken on the job of Membership Secretary.

Finally, it seemed a few weeks ago as if this Issue was going to be a shadow of its usual self because our wonderful designer, Simone Dickens, was marooned in Spain. She made it back on what turned out to be the last flight for some time. We are of course delighted, as, doubtless, were her hens, goats, pigs and plants – see previous issue about Simone and Davids' Kingston Smallholding.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please may I have your contributions for the Autumn edition of Ventnorensis by 5th September.

Peace and primroses: VBG's silent spring

The Harold Hillier Award 2020

The Harold Hillier Award has been awarded this year to ecologist Colin Pope. **Chris Kidd** describes his work and value to the Garden, and **Roz Whistance** chats to the man himself

Colin Pope: Charming, friendly, enthusiastic

Chris Kidd writes:

Within the trusteeship of the VBG Friends Society comes the decision on the Sir Harold Hillier Award, which annually should be made to a person deemed to have shown him or herself to give great service to horticulture on the Island. I have the enormous pleasure to summarise the service given by this year's award winner, Dr Colin Pope.

Colin is a remarkable man known throughout the Island, nationally and internationally. His career highlights are many and deserve a fuller biography than can be permitted here. In his landmark role as Ecology Officer for the Isle of Wight Council he was uniquely positioned to advise and guide a panoply of Islanders, from chief executives to householders, in preserving and strengthening our natural history and living environment. Within the local authority he was an officer commanding the greatest respect, his knowledge second to none. Colin is co-author of *The Isle of Wight Flora,* the most important reference book yet published on the subject. He is past president of the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society, and continues as Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland recorder for bats, vascular plants, lichens and fungi.

Contrasting with such professional and lay achievements, Colin is the most unassuming man. Charming, friendly and enthusiastic, quite the opposite of the person I'd expected when I arrived on the Island and had the good fortune to meet him whilst undertaking some council directive, now long forgotten. I do though remember Simon Goodenough sagely referring to Colin as "one of the good guys". Between us we hoped Colin's office could be lured to VBG as part of an effort to centralise partners with a shared ethos. With Colin's help we created an event at VBG to celebrate the centenary of the British Ecological Society. I mentioned to Colin how I'd long hoped he would become more involved with the Garden, and he seemed surprised, but I was absolutely delighted when on his retirement he offered his skills as a volunteer.

Colin volunteers here on Mondays and Fridays. He manages the living collection database, curates the accessions within the garden and labels plants. Colin brings a breadth of knowledge to the Garden that has never been here before: his insights into otherwise unseen worlds at VBG are revelatory. As a result, we see the Garden as a much more complex network of cohabiting and codependent organisms. He has an intimate knowledge of the Garden which he imparts monthly through his *Highlights* published on our website and emailed to Friends and members. Colin regularly joins or leads our monthly Design Walks.

In making the Hillier Award, the Friends Society should be proud to acknowledge so worthy a recipient. I'm surprised it has taken so long. It ought to be a knighthood.

Roz Whistance writes:

You might have been lucky enough to have heard him give a talk, or been led round some seemingly inauspicious heath to have a wealth of unexpected plant or insect life revealed. Or you'll have devoured his monthly musings on a plant at the Botanic Garden. Any of these will make you applaud this year's choice as recipient of the Harold Hillier Award, Colin Pope.

It was a bit of a smack on the forehead moment at the VBGFS Exec committee when we heard Chris Kidd's proposed recipient. Of course! Why ever not before? Maybe because Colin has become part of the soil of the place, quietly getting on with a job that requires specific expertise; or posting his monthly flower notes enthusiastically but not showily. We may have become guilty of, very quickly, taking Colin for granted.

"I'm very honoured to receive the Harold Hillier award," smiles Colin when I suggest as much. I say smiles: I can hear it in his voice as we speak, socially distantly, over the phone. Neither of us, sadly, are within walking distance of the Garden.

Colin has become the obvious Harold Hillier Award recipient for his tremendous support for Chris Kidd, and the Garden in general. "Over the years Chris has been pulled in so many different directions," says Colin. "His title is Curator, but he has less and less time for that aspect of his work, so I've helped a bit to fill in that gap."

An ecologist who was born and brought up on the Island – "I'm a proud Vectensian," he says – Colin studied botany at the Royal Holloway College in London, and went to Plymouth for his PhD in ecology. "I had a number of jobs around the country, but really wanted to come back to the Island. Then in the early 1990s I was working in Edinburgh, and was back here on holiday when I asked around if there were any jobs. Somebody said 'You could always register with County Hall as a teacher, and if any jobs came up they'd let you know.'"

It wasn't something he'd considered, but he popped along to County Hall to leave his name. "I was just leaving and they said 'Hang on a minute – there's a vacancy at Carisbrooke High School. Can you go up there?' I did, and they offered me a job as a science teacher! I went back to my job in Edinburgh and said I'm leaving next month."

He acknowledges that he was thrust in the deep end with teaching. "It wasn't really what I wanted to do but it meant I was on the Island." What it did mean was that he could get involved with things outside of work that really enthused him:

"I was volunteering with organisations like the Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Society, and the Isle of Wight Council were talking about setting up a Countryside Section on the Island and were looking for an ecology officer to help them. So I applied for that job and was fortunate to get it."

The work involved looking at the ecological impact on developments, working with the public and helping with events, and he enjoyed both the variety and the chance, in his spare time, to pursue his main interest and love – natural history and botany.

Then along he came to the Botanic Garden. "I visited quite a bit and got to know Chris [Kidd]. When I retired I asked if there was anything I could do at the Garden."

It was the curating side of his job as Curator that Chris asked Colin to help with. "There is a database of all the plants in the Garden which needs regular maintaining. New acquisitions go on the database, as does the condition of the plants. Things die, are replaced, and we record that. Sadly the database needs more time than I can give it."

The database is also the source of information to produce the labels for the plants, something less straightforward than might be thought.

"Plants coming in have name labels – but not necessarily the correct ones," Colin explains. "It can take some detective work to find out what the plant should be called. That might been speaking to specialists in other botanic gardens to get to the bottom of what the plant really is, then we can make those changes." [See Plant Detective Story Page 24.]

He'd really like a direct feed into Chris Kidd's brain in order to audit all the plants in the Garden – where they came from, when they were first planted. "We did that a few years ago with the eucalyptuses, and made a pretty good job of that, and started on the succulents, particularly the agaves. Clearly it's not something Chris has time for at the moment, but you just have to do what you can."

Asked if he has a favourite part of the Garden Colin hesitates. "I went to Tasmania once, to see tree ferns growing in the wild and it's given me a real love for the tree fern dell. But I love it all really. You can go there on a nice sunny day and it transports you to another place."

Leader: Colin delights and informs groups on Botany Club outings

Meet The Apprentice

The Friends' Society funds training for two apprentices. Indi is approaching the end of her first year - and, as she tells **Roz Whistance,** is enjoying almost every minute of her work

Indi: Loves being outside. Photograph by John Bagshawe

R: When did you join VBG as an apprentice?
I: I started on 8th July 2019.
R: Are you an Islander?
I: Yes, I've lived in Ventnor all my life
R: Full name and age?
I: Indigo Wyatt, 18.
R: How did you get involved with the Apprenticeship Scheme?
I: I spent a year at the IW College studying horticulture, and during that time I was volunteering twice a week at the Garden. I much preferred being outside to being in a classroom.
R: How does the Apprenticeship Scheme work?
I: I am still linked to the College – I get work from them that I do on the computer. At the Garden I am taught by Chris [Kidd] and Trish. I've learnt so much from Trish, and the whole gardening team are so supportive and experienced. I really do learn something new every day.
R: Do you have a favourite occupation in the Garden?
I: I enjoy sowing seeds in the greenhouse, then planting something another day. It's all good fun.
R: Are any parts of the work less enjoyable?
I: Sometimes when we do salad sowing it can take hours to do and can get a bit tedious, especially when it's sunny outside. The work is mostly outdoors for us, though, which is great.
R: What do you think are the benefits of learning at a botanic garden, as opposed to in a general horticultural setting?
I: It's a general education here too, you learn how to look after and maintain all plants, but working in a botanic garden, future employers will realise you know how to take care of unusual plants, that you understand the needs of plants from different countries and attend to them a bit better.
R: What else have you enjoyed as part of your training?
I: I've recently done a tractor training course, which taught me different skills from everyday gardening. I really enjoyed that as it was all new to me. There is also a chainsaw course that the Friends have signed me up for. The Friends fund me, and are really generous.
R: Where does your course take you from here?
I: I've got another year and will carry on learning in the Garden and through my college work. There is talk of taking on two new apprentices next year. That'd be nice, having two other people with us, helping out every day.
R: And after you finish?
I: The Island is in demand for gardening work. My sister works at Kew and she said I should think about aiming for there – that might be thinking too ambitiously. Maybe I'll get work on the Island or go to the mainland. It depends what comes up.
R: What are the effects of the coronavirus measures?
I: Currently the Garden is being used as a retreat, as the space the Garden provides means people can still keep their distance but enjoy the plants. This is the time of year when stuff is flowering, and it's a shame that people are missing it.

What's worrying is that without gardeners in a 22-acre garden, who's going to keep the weeds under control?
R: You're currently at home, as a precautionary measure aren't you?
I: Yes, I've had to self-isolate as my dad wasn't well, and can't wait to get back there. I've been keeping busy at home, my Dad and I have been keeping on top of things in our garden. I do enjoy gardening, even outside of work.

Our very own High Sheriff

Caroline Peel, Membership Secretary for the VBGFS for the past seven years, holds this significant and important office

Locked down but dressed up: Caroline in High Sheriff garb. Photograph by Ben Wood

It is an odd time for us all, locked down and isolated from family, friends and colleagues. But it is a particularly strange time for Caroline Peel. Caroline is this year's High Sheriff, and had been poised for a year of attending social functions, grand dinners, school concerts, charity events. Then on March 23rd, 'pressing the flesh' was suddenly, and particularly, outlawed.

"The diary was filled, and then everything had to be cancelled," says Caroline. "The thing I found difficult to get my head round is there's nothing useful I can do. All the volunteers in the organisations we're trying to help are trained in what they do. So there's absolutely no point me ringing up and saying (effecting irritating insinuating voice) 'are you alright, what can I do to help?'"

Even her Declaration, the official start of her year of office, was hit by the lockdown. It still went ahead, but by computer link. As she said wryly in her Declaration speech: "Some of my shrieval colleagues have managed to get their Declarations done 'properly' – procession with Judge in a lovely cathedral or guildhall – then a couple were scaled down into their gardens with just a JP – with the few of us left being told to do it on Zoom at the kitchen table!" She added that standards need to be maintained – and so she dressed in full regalia, despite being in her own kitchen.

Caroline's natural humour and unflappability make her an ideal candidate for the role of High Sheriff, which is an ancient one, originating from when circuit judges toured the land and needed safe harbour from potential violent or corrupting influences in any given region. Each county still has a High Sheriff, but despite the rather magnificent, theatrical outfit, the role is far more than simply a ceremonial hangover from olden times:

"The Shrievalty is a well established institution set up to support the unsung," says Caroline. "Each High Sheriff nominates particular groups that deserve the support of the High Sheriff's Trust during their year in office, while other existing causes continue to be supported."

She is full of praise for WightAID, an initiative set up by her predecessor Geoff Underwood and Council Leader Dave Stewart, who invited businesses to contribute to a fund to which Island charities and causes can apply for specific projects. "There is also the Isle of Wight Foundation and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation, all pooling a certain amount, and we work together."

Caroline has chosen to focus particularly on three small organisations that punch above their financial weight: Wight DASH (Domestic Abuse Support Hub, formerly known as the Women's Refuge); the Pop Up Soup Kitchen; and Suicide Prevention and Intervention Isle of Wight (SPIIOW), as well as the Street Pastors:

"I felt that these were small, easily overlooked charities, and they didn't ask for too much so it was easy to give them more support. Other organisations, asking for more, would mean the Trust would be one of several donors."

These charities address core needs: Caroline is keen to ram home the fact that the Isle of Wight is far from the prosperous bit of 'the affluent south' it is often assumed to be. "The Island is very poor. So one thing I did feel I could usefully do was write a begging letter to the Island's yacht clubs." The letter says: *"Wages are well below the national average; seasonal employment has a huge impact on unemployment levels, tourism is one of our largest earners. . . . Over 20% of our children are living in poverty. Add coronavirus to an already toxic mix and you will see that urgent steps have to be taken."*

She "cheekily" suggests that those who had intended to come to the Island they love but are conscientious in staying in their primary residence might donate the cost of a couple of return ferry tickets to the Fund. "It's brought in a couple of thousand so far, and every penny helps."

She is in regular contact with fellow Sheriffs: "We [High Sheriffs] in the South West region have a WhatsApp group, so we can tell each other about what we're doing to interfere in the smooth running of various organisations!" she jokes. "Also Susie Sheldon, the Lord Lieutenant, and I speak quite often. But it was quite surreal, doing the Declaration online."

The other thing she is doing while the lockdown persists is talking to people – either while on the allowed daily exercise, with appropriate social distancing of course – or by phone. "I make a point of phoning somebody who is on their own every day, just to see if there is anything I can do. It's probably enough at the moment."

As for her role on the VBG Friends, she has stepped down as Membership Secretary – handing over to the very committed and capable Val Pitts – but is still on the Executive Committee. "After seven years it's nice to have a breather from it and re-look at it with fresh eyes."

More than any of her predecessors in the High Sheriff role she is having to "suck it and see, play it by ear", thanks to the coronavirus. She adds: Let's hope everyone's nicer as a result, kinder and more caring." She pauses. "I think they will be." [See WightAID, Page 30]

DISCOUNTS for members

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

Benefitting the community

A letter from former Curator, **Simon Goodenough**

Dear Roz,

Delighted to read in *Ventnorensis* [Autumn/Winter 2019] about the involvement of Dr Peter Coleman. One of the major aspects of VBG in the time of IWC at least in my eyes was to engage with the wider community and in particular Special Needs schools, the unemployed and those requiring OT.

It is a bitter irony that a "free pass" is being offered when it was always free before! However I am so pleased that we have a medical man on the committee and there is now a push to do something about a most pressing social problem. For the five years I was in Wales I worked with the Probation Service, 'Men in Sheds' and 'Help for Heroes' to encourage people back in to work and/or recovery. I do hope and I am certain it will be a tremendous success to undertake such a project at VBG. GP referral to work at VBG would be a great start, that was a conversation I had more than 10 years ago on the IW but nobody was listening. Now it is further up the agenda – Hurrah!

There are so many ways to engage with a community and one of the great successes we had in Wales was our Grow the Future Project. I am pleased to say that it was so successful that the scheme has since my departure been further funded and expanded at NBG Wales. https://botanicgarden.wales/press/growing-future-national-botanic-garden-wales/ Take a look at this for ideas. A very dear friend of mine, Linda Phillips, set up an amazing project way back in 1982 which is also an incredible blueprint for community activism, http://www.rootsandshoots.org.uk/ ; there have been many imitations of this project.

Grow the Future: Simon started this movement in Wales

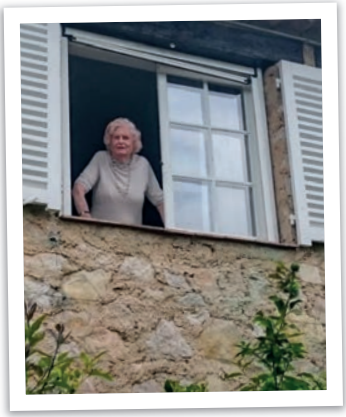
On a larger scale and something that may prove interesting reading, see this https://www.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/imagine-inclusive-market-agriculture-incubator-in-north-west-europe/ I have always felt that the use of marginal pieces of land could be brought in to cultivation and I am sure that there are numerous sites on the IW that could be used. At this time of political upheaval I am sure that good news stories are always worthwhile it is always good to strike with ideas at times when others are bereft of such and need to be seen to be doing something positive i.e. the majority of Councillors and politicians, now would be the time to lobby! Anyhow quite enough from me.

Trust all well for you.

Kindest regards
Simon

Our *Amie* in the South

Routine admin led **Val Pitts** to a Friend for whom a rose is named



Friend from a distance: Joanna Millar

> "We are having extraordinary weather here – the temperature is up to 22 degrees in the middle of the day. As a result all sorts of things are coming into bud and I am terribly afraid we shall have a cold spell and all will be lost! I do so wish I could visit you [at VBG] but now I no longer travel I still keep my garden going and even had a rose named after me."

This intriguing passage in a reply to my letter on the mundane subject of updating Standing Order details for membership subscriptions arrived in mid-February when we were still enduring the seemingly endless streams of rain and gales. It conjured up dreams of the warmth and scents of the Mediterranean.

The lady and the rose in question are Joanna Millar, and both are remarkable, as I discovered as the story unfolded. Joanna was writing from her home, the more than 200-year-old Prieur in Tourrettes-sur-Loup near Cannes, which she and her husband bought in 1969 as a 'dilapidated wreck" with a wilderness of a garden containing a number of ancient olive trees and "many interesting trees and shrubs". Fifty years on, Joanna has created a Provençal paradise that reflects her horticultural skill and enthusiasm, and the vast knowledge she has developed of gardening in a Mediterranean climate.

Sundial: COMME MOI TU N'ES Q'UN PEU D'OMBRE QUI PASSE – Like me, you are but a passing shadow

Curious, but unable to book a ferry and drive south, I have enjoyed virtual tours of Joanna's garden in the company of Robin Lane Fox (*Financial Times,* June 9th 2012), The International Women's Club, Provence (https://iwcpgardeninggroup.blogspot.com/2013/05/domaine-du-prieure-and-jardin-des.html) and, of course, Joanna's own words and pictures (pers. comm. and https://mediterraneangardeningfrance.org/dirG06140.htm). [You can easily find these links by typing Joanna Millar and Tourettes-sur-Loup into Google]

Joanna describes her garden as having grown like Topsy with no particular design, but being free-flowing with plants being allowed to seed themselves around wherever

possible. The basic structure was imposed by the series of *restanques* – stone-walled limestone terraces – on which Joanna has created flower beds around and among the olives and other trees and shrubs. Roses are a great feature, many such as Rambling Rector and Constance Spry, having originated from England. Rosa Joanna Millar, however, now registered as a cross between R. *banksiae normalis* x R. *gigantean*, is a previously unknown rose, which Joanna 'rescued' from a famous, but by then run-down garden, La Mortola, in Italy. It romps up a cypress tree, and Joanna describes it as an astounding sight, with its many thousands of blossoms showing in March and April.

Joanna is a long-time member of VBGFS, having heard of the Garden through friends who lived on the Island. Her husband (John Humphrey Millar 1903-2006) was, among many other things, a life member of the Royal Yacht Squadron and they visited Cowes many times. Joanna says that on each visit she took the opportunity of visiting the Garden, which she fell in love with. "Living in the Mediterranean, I was enchanted to see so many of our local plants flourishing in the very protected environment at Ventnor." She also used to take full advantage of the seed distribution scheme, which she misses, but has quite a few plants from VBG in her own garden.

With her own beautiful garden full of plants that provide colour, interest and perfume at all seasons of the year, it is easy to understand why Joanna has an affinity with VBG. Like so many of us, Joanna is locked down and I am sure that we all wish our Friend in the South well as she sits out the pandemic, no doubt revelling in the joy of her garden as never before. On her house wall, above a beautiful wisteria that is now in full glorious flower, there is a sundial with an image and a motto, which, if applied to Covid-19, becomes a perfect metaphor for our troubled time:

COMME MOI TU N'ES Q'UN PEU D'OMBRE QUI PASSE – Like me, you are but a passing shadow.

Romping: Rosa *Joanna Millar* is a cross between R. *banksiae normali* x R. *gigantean*

A plant detective story

Colin Pope on the meticulous work that goes into identifying a plant – and how VBG's name is once again in lights in the academic world

Name corrected: Strobilanthes glutinosa

When plants are brought into the Garden, we rely on the supplier to provide the correct name or cultivar for the plant. Sometimes this is correct, sometimes not, or the name may have changed because the plant has been reclassified or re-determined.

When I first started volunteering at the Garden, an attractive winter-flowering plant was growing on the South African Terrace forming a mound of foliage and bearing purple tubular flowers. It was clearly a type of *Strobilanthes,* a plant that has been growing in the Long Border since Hillier times, but no-one knew the name of this species. A quick Google search did not throw up any outdoor winter-flowering species of *Strobilanthes.* However, the genus comprises plants which are native to tropical Asia and Madagascar, with a few species extending north into temperate regions of Asia. Clearly, it is not a South African plant and, in due course, material was propagated and plants were moved to the Japanese Terrace.

Meanwhile, I had managed to track down John Wood, a Senior Research Associate at Oxford University, who had a specialist interest in *Strobilanthes.* He was very helpful in enabling us to correctly name the autumn flowered *Strobilanthes* species growing in the Long Border, which at the time we had named erroneously. He was very interested in our winter flowering species and able to name it as *Strobilanthes glutinosa.* It was a plant that he had grown in his conservatory at home and it was also growing in the Temperate House at Kew but he knew of nowhere else that it was grown and he was keen to come and see ours.

At the time (2016), the plant had been grubbed up in the South African Terrace and the propagated plants were taking their time to establish on the Japanese Terrace. Finally, this last winter they formed strong bushes covered in flowers, and John Wood made the journey down to Ventnor to see them. He was most impressed and we were able to present him with a potted specimen to take back.

His visit encouraged Chris Kidd to think back to when our plants were first acquired. He thought that they had come from Hardy Exotics, a plant nursery near Penzance in Cornwall, and that the owner, Chris Shilton, collected plants from the garden of a plant collector who had died but specialised in plants from the Himalayas. This tied in with John Wood's understanding of how the plants arrived at Kew. Edward Needham was a

remarkable character who spent much of his life collecting plants from the wild in the Himalayas and growing them in his garden in Cornwall. He was responsible for bringing a number of Himalayan plants into cultivation.

It would seem that all the plants of *Strobilanthes glutinosa* grown in this country originate from Edward Needham's introduction and yet it is rarely grown in this country, and being somewhat tender is generally grown under glass. Although very showy and flowering at a time of year when flowers are highly valued, it probably escaped wider cultivation because most plant collectors visit the Himalayas in summer or autumn and would have easily missed seeing the plant.

Strobilanthes glutinosa is found in the Western Himalayas from Kashmir to Nepal at altitudes of 1000-2000 metres. The flowers are larger than other species of *Strobilanthes* and the viscous hairs on the calyx and corolla emit a strong smell of camphor. It flowers sporadically throughout the winter and by the time spring arrives the plants are looking rather scruffy. John is writing a paper on the plant and it will appear in the prestigious Curtis's Botanical Magazine, a journal from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, which has been published continuously since 1787. The article will make reference to Ventnor Botanic Garden as the only known place in Britain where this plant is grown outdoors.

Phil Le May: Proud to be a Patron

We are delighted that former Chairman, Phil Le May, has accepted the Friends' invitation to become a Patron.

He said: "Not only am I proud of what we have all achieved at VBG over the years, but I am especially proud of the Friends' Society. The apprentice program is so successful and it is a joy to me to see young people gaining confidence and knowledge whilst helping the Garden. None of that would be possibly without the stalwart work of the Executive Committee which I know, at times, can seem like a thankless task. Thank you all."

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

Very social distancing: In order to avoid the Coronavirus, Chris Kidd has positioned a chair – here demonstrated by our Chairman, John Bagshawe – upon which to greet visitors some three meters away, opposite his desk. His office has become a wholesale beer warehouse, so communication is through a tunnel of Botanic Ale.

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Just Google it!

Google, the massive global search engine, has taken more than just a passing interest in a certain small garden on a certain small Island off the south coast of Britain. Marketing Manager **Jack Cavanagh** explains

Our Garden is going to be featured alongside the big names from around the country.

Google's Arts and Culture platform has a new project on British gardens, and is looking to feature gardens that were just a bit different. While Ventnor Botanic Garden isn't a big name like Kew, being the amazing garden that we are, and what we have in terms of history, stories and wonderful plants, it really interested the people at Google.

We all know that Ventnor Botanic Garden, with its history and its microclimate, is really special, it's something no one else has, and they hooked onto that. They were particularly impressed with the amount of historical and horticultural stories we could provide, and because we already have so much quality written and photographic content they are set to create an online interactive garden feature.

I have seen examples of such features – there's a beautiful one of the British Museum, and ours will be like that only more colourful!

The plan was that the Google people were going to come in spring or early summer – and clearly with the coronavirus precautions that's not going to happen now. But when it does, either in September or spring next year, they will produce a virtual tour of the Garden. As you click around you'll be able to zoom in on something – a particular plant or tree, or an architectural feature from the Old Hospital say, and up will pop some extra information.

You might wonder why Google is so interested in our little 22 acres. Well what we have is so many good exhibits about the history, arts and wellbeing that is tied up with what is already an unusual garden. When conversations developed further and I was able to send some content and photos to them, they were so impressed that they came up with an even wilder idea – VBG in Trafalgar Square!

This is only a notion at present but we did have a conversation whereby in the craziness of the hustle and bustle of London people might escape to the peace and beauty of Ventnor Botanic Garden – via interactive headsets that Google will produce. We are still in talks at present but our size and independence counts for quite a bit as, unlike gardens connected with national organisations, VBG can act swiftly to approve the work.

I've been doing a lot of work behind the scenes and, when the ball does get rolling again after the lockdown, I can't wait to be showing that off to everybody. I'll bring my projector along and do a presentation to the Friends, so everyone can see what it's going to look like when it goes live.

I think it looks great. I just can't share it yet.

Landing the loot

How the Friends' have been able to support the Garden through charitable grants. Form-filler extraordinaire **Sally Peake** explains

When I first joined VBG Friends' Society in 2003, I quickly became aware of some really creative ways that the then Curator, Simon Goodenough, had for raising funds that were way beyond the ability of a small regional council who were then responsible for maintaining the Garden as a free-to-access public space. After the IWC obtained help from the Millenium Lottery Fund to build the new Visitor Centre, Simon asked the Friends to apply for grants through Open Spaces to create the Southern Hemisphere Garden in 2004 and then the Arid Garden, opened by HRH The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall in 2009. I learned that behind these successes were inspirational grant application forms, pored over for many, many hours by Simon and professional fundraiser, Martin Fine. They then enlisted our previous Hon Sec, and still active Trustee and Committee member, Rosemary Stewart, who filled in the application forms on behalf of the Friends.

Royal visit: Simon Goodenough greets the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall as they open the Arid Garden, 2009

So passes several years and the change in management of the Garden to the current Community Interest Company. Although not-for-profit CICs are eligible for certain grants, it is still the case that charitable organisations are more readily considered for grants, and particularly those organisations such as ours with a long track record of financial probity.

I can no longer remember how it came to be that I acquired the role of looking for a grant to support the Garden's wish to revamp the Hop Yard, but I do recall being very grateful when someone suggested I got in touch with Lucy DeVille; Lucy had recently moved to Ventnor from London where she had experience as a professional fundraiser for St George's Hospital. The Tesco 'Bags of Help' fund had just been launched, to be facilitated by Groundwork, with whom we had a track record as they had also been the facilitators for the Westgate project (now The Arid Garden).

Much of the application procedure was, frankly, tedious – confirmation of land ownership and access, details of leases, and personal details for our Treasurer and me. However, the real skill was interpreting the technical jargon to make our project 'sing':

who would it benefit, how could we involve the local community and what might we achieve in social cohesion. With this aspect, Lucy was in her element and soon we reached the latter stages of the application process.

It was then that mild panic hit me; the final allocation of funds depended on a public vote by Tesco's customers on the Isle of Wight. Would we be able to persuade them to support us to win the top grant allocation of £10,000? Yes! The result? Our lovely productive Hop Yard, plus, an even greater benefit, a larger workforce of volunteers.

In 2017, Lucy and I joined forces again to apply for funds to 'Celebrate!' from the Big Lottery – to celebrate the 45th anniversary of Earl Mountbatten opening the "Steephill Pleasure Gardens with special botanic interest". What fun we had! Poetry trails, storytelling, Art in the Garden, a dawn chorus, talks and walks to cater for hundreds of people of all ages who all visited the Garden and were able to enjoy our offering at little or no cost. The grant money made this happen – and the goodwill generated encouraged people to explore more of what the Garden can offer. It is always difficult to quantify but I feel sure that the sale of annual passes has benefitted from that event in particular.

Volunteers are particularly well thought of, and rightly so, by grant-aiding bodies. Volunteering can offer so much to both parties; the monetary value of their work is immense and much appreciated by VBG-CIC. The additional revenue boosted by volunteer guides for coach tours, school parties and special interest groups, by our wonderful 'seed' ladies who work tirelessly to keep seed packet stocks turning over, and the sheer weight of numbers working in the Garden is a vital asset to the CIC. Then there is the benefit to the volunteer – worthwhile work experience to students, healthy outdoor activity and the chance to socialise with a wide range of people who share a common interest. So, it was disconcerting when the Committee began to hear discontent from the ranks – insufficient hand tools, barrows with punctured wheels, secateurs with blunt blades and saws that wouldn't cut butter let alone weed trees! But WightAID came to our rescue – a small grant application – and we were awarded £500 to replace the old and broken tools. So the smiles are back on the faces of our valiant volunteers. Long may they last!

Grants fill the spaces that the CIC cannot manage. I am not an enthusiastic form-filler but I derive a huge sense of achievement when the Friends are able to turn the 'out of reach' into the 'Can Do'! Our next mission is to seek support to run a bigger and better Hop Festival, where more local people can get involved with what we do to maintain and improve Ventnor Botanic Garden. I hope the hurdle that is Covid-19 will be well behind us by September so that we shall all have reason to celebrate the hop harvest. [See Tools for Volunteers, Page 30]

Slice of history: Cake to celebrate Celebrate!

Tools for Volunteers

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society (VBGFS) were thrilled to have been awarded a £500 grant from the Island-based WightAID Foundation. The grant funded the purchase of new hand tools for the ever-growing and enthusiastic band of gardening volunteers who regularly join the gardening team at VBG. Secateurs, rakes, brooms and barrows were all needed to make the most of this willing workforce.

In mid-February, Sally Peake from the Friends' Society and Adam Cooke, VBG apprentice, were invited to join other groups receiving their grants at a joint cheque presentation at WightAID's head office at Calbourne. Sally said: "It is so inspiring to hear how WightAID encourages and helps Island businesses to support local charity – money raised on the Island for the Island." Adam, who has been working at VBG for nearly two years said: "I was amazed at the different projects being funded. It was great to learn how the Island business community can help improve life for everyone." He added: "Our volunteers are so brilliant – we achieve so much more with the extra hands, and new tools will really make their jobs easier and more enjoyable."

Volunteers who would like to help at the Garden are encouraged to get in touch, via the Friends' website at www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk or by phone to Sally Peake (731403). Sally says: "We meet every Wednesday at 10am and are happy to welcome would-be-gardeners with or without experience. There's a job for everyone. All that you need is strong shoes and a willingness to join in."

Getting the grant: Sally Peake and Adam Cooke join other groups receiving grants from the generous WightAID Foundation

Postponed: New date to be advised

Annual General Meeting

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. **Approval of the Minutes of the previous AGM** held on 21 February 2019
3. Matters Arising
4. **Chairman's Report on behalf of The Trustees** John Bagshawe
5. **Hon Treasurer's Report and appointment of Independent Examiner** Tim Woodcock
6. **Membership Report** Val Pitts
7. **Health and Wellbeing Report** Peter Coleman
8. **Appointment of Trustees of VBGFS**
   No Trustees are required to stand down by rotation
   Jane Clark has resigned as a Trustee and member of the Committee
9. **Election of Officers and Committee for CIO**
   The Officers and Committee are happy to seek re-election
   Val Pitts has joined the Committee as Membership Secretary during the year

   Chris Kidd and Colin Pope continue as ex officio members
10. Meeting closes

The Presentation of the Harold Hillier Award for Services to Horticulture on the Island follows

The Harold Hillier Award was instigated by the Hillier Family in memory of Sir Harold, who was instrumental in the creation of Ventnor Botanic Garden. The trophy was to be presented annually to a person who has made a significant contribution to horticulture on the Island. While Simon Goodenough was Curator of VBG the award was resurrected, and each year subsequently the recipient has been chosen by the Curator and the Friends' Society.

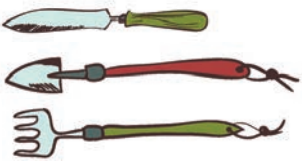
In normal times the Award is presented at the Society's AGM, but for now we simply congratulate COLIN POPE on his award.

Membership News

A very warm welcome to Mrs Alexandria Meddle and Charlotte of Leigh-on-Sea, who have recently joined the Friends' Society.

President

Brian Kidd



Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse MBE
Mike Fitt OBE
Simon Goodenough
Alan Titchmarsh MBE
Phil Le May

Standing Orders - a further plea

We really appreciate the continuing support of all our Members, but unfortunately we appear to have confused a lot of people when we increased membership rates and changed our bank account in 2018. Many of you had made the changes, thank you, but, at the beginning of this year, nearly 100 Standing Orders were paid into the old account, many still at the old rate. I wrote to all those concerned and am very grateful to all of you who replied with amended details. It is possible that some of you may have instructed your Banks directly; if so, could you please send me a quick email to let me know (vbgfs.membership@gmail.com)

A few more updated forms have arrived recently, maybe an unexpected benefit of Lockdown. To those who have yet to reply, please dig out those forms and SAEs I sent. If you need a new form, you will find one to download on the Membership section of the Friends' website (www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk) and it includes my address for posting.

The Bank Account details are:: ***Name:Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society***
Sort Code 54-41-31 Account number 49647717

Membership rates are as follows:

- Individual – £20
- Second member at same address – £10
- Junior (under 16) – £2
- Non-UK individual – £20

Therefore, if you paid into the old account at the old rate this year (£15 individual/£22 joint), when completing the new Mandate, please fill in to pay £5 or £8 on the 'immediately' line and the relevant full amount in the 'hereafter' section.

A few members had amended the amount, but not changed the account details. There is nothing more to pay this year, of course, but please fill in a new Standing Order so that the money goes to the correct account from next January.

Val Pitts, Membership Secretary

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

Horticulture and Its Opportunities - a Masterclass at Kew

Sally Peake on a marvellous chance for our apprentices

Kew for a great day: Indi, Steve, Trish and Adam

For the last few years, our young horticulturalists have participated with other trainees from the Royal Parks in various training and networking days, thanks to the vigorous efforts of Mike Fitt OBE, Chair of the Royal Parks Guild. This year, the masterclass reached a new and much bigger audience. By linking in to the Kew Guild (for which our very own Chris Kidd is President for 2020) and tapping into the enthusiasm of Richard Barley, Director of Horticulture at Royal Botanic Garden Kew, over 200 young people and their mentors came to Kew, the costs met by the Royal Parks Guild and the Kew Guild, with support from commercial sponsors.

It made financial sense for the five of us to travel by car, so, very early on Friday, 22nd November, I set off from home to collect Indi, Adam, Trish and Steve for the six o'clock ferry from Fishbourne. We easily made the reception at Kew at 9.30am.

Richard Barley outlined how vital horticultural careers were to the world and the importance of sharing knowledge and experiences. This was a theme repeated by all the speakers:

Tom Pickering, Nursery Supervisor at Kew on 'The best job in the world': Faye Adams, 3rd year Diploma student, Kew, on Networking and job-finding tips: Georgi Ennis, Arboriculturalist, urging people to join her swinging through trees with machinery with a 26-second speeded-up tree-felling video: Cecily Eltringham, Royal Parks apprentice, on green spaces as a healthy working environment: Jason Booth and Daniel Bradley of Institute of Groundsmanship on opportunities for first class careers in managing sports turf from schools and golf courses to Wembley.

Ben Preston, head gardener at York Gate, spoke of key career moments: finding the book *Plant Names Simplified* and a weekend at Great Dixter working with the great Fergus Garrett. Miranda Janatka from BBC *Gardener's World* talked on opportunities to share knowledge and experiences through writing, film-making and blogging.

In smaller groups we explored aspects of Kew not always seen by visitors. Adam and I were taken to the new propagation houses, where all aspects of climate control could be managed. Kew has a Living Collections Strategy: plants most endangered replace older specimens that could be lost at Kew itself. Our enthusiastic guide stressed the importance of keeping notes on methodology; when sowing seed or taking cuttings, having knowledge of the best method (and the failures) can be critical when handling rare material. I was intrigued by the 'airpots' for tree seedlings which encourage good rootball formation and allow the young plant to stay undisturbed by 'potting on'.

Then a whistle stop tour of the new Evolution Gardens, replanted to show the divergence and evolution of species, a science where recent techniques in DNA sequencing has changed our understanding of plant relationships.

Finally, back to the lecture theatre to applaud those receiving the Royal Parks Apprentice Awards. As dusk fell our one regret was that the day hadn't lasted long enough.

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