ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'For me, the most wonderful aspect of Ventnor Botanic Garden is the emphasis placed on plantsmanship and design based upon natural landscapes'

David Pearce, former VBG Apprentice, graduate of RHS Wisley. *Page 10*

VOLUME 27 NO. 2 AUTUMN/WINTER 2020

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

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/

THROUGHOUT AUTUMN . . .

Seasonal Suppers each Friday in *edulis*

NOVEMBER SPECIAL EVENTS:

The Plantation Room Café reopens for hot drinks, cakes and snacks

Special November offer for VBG pass holders: 6 *edulis*Restaurant@Home meals for price of 5

NOV 26th AND 27th: 10am-6pm Christmas Shopping Experience (Pass holders only) Enjoy mulled wine and pastries, festive piano tunes AND 10% discount off everything in the shop, no minimum spend. Also save 20% on your annual Garden 'membership' pass. Chance to win a VBG Christmas hamper.

THE DAILY WELLBEING PROGRAMME:

MONDAYS:

2.00pm-3.15pm, Creative Dance, Echium Room.

Dancing for mature movers, with social distancing, led by teacher Michelle Hainsworth. 01983 754189 to book/go on waiting list.

TUESDAYS:

11.30am-12.30pm, Tai Chi

Slow body movements combined as a flowing exercise. All levels. No booking required.

12pm-1pm, Qigong with Gary, Echium Room

Gentle exercise promoting relief or prevention of physical problems and stress.

WEDNESDAYS:

11.30am-12.30pm, Tai Chi

Slow body movements combined as a flowing exercise. All levels. No booking required.

THURSDAYS:

12pm-1pm, Qigong with Gary, Echium Room

Gentle exercise promoting relief or prevention of physical problems and stress.

FRIDAYS:

9.30am-11am, Outdoor British Yoga Wheel with Mark, New Zealand Garden

Meet in New Zealand garden. Friendly, safe distanced class, to promote improved strength and flexibility, relaxation and wellbeing.

11.30am-12.30pm, Tai Chi

Slow body movements combined as a flowing exercise. All levels. No booking required.

5.30pm-8.00pm Autumn Suppers

Seasonal produce will be served in the *edulis* Restaurant every Friday, with music from 5.30pm. Or just come for a drink.

The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) means 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: Chris Kidd addressing VBG volunteers

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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AUTUMN 2020

Curator's Notes

Despite everything, the Garden offers respite, inspiration and those lightbulb moments of insight, says **Chris Kidd**

Dear Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden,

There can be little doubt that 2020 has been catastrophic for humanity on both a global and local level, having claimed lives and impacted either directly or indirectly every person on the planet. The ramifications are too complex to comprehend. All of us at VBG have faced the crisis with fortitude and hope that we will turn the corner to a new normality soon.

Echium Candican. Photo by Rosemary Stewart

I had such high hopes for 2020 in the Garden, and with my family too, all of which have evaporated. But the Garden and our dedication to it goes on. As an antidote to the crisis, people turned to their gardens and open spaces. Because VBG remained open, it offered escape to so many people. I'm reminded of the therapeutic balm that nature, fresh air and gardens can give. In 2012 we found, in amongst a survey into *What does VBG mean to you* a note from a visitor for whom VBG was particularly special, having pulled through the most horrific mental anguish as a result of simply walking through this Garden. They found reason to live from within our plant community. In such stressful times it is impossible to estimate a value to our asset here at VBG.

Looking at the Garden this morning it's clear the seasonal wheel has turned and we rush towards equinox. The Garden has moved on and I am surprised at the level of growth from the previous six months. I am expectant of some exciting growth in the Washingtonia palms in the Arid Garden. I am hopeful, once again, that our Silver Trees may produce some buds for their rare lemony scented flowers. I fear the winter ahead and can see the same thoughts passing through Trish's head. Surely the Garden's list to Santa Claus has a mild winter right at the top.

We are planning for 2021 and hope to have some new projects underway through the winter months. One of our biggest challenges has always been opening the cover of the great book of stories about each plant and the community they inhabit at VBG. On a superficial level this Garden presents itself as a unique collection delivered in an enigmatic, perhaps esoteric style. The deeper meanings of the plant interactions, their community and synthetic ecology is a greater wonder to behold. It is the stories that bring the collection to life. There is a 'lightbulb moment' when, for a visitor, the penny

suddenly drops, whether that might be realising why New Zealand plants tend not to be colourful, why *Tmesipteris* defy cultivation in pots, or why ancient canonical Australian aboriginal artwork suddenly stopped. We hope that 2021 will enable even more visitors to see deeper into the layers of the Garden.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Dear members . . .

This Issue represents a celebration - yes, a celebration! - of our wonderful apprentices past and present, of our volunteers, and the person who links both (and everything else at VBG) – Trish Brenchley.

There are thanks and plaudits for apprentices Indi, Adam and latterly Ellis for keeping the Garden going during lockdown [Pages 7 and 31]. It is a delight, too, to hear how the passion for horticulture in former apprentice David Pearce was fostered at VBG and burgeoned on the diploma course at RHS Garden Wisley. [See P10]

Huge thanks are expressed for the volunteers' unstinting work. [See Jenny Parker, P23 and Above and Beyond, P25]. And as for Trish – I offer no apology for re-running the press coverage she received when honoured with the Banksian medal, [Page 24]. See too the heartfelt tribute from our Curator. [Page 12]

You'll find there are a few regular features missing in this Issue of Ventnorensis – their writers haven't been in the Garden as much as usual. Some have told their lockdown stories, [PPs 21-24] but others haven't. Dr Peter Coleman was brought back from retirement to work on the Government's 111 Covid assessment line, taking calls from all over England and advising on home care measures or sending an emergency ambulance. Yet he still ploughed on with the Friends and CIC's wonderful Wellbeing measures. [Page 5]

I apologise to those from whom I have badgered words and photos, then not used them. There's been a lot to say – but what better, in these strange and stressful times, than the words of Audrey Hepburn I spotted on a blackboard in Gerry Price's Coastal Garden nursery – "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." [See Page 14]

Roz Whistance, Editor

Many thanks to Simone Dickens for her beautiful design of Ventnorensis, and for Rosemary Stewart for photographs and proof reading.

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

The therapeutic balm fresh air and gardens give.
Photo by John Bagshawe

Chairman's Message

We have hope, pride and deep gratitude, says **John Bagshawe**

I was so pleased when the first lockdown finished, the Garden was looking lovely with all of the effort from Trish, the apprentices, the volunteers and with the support of the Friends. There was hope that some sort of normality would return, together with the Gardening staff coming back off furlough.

Staycation: visitors have flocked to the Garden

Over the summer the number of visitors to the Garden was probably the highest it has ever been and the car park was full most of the time. I would imagine that many visitors to the Island this year felt it was best not to go abroad but do a staycation.

It was fantastic that Trish was awarded the RHS Banksian Medal, which was so well deserved. A lovely honour. [See Pages 8, 12, 25, 29]

The number of volunteers has steadily increased since lockdown finished, which is lovely to see. However, the Gardening Staff are mainly still furloughed.

Unfortunately for the Friends the income we have received since lockdown has been negligible. We were happy to continue to pay for Trish and the apprentices during lockdown, as we wanted to support the Garden in as many ways as possible. However, the virus crisis meant our usual social and fundraising events were cancelled, and furthermore the CIC decided after lockdown finished to change the way income was given to the Friends, which in the past enabled the Friends to collect Gift Aid, providing us with a reasonable income to cover most of the costs for salaries and other projects.

A new system asked visitors to 'round up' their entry fee – 'Round Up For Apprentices'. This has not worked well for the Friends as our income for the summer period is now less than 10 per cent of that we received last year, and with probably the highest number of visitors we've had, we would have received more than we did from last year's summer period.

We are striving to make changes to the Friends' income, so that we can continue to support the Garden in future as we have always done in the past. In the meantime we are fortunate in having good reserves that will enable us to cover all of our existing commitments.

Wellbeing Update

Dr Peter Coleman explains how the Wellbeing Initiative has been even more of a lifeline during the Covid crisis

The arrival of the pandemic has shocked us all and has changed all of our lives, very often for the worse. There have been significant impacts on health and wellbeing, not only the direct effects of infection but also the effects on social, mental and economic wellbeing caused by the necessary lockdown and subsequent restrictions.

Local residents were lucky to have access to the Garden, which was able to stay open even during the tightest lockdown phase, and also offered half price annual 'membership' for annual access to the Garden. Since the relaxation of restrictions, the large number of visitors to the Island who have been desperate for a holiday, but avoiding foreign travel, have also benefited from this beautiful and peaceful location.

In a previous edition of *Ventnorensis* I discussed the well-researched evidence about the benefits of spaces such as the Garden to mental, physical and social wellbeing so it must have been a great blessing for those who were able to use this facility during these very hard times. This underlines one of the main objectives of the Garden to provide a wellbeing resource to the local community and visitors.

After the enforced period of inactivity in specific wellbeing projects offered by the Garden, I have been able to make some tentative steps towards supporting access for wellbeing purposes. During the first peak of the pandemic it was not appropriate to bring potentially vulnerable people to an environment where they might risk infection by exposure to other visitors.

The Director of the Garden, John Curtis, had previously agreed a scheme to offer free three-month passes to people treated in certain departments of St Mary's Hospital, Sevenacres Hospital and Mountbatten Hospice.

Benefits of nature: mental, social and physical

The team at Sevenacres were offered a group pass for the occupational therapy team to bring small escorted groups of in-patients on day trips to the Garden, and this has been a great success and is reported to be a useful contribution to recovery. Former in-patients at Sevenacres have also been offered three-month passes, and this too is reported to have been of great value.

Mountbatten Hospice had the same opportunity to offer these three-month passes to their patients. John has kindly agreed to extend this scheme, so in discussion with teams at St Mary's, we have extended this opportunity to patients attending the respiratory rehabilitation programme and, very topically, patients on the Covid rehabilitation programme.

Many of you will be familiar with the long term debilitating consequences of Covid infection, especially if hospitalisation is required, and we are particularly pleased to offer support to this group.

It had been proposed to offer art classes to small groups of people using these passes, with the help of artist Carol Ann Eades, who has a long association with the Garden. Carol Ann had kindly agreed to provide her services without charge while the Friends funded the materials for these classes. It had been intended to start regular classes, free of charge for those in receipt of the special three-month passes, from May of this year, but that was clearly impossible and the on-going need for social distancing makes it inappropriate to continue at this time.

The Friends have, for the second year, funded annual 'membership' passes for a limited number of families in Ventnor. Last year four families benefitted from these annual 'membership' passes and this year we were delighted to fund this for eight families. With the help of St Francis school we aimed to support particularly families with limited access to outdoor space in their own homes.

The Friends and John Curtis remain committed to supporting the wellbeing opportunities offered by the Garden and hope to continue and expand our activities in this area as time goes on.

Bring and Buy

Everyone was very supportive of our autumn Plant Sale, and brought in plants and other items to sell. We were very pleased with the result and made £230. Bridgette Sibbick

Meet The Apprentice!

When **Sally Peake,** VBGFS's equivalent of TV's Lord Sugar, interviewed for our next apprentice, she didn't have a difficult job to decide to recruit Ellis Gant. He came to join Indi in June, while Adam moved into the world of work.

Growing knowledge: Ellis Gant

Name: Ellis Gant **Age:** 18
Education: Cowes Enterprise College
Qualifications: A-levels in Geography, Chemistry and Economics.

So, why horticulture?
I'd been thinking about a career with the environment, but was also considering horticulture. I chose A-Levels which would cover all the bases. What I did know was that I wanted to work in the outside environment.

How did you become aware of the VBGFS Apprenticeship Scheme?
It was during lockdown when I saw it advertised, and I applied online. Of course there was no face-to-face interview, but I spoke to Sally Peake on the phone, and after a few calls I was offered the place.

How does your training work?
We are taught by Trish Brenchley, who follows the College curriculum. It's very hands-on, and because there's so much to learn it's great when we revisit something we've done before. It's good to realize it feels familiar.

What input does the Isle of Wight College have?
For each unit in the curriculum, an observer from the College comes to see how we are taught, and how we are learning. So, for example, in a unit about propagation she will observe the teaching session, then watches us putting into practice what we've been taught.

What about written work?
I do that in the evenings. There's a workbook set by the College that covers the theory side of what we do during the day. It's good because it links the academic side with the practical.

Have you developed any particular favourite areas in the work?
I really love the propagating side of things, and growing vegetables. The other day I came across a vegetable I'd never heard of before. That's really exciting.

And your ambitions for the future?
I've started looking at courses, and RHS Wisley has a range of really interesting ones. I'd love to go there – initially just to spend a day and look around, whenever COVID restrictions make that possible.

PRESS REPORT

Surprise award for VBG Gardener

By Roz Whistance

Trish Brenchley is presented with the RHS Banksian Medal, by John Bagshawe, Chairman of the VBGFS

A coffee break turned into an emotional surprise for a gardener at Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Trish Brenchley was shocked when the Wednesday Garden volunteers she supervises surrounded her and she was presented by the VBG Friends' Society with the RHS Banksian Medal, one of the Royal Horticultural Society's premier awards.

Trish, the Garden Supervisor during the 1980s and brought back by the VBG Friends' Society (VBGFS) to run its horticultural apprentice training scheme, did not go on furlough during lockdown when all the other gardeners were furloughed, but stayed with two young horticultural apprentices to keep the Garden under control and looking lovely.

Presenting the medal on behalf of VBGFS, Chris Kidd, Curator of the Botanic Garden, said: "It's the highest award that the RHS offers. It's normally given to people who have performed in an extraordinary way in horticultural competitions in its regional shows. In this unusual year, the Society has allowed it to be presented to people who have done extraordinary things in horticulture."

As an affiliated member of the RHS, Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society (VBGFS) chose to award Trish because of her extraordinary and unstinting work in keeping the Garden going during lockdown. "Trish cares for the Garden in a fundamental way," said Chris Kidd. "She's been here longer than anyone who's here now. During the pandemic

Trish, centre, with VBG Curator Chris Kidd to her left, surrounded by the Garden volunteers and VBG Friends

Applause from the VBG Friends and Garden Volunteers as John Bagshawe presents the RHS Banksian Medal to Trish

when we, all the gardeners, were furloughed, she remained here with the two apprentices. And with you, the volunteers and the Friends, she kept the Garden going."

An overwhelmed Trish, drawing close to her two apprentices Indi Wyatt and Ellis Gant, said: "I'm overwhelmed. We stuck together. We love what we do, and I couldn't do it without you guys. Thank you so much!"

Wiping away tears she said: "I didn't dream this in 100 million, trillion years – it was just what was needed to be done. And the Friends have been so supportive, they've been with us the whole time, kept us going, as soon as they could come back." She particularly mentioned John Bagshawe, chairman of the Friends' Society, who kept the extensive areas of grass mowed, whilst former chairman Phil Le May worked on the Palm Garden and the Mediterranean Garden, as well as former apprentice Adam Cooke who worked with Indi throughout lockdown and now qualified and employed.

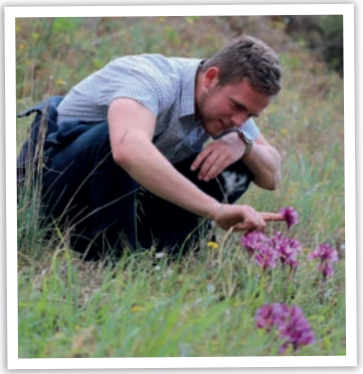
Trish Brenchley, with VBG Horticultural Apprentices Indi [left] and Ellis [right]

"It was a team effort. As soon as the volunteers could come back they did." Looking at the Banksian medal she said: "I wouldn't have dreamt this, ever. It's just amazing." See Crucial Trish, Page 12

First published in IW Observer and IW County Press

A life without Echiums

David Pearce recalls his post-Ventnorian adventures and growing passion for plant ecology



Butterfly Orchid. Photo by Lee Behegan

"If you can make it through the first month, then you'll be fine." These were the words Chris Kidd, VBG's curator, uttered to me on that last day of my apprenticeship, before my departure to Surrey and the RHS's flagship garden, Wisley. A little while later and I was flung into the diploma course with nine course mates of a similar level of naivety as me as to what they had signed up to.

The Wisley Diploma is one of the oldest and most recognised horticulture qualifications, with alumni including the world-famous garden designer Dan Pearson, Mike Nelhams, curator of Tresco Abbey Garden, and the renowned author, botanist and horticulturist Brian Mathew. But there was little time to revel in our accomplishment: we had to arrange our first-year bursary. Put eight incredibly enthusiastic plantspeople in a room with a somewhat infinite amount of funds and one soon realises how hard it will be to come to a unanimous agreement; I was set on going to South Africa, with Madeira, the Canaries, Switzerland, New Zealand and California being among the suggestions. We eventually settled on Andalusia in Southern Spain.

The trip, however, was worth every minute of anguish. The rich diversity of plants, landscapes and gardens appeased everyone's hunger for Mediterranean plantsmanship. Our trip to Spain resulted not only from a passion for wild plant species, but also an appreciation of their application in horticulture.

As our climate changes, creating a less favourable environment for many of our native species, and one more suitable for a wide range of foreign plant pathogens and invasive species, it will become increasingly important to optimise biodiversity, and to use the information given to us through ecology; to conserve, garden, develop and restore. Indeed, the future of horticulture lies somewhere between ecology and traditional horticulture, an ideology long adopted and pioneered at Ventnor. The full report can be found at rhs.org.uk/education-learning/pdf/Bursaries/Bursary-Reports/rhs-bursary-report-wisley-students-andalucia.pdf.

Back in RHS Garden, Wisley, our thoughts turned from the lavish amounts of *pan con tomate, pisto, panellets* and *paella* to the ever-pressing plant pathogen portfolio. Three months of arduous deadlines, sleepless nights and stressful exams followed, and we began craving the simplicity of mountains, rivers, the beautiful diversity of life – and maybe a little whisky. Hence we set off to the Scottish Highlands, flying into Inverness and driving down to Skye before a day of botanising, and then heading off to the Outer Hebrides and the Island of North Uist.

We were lured here by the machair meadows. From the Gaelic meaning 'low lying grassy plain', the machair is almost entirely found in the west coast of Uist. Formed from a

combination of nutrient-rich shell deposit and the 6000 year old tradition of crofting – a rotational, low intensity agricultural process resulting in a mosaic of various habitats – this is a unique example of agriculture working with nature to create a refuge for a wide range of flora and fauna. These include one of Britain's rarest bees, the Great Yellow Bumblebee; a number of endangered seabirds including the ringed plover; and a large diversity of orchids including the endemic hebridean spotted orchid *(Dactylorhiza fuchsii subsp. herbidensis),* a stunning purple sub-species of the more well-known common spotted orchid.

The machair has long fascinated ecologists; a harmonic symbiosis between nature and man resulting in some of our country's greatest biodiversity, with more than 40 plant species per square metre. Machair provides many clues to how we can address the biodiversity crisis whilst feeding an ever-growing population.

The Hebridean spotted orchid amounts the machair

February 2020, and after six months of diligent dissertation research I was once again back out looking at wild plant species, this time with the local recorder for Snowdonia and owner of the world's smallest accredited botanic garden; Robbie Backhall-Miles. After a week learning germination protocol for some of South Africa's rarest species of Proteaceae – scraping and soaking *Mimetes* seed – we rewarded ourselves with some in-situ conservation. Our task was to ascend one of Snowdonia's most picturesque walking spots; Cym Idwal. We hiked for roughly an hour through the horrendous February Welsh weather to a series of large boulders. Robbie explained these were pyroclastic rock; ejected during volcanic eruptions almost 500 million years ago. Containing a large concentration of micro-nutrients and a good porous structure, they provided perfect growing conditions for the sub-Antarctic alpine genus of *Saxifraga.* Saxifrages have survived in Wales and Scotland longer than most other plants; they evaded the ice age by clinging to the top of the highest mountains, their long root system and compact cushion-like structure anchoring them to the rock during the almost never-ending blizzards. "What bonkers insect would be pollinating it in this weather?" I said as we observed the flowers of the purple saxifrage *(Saxifraga oppositifolia)* in the 5°C storm of wind and rain.

Next we carried out population checks on Wales's only tufted saxifrage *(Saxifraga cespitosa);* three individuals were counted with clear signs of over-grazing by Snowdonia's tenacious feral goats. Recently seed has been collected and distributed around Welsh botanic gardens to conserve these beautiful plants, with re-introductions planned.

How does all this link to horticulture, I hear you ask. For me, the most wonderful aspect of Ventnor Botanic Garden is the emphasis on plantsmanship and design based upon natural landscapes. There are examples in the Garden in which an ecosystem (often from the other side of the world) has been copied and inserted into an area so like-for-like that the ecosystem itself begins to flourish, to outcompete weeds and create an immersive, Covid-friendly, exotic holiday for visitors. This is known as the 'Ventnor Method', which has inspired me and will continue to stimulate my interest in ecology and wild plant populations in order to further our collections, gardens and ability to apply conservation in a horticultural scenario.

Linaria Verticallia. Photo by Lee Behegan

Thank you Trish: John presents framed Banksian certificate

Our crucial Trish

Nobody could be more deserving of this award, Chris Kidd tells **Roz Whistance**

It is a sunny morning in mid-September and Chris Kidd will shortly be part of the presentation of the prestigious RHS Banksian Award to Trish Brenchley. We are sitting on the bench above the Arid Garden, which, it transpires, is a pretty apt place to recall the huge impact Trish has had on Ventnor Botanic Garden:

"If you look at a map of the Garden at the time I came here as Head Gardener it was divided into alphabetical areas, that was A, that was B etc. This place didn't have a letter because it was nothing."

This is Chris setting the scene in which Trish has played such a huge part. Under the curatorship of Simon Goodenough with his wife Debs, and under the ownership of the IW Council, Trish's job was Garden Supervisor. "She was Simon's key appointment, the one that got people out of the tearoom in the morning and gave out the job lists, who managed the whole place." Her role expanded when Debs left, "and Simon got suspended over something," Chris says, suggesting being suspended was something of an occupational hazard for Simon. "So Trish took a fuller role, but with absolutely no Council support. What she's done during this Covid crisis is a repeat of that, falling into the breach."

For throughout lockdown, as is well documented in this issue of *Ventnorensis,* Trish worked every day to keep the Garden going, while the other gardeners were furloughed.

Back then was a time of prosperity for the Council and the Garden, and Chris seized on the opportunity to fill the new post of Head Gardener. "I took a massive pay cut to come here as I could see the possibilities." Those possibilities were endless: "We doubled the cultivated space of the Garden, and between me and Simon we came up with ideas, and the Friends came up with the money."

Here, Trish's role was crucial. "You're driving the development, but you can't do any of that if nobody's looking after what's already there, *and* what's being created."

Trish was looking after the same number of staff as before, but also taking on all the new projects, including the construction. "Trish's role just exploded," says Chris, "and in quite fundamental ways. We were changing the Temperate House to a Tropical House, and with some plywood we acquired, created a wall. The house throws a long shadow across the bank, and Trish planted the ejected residents of the Temperate House above that wall, and, against all expectation, they survived. Had that not happened we wouldn't have planned to do the Arid Bank," he adds – the area that hadn't even warranted a designation. He admits he himself thought the cacti and succulents would either die or look awful, as they always did in other gardens. "It's a hard life for plants in this Garden!" he adds. Pointing to the Puyas flowering strongly next to us, he says: "Nobody's done anything to them since they were put in. Trish knew that's an essential part of how the Garden works."

Chris also recalls the time when a huge soakaway had to be filled in when constructing the Australian terrace. "Peter Brown, the JCB driver who has worked on most of our

projects, watched as liquid concrete was being poured into buckets to make the retaining wall, and the one person actually in the ditch was Trish. "There she is, all you blokes standing round watching and she is in the ditch with her welly boots putting the concrete in!"

Chris admits that for a long time he and Trish didn't get on that well. "I was coming down here as a bloke with a botanic garden background. Trish already gave a huge damn about the place because she'd been here so long. We only resolved things when we understood we both care about the Garden – but were coming at it from different angles."

The effect of that love for the Garden was pointed up when Trish left, at the time the Council put it up for sale. And when she came back? "It was the best thing that ever happened, it really was. The place was going to pieces, Trish's mixed border, the diamond running through the middle of the Garden, had gone to bits. We were looking at grassing it over. That was a symptom of the whole place really . . . Trish comes back and bang bang bang, everything changes, she does what she does so well. Where we are now with the apprentices, that's her great forte."

Trish came back at the behest of the Friends, her task primarily now to lead the Friends' Apprenticeship Scheme. But being Trish, her role has splurged, and she also supervises the Wednesday Volunteers, and an awful lot more.

"Trish has always had this amazing ability to work with a wide spectrum of people," says Chris, laughing when he recalls some of the Government schemes in the 1980s and 90s when people were bussed in who had no interest in gardening. "They were there because they had to be, and if they didn't come they were not going to get their dole money.

"We were once offered a guy that murdered people. Everyone was worried to death about it. So I was reassured by the probation people that he was ok as long as he hadn't had a drink! That's fabulous then. That's really helpful. And Trish had to manage all this, to get all these people to be actively productive – and she did it."

On the other side of Trish's coin are the volunteers. "They come in only because they love the Garden. The reason we have so many, and in 20 years haven't had a week when nobody's come in, is because of Trish. She gets the best out of everyone."

Having seen her that morning gently advising the Wednesday volunteers on taking out agapanthus I ask how she manages such a cross section of people. Is she very quietly spoken? "No, she's very loud! I'm surprised we can't hear her from here." Joking aside, he says her directness is a huge asset. "If Trish thinks something needs doing, you'd better do it as she's almost always right."

No surprise then that, when the Covid crisis happened and faced with the sudden disappearance of all the other gardeners as they were put on furlough, Trish once again saved the day. The days. The months. She, and apprentices Adam and Indi, and later Indi and Ellis, came in every day and worked.

"If she hadn't come in, the volunteers wouldn't have come. John Bagshawe [Chairman of the VBGFS) wouldn't have come in and mowed every day. Phil Le May wouldn't have taken on another bit of the Garden and looked after that. The Wednesday gang would have cleared off. The apprentices wouldn't have been able to do it without leadership. So she's smack in the middle of it."

He pauses. "Truly, the Banksian Award – you couldn't find anyone on the Island more deserving of it."

See Apprentice Update, Page 31

The Coastal Gardener

Gerry Price didn't intend to be a gardener, or run a nursery. It just happened, she tells **Roz Whistance**

Gerry Price: Gardener and designer

The seeds of Gerry Price's inspirational little nursery in St Helens were sown as far from the coast as you can get, almost. "I was living in Nottingham at the time so the idea of having a coastal garden there didn't quite work," she laughs.

Now, The Coastal Gardener can be found just past the sign announcing entry to St Helens, and she shares the land rather fortuitously with a café. An array of soft colours, wafting grasses and, well, mysteries, greet you as you walk into the nursery.

Gerry trained as an artist, and for her MA show in fine art sculpture she created a garden. "It was partly inspired by Derek Jarman's garden in Dungeness, with a lot of sculptures. A theatre group doing outreach work saw it and asked me if I would work with school and community groups on wildlife gardens and food projects." She adds: "I didn't intend to be a garden designer or run a nursery – it just happened."

It was years later, when she moved with her family to Bembridge, that she realised she could at last have a coastal garden. But she discovered that a lot of the plants she wanted weren't available on the Island, and mail order companies slapped on the 'offshore surcharge' we all know and love. "So I got seeds and planted them myself."

Her front garden was soon a breezy delight of drifting colours and intriguing sculptures, and soon passers-by would ask her about her plants. "I'd say I've got a spare one if you want it, and then started putting a table out with an honesty box. All the plants went."

A friend with connections to the National Garden Scheme (NGS) asked if she'd open her garden for charity. "I said yes, but it didn't dawn on me until some time later that it meant literally hundreds of people coming to see your garden!"

Unsurprisingly – except perhaps to Gerry – people started asking her to design their gardens. "I hadn't designed private gardens before, only for schools and public spaces. And, for the NGS, you can sell plants for extra money for charity, so I sold them, and people would come back and ask if I had any more."

And so the nursery, and the design business, began. "And it's non-stop!" she says. "We've designed around 50 gardens over the years, anything from huge spaces to a single border. For next year we've had over 20 enquiries already."

Gerry has an assistant, Steph, and Joe Cole Landscaping in Shanklin does all the hard landscaping. "I design impossible things like curvy planters in brick, I give them a ludicrous drawing and they scratch their heads, and before I know it what I've drawn is there."

Having your garden designed is a dream for many people, but most are unlikely to know about cost. "Our analogy to help guide people is to think how much they'd spend on a

kitchen. If you're happy with a chainstore/Wicks kitchen, and you've spent £15,000 on that, that's probably what you'd be looking at spending on your garden. If you have a Smallbone of Devises hand-built kitchen with marble worktops and those fancy swoopy taps you're spending £70,000 to £80,000, and that's probably comparable to what you'd spend on your garden."

We have a wander round the nursery. There are beautiful show beds, demonstrating the possibilities of the maritime plants, and then a sales area with pleasing homespun signs, pointing you towards small ground cover, medium plants or shrubs or trees.

Gerry is always happy to advise people on the plants she sells. And surprise them. "The tourists are amazed by the things like echiums and salvias that grow outside on the Isle of Wight, and that you don't have to lift your dahlias. I doubt there's anyone who has known all the plants we have – even Alan Titchmarsh didn't know one of our plants!"

This isn't a quest to be different, she says, but because coastal plants from Spain and France won't be available through the commercial nurseries, which grow at scale. "Whereas if I propagate half a dozen of something that's fine." Nor is it about running a plant shop but about propagating and trialing plants in different conditions. "Virtually everything we sell is propagated by us. Trees and shrubs take a long time to be big enough to sell so we buy in mature trees and some shrubs." She tries to buy in bare-rooted plants, which is part of her ethos of sustainability. "We only use peat-free compost, we don't use any chemicals, and we recycle all our plant pots because regular customers will bring back plastic pots when they come for more plants."

Show beds: How does your garden grow?

Rarely found: Eryngium pandanufolium Physic Purple

Surprised by plants: Gerry's September arrivals

As well as giving back to the environment The Coastal Gardener gives out to the community. "Prior to the Covid crisis we ran free talks on Thursday afternoons, as well as day courses that people could pay to attend on coastal gardening. I have made a few videos for the Green Island Veg Economy, (GIVE) since lockdown."

She is also looking forward to offering VBG's apprentices some work experience outside the Garden.

All in all life for the Coastal Gardener is pretty non-stop. Even though the nursery closes from now until March, the design work goes on. Which isn't a bad state of affairs for a business that happened by serendipity.

The Coastal Gardener, Fakenham Farm, Eddington Road, St Helens, Isle of Wight, PO35 5TN. 07977 550050. Open Thursday to Sunday, from March to mid-October.

Annual General Meeting

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

SECRETARIAL REPORT – Jenny Parker

The postponement of our AGM planned for 15 April was one of the first decisions made by the Committee at the end of March when we had little idea of what was to come. We were hoping that the effect of Covid 19 would pass quickly and normality return. As the summer has gone along we have all had to adjust our lives, be grateful for the good things and learn to be patient.

An AGM meeting is not possible at the moment and may not be until next year. We feel a Zoom meeting is not ideal for our membership but to postpone the AGM into next year means we will be due two AGMs very close together.

We have followed the Charities Commission Guidelines and submitted our accounts and reports as required for the year to Sept 19. We will also publish them on our website. Following our call in *Ventnorensis* for any resolutions for the AGM nothing has been raised.

No Trustees are due for re-election this year. Jane Clarke resigned from the Committee and Peter Coleman was elected to her role as Deputy Chairman. The current Committee is seeking re-election, which includes Val Pitts who was co-opted on to the Committee to take over as Membership Secretary when Caroline Peel took up her role of High Sheriff. Caroline remains an active member of the Committee.

There are no major changes for which we would require a membership vote.

It is proposed that the term of the current Committee be extended until an Annual General Meeting of the Society can be held, if the law permits, in April 2021 (date to be confirmed in due course).

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – Robert John Bagshawe (Chairman) 20th July 2020

In 2018 - 2019 Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society carried out activities as follows:

Through our Gift Aid programme, administered by the Ventnor Botanic Garden Community Interest Company (VBG-CIC), we were able to support the Horticultural Apprenticeship scheme that involves the part-time employment of a skilled trainer/mentor and two full-time apprentices. The Society has also funded extracurricular experiences for the apprentices to widen their understanding of horticultural careers. During the year, another apprentice successfully completed his two-year apprenticeship and a new apprentice was recruited onto the programme. The Friends also provide funds to purchase trees and shrubs, and food for the Garden's red squirrels.

Volunteer numbers grow in many areas of the Garden – horticultural maintenance, propagation, tour guides, seed cleaning and retailing, retail assistance, information and event management. Members continue to support the VBG-CIC by volunteering as guides for schools, groups and the general public.

Fundraising has taken many forms from a continuation of the 'talent-raising' scheme initiated in 2017, the proceeds of plant sales, soup lunches, Secret Art and donations at walks and talks. This year, the Friends provided photographs for greetings cards and an inaugural 2019 calendar which, as a joint venture with the VBG-CIC, will be an annual product.

The Friends' Health and Wellbeing scheme provided four family Annual Passes for disadvantaged families. The scheme is being extended by the CIC to include recovering cancer sufferers and more.

Botany Club and Café Botanique gave members and the public insight into specialist knowledge of expert speakers and leaders. A trip to Folly Farm in Berkshire was hosted by the past Curator of the Garden, Simon Goodenough.

Two issues of *Ventnorensis*, our biannual magazine for members, were produced. Our website continues to develop as a promotional tool for events, along with regular emails for members. The requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) has been discussed and compliance implemented.

Membership: September 2018 480. September 2019 446

REPORT OF THE MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON 21ST FEBRUARY 2019

Sally Peake Chairman welcomed 37 members to the Echium Room at VBG on a dark February evening.

Apologies had been received from a further 6 members.

The Minutes of the previous AGM were agreed with no matters arising.

Chairman's Report

Sally Peake presented her report for the year which was submitted to the Charities Commission. She announced she would be stepping down as Chairman after 3 years. The Committee recommended John Bagshawe to take over.

The Financial Report and Accounts up to 30 September 2018

Copies of the accounts were shared with members and Tim Woodcock, Hon Treasurer presented his report (also for submission to the Charities Commission). A vote was taken to accept the accounts and for Roger Sims to continue to independently check and agree the accounts.

Membership Report

Caroline Peel reported membership to stand at 480 (Sept 2018) but hoped that the free passes for entry to the Garden now included with membership of the Friends would help encourage new members.

Sally Peake stood down as Chairman and the election of the Trustees, officers and Committee members of the CIC followed:

Appointment of Trustees of VBGFS

Sally Peake, Tim Woodcock, Caroline Peel and Jane Clarke stood down as required at the first AGM of the CIO and were re-elected.

John Bagshawe, Rosemary Stewart and Jenny Parker were elected as Trustees.

Election of Officers for the Charitable Incorporated Organisaiton

Chairman, John Bagshawe — Vice Chairman, Jane Clarke
Hon Secretary, Jenny Parker — Hon Treasurer, Tim Woodcock

Other serving members of the Committee were re-elected

Sally Peake, Caroline Peel, Colin Smith, Rosemary Stewart, Ros Whistance

New member of the Committee

Peter Coleman with a special interest in Health and Wellbeing was elected Chris Kidd and Colin Pope remain Ex officio members of the Committee requiring no election.

Any Other Business

A member asked why more interest was not raised on cash held in the bank. The Treasurer said interest earned was under review but decent rates were very hard to find.

The meeting closed at 19.35

TREASURER'S REPORT – T W Woodcock, Treasurer/ Trustee: VBGFS. 09/09/19

CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends Society CIO			Charity No. 1174751	
Accounts for the period				
Period start date	10/1/2018	To	Period end date	9/30/2019

Section A Statement of financial activities

Recommended categories by activity	Unrestricted funds	Restricted income funds		Total funds	Prior year funds
	£	£		£	£
Incoming resources (Note 3)					
Income and endowments from:					
Donations and legacies	45,804	-	-	45,804	37,934
Charitable activities	-	-	-	-	-
Other trading activities	10,497	-	-	10,497	9,232
Investments	194	-	-	194	37
Separate material item of income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	56,495	-	-	56,495	47,203
Resources expended (Note 4)					
Expenditure on:					
Raising funds	4,395		-	4,395	4,296
Charitable activities	44,993		-	44,993	41,761
Separate material item of expense	-	-	-	-	-
Other	3,429	-	-	3,429	3,197
Total	52,817	-	-	52,817	49,254
Net income/(expenditure) before investment gains/(losses)	3,678	-	-	3,678	(2,051)
Net gains/(losses) on investments	-	-	-	-	-
Net income/(expenditure)	3,678	-	-	3,678	(2,051)
Extraordinary items	-	-	-	-	-
Transfers between funds	-		-	-	-
Other recognised gains/(losses):					
Gains and losses on revaluation of fixed assets for the charity's own use	-	-	-	-	-
Other gains/(losses)	-	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds	3,678	-	-	3,678	(2,051)
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward	(2,057)	6	-	(2,051)	-
Total funds carried forward	1,621	6	-	1,627	(2,051)

Note: **On 1st October 2017 the assets and liabilities of Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends Society, Charity No. 1080835 were transferred to this Charitable Incorporated Organisation.**

Section B	Balance sheet				
	Unrestricted funds	Restricted income funds		Total this year	Total last year
	£	£		£	£
Fixed assets					
Intangible assets	-	-	-	-	-
Tangible assets	-	-	-	-	-
Heritage assets	-	-	-	-	-
Investments	-	-	-	-	-
Total fixed assets	-	-	-	-	-
Current assets					
Stocks	1,172	-	-	1,172	604
Debtors (Note 6)	14,362	-	-	14,362	11,641
Investments		-	-	-	-
Cash at bank and in hand (Note 8)	80,057	11,334	-	91,391	95,376
Total current assets	95,591	11,334	-	106,925	107,621
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year (Note 7)	4,886	-	-	4,886	9,260
Net current assets/(liabilities)	90,705	11,334	-	102,039	98,361
Total assets less current liabilities	90,705	11,334	-	102,039	98,361
Creditors: amounts falling due after one year (Note 7)	-	-	-	-	-
Provisions for liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Total net assets or liabilities	90,705	11,334	-	102,039	98,361
Funds of the Charity					
Endowment funds	-			-	-
Restricted income funds (Note 9)		11,334		11,334	11,414
Unrestricted funds (Note 9)	90,705		-	90,705	86,947
Revaluation reserve				-	-
Total funds	90,705	11,334	-	102,039	98,361

Note: On 1st October 2017 the assets and liabilities of Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends Society, Charity No. 1080835 were transferred to this Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Socially distanced meeting: VBGFS Executive Committee

Weather in the Garden

(April to August 2020) **by Chris Watts**

Lockdown, introduced towards the end of March, coincided uncannily with the start of a spell of superb weather which lasted for over 70 days, and you could say a new normal was seemingly established in more ways than one. Day after day of blue skies became a regular feature, interrupted only by a couple of rainy days around the middle of April. May was exceptionally dry and sunny with rain/sun totals rivalling the Mediterranean, although the temperatures kept on reminding us that we were still in England!

However on June 3rd the weather broke; the dawn to dusk sunshine of the two previous months ended. Summer, as we know and love it, returned, and the old normal was restored! We then had a couple of unremarkable months – June and July, although it stayed rather dry overall.

Then came August, what a month! There was a lot of weather in August (not a phrase I am fond of but often hear - I reluctantly use it in this case). First of all we had the great heat, with two heatwaves* from the 7th to the 9th and 11th to the 13th; there were two tropical nights** on the 8th and 12th. At the Hospital weather station where temperatures were recorded for 70 years (1880-1950), the highest ever measured was 31.7°C on the 16th August 1949. Would this year beat that, and set some sort of a record? Yes! The 8th came near with 31.5°C, but the following day sealed it with exactly 32.0°C! In the old money not quite 90°F, but 89.6°F.

Then came a lot of rain and wind, scarcely a week later. This totalled 28.3mm on the 16th, the wettest day of the year so far. Then on the 24th early in the morning a shower brought torrential rain for two and a half hours (8.07am-10.38am), amounting to 26mm. Around the same time we had to contend with some extremely strong winds brought about by Storm Ellen (21st) and particularly from Storm Francis (25th). Luckily although the trees were still in leaf there was little damage in the Garden, just a scattering of debris. I notice that in the next list of storm names, the third (for 'C') is Christoph, so watch out for that one! The Bank Holiday to end the month saw the return of dry and sunny weather, but a northerly airflow ensured below average temperatures.

** A heatwave is defined for the IOW as three consecutive days with top temperature over 26°C.*
*** A tropical night is one where temperatures do not dip below 20°C.*

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
April	*12.0++*	*53.7*	*6*	*12.5*	*1*	*18.4*	*10*
May	*13.6+*	*3.8---*	*2*	*15.6*	*8*	*2.0*	*21*
June	*16.1+*	*30.6--*	*9*	*18.4*	*9*	*7.4*	*4*
July	*17.0*	*24.9---*	*6*	*19.1*	*22*	*11.4*	*4*
August	*19.0++*	*116.7++*	*10*	*20.5*	*22*	*28.3*	*6*

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

Growing confidence (a bit)

By **Roz Whistance**

Messy worker: shed painting

The very day after the PM's announcement I was due to drive down to Cornwall to help my sister move house, and take my mum out and about. That, of course, didn't happen.

That apart, even now as I write this I feel guilty at how much I enjoyed the sudden freedom. As a freelance writer and photographer there was no work, and all those years of photographs could be finally sorted. But there was also sunshine, and in case it stopped I washed the cars, then painted the sheds, then I weeded the garden we share with my mother-in-law, then weeded it again. Anything to avoid being inside in the gorgeous spring weather.

Now a confession: I am afraid of gardening. I grew up with a small, north London garden, clay soil, where roses grew and thrived and I was unaware of anything else, so everything else was embedded in my head as a mystery. Weeding and pruning, after a fashion, I can do but how deep do you plant this? How much space do you give that? The previous year, with the help of a gardener, we'd evicted a load of boring shrubs and planted new things – among them a climbing hydrangea with pendulous flowers and autumnal leaf colour, and a vine: which were pleasing, and growing, but there was a load of bare soil which simply invited the weeds.

Then VBG started selling, and delivering, plants and mother-in-law and I invested. It was a bit of a stab in the dark for a non-gardener but it got me started. My husband ordered sweet peas, which I planted in mostly gravel, sure they'd shrivel and die, but they made a magnificent show on a fence that had hitherto been bare.

Each evening we took my mother-in-law for a walk in her wheelchair, and as a change from seeing the sea we found lanes where plants were being sold outside a house. We began loading my poor mother-in-law's lap with pots, big and small, and yes, I planted them. I put them in and they grew.

I went running for my hour's exercise and saw virtually no-one. Lying on my exercise mat in the garden afterwards, my stretchy blue stretch band the same deep blue as the sky, every day, for months, I watched the buds turn into flowers. Some plants perplexed me: the buds on a pink bottlebrush, planted last year (doubtless in the wrong place) remained buds for so long, as did the agapanthus buds, so I was sure they had died. But they hadn't, and I loved them for the anticipation they provided almost as much as for the long and beautiful show they gave, and are still, just about, giving.

So, lockdown. I broke my fear of planting things, though can't say I know what I'm doing. We managed a day trip to Cornwall in early June for my mum's 90th birthday – us in the garden, her and her friends inside her lovely, though locked, care home.

The photographs remain unsorted.

Takeaways: **Val Pitts** lists her things to be thankful for

- Quiet roads (a very distant memory)
- Having the bluebells on St Boniface Down to myself
- Shopping at our lovely small shops and the groceries coming to my door – no plans to change this now (childhood memories of Mr Brown bringing the weekly order on his special bicycle)
- Happy hours in our garden and not doing any of the indoor 'lockdown list'
- Wondering where the time had disappeared
- Above all – Ventnor Botanic Garden: the regular dog walks watching the season unfold; the friendly and hard-working staff who kept it all going; the lovely plants on sale when even the garden centres weren't open; the take-away coffees in the sun in the Medicinal Garden; Darren's delicious take-aways; still being able to volunteer. It was a precious bit of 'normal' among the uncertainty.

DISCOUNTS for members

Friends should always carry their Friends' Membership Card with them, to benefit from discounts and benefits that may be on offer.

For example, you can obtain 10 per cent discount from Deacons Nursery at Godshill, and also at The Coastal Gardener, Seaview, [see feature, Page 16] if you show your Friends' Membership Card.

VBGFS members have two free entries to VBG per year, cards given when membership is renewed.

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.

A Potted Pandemic

Jenny Parker, separated from family and with travel plans scuppered, found solace from companionship in the Garden

Cuddle at last: Jenny with baby Millie

I have always known how lucky I am, but 2020 has made me realise just how much you don't appreciate what you have. This was going to be a special year: a first grandchild due, a graduation to attend in Cyprus, a return trip to Africa to visit more elephants in the wild and all those National Trust properties to visit, delayed for years because of work.

But, it was not to be. The baby arrived and I was able to rush over and welcome a granddaughter with a short cuddle before lockdown. Back on the Island the dog loved the extended walks along the deserted Military Road. The family kept in touch with email, calls, Facetime and Zoom, and we started Family Quiz Nights.

Looking at my diary I went back to VBG on Wednesday 22 April desperate to "do something normal". It didn't take long to realise how important being and working in the Garden is for wellbeing. Trish and the apprentices were there as cheerful as ever and we enjoyed each other's company and felt a huge sense of achievement. Over the weeks more and more regular and new volunteers turned up and the group has gone from strength to strength – we started to get lots done.

The Garden never closed and Islanders started to realise what a gem it really is. The volunteers helped with weekend watering and I remember a Saturday morning in the spring outside the café watering the plants, with a coffee to enjoy and chatting to every visitor arriving. It felt so good to be involved.

Clearing dead and unwanted echiums was very popular with lots of volunteers, since a small push has a huge impact and makes you feel very strong! We always laugh and joke, which is a tonic in itself. We have shared our sorrows and joys and rejoiced that we have stayed well and able to garden.

Now with holidays cancelled or delayed I have managed to see the family, and been able to cuddle and play with my six-month-old granddaughter at last. We are again uncertain of the future but I know lots of us will continue to volunteer and do all we can to keep our beautiful Garden going.

My local patch

Colin Pope finds interest in the mundane

Once the shock of lockdown had sunk in, I realised that this was an opportunity to explore my local patch, which I had previously somewhat ignored. I think that naturalists are quite well equipped to appreciate a quieter and slower existence. Enjoyment of the outdoors was greatly enhanced by the beautiful prolonged spell of sunny weather we enjoyed this spring. It was invigorating to watch spring unfold and to appreciate the commoner flowers, birds and butterflies that we sometimes take for granted. It was also an eye-opener for me to see how much diverse wildlife was thriving on the outskirts of Ryde – skylarks and dingy skipper butterflies in a very mundane looking field; red squirrels and whitethroats along the scrubby margins. Having the time to look closely at quite common wild plants revealed unexpected features, which I had previously overlooked.

When I finally ventured out as far as Ventnor and visited the Garden, I was bowled over with how good it looked and struck by how hard Trish, Indi and Adam must have been working to keep on top of everything. And I was thrilled to enjoy my first flat white for the first time in two months, sitting in the Garden enjoying the plants.

Soul destroying

Chris Kidd was in Spain when everything stopped

Lockdown for Liz and myself began earlier than most as we were in Spain. After a single day of freedom our neighbour said if we wanted supplies go to the store right now. We thought the Latin temperament wouldn't be commanded from Madrid, so by the time we went to the supermarket the shelves were empty. The following day reality hit. Flights were cancelled, police forces patrolled the streets, drones and helicopters flew. Permission to be outside, even in a vehicle, was for single persons only, for a single trip to a supermarket or pharmacy – or an on-the-spot 500Euro fine. Streets were deserted: an apocalyptic silence fell.

'Leaving the house felt like a criminal act'

Roadblocks isolated towns from each other. Simply leaving the house felt like a criminal act. On Thursdays the Spanish emerged from their houses at dusk to clap, sing songs, or sound their horns to support their emergency services. Stories emerged of care homes found full of corpses where the staff had been made to stay away. We had texts from the UK urging us to leave.

A king's ransom brought us back to the UK on the day the English lockdown began. My father's health had deteriorated dramatically. We needed to look after my mother as my father undertook six weeks of daily radiotherapy. Rather than return home to the Island we rented near their home, already on the market. And so began the UK lockdown in earnest.

Our horrible routine was soul destroying and I'll save you the detail. The only highs for us were that in the absence of people wildlife seemed to proliferate. We watched the seemingly continuous courtship and fecundity of pigeons, saw deer in increasingly urban environments, rats dining with squirrels beside ponds which shrank under a hot sun. Wild flowers were reprieved from the predation of mowers and each representative of the orchid family recorded in Hampshire made an appearance, crowned with the Twayblade on a former railway siding one boiling day.

In my parents' garden three species of orchid bloomed, remainders of thirty years' hard work to transform bare grass to a garden that raised thousands of pounds for cancer charities.

Positive shielding

Rosemary Stewart From 'wildish' garden to productive paradise

I decided that, being over 80, I must be extra careful and my lockdown 'exercise' would have to be in my rather haphazard, wildish, large garden. So, I investigated delivery options and seed suppliers. From Forest View Nursery came some colourful annuals and a pot luck group of perennials, and the Organic Catalogue sent interesting vegetable seeds and dramatic looking flowers.

Bishops Balls: gomphocarpus physocarpus

Soon my spare room had an array of seedlings balanced on boxes. My gardener, Christine, cleared and sowed a patch for cornflowers, poppies and wildflower seeds. She planted up a lavender border. With chippings she made a tidy path between the vegetable strips for the beans, peas and courgettes. I prepared the greenhouse . . . and we were off!

What a summer of growth! Established salvias, agapanthus, euryops, crocosmia, cistus etc were joined by dramatic tithonias and rudbeckia and brilliant blue *salvia patens.* The campsis excelled and tall *verbena bonariensis* and *echium vulgare* popped up everywhere. The bees were in seventh heaven!

However, my pride and joy has been my *gomphocarpus physocarpus* - or bishop's balls! I had been amazed by them in Malawi and on St Helena. They are the food plant of the spectacular caterpillar of the African monarch butterfly.

The tomatoes have been prolific, the HUGE peppers turned red, the cucumbers juicy, the beans were delicious and I enjoyed lots of colour from my flowers. Inside, the *gloriosa superba* tubers produced 30 flowers on 6ft high stems and now in autumn, beneath the *betula* Jacquemontii at the front, I enjoy my big patch of *cyclamen hederifolium.*

The wildflower trial was so encouraging that Christine and my grass cutter, Darren, have prepared a 18sq m strip of lawn for a proper wildflower meadow for bee and butterfly friendly flowers and grasses.

PS Oh dear! At the end of July I tripped over my hose. Bang! A & E, black eye, cut and enormous swollen cheek with a haematoma still here after two months! Thank goodness for the garden – and my lovely son who was here on holiday.

Above and beyond

Our volunteers have gone far more than the extra mile over this spring and summer, when the Garden needed all the help it could get. We are so very grateful to you all.

We are always on the lookout for more to join us in gardening, seed sorting, help in the potting shed, propagating, pruning, as well as tour-guiding, meet & greet, help in the shop and with special events such as plant swaps and social events when they next happen. You could even aspire to having your own project in the Garden.

Val Pitts: "I never would have thought I could do a thing like making a video"

Of course we are not the only organisation who rely on volunteers, and in normal times we would recruit via the Volunteer Fair. This year it has gone virtual, and, always ready to rise to a challenge, Val Pitts taught herself the skills to make a short video to show to the Island what fun our volunteers have. See it on the front page of our website: **https://ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk/2020/10/06/volunteer-fair-2/**

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

BOOK REVIEW

Plant-based reading

Storytelling was once just for the kids. Not any more says **Roz Whistance**

Stories are as fundamental to humans as music and drama, and in recent years live storytelling has had a huge resurgence in popularity – for adults now, not just for children. Hearing tales written by their performer at festivals and other events is another thing that has sadly not been available this summer but this book goes a long way to making up for that.

Botanical Folk Tales of Britain and Ireland by Lisa Schneidau is a lovely collection of traditional folk tales retold, all based in the natural world. Schneidau introduces herself by recalling a childhood in Buckinghamshire "when the moon daisies were nearly as tall as me, when we picked field mushrooms from the fairy rings and fried them for breakfast."

That was until, one week, the local farmer chopped down their willow tree house, and ploughed up the wild flower meadow. "I can still feel the knot of deep grief that twisted in our bellies that year." Schneidau went on to do two science degrees before working in conservation – and it was among conservation projects that she came across storytelling.

Her own book takes botanical folk tales from around the country, and around the year, beginning at midwinter – "where most plant life is dormant. This is a time of the longest darkness. The winter guardian plants – bruised ivy, spiky holly and the yew with its vibrant red yew-gogs – give us some hope and cheer during the dark times."

This book indeed gives hope and cheer with its warmth of language which is never inaccessible. Thoroughly recommended as a Christmas present.

Botanical Folk Tales (Paperback) by Lisa Schneidau, £7.99 at Amazon

- Many storytellers have gone online, and you can see Lisa Schneidau performing on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bzo0YUcF4_A

Christmas Wreath Making Workshop*
with artist Carol Ann Eades
Check event time and date, and
book your place, on 01983 855397,
or on info@botanic.co.uk
**This event was being finalised at time of going to press*

Great Friends' Recipe Swap

We all swap plants, but what about those dormant, dormouse days when you can't get out? This is the first *Ventnorensis* Great Friends' Recipe Swap

by Jan Caunt

Jan's Chocolate Orange Cake

Note: I adapted this from Nigella Lawson's How to Be a Domestic Goddess. She uses thin-cut marmalade, whereas I prefer a thick-cut which leaves nice big chunks of crystallised peel in the finished cake. I've made it with white self-raising and wholemeal self-raising flours, both with equally good results.

125g unsalted butter
100g dark chocolate, broken into pieces
300g marmalade
150g caster sugar
2 large eggs, beaten
150g self-raising flour
pinch of salt
20cm Spingform tin, buttered & floured

Preheat oven to 180c/gas mark 4

Plain looking – but bursting with flavour

METHOD

Put butter to melt in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over a low heat. When it's nearly melted, stir in the chocolate. Leave for a moment to begin softening, then take the pan off the heat and stir with a wooden spoon until the butter and chocolate are smooth and melted. Now add the marmalade, sugar, salt and eggs. Stir until well amalgamated, and beat in the flour bit by bit. Put into prepared tin and bake for about 50 mins or until a skewer comes out clean. Cool in the pan on a rack for 10 mins before turning out.

You can eat it slightly warm with crème fraiche, or cold. It's a plain-looking cake, so if you want something more elaborate, dust with icing sugar or, or even better, with a cake stencil.

VARIATIONS

You could substitute marmalade for jam, perhaps raspberry or apricot, or consider making it with the same weight of prune puree (served with crème fraiche to which you can add a few drops of Armagnac). Indeed you could add a slug of Armagnac to the cake too, or just pour a little over as soon as you unmould it.

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Our members and volunteers do so much to help that we are always grateful when we hear about a fundraising scheme that is free for us all to use and could make a big difference.

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With all the restrictions on our movements at the moment, we feel sure that many of us will resort to online shopping this year and VBGFS could benefit from your shopping at no cost to you (and no fees for us) - direct help from Amazon!

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Sally Peake

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The RHS Banksian Medal

The Friends were given a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge the work of an amazing gardener, writes **Jenny Parker**

Going for the Gong: Trish's Banksian Medal

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society is, as you all probably know, an affiliated member of The Royal Horticulture Society.

As such we are entitled to one Banksian Medal every year. This is "a premier award" to present to the holder of the most points gained in Horticulture classes at our Annual Show. Of course, we do not hold an annual Horticultural Show, although maybe it is an idea for the future?

Everything was progressing in the usual way in early 2020 and the RHS had put the order in for this year's Medals. On 21 May the RHS sent an Affiliated Societies newsletter by email, which said:

Just for this year, if you aren't running a show, we're encouraging you to award the medal to someone who has been especially helpful and kind – a credit to your group. It might be someone who's been keeping in touch with anyone living on their own, or who has kept allotment plots thriving whilst their owners are unable to leave their house, or who has organised food deliveries for neighbours. Or, if your club had a virtual show, the person who organised it may well deserve a medal. This year we are doing things differently, who do you know deserves a medal?

It was clear by the end of May that with the gardeners and the curator all on furlough Trish and the apprentices supported by loyal hardworking volunteers were keeping the Garden going and even looking as good as ever in spring. Trish had refused pay for all her extra hours and just kept going. We are so proud of her.

To the VBGFS Committee, therefore, it was obvious that we should approached the RHS for a medal to present to her as a mark of appreciation. Trish is someone who has been far, far more than helpful and kind, and is a huge credit to the Friends. She has kept VBG going, while at the same time enabling the apprentices to continue their studies. Adam finished his two years with us at the end of June and Ellis has joined Indi as our new apprentice.

When the RHS sent us the medal it added a covering note to say Trish had gone that extra mile during lockdown and was a deserving recipient.

Banksian Medal

PRESENTED BY

The Royal Horticultural Society

AND AWARDED BY

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

TO

Trish Brenchley

for the largest total amount of prize money/points in the whole of the horticultural classes

(Winners in previous two years excluded.)

RHS Certificate: Not from points, but dedication

The genius of THIS Botanic Garden

Realisation: Chris Kidd

While chatting to Chris Kidd it was interesting to hear his reflections on where Ventnor Botanic Garden sits in relation to others, and what, therefore, it has to offer to our apprentices, past and present

"This is an amazing environment to work in," says Chris. "It's one of the great gardens of Britain, if not the world, for what it is."

It is something that has dawned on him in the last 20 years, he says, that this Garden is not a conventional botanic garden at all, and never will be. "But in its own niche it is absolutely unique in the world."

This was an intriguing thought, and one that needed to be explored. In what way is VBG not conventional?

"Simon [Goodenough] and I were Kew-trained. Being at Kew you see what the epitome of a botanic garden is and what it does. Behind it is a huge science vehicle, and behind the garden at Kew, certainly when Simon and I were there, it was a living collection – a science item that happened to be good to visit. That was the view that was taken by Government and directors at the time. It had a staff of 500 and over 100 of them were gardeners. That gives you an idea of how Simon and I thought, and what we thought we'd do."

He talks about himself and Simon 'dropping off the Kew conveyor belt'. "Kew has a history of pumping out gardeners and running botanic gardens all over the world. Here at Ventnor, Simon set up a library, as Kew has a library. He set up a plant collection, because Kew has a plant collection, labelled and curated with plant records behind it. All those things. But this Garden has never hit the next level up of science, and never will – because Kew has all those gardeners and about 20 scientists."

This is not a cause for lament, however. "These things dawn on you over time," says Chris. "You think, we were never going to make mini Kew down here – but look what we've made anyway! This stunning thing! And after a while its like being weaned away from mother, you start looking back at Kew and thinking – that's so wrong. What we're doing here is what botanic gardens of the future should look like. We've made something much more important. We've made a garden which is sustainable, and a model for how gardens in the future should be."

While Kew is sustainable financially, from its central Government funding, it is Ventnor that has the genuinely sustainable living collection.

Sustainability began with Simon deciding to grow plants from parts of the world that shared the climate of Ventnor's Undercliff. "It had been done by Tony Schilling at Wakehurst Place: it dawned on him that the valley in Wakehurst was near identical to a valley in the Himalayas, so he collected plants from there and planted them. It worked."

He's pretty sure Simon hadn't taken his ideas from there, but the success of Simon's own little experiments were a landmark. "Now you've got the Puyas there growing, nobody tends them, nobody's all over them with secateurs, or feeding or monitoring or watering them. Yet they're better there than anywhere else in Britain. That's the genius of the place."

It is that genius that our apprentices are learning from and taking away. See David Pearce, page 10.

Apprentice Update

Ellis Gant started his two-year apprenticeship with us on 29th June, replacing Adam Cooke who completed his time with us successfully the previous week. Adam has found employment at a large local garden where he had built up contacts through his father/ brother who both work as self-employed gardeners. I am sure we all wish him well and hope to hear his news on a regular basis.

Cutting a dash: Ellis tackles the hedge

Another place: Sally takes the apprentices to the Coastal Gardener nursery [See Page 16]

Indy is now into her second year; she successfully completed a tractor-driving course funded by the Friends in March (just before lockdown). I would hope that, as regulations relax, we shall be able to offer her more off-site opportunities to expand her knowledge, experience and confidence.

Ellis has settled in well; he is strong, willing and cheerful – all attributes that'll enable him to take the best of what VBG has to offer. Please do introduce yourselves when the occasion arises.

Sally Peake

Indi at the wheel: Tractor driving mastered

Membership News

We are delighted to welcome the following new Friends:

Gillian Woods of Bonchurch
Gerry Price of Bembridge
Michael and Wendy Peskett of Gurnard
Deborah Meadowes of Bembridge
Ellison and Edwina Withe of St Helens
Jack Cavanagh of Ventnor

President

Brian Kidd

Patrons

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

Please renew your Membership

The Membership Year runs from January 1st – December 31st. A copy of our new promotional leaflet is enclosed with this copy of Ventnorensis. **The form shows details of the ways to pay, which have changed.** With the much-increased use of internet banking, we have now included the option to pay by BACS and, if you prefer to set up a new Standing Order, we ask you to deal with your bank directly and create a regular payment rather than filling in a form to send to us to post on. Payment by cheque is still acceptable of course. If you pay by Standing Order, you don't need to send the form back unless any of your details or Gift Aid instructions have changed. You may scan and email the form if you prefer.

If you are setting up a new payment, please note that the name of our account is **Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends.** The Banks are now very fussy about the name being exactly right, so please ignore any variant you may have used or seen in print before.

Standing Orders to our old account: our bank account and Membership Rates were changed in 2018, but unfortunately there are still some Friends who have not amended their instructions. If you think you may be one of them – **please check and change your payment details if necessary.**

The old rates were £15/£22 for Single/Joint Membership and the old Bank Account was 05441358

The current rates are £20/£30 for Single/Joint Membership and the new Bank Account is 49647717

Finally, if you sent me an amended Standing Order form this year, please check that your Bank implemented your instructions correctly and have also cancelled the old SO.

We are very grateful to all our Friends and hope you will continue to support us and the work we do for our wonderful Garden.

If you have any payment queries, please get in touch.

Val Pitts, Membership Secretary
vbgfs.membership@gmail.com

Design by Simone Dickens, Coco Design Co. Kingston Smallholding, Shorwell. IW. PO30 3LP. Tel: 07530 867318 / 01983 551527 simone.dickens@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERING

The Seed Sorters

If pushing over spent echiums is not your thing, come and join the merry band who enable everyone to have a bit of VBG, says **Rosemary Stewart**

Over the 24 years that I have been volunteering at VBG we have collected seeds, cleaned them and put them into packets. Groups started gathering them in July and the Friends produced an annual Seed Catalogue. At the peak in 1996 we offered nearly 300 different varieties for sale – all from the Garden! Every year there were 10 free packets included with Friends' membership. Deb Goodenough started it off, and when she left Trish took over the writing of descriptions for each one. Up to about 20 of us sat at tables in the Temperate House on winter Wednesdays, and even took some to clean at home.

Seed celebrations: A young Trish standing with some of us having a Christmas drink in 1996. Me at the front left!

Then, when the management became a CIC, the catalogue came to an end. However, some seeds were still collected and processed. After a while, some packet covers were designed, the seed selection shelves were made, photos were taken and we were off again!

Now there is a dedicated team of "Seed Ladies" (though gentlemen are more than welcome too) who sit in the Nammet Room every Wednesday working away to keep the shelves supplied. Visitors to the shop are interested to see the unusual varieties, and sales are buoyant. Echium seeds are sold in gift 'pyramids' and home grown seeds are now supplemented with a quality selection from Moles Seeds.

In 2020, toasting a Seed Lady's 80th birthday

It is intensive work, extracting the seed from the stems collected in the autumn, so we work with various sieves, 'blowing' and sorting patiently. At the same time, all sorts of lighthearted chatter goes on about our daily lives, families and adventures. At 11am it is Coffee Time and biscuits and cake are produced from our bags to share and keep up our spirits. Jan Caunt oversees the work and keeps the shelves filled, even coming down at the weekend to see if anything has run out – another of the Friends' valuable dedicated volunteers.

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