ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'This issue is a celebration of the work, dedication, achievements and camaraderie of the Friends' Society since its inception to the present day' –
John Bagshawe, Chairman

VOLUME 28 NO. 1 SPRING/SUMMER 2021

Spring/summer opening times

10am till 5pm daily.
Food and drink 10am-5pm, Friday & Saturday, 8pm
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/

SUMMER SPECIAL EVENTS

Artist in Residence: Visit Guy Eades in his studio and look out for his works on display. See Page 25

June 4th 12noon-1.00pm: Storytime & Singalong with Rapunzel

July 8th 08.00am: Friends' trip to Folly Farm

July 28th 6.00pm-8.30pm: Quantum Theatre Presents 'Treasure Island'

August 1st 2.30pm: Quantum Theatre presents 'The Tale of Peter Rabbit & Benjamin Bunny'

7.00pm-9.30pm: 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

THE DAILY WELLBEING PROGRAMME:

please check availability

Daily: 12pm-1pm Safe Distanced Qigong with Gary, Echium Room. Gentle exercise promoting relief or prevention of physical problems and stress.

Mondays: 2.00pm-3.30pm: Creative Dance. Dancing for mature movers, with social distancing, led by teacher Michelle Hainsworth. 01983 754189 to book/go on waiting list.

Tuesdays: 9.30am-11am British Yoga Wheel with Mark. Friendly, safe distanced class, to promote improved strength and flexibility, relaxation and wellbeing.

Wednesdays: 10.30am-11.30am: Tai Chi. Slow body movements combined as a flowing exercise. All levels.

Fridays: 9.30am-11am British Yoga Wheel with Mark. Friendly, safe distanced class, to promote improved strength and flexibility, relaxation and wellbeing.

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: The Japanese bridge and Tori gate with cherry trees. Photograph by Caroline Peel

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All the Garden's a stage

. . . and the plants merely method actors. **Chris Kidd** sets to musing

Dear Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden,

In 2000 we began work transforming the Mediterranean Garden at VBG from a rum collection of Mediterranean-style plants circling the sundial lawn into the dynamic plant population we have now. I was working alongside Julian Winslow on shovel, Peter Brown on JCB and Simon Goodenough on primitive digital camera. Discussion, as we changed land profiles, formed clints and dug grykes, was varied and often surreal. Our aim was to create a naturalistic landscape that would form the habitat for the Old World Mediterranean plants, a stage set for them to grow into. It became clear that all of horticulture is theatre, and we were going to use the plants to play themselves. We struck on an idea that these would grow in the style a method actor would use in performance, like the method acting style set by Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner. Think Daniel Day Lewis as a Cistus on a limestone pavement. Simon laughed heartily as we announced we had invented "method horticulture".

With apologies to William Shakespeare.

Circling the sundial: Verbascum popped up everywhere, June 2003

Mediterranean clints & grykes: Iris pushes through clint, gryke behind, 2002

All the garden's a stage,
And all the plants merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one plant in its time plays many parts,
Their acts being seven ages. At first, the seedling,
Unfurling and spreading under nursery glass.
Then the potted juvenile, with his label
And shining leaves, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the tractor journey.
Smoking like furnace, with a woeful grind
Of John Deere gearbox. Then the planting,
Full of strange oaths from bearded men,
Volunteers in honour, sudden, some quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the curator's mouth. And then the flowering,
In fair petalled head with good capon lined,
With stamens full and pods of tiny seeds,
Full of insects and modern instances;
And so they plays their part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered senescence
With withered stem and gall on side;
Their youthful ways, well spent behind, the world in which
New seeds have dropped, fresh stone a bed, the future crop.
Turn generation afresh without planter's choosing. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
the plant stands dead, touching sky, unpruned.
Sans label, sans gardener, sans plan, sans everything. But not unseen.

'Chris's folly': Well discovered while digging the Mediterranean garden, 2001

All of horticulture is theatre: Echiums, 22 May 2002

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, St Helens, if you show your Friends' Membership Card.

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

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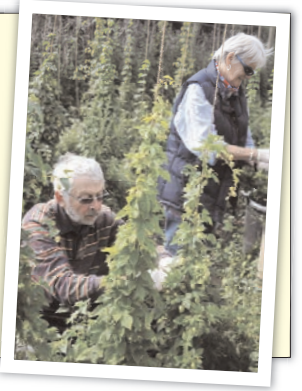
Gardening Volunteers

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 as well as sensible clothing and a flask of refreshment, bring your own hand tools.

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



Chairman's Message

This issue of *Ventnorensis* is a celebration of the work, dedication, achievements and camaraderie of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society since its inception to the present day.

Our story begins with Simon Goodenough, who set up the Friends' Society; Rosemary Stewart looks at our achievements historically and our importance as a social network, and Sally Peake takes us up to the present day.

Just read and be amazed by everything we, as a group, have done for the Garden.

And that is all I need to say.

John Bagshawe

Special award for Apprentice Indi

Indi Wyatt came to Ventnor Botanic Garden in 2019 on a two-year study programme. She was nominated by her College tutor for her hard work and commitment, having worked since the beginning of the first lockdown to keep the living collection of plants alive at VBG for future generations. Together with Trish and apprentice Adam, who completed his qualification in summer 2020, they all worked exceptionally hard to maintain the Garden whilst all the other staff were furloughed and there were no volunteers allowed into VBG. Without Indi's efforts to help with maintenance, whist still in training herself, the Garden would not have been in such a good position to welcome visitors back once the restrictions were eased.

I was delighted to receive news of the nomination from the College as Indi has always seemed outstanding to me, and they have confirmed it.

Caroline Peel

High Sheriff Caroline Peel, Indi's Mum, Indi, Indi's Dad, Trish Brenchley

OBITUARY

Brian Kidd, 1938-2020
President, Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

It was with great sorrow that we learned that Brian Kidd, our president for 15 years, died in December. He was 82.

An inspiration to the Society, Brian was elected as president in 2005. He never failed to actively support the values and aspirations of the Friends, something encapsulated when he gave out £1 coins to all attendees of our AGM in 2018 and, mirroring the Parable of the Talents, asked for those pounds to be set to work and grow. It was a fundraising idea that evoked imagination and camaraderie – and lots of money for the Apprentice Fund.

Brian was a weekly gardening columnist on the Portsmouth News and its Weekend magazine for more than 40 years, and a panellist on BBC Radio Solent's gardening show.

Brian and Chris Kidd

His working life started when he was apprenticed to Portsmouth City Council in the 1950s, and went on to become the city's head of parks and gardens. He designed and tended the city's green spaces over several decades and even had a road named after him – Brian Kidd Way, near Southsea Castle – where he had designed the gardens leading up to the heritage site. When he retired in 2003 he was granted the Freedom of Portsmouth.

In a letter to our Hon Treasurer, Seamus Meyer wrote: *"I worked with Brian at Portsmouth City Council from 1988 until Brian retired. He was a very knowledgeable plantsman and a lovely man. He always brought a smile to the office, and was a brilliant ambassador for Portsmouth. I will always have fond memories of Brian, a lovely man who truly made a difference."*

We will have a fuller look at Brian's life in the next issue, but meanwhile here is a snippet from the AGM minutes from 2008:

After coffee, members were thoroughly entertained by Brian and Chris Kidd talking about the highlights of their respective careers with amusing anecdotes and some happy memories of days on the allotment. We were all impressed by the list of awards gained by Chris when he graduated from his training at Kew, revealed by his proud father!

PLANTING PROFILE

Planning for the Future

By **Chris Kidd, Curator**

In a series of articles I'd like to show the Friends the guiding documentation for the future of this Garden's plant collection, area by area. The actual documents are fairly bleak and minimal, taking function over form, so I've tried to lubricate them a bit: I'm sure you'll get the gist. As with all plans, these may be aspirational and subject to change.

It's worth bearing in mind that I've not seen a single planning document from the Hillier era, or the Council era for that matter. Both were concerned with the melody, intrigue and beauty of populating these remarkable acres with rare and exotic plants. Perhaps we shoehorned some of Hillier's collection into the semblance of a modern botanic garden layout, and in doing so we lost integrity with the America's collection for example, but who has the stomach to remove champions from China simply because they are no longer in the right place? First in the series is the Japanese Terraces, but as we shall see the name may no longer be appropriate . . .

Japanese Terraces

Setting

Created post-1987 in an area that Harold Hillier referred to as Area F. This is a north facing slope with residual Victorian *Pinus nigra* var. *maritime;* remnant and emergent *Quercus ilex;* and some specimen Hillier trees it edged a notable *Arbutus* collection. There is an Eastern band of *Cupressus macrocarpa* windbreak planted c1972, western band of *Quercus ilex* windbreak.

Development

A tricky topography: the solution started with landscaping and terracing using reclaimed timber, post-1987. Additional self-generated compost to lower pH was imported as backfill as the terraces were made to facilitate plantings of hardy commercial Japanese natives of horticultural merit. Existing plantings from this first wave remain, showing just how long it takes to achieve a decent specimen Camellia.

Camellia 'Blood of China, May 2009: Hardy, commercial, of horticultural merit

Extension of terraces began in 2000, completing the use of stored reclaimed timber westwards. This time saw the creation of faux architectural structures, installation of dry pools, a dry river, elevated dry garden, and bridges. A decision was taken to broaden the geographical origins of plants for this area, bringing in accessions from recent plant collecting trips to the Far East by national botanic gardens. Planting of these new accessions (not necessarily Japanese) were half-hardy shrubs, with known natural provenance. Such plantings were highly risky and few were successful.

Feeling Japanese: 2000 saw faux architectural structures added, bridge then recently Tori gate

Steps were added to the lower level, and extension of steps to highest level.

The installation of the buoy at the top of the central steps highlighted the lack of any great avenues within this garden. The Mediterranean Grape Arch covers a path which isn't straight to the line of the tunnel, even though it covers the historical pipeline from the old Chest Hospital. Standing at either end of the "dog leg" this can be clearly seen.

Very recently there has been removal of a damaged windbreak, extending landscaping westwards. There followed removal of many inappropriate plantings and reclaim of sward: a historic planting of Cornus had marched over the lawn behind the terraces to little or no horticultural merit. The resultant openness gave opportunity for the planting of horticultural Japanese cherry cvs in a gardenesque style. While these plants are a long way from botanically interesting, and outside of the plant range expected for a garden whose strength is its mild climate, commercial interests have to be considered, and these cherries flower in a low point in the season before the Echiums begin.

Mediterranean Grape Arch: covers historical pipeline from old Chest Hospital

Removal of western band of *Quercus ilex* windbreak enabled us to add Camellias again. Extending eastwards to the terracing we planted a mix of hardy and non-hardy Japanese natives of horticultural merit with far eastern half-hardy shrubs. We began planting Magnolias to create an avenue for 50-years hence, which will flower against a dark backdrop. Installation of the Tori gate gave a further Japanese feel to the 'gardenesque' end of the area.

Botanic Direction

The shallow, north facing valley side of VBG has been underutilised, and has become an exceptionally deep windbreak with little or no new planting since 1972. This is because the focus has been on the greater valued south facing side of the valley. With the south sides fully designated, the opportunity to develop the north, using the principals developed on the south, is clear.

The opportunity to determine up to 30 per cent of the garden area is a rare one: consideration must be given to principals beyond the plant makeup, such as garden flow,

potential for a "big picture" landscape with avenues and sub-partitions, functional spaces etc. It's also an opportunity to consider inclusivity for all visitors in a topographically less challenging area.

The value of the windbreak is overstated: pure southerly gales are rare and their potential for destruction less than the south-easterlies. The windbreak should be limited to the immediate margins of the coastal path, and create a dark backdrop.

'Gardenesque': Cherries flower at seasonal low point, before Echiums begin

We should evaluate the success of Magnolia Avenue. There are suspicions about soil depth and summer drought stress for some of the Chinese trees, which traditionally like a deep loam. Maybe move them eastwards. Research into the origins of Far Eastern Magnolia would be helpful, with a view on replacement with different stock that may/may not be in cultivation. There is the obvious concern with immediacy of planting and fulfilling expectations: champions don't happen overnight and nobody buys success. Losses on the road to championship are high: for example, over 90 per cent of Eucalyptus elsewhere in the Garden. To alleviate these issues, do we consider interplanting Hamamellis? *Pseudolarix amabilis* would work very well as an autumn showcase plant, but is it too warm here?

Within the next few years there should be gradual west-to-east removal of windbreak trees. Replace with Magnolia Avenue, populated with very large Chinese species and cultivars for 50-year maturity horizon, interplanted with immediate impact shrubby cultivars. Extend Camellia collection where permissible for 25-year maturity horizon. Give thought to new wild provenance stock if possible.

Extend gardenesque planting eastwards, using commercial ornamental plants supporting half-hardy Far Eastern ethos. Combine with new accessions of wild origin where possible, combined with high risk half-hardy plants. This area of VBG has fewer champions than anywhere else and no national collection members. Join to Hydrangea planting on area J.

Extend landscaping westwards to incorporate area above playground and facilitate better access to Tori gate. Create feature of sun recorder station. Remove last large *C. macrocarpa* from dry pool. Decide limit of bamboo extent: it has become an interesting horticultural feature as a monoculture but is impacting taxa numbers negatively.

The final note is that *"Cryptomeria senescence imminent"*. I used to hear this lament from Simon, and increasingly I find myself saying: "I remember putting them in."

POPE'S PLANTS

From VBG to beyond

Lockdown has focussed **Colin Pope's** attention nearer to his own home

Over recent months, those of us fortunate enough to have gardens will have spent more than usual amounts of time in them. They have provided a place of solace and retreat as well as exercise. But we share our gardens with all sorts of wildlife, some of them unwelcome but most either beneficial or benign. This has been a wonderful opportunity for studying and marvelling at the plants and animals that share our open spaces.

Breakout from VBG: African Daisy Bush or Shoddy Ragwort, Senecio pterophorus, on a St Helens roadside verge

We have a relatively small garden situated in a suburb of Ryde, but I have been amazed at the wildlife it attracts, and over the past year I have learnt so much about its behaviour and habits, about which I was previously only vaguely aware. The changing bird populations throughout the year have been a revelation. My ornamental crab tree, Red Sentinel, has been a magnet for Redwings, Fieldfare and Blackcap at times during the winter, feasting on the softened fruits. During the spring, numbers of birds dropped as wintering birds moved away back to their breeding grounds. Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Robins and Coal Tits have been regular throughout the year and seem to breed in the vicinity.

Holly Blue butterflies are regular garden visitors but in warm summer weather White Admiral and Small Copper have been unexpected fleeting callers. Purple Hairstreaks have been spotted on our oak tree. Some of our garden 'weeds' include Early Dog Violet, *Viola reichenbechiana,* Wood Speedwell, *Veronica montana, Bryony, Tamus communis* and Wood Avens, *Geum urbanum.* These are essentially woodland plants and suggest that they may be survivors from a wooded hedgerow corridor that existed before our Victorian house was built.

You do not necessarily have to visit Ventnor Botanic Garden to see some of the plants that are grown there. I recently received a report from a botanical colleague of a plant of the African Daisy Bush or Shoddy Ragwort, *Senecio pterophorus,* growing on a roadside verge at St Helen's. This is a shrubby, yellow flowered South African plant, which has been growing at the Botanic Garden for many years. It has proven to be something of a toughie and it seeds frequently in the South African garden and beyond, and has to be uprooted each year to stop it taking over. You can see plants of it growing by the roadside outside of the Garden and its appearance at St Helen's is undoubtedly accidental, perhaps brought in with a plant bought at the Garden. This is a plant which is likely to be here to stay and will start to spread. It is currently unknown elsewhere in the UK.

In the same way, the Kangaroo-apple, *Solanum laciniatum,* now pops up in all sorts of unlikely places. You can find fine plants of it in the Garden, where it was first introduced to the Island, and the orange fruits are very attractive to blackbirds, which seem to be the vectors for its spread. Whether these plants will become problems in the future remains to be seen. They are plants on the borderline of hardiness and unseasonably frosty cold snaps may well keep them in check.

The start of the Friendship

Simon Goodenough on how the Society became the power behind the curator's throne

Shortly after I started at Ventnor Botanic Garden, I was introduced to the Isle of Wight Botanic Garden Society; instrumental, as I understood it, in applying pressure to create a botanic garden on the Island. I was invited to several of their committee meetings, and discovered that having achieved their goal of getting a botanic garden on the IW they had expanded their remit to encourage the development of gardens of botanical interest and for the furtherance of horticultural and botanical studies at the Isle of Wight College. Very laudable objectives indeed.

Raising the gavel: Simon as fundraising auctioneer

At this time the Island had two Borough Councils and the County Council. South Wight Borough Council had been the lead player in the development of the Garden at Ventnor, with the help of Hillier's Nursery and in particular Sir Harold Hillier who had taken a keen personal interest in the project.

The Isle of Wight Botanic Garden Society applied gentle pressure on Medina Borough Council to develop an arboretum. It was a good ploy in "playing off" the Borough Councils against each other, the implication being if SWBC has its Botanic Garden, wouldn't it be great if Medina Borough Council developed an Island Arboretum. A site at Seaclose was chosen and, pushed and cajoled by the Isle of Wight Botanic Garden Society MBC started a rather half-hearted planting of specimen trees. Also, the IWBGS organised regular lectures on things horticultural. These were usually held at the College.

With all this activity by the IWBGS it soon became clear to me that what Ventnor Botanic Garden really needed was its own supporter group: a small botanic garden in a small Local Authority was always going to struggle for resources, and a dedicated Friends group would be essential for the development of the Garden. My first hurdle was to convince the Isle of Wight Botanic Garden Society that Ventnor required its own dedicated support group. Unfortunately, the IWBGS felt proprietorial about Ventnor and saw no need to change the status quo.

Long story short I held a public meeting in the Ventnor Winter Gardens, calling for people who may have an interest in forming a Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden. To my relief there was a group of about 30 people, including some of the IWBGS who were less opposed to the idea. From that meeting a committee was formed, key people being Bob Playfoot as the first Chairman and Bill Kidson as Secretary; Bill's wife took on the

role of Membership Secretary, and performed miracles in encouraging people to join and offering a big welcome to them.

Wednesday Seed Cleaners, 2006

Initially Deb and I took it upon ourselves to build the offer that we gave to the members of the Friends. The most obvious and popular was the huge effort to create an "Index Seminum" a seed list that came from the Garden and became available to members in the shape of 20 free packets of seed. At first Deb and I did all the harvesting, cleaning and packaging but as the list grew it was obvious we needed help: so was born the Wednesday Seed Cleaners' Group. Driven by Deb's enthusiasm this became one of our most successful volunteer groups. Not only did this give us seeds to offer to the Friends as part of their subscription but it gave the Garden a valuable source of seeds for growing new plants for the rejuvenation of the Garden itself. Latterly it also provided a large selection of Ventnor Botanic Garden seeds for general sale to the public. Although we never really quantified how much money this generated for the Garden over the years, we sold thousands of pounds worth of seeds, all thanks to the Friends.

Prior to the formation of the Friends we had made a call for volunteers to help us in the Garden, and two people who stand out are Barbara Smith and Pat Luckett who were our first volunteers and put in unwavering efforts to help us tame the Garden and raise plants for new schemes. Eventually the Friends took on the role of organising volunteers and for many years a band of committed and enthusiastic folk met each week to work alongside us and the staff. I believe that in the 25 years I was at VBG, the Garden would not have been anywhere near as good without all the volunteer's efforts.

With the continuing success of the Friends, membership increased and many events and offers evolved. The little Gestetnered news sheet that Deb and I produced was adopted by the Friends, became the Newsletter, and through several designs has become *Ventnorensis*.

Many of the educational children's events were driven by the enthusiasm of the Friends to a point where we had an Education Officer on staff and a formal educational offer grew, still ably supported by the Friends.

So many people have dedicated huge amounts of time and effort to the Friends and it is difficult to not name them here, but I am sure other commentators will do so.

Finally, and by no means least, the Friends have generated many thousands of pounds either through their own endeavors such as plant sales, plant auctions and social gatherings or by being the lead body in grant applications to which the Isle of Wight Council could not apply directly. May I take this opportunity to thank the Friends for all they have done over the years. I will remain eternally grateful and hold the fondest memories of my time at Ventnor. See pages 16, 23 and 29

Weather in the Garden

(September 2020 to March 2021) **by Chris Watts**

I think we can get September, November and March out of the way fairly quickly, as these three months do not need any more analysis other than the data in the accompanying table. So October is the first month for comment.

October: it was very wet, the wettest month since November 2014 (189.1mm). The 2nd was the wettest day since 23rd September 2012 (44.7mm). Records from the station at Ventnor Park indicate that it was the wettest October since 1987, the year of the Great Storm.

'Surely the Garden's list to Santa Claus has a mild winter right at the top.' This quotation by our Curator, Chris, is taken from the last issue of *Ventnorensis,* Page 2. In a subsequent chat Chris put some numbers on what a mild winter might mean, ie. not seeing the temperature fall below -4°C and/or a spell of continuous frost lasting over 48 hours. Well, Santa gave Chris a bit of a bumpy ride! No sooner was Christmas over than late December saw air frosts arriving, not too severe to start, but then New Year's Day brought -1.6°C. The 10th January saw the lowest temperature with -2.6°C. February followed with a spell of weather dubbed the mini beast from the east, week beginning the 7th. The lowest temperature here was on the 8th, -1.4°C; this doesn't appear to be too low at first, but when you factor in an ice day* on the 8th with the thermometer staying below freezing point for 33 hours between midnight on the 7th until 9am on the 9th, coupled with a brisk north-easter, it gets more serious for any delicate plant life. By the time the meteorological winter was over (end of February), there had been a total of 14 air frosts. But even then frosts were not finished, as a further frost was recorded on the 7th March.

What did all this mean for the Garden? Luckily this winter did not breach Chris's criteria as outlined above, and the Garden has not suffered too badly. The flower count at the beginning of January was reasonably healthy at 212, but just before the year end pittosporum on the western perimeter of the Garden received a hit in high winds, the remains of which had to be removed. The only other casualties were the result of frost, not surprisingly the bananas, and also the South African terrace which will need extensive replanting. Plants such as lampranthus, osteospermum, pelargonium, sparmannia and agapanthus are amongst those named by Trish. The magnolias however, survived, and gave a magnificent display for visitors as they entered the car park!

** An ice day is one where the highest temperature for the day stays below 0°C.*

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
September	*16.5+*	*29.2—-*	*5*	*17.3*	*6.6*	*0*	*13.3*
October	*12.6*	*188.0++*	*20*	*13.4*	*5.9*	*0*	*43.6*
November	*11.1++*	*74.0--*	*11*	*11.6*	*4.1*	*0*	*35.3*
December	*7.1*	*151.5++*	*20*	*8.3*	*-0.8*	*3*	*25.6*
Year 2020	*12.5*	*950.7++*	*127*	*13.4*	*-0.8*	*3*	*43.6*
January	*5.4*	*110.4++*	*17*	*5.9*	*-2.6*	*6*	*29.0*
February	*6.5+*	*63.5+*	*13*	*6.6*	*-1.4*	*5*	*12.1*
March	*8.4+*	*28.2—-*	*5*	*8.4*	*-0.9*	*1*	*10.0*

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

Dear members . . .

Once again this hasn't been a normal time for the Society, so while we've been unable to botanise, socialise and fundraise, this seemed like a good moment to look back at the history of the Friends' Society. Beginning with its founding by former curator Simon Goodenough, (P10), Rosemary Stewart looks at what we achieved under the auspices of the IW Council, (PP 16 & 23); and Sally Peake brings us up to the present day (P29). Being reminded of the Friends' colossal achievements I couldn't help thinking about John Cleese in *Life of Brian,* with his "What have the Romans ever done for us" speech!

One of our (many) major achievements has been to bring on young horticulturalists, and former apprentice and now learned gardener David Pearce tells us about plants that thrive by fire (P14): Indi Wyatt, too, is rewarded by IW College (P4), and we received from Spain the results of research conducted at VBG (P20). We take another virtual trip to not-so foreign parts, with Caroline Sandwich leading us around the beautiful Mapperton Gardens in Dorset (P18).

Our usual contributions look a bit different too, not least our Curator's Notes, where Chris Kidd becomes wonderfully fanciful (P2). In the first of a new series where Chris shares his thoughts and plans for the Garden, he begins with Japan (P6). Colin Pope appreciates the wildlife in his own garden (P9) – and is appreciated in his turn (P23).

With thanks to everyone who has contributed words and photographs, in particular Rosemary for her photo archives, I hope you enjoy this issue of *Ventnorensis*.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please may I have your contributions and ideas for the Autumn/Winter issue by 20th September 2021.

To all members

Annual General Meeting

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

To be held on Thursday 15 July 2021 at 7pm
in the Echium Room Ventnor Botanic Garden

A copy of the Agenda including details of voting due to take place at the meeting will be made available on our website from 24 June 2021. If you would like a printed copy please contact the Secretary, Jenny Parker: jenniferparker126@hotmail.co.uk 01983 730668 and we will send it out to you by post.

If you wish to put forward any resolutions to the AGM, please notify the Chairman, John Bagshawe: bagshawej@yahoo.co.uk 01983 731799 no later than Thursday 1 July 2021

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

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

Diversity through the flames of time

David Pearce on Pyrophytic ecosystems: their importance to the planet and their place at Ventnor Botanic Garden

In the Cape Floristic Provence of South Africa, there are 9000 vascular plant species, of which 69 per cent are endemic. In 0.5 per cent of the continent's land space are 20 per cent of its plant species, making it one of the most biodiverse places on the planet. Just south of Cape Town, Table Mountain alone contains a higher vascular plant diversity than the entirety of the British Isles, and this largely comes down to the infertile, geologically unique mosaic that is regularly refreshed and, importantly, 'reset', every 10-20 years by nature's gardener. Fire.

Banksia sphaerocarpa: It retains the hair-like pollen-presenters to aid its flammability (fig. 1)

Fire can influence the ecology and persistence of many plant species. Such species can be termed 'pyrophytic' and consist of two types – 'active' and 'passive'. Active pyrophytes are so called because they encourage fires. Mediterranean species, such as *Cistus albidus,* contain volatile and flammable oils, which under high temperatures can combust spontaneously at around 35°C. Another active pyrophyte, *Banksia spaerocarpa* (Figure 1) has the additional ability to provide flammable incendiary devices.

The King Protea (Protea cynaroides): National flower of South Africa, growing in VBG's acidic bed in the South African Garden. Photographed in 2016 (fig 2)

Unlike their active counterparts, passive pyrophytes have evolved to resist fire. Their many adaptions include having thick, fire resistant bark, e.g. the American redwood *(Sequoiadendron giganteum)* – visible in the America's arboretum – or by having lignotubers (wood stem tubers from where the plant regrows after being burnt down), which are common in many South African Proteaceae (and can be seen in Ventnor's acidic bed in the South African Garden) (Figure 2).

Fire regimes are extremely important for many plants' phenological pattern of breaking seed dormancy. Many pyrophytic species require specific chemicals that are only induced by fire to break dormancy, while species which possess 'serotinous' seeds are only released from protective seed pods by specific heats, often specific to climate or region.

However, pyrophytes are feeling the effects of climate change. Increasing summer temperatures, in tandem with increasingly erratic weather events, such as storms and

lightning, have led to an overall increase in the occurrence and severity of wildfires throughout the globe. Most notable are the wildfires that have occurred throughout California and Western Australia. Hotter weather and human attempts at restricting and preventing wildfires (leading to a build-up of dry flammable detritus) has meant that fire regimes that have dominated these landscapes for the past thousands of years, shaping the ecosystem, are now disrupted.

As a result, the ecological benefits which pyrophytic plants commonly possess, such as having a head start over potentially competing species, are becoming less advantageous in the new environment, and struggle to persist. For species reliant on post-fire seed germination e.g. King Protea *(Protea cynaroides)* a slight increase in fire regularity can lead to long built-up seed stores being germinated and then burnt down before having the opportunity to set seed again.

Spectacular phenomenon: Annuals, such as Californian poppies, bursting into flower four months after a wildfire (fig 3)

It is not all doom and gloom though! Back in California, and four months after the large 2008 wildfire, one of nature's most fascinating and beautiful events occurred. Annual species including Californian poppies *(Escholtzia californica), Delphinium cardinale, Mimulus brevipes* and *Phacelia minor* burst from their mass of seed stores (Figure 3). These are succeeded by biennials, short-lived perennials e.g. *Dicentra chrysantha, Zauschneria californica* and short-lived woody shrubs, and scrub emerging from seed stores or from sub-terranean ligno-tubers e.g. *Romneya coulteri.* In the western cape of South Africa, for example, wildfires, which are often naturally caused by lightening, are subsequently followed by high rainfall. Plants can utilise the readily available moisture to germinate and grow, resulting in a burst of floral life and an increased chance in successful plant-pollinator interactions through mass blooming.

Delphinium cardinale (fig 4)

Botanic Gardens, such as Ventnor, play home to many species of pyrophytic plants. Indeed, pyrophytes can thrive in a British horticultural setting. Typically, they are more resistant to frost and cold due to characteristics evolved to grow back from fire damage, or to resist the burning through insulation. VBG therefore provides a perfect place for spreading awareness and encouraging the conservation and protection of these beautifully complex and much misunderstood ecosystems, which shape a large proportion of the world's biodiversity.

Authors: David Pearce (Horticulturist and propagator for a private estate in the Cotswolds) and Hannah Hall (PhD Candidate for the University of Reading).

Bonding and belonging

Rosemary Stewart shares her memories of the VBG Friends' Society under the Isle of Wight Council, 2000 – 2011

In 1996 I saw in the County Press an invitation to become a volunteer at VBG. I knew a little about gardening so I went over to see what I could do. I found a small group of friendly local people under the supervision of Deb Goodenough and her small team of gardeners, all working for Curator, Simon Goodenough. Every week we were given a different task and learnt something new about the amazing exotic plants we cared for. Deb was a wonderful teacher and when it came to seed collecting she loved to marvel about how beautiful some of them were. All year we weeded and planted and cut back – in the main border, the Mediterranean, up the steep banks and around the pond, pulling out bindweed and heaving down the dead echiums.

Simon and Deb Goodenough: Deb's visit on 21st Open Day, 2008

All those volunteers were members of the Friends' Society and we soon bonded as a group with a passion for the Garden, ready to help and raise money to help Simon and Deb to develop their far-reaching plans for the future. I was soon asked if I would join the Committee and by 2000 I had become the Hon Sec, a position I held until 2018.

Getting the boot: Collection box, circa 2001

The Chairman was Gordon Morton, an energetic organiser, assisted by his wife Peggy. Membership numbers exceeded 1,100 – ably managed by our Mem Sec, Trevor Lupton and Hon Treasurer, Eric Everitt.

A special member of the Committee to remember was Bob Millson, a mainstay of the Friends' Society, always contributing to its development. He drew up the Constitution and negotiated becoming a Charity in 2000; he edited *Ventnorensis* for a while, set up the website, made collecting boxes, helped at coffee mornings, gave lifts to the ladies and could always solve a problem. A collection of £300 on his passing in 2006 funded Bob's Bridge and some of the planting in the Australian Garden.

The indomitable Jonyth Hill was the team leader in organising events and outings to the mainland, plant sales and coffee mornings. With a hot water heater and donated crockery the mobile team was ready to go! Members grew plants for us and we were given specimens from VBG to sell, so there was plenty for the

popular plant stall, run by Barbara Shaw and her team. Those were the days before Health & Safety so we had happy times looking at some lovely gardens without much anxiety.

Indomitable: Jonyth at Friends' produce sale at Hopfest 2010

The team organised some memorable trips to the mainland over the years, the most exciting being two visits to Highgrove where we were personally shown round by the head gardener and secondly by our Deb, who had by then moved on to become Head Gardener for Prince Charles. Wisley, Kew, West Dean, Bristol Botanic Garden, Meon Valley and Hadspen were among many enjoyable coach outings. Interesting local visits included Wight Salads, the nerines at Springbank, and even behind the scenes at Lynbottom tip!

Very important fundraisers in the earlier years were the Plant Auctions. Simon donated special dramatic specimens for serious evenings of tempting our members to part with their money. He dressed for the occasion and with his entertaining patter made each plant unique – so we made some serious money!

Plant Sales in spring and autumn were hugely profitable. Members donated plants and Simon was happy to give us some Garden extras. A line of tables and trolleys were set up at the side of the Temperate House and sometimes we took over £1,000!

As well as continuing the Newsletter, which eventually became *Ventnorensis*, we published a lengthy Seed List and offered members *20 free packets of over 200 seeds* gathered from the Garden – cleaned and packeted by the Volunteers in the winter! In addition to collection boxes we begged donations in a 'welly boot' beside the garden working parties, we organised events, and we applied for grants. We set up photo competitions, IW quizzes, and helped to host important visitors such as the Worshipful Company of Gardeners.

Cutting the 21st Birthday cake: President Brian Kidd, 2008

The years went by, new committees came and went, membership numbers dropped. We watched the Isle of Wight Council cutting the budget while considerable losses were being made, until there came a time in 2011, during the chairmanship of Philip Le May, when they had to withdraw from running the Garden. Latterly most of the regular staff had had to leave, including Trish Brenchley but, as you know, she was tempted back by the Friends some years later.

We were so sad to say goodbye to Simon in 2011. His leaving party on a lovely June evening was packed with many friends and supporters. But the new era, with the CIC taking on the Garden from the Council, was about to begin. See Pages 17 & 31

Mapperton Gardens, Dorset

Four great wisteria clothe the south facade north stable block completed in 1670

Caroline Montague, Countess of Sandwich, guides us through her award-winning gardens

Mapperton Gardens were lucky enough to win the Historic Houses-Christies Garden of the Year Award in 2020. It is a really important prize and in any year except 2020 its publicity brings thousands of people to the gardens. Last year was different! However, we did produce at least two films on the garden* and according to 2021 garden visitors figures, they have attracted the punters.

I'm glad to be introducing Mapperton Gardens to the Isle of Wight and particularly to Ventnor Botanic Garden, which I love. My husband has been coming to the Isle of Wight all his life (78 now) and I have come almost every year since we met (56 years). We feel we belong to the Isle of Wight as much as to west Dorset but in our gardens here we know we can't grow those choice, tender plants that flourish with you. For instance, our echiums have definitely succumbed to the frost almost every night in April. I don't like the look of some of our rarer phlomis, and as for a white *geranium sp. madarense.*

But Mapperton Gardens have also had a wonderful spring this year. Our flowering trees have excelled themselves. The magnolias especially have been magnificent. Two Campbell's magnolia *(magnolia campbelli mollicomata)* were covered in huge pink flowers smelling of marshmallow and looking like Ascot hats. Magnolia Wada's Memory was covered in sweet smelling white flowers. She's a cross between *stellata* and *soulangeana* and shows considerable hybrid vigour, having grown to 20 foot in 10 years. Wada was apparently the curator of a Japanese botanical garden, and how lovely to have such a fine magnolia named after him. Our other magnolias, mostly *soulangeana* crosses, did well until the frost turned them browny pink. Our 50-year-old *stellata* is still flowering. It's worth coming to Mapperton Gardens in April to see the magnolias, and this year we have planted more.

Malus 'Red Sentinel' lines path to the Orangery

The flowering cherries have also done very well. We have planted a grove of the Japanese Great White Cherry *(prunus Taihaku)* which has given us a white heaven of blossom. We have others in the arboretum and in Daniel's garden. *Prunus Taihaku* has an extraordinary story. It was extinct in Japan but one specimen was found in the Sussex garden of a collector and from that single specimen derive all Taihaku across the world. The yellowy flowered prunus *(Prunus Yukon)* has been terrific as has Sargentii, though

Prunus 'Taihaku' on the upper banks of the Arboretum

we prefer her in the autumn. The avenue of Malus Red Sentinel in flower below the Orangery compliments the tulips.

Mapperton Gardens range from the very formal to the natural landscape of the arboretum. Up by the house is the formal Front Courtyard with huge wisterias, *clematis montana, itea ilicifolia, schizophragma integrifolium* and lots of euphorbias. It always looks good; even humans and children cannot destroy its magic. And so to the main lawn which in the 19th century, or possibly earlier, had a large parterre. It's the croquet lawn, it's used for weddings and it sets off the classical north façade of the house.

Steps lead down to the 1920s formal Italianate garden put in by the then owner, Mrs Ethel Labouchere. This garden relies on topiary, stonework, paving, pools and fountains for effect while beside the Red Wall and leading down from the Orangery we have mixed borders. My husband's father put in the Orangery in 1968 at a capital cost per orange that I don't like to contemplate. Now it is mature with *rosa niphetos*, cestrums, citrus fruits and tree ferns *(dicksonias antarctica* and *squarrosa)*. At the south end is a pergola full of roses and clematis and early in the year spectacular groups of hellebores and epimediums.

Below this garden are the two tanks; the upper one we use as a swimming pool – waving to the frogs as we go by – and the lower pool is full of water lilies and golden orfe. To the east of these is Daniel's garden, a woodland garden with camellias, azaleas, hydrangea *quercifolium* and a bed planted with plants I know the deer won't eat.

The garden pavilion reflected in the upper tank

We then move down stone steps to the fourth level where the arboretum expands almost into the countryside. Indeed, the whole garden lies in a steep combe enclosed by countryside and typical of the geology of west Dorset. Mature specimen trees in the arboretum include the pocket handkerchief tree *(davidia involucrata)*, tulip tree *(liriodendron tulipifera), sequoiadendron glyptostroboides, cornus controversa variegata* and *cornus alternifolia variegata, stewartia pseudocamellia, acer rufinerve,* some specie oaks and the Campbell's magnolias. In the autumn the colour from the acers, in particular, is magnificent while the tulip tree keeps its golden leaves till December.

Round the corner is the spring garden with swathes of snowdrops, bluebells, and lovely wild flowers such as archangel, pink campion, stitchwort and the ever-present dog's mercury. From the spring garden a walk up to the chestnut avenue takes us back to the café, shop and car park.

People often ask me what is the best season for the gardens. I can never respond; they look wonderful at all times, even in bone-chilling February rain when our visitors seem most stoic.

**For a virtual tour round Mapperton Gardens visit https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDJ1_Zw-an79os309hDvHtg*

Open Sundays to Thursdays, visit Mapperton.com for opening information and prices.

Mapperton House & Gardens, Beaminster DT8 3NR Tel: 01308 862645 Email: office@mapperton.com

Our part in the great Spanish monkey flower experiment

Sally Peake was delighted to hear the conclusion of the Mimulus project

Botanic research is a time-consuming business, particularly when you have two small children.

Many Friends will remember back to the summer of 2015 (see *Ventnorensis,* Autumn 2015) when the terrace outside the Temperate House was transformed into a temporary pond, holding a vast number of pots – each containing a mimulus plant with a deeply hidden label. The project was to investigate adaptation of these invasive plants to different climatic circumstances, and VBG had been chosen to host the southern research site, with the northern site on the Shetland Isles.

Little monkeys: Jose and Violetta with Simba and Limón

A pair of charming Spanish researchers appeared in mid-May and persuaded various volunteers, me included, to help them set up the experiment and then monitor it throughout the summer. Both Violeta and Jose stayed at our house on and off, as they managed both sites. We kept in touch since, and as time went on two small boys were born, and both parents took jobs in different parts of Spain.

So it was with enormous surprise and excitement that I received, this April, a message from Jose with their published results attached, the entirety of which can be accessed through this link:

Experiment: Temporary pond outside Temperate House

Annals of Botany XX: 1–14, 2021

doi: 10.1093/aob/mcab004, available online at www.academic.oup.com/aob

Rapid local adaptation in both sexual and asexual invasive populations of monkey flowers *(Mimulus spp.)*

Violeta I. Simón-Porcar[1,*], Jose L. Silva[2] and Mario Vallejo-Marín[3]

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Forgive me for summarising the summary!

Mimulus: Labelled and monitored

• **Background and Aims** Generally, local adaptation has been seen as the result of a long evolutionary history, particularly with regard to sexual lineages. By contrast, phenotypic plasticity has been thought to be most important during the initial stages of population establishment, and in asexual species. The purpose of this work was to evaluate the roles of adaptive evolution and phenotypic plasticity in the invasive success of two closely related species of invasive monkey flowers *(Mimulus)* in the UK that have contrasting reproductive strategies: *M. guttatus* combines sexual (seeds) and asexual (clonal growth) reproduction while *M.* × *robertsii* is entirely asexual.

• **Methods** They compared the clonality (number of stolons), oral and vegetative phenotype, and phenotypic plasticity of native *(M. guttatus)* and invasive *(M. guttatus* and *M.* × *robertsii)* populations grown in controlled environment chambers under the environmental conditions at each latitudinal extreme of the UK. The goal was to discern the roles of temperature and photoperiod on the expression of phenotypic traits. Next, we tested the existence of local adaptation in the two species within the invasive range with a reciprocal transplant experiment at two sites in the latitudinal extremes of the UK, and analysed which phenotypic traits underlie potential local advantages in each species.

• **Key Results** Populations of *M. guttatus* in the UK showed local adaptation through sexual function (fruit production), while *M.* × *robertsii* showed local adaptation via asexual function (stolon production). Phenotypic selection analyses revealed that different traits are associated with fitness in each species. Invasive and native populations of *M. guttatus* had similar phenotypic plasticity and clonality. *M.* × *robertsii* presents greater plasticity and clonality than native *M. guttatus,* but most populations have restricted clonality under the warm conditions of the south of the UK.

• **Conclusions** This study provides experimental evidence of local adaptation in a strictly asexual invasive species with high clonality and phenotypic plasticity. This indicates that even asexual taxa can rapidly (<200 years) adapt to novel environmental conditions in which alternative strategies may not ensure the persistence of populations.

Results: Blossoming

Sally writes . . . Violeta and Jose wanted to draw my attention particularly to the Acknowledgements at the end of their work where they paid tribute to VBGFS in facilitating their project (our then Chairman Dr Chris Kershaw was instrumental in attracting the project, and Chris Kidd was very long-suffering and helpful in setting up the pond). I was also struck by a comment not often seen in erudite scientific papers:

"Jacinto Simba behaved very well inside the belly of V.I.S.P. during the development of reciprocal transplants." Simba is now five years old with a three-year old brother; no doubt they are part of the reason for delayed publication!

Fungus named after Colin Pope

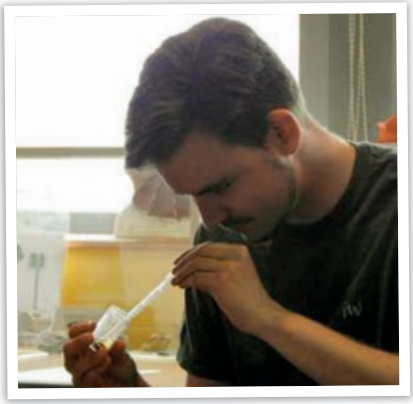
Stalwarts of – or occasional dropper-inners to – Botany Club may have enjoyed talks and tours about fungus by **George Greiff.** Now the Oxford student has discovered a new species – and named it after his mentor and our own Colin Pope

Appropriate tribute: Colin Pope with Bryostroma popei

The new discovery is called *Bryostroma popei*, the name announced in the Kew Bulletin late last year and is a tiny fungus which lives inside a common riverside moss called Kneiff's feather-moss. It is particularly hard to find and identify. George collected the species in woods at Briddlesford in 2019, confirming his discovery with fungus specialist Dr Paul Cannon of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

George told On The Wight: "I first met Colin when he was giving a talk at Ventnor Botanic Garden, and he has always been a great mentor and friend. I'm now studying bryophytes at Oxford University, and I wouldn't have been able to get this far without his influence and support. For me it was a no-brainer honouring Colin with the new species."

Matthew Chatfield, current president of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society, said: "Colin is one of the foremost naturalists on the Island, and he is always generous in passing on what he knows. His enthusiasm for, and understanding of, mosses and fungi means that this new discovery is a particularly appropriate way to celebrate his substantial contribution to our wildlife." He added:



George Greiff: 'A no-brainer to honour Colin'

"I must also pay tribute to George Greiff whose remarkable hard work and skill is really improving our understanding of mosses on the Isle of Wight and beyond. Maybe one day somebody will return the compliment and name a new species after him."

What the Friends funded in the early years by **Rosemary Stewart**

Funding the Garden was key to the Friends' activities. 'Project 2000' had enabled us to present a cheque for £10,000 to Simon for landscaping round the new Visitor Centre opened by David Bellamy, then, as time went on, we were able to hand over thousands of pounds to buy new plants, seeds, bulbs, books, tools, display boards and make some structural improvements. Highlights were the carving of the wonderful Totem pole and placing the dramatic Easter Island Head on the cliff!

Project 2000 cash: Simon receives cheque from Gordon Morton for plants surrounding Visitor Centre

In 2001 we received the first tranche of an £8,000 grant from the Sir Maurice Laing Foundation. Deb had recently left to take up her post as Head Gardener at Osborne House and Chris Kidd had filled her place. His enthusiasm, along with our donation of £6,000, drove along Simon and Chris's ambitious plans for refurbishing the Temperate House with thermal heating, a mineshaft with waterfall, rocks, palms and tree ferns, bananas and exotic plants. The public paid £1 entrance fee for a whole new experience. It was now a Tropical House. Over three years, £178,000 was taken, and also helped install the dramatic new Giant Waterlily Pond in 2005. This, of course, eventually led to the BBC TV programme with Carol Klein marvelling at the wonders of the overnight pollination of the lilies.

Art in Action: Easter Island head

First Waterlily in newly refurbished Temperate House

Legacies followed. In 2004 we gratefully accepted £20,000 from the will of Mrs Mary Edmonds, giving us enough to form the basis of an application for a grant from Living Spaces to construct a Southern Hemisphere Garden at the eastern end. You may remember the hullaballoo around the burying of the buses and the artificial rocks covering them, constructed by the now well-known Artecology team! They planted eucalyptus, tree ferns, banksias and colourful borders which we now call the South African terraces.

2008 was a busy year. The Friends' 21st Birthday Open Day was the highlight, opened by special guest Alan Titchmarsh and featuring lots of stalls and happy faces. We launched a new Glasshouse Fund that day. It was an ambitious plan for unique glass panels up the hillside but sadly budget cuts put it on hold. However, with our help the new Hop Garden was prepared, ancient olive trees planted and a substantial olive grove planned.

A legacy of £20,000 from Henry Aldis had helped with obtaining a grant from The Big Lottery Fund, which stumped up £50,000 for the landscaping of the area around Signal Point house. We welcomed the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall (on Camilla's birthday) to open our unique Arid Garden in 2009.

In 2010, our final big fling was to celebrate the Hop Harvest with our Hopfest on the top lawn over two days. Marquees went up for displays by local country craftsmen, hot food and stalls; the beer tent was decorated with hops, musicians came and hay bales appeared for seats to watch the Morris Dancers. It was lovely to see all the children. The Friends sold homemade goodies and set up competitions. It was a great weekend.

The fate of the Garden was decided but we continued to make available our promised money for plants. *Ventnorensis* was blossoming in the capable hands of Ros Whistance and designer Simone Dickens. Events were planned and volunteers continued to come and support the Garden. See final part, Page 29

Burying the bus: structure for the Southern Hemisphere Garden

Artist in Residence

There has always been a natural link between gardens and art, and VBG has welcomed back **Guy Eades** to the studio

"In the mornings I am out in the Garden itself, hopefully gaining inspiration and working, but between 2.00pm and 4.00pm I'm in the studio, ready to chat as people wander in," says Guy. His work produced so far will be on display – unless it has been bought by passing art lovers: "While I'm not a botanical artist who works on the detailed structure of a plant, I become inspired by them. The paintings themselves are independent objects from ideas gleaned from observation."

Echium and Agapanthus

He begins by drawing, to work things out visually. "There's always that nagging feeling you might not get inspired. It takes a while to find a streak that is creative and productive," he smiles. "So you have to go researching – that's part of the point of actually being there, to get inspiration from the place."

While for his paintings he favours oil on canvas, before starting the residency he had been moving more towards watercolour, as well as ink on paper. "It's partly for practical reasons, avoiding carting lots of paints around the Garden. But I also like to make my own ink." The inks Guy makes are from plants, which he likes to gather himself, a practice going back to medieval times: "Manuscripts, with ink on oak galls, for example, have survived over centuries. Some plants produce more light-fast ink than others. If it's not too acidic it won't eat into a surface and there's no reason why it shouldn't last for ages and ages." He adds: "As to how the ink turns out, you can predict so far, based on your knowledge of the plant's properties, but then you just have to wait to see what happens."

Echium and Agapanthus

Guy, as many members will know, shared the role of VBG Artist in Residence a few years ago. "People do like to talk to you. Of course most people who go to the Garden are of a curious nature."

Anyone wishing to visit Guy in the Temperate House studio to see his work will need to buy a ticket for the Garden, or show their Garden pass. He and Carol Ann will hold an Open Studio from 16-26 July at 10 Avenue Road, Sandown, PO36 8BN where their paintings and textiles, many inspired by VBG, will be shown.

Green Compost

Polishing up my green credentials, *writes Val Pitts,* I have just bought a re-fillable bag of the excellent Melcourt Professional peat-free compost from Gerry Price, 'The Coastal Gardener', a member of the Friends who featured in the last edition. Now I am all set for a busy time potting on. It is the best peat-free I have tried and is a great way of cutting down on plastic bags. Gerry, who offers Friends 10% discount, writes more about her ways of contributing to sustainable gardening below:

Peat-free in bring-your-own bags

The Coastal Gardener Nursery is trailing a blaze on the Island for sustainable horticulture.

The nursery has always been peat free, but this year has taken the supply of compost one step further by selling Melcourt professional peat free compost by the litre in "Bags for Life". A huge bale of compost is delivered to the nursery where it is decanted, on demand, so that customers can buy as much or as little as they need. The nursery used to dispose of hundreds of plastic compost bags every year but has now reduced waste to just one outer wrapper per delivery.

As soon as COVID restrictions are relaxed (expected mid-June) customers will also be able to purchase perlite, vermiculite and pelleted chicken feed by the pint/litre. Hessian will be available by the metre as an alternative to synthetic fleece.

The nursery also has a "Pot Drop" return scheme for customers to return pots and trays. The pots are reused at the nursery with free pots, of all sizes, available for collection by anyone who would like some.

Individual plant labels are no longer used at the nursery. Instead plant names and prices are written on the pots. Many customers take photographs of the bed labels which provide full cultural information.

The nursery uses only organic feeds and is free from neonictinoids.

Propagating plants on site reduces the carbon footprint of plants for sale and has ensured that the nursery has been able to maintain supplies whilst some other nurseries and garden centres have faced disruption to supplies due to Brexit and COVID, both of which have adversely affected the importation of plants from Europe.

Gerry Price and the team at The Coastal Gardener Nursery, Eddington Rd, St Helens, are always looking ways to increase sustainability and reduce their environmental impact. If you have any suggestions please do get in touch at thecoastalgardener@icloud.com

Great Friends' Recipe Swap

Unlocking the lemon! **Jan Morris** shares her simple but delicious recipe

Lemon cake

4oz (100g) marg or butter
5oz (125g) SR flour
2 tbsp lemon curd
3½oz (87g) caster sugar
2 large eggs
Preheat oven to
160c fan/180c/gas mark 4

Topping (optional)
Juice of 1 lemon
2 tbsp demerara sugar

METHOD

Cream together sugar and fat. Mix in flour, eggs, and lemon curd.

When well mixed put into a greased loaf tin and cook for 50 minutes to 1 hour. Gas mark 4. Middle shelf.

After cooking and whilst cake still hot, pour the lemon juice over the top of the cake and sprinkle with sugar.

Ed's note: I tried it with half SR wholemeal flour too.

Secret curd: Jan's light and lemony sharing cake

Unlocked at Northcourt House

Northcourt fun for all the family: Photo by Ian Pratt

Unplanned events are often the most enjoyable and those Members who had no particular plans over the Easter holiday were delighted to have the opportunity to visit the Harrison's beautiful garden at Shorwell. Nearly 50 visitors were welcomed and able to enjoy, in particular, around a hundred Camellias and numerous Magnolias in the wooded parts of the garden. For many, it was a first, cautious trip, away from their own homes and gardens and it was a delight to see socially-distanced encounters with friends. Thank you so much John and Christine; it was a much-appreciated bright spot and the first opportunity for the Friends to raise more funds for our objectives at VBG.

Sally Peake

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The New Era

Sally Peake on the Friends' work with the CIC from 2011

In the Spring 2012 edition of Ventnorensis Chris Kidd told us: "This is a botanic garden and there are wonderful things about this that make it a botanic garden. We've really just started to scratch the surface of some of those things because we've never been able to do them in the past. Now we're absolutely sure we can do the things we've always aspired to, on top of all the things that we've always done really well."

And John Curtis said: "The Friends are the longevity, they are the history, they are the dedicated custodians of the Garden. We should embrace them in full."

Botany Club walks: Social, educational and fun

Over the past 10 years, the CIC has sought to "invigorate the Garden's finances, expand its educational remit and enhance its scientific status as a Botanic Garden . . ." and the Friends have been at the centre of all these ambitions. For those of us who need a reminder – and for our newer members who may not know – here is a summary of key moments from the past ten years:

Historically, the Friends' fundraising activities were mainly a succession of social and educational events run by a wonderful team of people under the inspirational leadership of Jonyth Hill (I had been recruited within weeks of joining the Friends and became a willing disciple). Eminent lecturers, such as Anne Swithinbank and Jekka McVicar were invited to speak, often requiring the Friends to hire huge halls to accommodate ticketholders, while

Smart fundraisers: Summer party

a willing band of volunteers produced plants and refreshments to sell at Open Gardens and coffee mornings. For several years, we cooperated with the National Garden Scheme to our mutual benefit; in 2012 we raised over £2,000 from sales at NGS events.

Increasingly, the CIC was keen to involve its own catering team so events were run at VBG to facilitate this. There were a number of hugely enjoyable Summer Parties and Musical Soirees organised by Caroline Peel; no one who was there will forget our evening with comic chanteuse Dillie Keane.

Comic chanteuse Dillie Keane

Grants available to charities have always been a mainstay of Friend's activities but now we needed to be creative with project ideas as well, as most grants are available only for projects that allow free public access. In 2012, Irene Fletcher secured a £9,500 AONB grant for St Francis School to benefit from using their local environment (including VBG), and the Friends agreed a £3,000 grant to support the transport costs for school visits as well as providing school tour guides to make sure the youngsters got the most benefit from their visits. The £10,000 from Tesco Bags of Help funded the restoration of the Hop Yard in 2016, and a Big Lottery grant of £7,000 was able to support a wonderful midsummer week of activities in the Garden in 2017, allowing new visitors to experience all VBG has to offer.

Grant applications: Tesco award

The Friends have always responded to pleas from our Curator – some planned and sometimes emergencies. Winter storms caused damage to the cladding on the Temperate House and the Friends pledged to raise the £21,000 needed for replacement materials.

The Friends did their best to support the use of the Garden for weddings, funerals and other community events. A memorial scheme to buy olive trees, and then magnolias, was introduced, and Committee members were often on hand to guide those who wanted some help with choosing their special place to remember a loved one.

We made available £10,000 for the Drive Thru project, which sadly lost its potential impact when the Undercliff Drive collapsed at St Lawrence. Another £10,000 enabled the Japanese Terraces to be reinvigorated, and £15,000 was raised to enhance the Australian Garden with rock art. Indeed many of our fundraising events now concentrated on enhancing the visitor experience at VBG: - Art exhibitions including two Secret Art events proved to be very popular and two photographic competitions provided material for calendars. Lectures continued with series of Botany Club walks and Café Botanique evenings providing the opportunity to stretch our minds – and our legs.

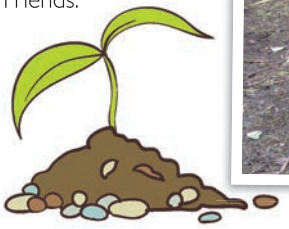
In 2016, the tricky logistics of running a Gift Aid scheme were finally overcome and the power of leverage was made available to us. Able to take advantage of HMRC tax rules, the Friends maximised the benefit of just £1 from each paying visitor. Over five years this scheme supported an Apprenticeship Programme in the Garden. With skilled and patient tutoring and mentoring, five young people have been able to enter horticulture as a career, as well as being a valuable labour resource in the Garden. The Friends also raised funds to enhance their experience – paying for them qualifications to drive tractors, handle chainsaws and understand the regulations surrounding pesticide use – and giving opportunities to visit Chelsea Flower Show and Kew, work with gardeners on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, and be involved in large-scale projects such as the First World War memorial 'From Battlefield to Butterflies'.

At the heart of this activity is the ingenuity of our Friends and volunteers. A few years ago our much-missed President, Brian Kidd, handed out £1 to everyone present at the AGM, and reminded us of the Parable of the Talents. What followed was amazing: from Boxing Day swims to soup lunches for winter gardening volunteers; from plant sales and seed swaps to a very memorable Desert Island discs evening – each £1 was turned into tens, if not hundreds, of pounds to be spent for Ventnor Botanic Garden.

It is amazing that during this year of lockdowns, when normal fundraising has had to be curtailed, we have been able to continue our support for the Apprenticeship programme, despite the cessation of the Gift Aid scheme. A total of £133,884 has been donated to support the apprenticeship scheme.

Our work in supporting VBG's future is dependent on our flexible approach and the need to attract good people and funds commensurate with a vibrant community. Our Committee continues to thrive and as our Chairman, John Bagshawe, said last autumn: "When the lockdown has finished, the Friends will need to be there for the Garden." With a total of £264,448 raised for the Garden by the Friends since 2012, we have shown what can happen when we all work together.

I would like to give Trish and the apprentices the final word: "The love, joy and enthusiasm we all have for the Garden keeps us in a united camaraderie that spreads through all the volunteers and Friends."

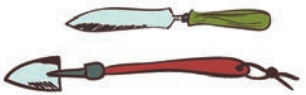


Rocking the Art: Dreamtime work in Australian Garden

Membership News

Thank you to all our wonderful Members who continue to support us, and a very warm welcome to the following new Friends:

Patricia Cook and John Peace of Ventnor
Wybogina Dyer of Yarmouth
Paul Hippolite of Cowes
Tim and Louise Huband of Debenham, Suffolk
Nick Parker of Kelvedon, Essex
Tom Parker of Walthamstow
Peter and Mencia Scott of Shalfleet
Sue Shaw of Ventnor
Avril Watson of Ventnor
Gillian Wanless of Ryde
Paul Webster of Ventnor
Penny Whitehead of Chillerton



Patrons

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

Membership cards were sent out to renewing Members in January. Remember that showing your card entitles you to 25% discount on an annual admission ticket to Ventnor Botanic Garden. **(Without the Friends' discount, Individual Annual passes cost £29.50, Joint passes, £54.00, Family passes, £69.00. This gives you unlimited access for a year + free parking. Pass holders can bring a friend for whom Garden entrance is half price. Day Admission otherwise is £9.50 with a further free visit within seven days).**

Friends' Outing 2008: to Hillier Award-winner Ken Hall's Nerine collection: Photo: Rosemary Stewart

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