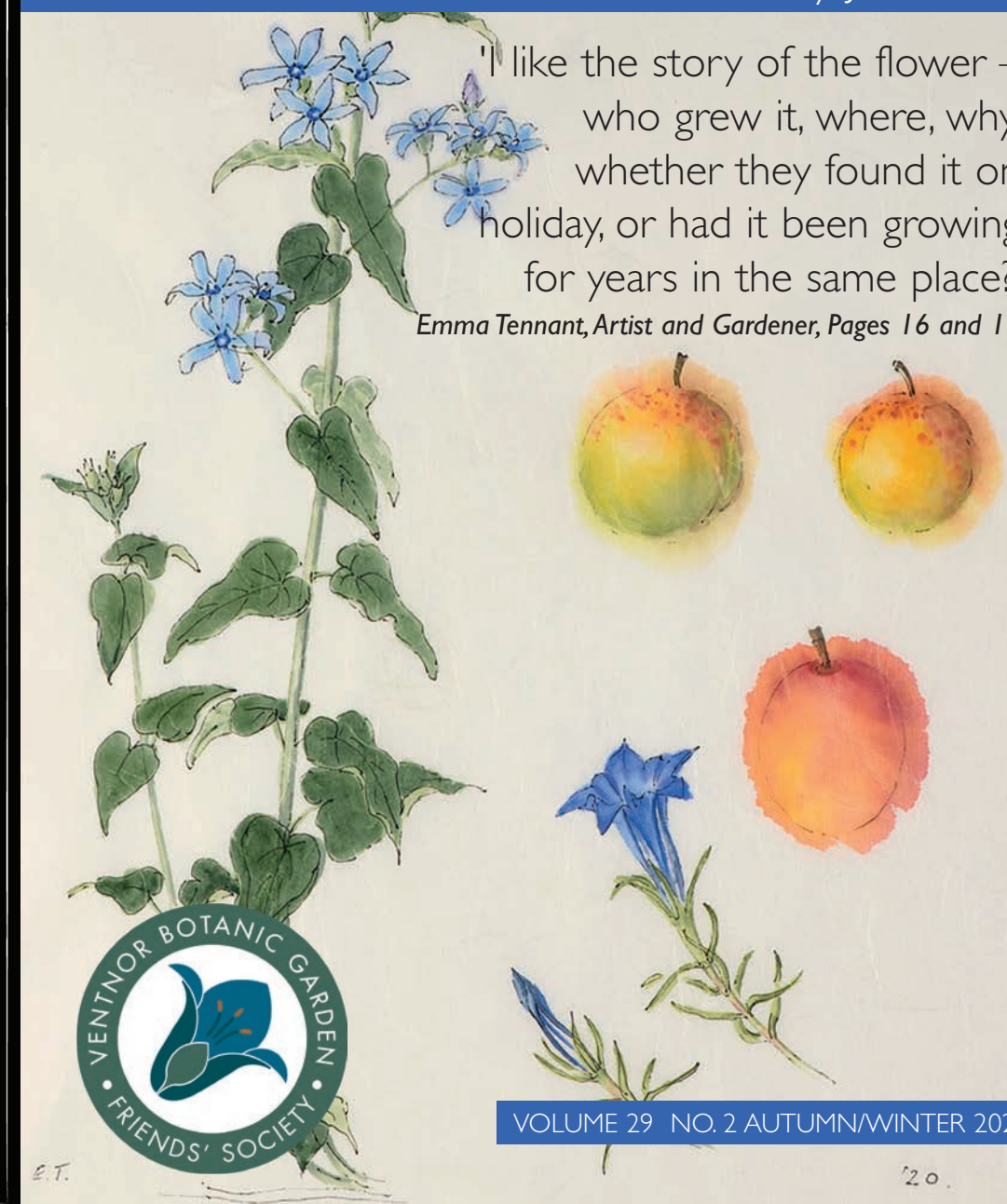
ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal



'I like the story of the flower – who grew it, where, why, whether they found it on holiday, or had it been growing for years in the same place?'

Emma Tennant, Artist and Gardener, Pages 16 and 17

VOLUME 29 NO. 2 AUTUMN/WINTER 2021

Autumn/winter opening times

10am till 4pm daily. Plantation Room Café is open daily from 10am, serving breakfast, lunch and cake. *edulis* Restaurant is closed for the season. For opening times, and for information about special events for adults or children in the Visitor Centre, details of the 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, Dance, Tai Chi and Qigong. See the website for details: www.botanic.co.uk/whats-on/

SPECIAL EVENTS

Dec 12th 9.00am-4.00pm:
Mountbatten Hospice charity fun run.
For the first time this Fun Run takes place at the Garden. While runners run round the Garden, shoppers can shop: **Christmas market on the top lawn.**

Jan 12th 12 noon:

Volunteers' Get-Together

It has long been a tradition amongst the volunteers to have a relaxed lunchtime Get Together in January after a morning's gardening. Our Curator takes the opportunity to thank us for our work and to let us know of any plans for the coming year. We all bring a plate of food and enjoy having a chat with others.

We should also be very pleased to welcome some of our ex-volunteers, particularly the ones we have not seen since the beginning of lockdown or have not come for a while - gardeners, tour guides, those who used to help in the information kiosk, helpers with children's events etc.

If there are any of you loyal members who have been thinking about coming to volunteer then you will also be very welcome and you would have the chance to chat and find out what you could do.

Please get in touch with me by email rosemarystewart@icloud.com or telephone 01983 292107. Rosemary Stewart

THE DAILY WELLBEING PROGRAMME:

please check availability

Mondays: 9.30pm-11.00am: Yoga Nidra with Sue Bolton. Book on 01983 856609
11.15am-12.15am: Tai Chi Slow flowing exercise for physical and mental relaxation: strengthens cardiovascular and immune systems. All fitness levels.
1.30pm-2.45pm: Creative Dance Dancing for mature movers, with social distancing, led by Michelle Hainsworth. 01983 754189.

Tuesdays: 9.30am-11am Yoga with Trish Campbell In Echium Room, with social distancing.
12.00 noon-1.00pm: Qigong In New Zealand Garden. Gentle, for inner tranquility and relief of chronic health problems. £5, pay the teacher. 07484 140564.

Wednesdays 9.30am-10.30am: Tai Chi Top Lawn. Loose clothing, soft shoes. antbellis@aol.com
10.30am-11.30am: Tai Chi. As above

Thursdays 10.30am-11.30am: Re-flo Echium Room. Slow fusion of yoga styles for core strength and spinal mobility. £10, or 10 classes for £85. lennybiggs@hotmail.com.
10.30am-11.30am: Burlesque Chair Dancing with Coco Monroe. Such sassy fun you won't know you're working out.
12.00pm-1.00pm Qigong. In New Zealand Garden or inside if bad weather. £5 payable to the teacher. 07484 140564.

Thursdays every two weeks, 5.30pm-7.30pm: Forest Bathing Open your senses and create balance for your body, mind and spirit. Relaxed clothing, bring a mat. £20. Book, text Anthea, 07507 442259

Fridays, 9.30am-11.00am: British Yoga Wheel with Mark Echium Room. Friendly, distanced class, for strength, flexibility, wellbeing.
11.15am-12.15am: Tai Chi Top Lawn: Slow body movements. All levels.

Front Cover: Autumn Fruit and Flowers by Emma Tennant

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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Contents

Regulars

Opening Times ..... Facing Page
Curator's Notes ..... Page 2
Chairman's Message ..... Page 4
Editor's Letter ..... Page 5
[2nd in Series] Planting Profile ..... Page 6
Pope's Plants ..... Page 10
Weather in the Garden ..... Page 12
Friends' Recipe Swap ..... Page 29

Notice board

Dates for your Diary ..... Facing Page
AGM Report & Date for 2022 ..... Page 3
Gardening Volunteers ..... Page 21 & 28 & 30
Bracteate Bluebell ..... Page 20
Data Protection ..... Page 24
Soup for Volunteers ..... Page 24
Membership News ..... Page 32
Discounts for Members ..... Page 32

Special Features

Memories of Brian Kidd ..... Page 8
Sun Recorder Plinth ..... Page 11
Obituary: Eric Everitt ..... Page 13
Apprentice Ellis on Tresco ..... Page 14
Emma Tennant Exhibition ..... Page 16
Northcourt Gardens ..... Page 18
Obituary: John Hill ..... Page 21
Harold Hiller Awards ..... Page 22
Ventnor Day ..... Page 23
Artists in Residence ..... Page 25
Wellbeing Passes ..... Page 26
Runaway Courgettes ..... Page 27
Trip to Folly Farm ..... Page 31

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Forty-nine years and counting

Witchcraft? No, it's the microclimate and efforts of staff and volunteers that makes seeds rocket, says **Chris Kidd**

Dear Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden,

In the flash of an eye 49 years have rolled past and next year sees Ventnor Botanic Garden turn its first half century. I anticipate a year of celebration, which I think you'll agree is overdue. It is hard to believe that the Garden is still so young when the specimens seem so majestic. On a garden tour recently (I wonder how many we have given over 50 years?) our visitors were struck by the speed of growth. I pointed out that in the first hour of the tour, starting at the entrance, everything seen had been just a seed 15 years ago. Our guests looked up at the towering Eucalyptus, feeling as if they were in New South Wales.

Miraculous: Speed of Growth

Another two guests, Dan and Laurie, worked with us for a week in October, bramble bashing. They have previously stayed here in The Cabin and are fans of the Garden. It was a treat to show Dan some less-seen vistas through the gum trees as he recorded me describing the synthetic ecosystem before us. We were standing on recycled buses, masquerading as rocks, above the Australian section. [See Page 6].

When we planted these trees we didn't imagine their roots would have truffles, or that the treeferns below would host epiphytic ferns that defied cultivation. One hot summer day, Roy Cummins swore as he rolled down the hill, again, all the way to the bottom. He planted the saplings using a crowbar both to keep himself upright and prise open the compacted soil. "Mix them up Roy. Throw them in the air and put them in where they land." Roy asked how Julian knew where the softest ground was: "Been here 15 years, Roy." Another 15 years later and they dwarf the lamppost that lights the end of the car park. It's like Narnia - though TV botanist James Wong said it is more like witchcraft, the way we grow plants. Truth be told, it's nothing more sinister than the combined efforts of staff and volunteers, the genetic blueprint within the plant and the mysterious microclimate of the Undercliff.

"A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit." So says the Greek proverb. The Greeks clearly hadn't taken into account the microclimate of VBG. Let's plant more trees. Forget the crowbar, Roy. I know where the soft spots are.

Annual General Meeting, 27th July 2021

After such a long time, it was a pleasure to set up the Echium room at Ventnor Botanic Garden for a meeting of the Friends. Ideally suited for social distancing, we opened the doors wide onto the balcony and spread the chairs around. Thirty-four members arrived and it felt good to be together again.

Our Chairman, John Bagshawe, welcomed members and began the meeting by announcing, sadly, that our President Brian Kidd had passed away earlier in the year, and he extended our sympathy to Chris and the family.

He was also able to announce that Mike Fitt had accepted our invitation to take over the role.

The meeting continued in the usual format with reports from the Chairman, Tim Woodcock our Hon Treasurer and Val Pitts our Membership Secretary. The AGM covered the year to the end of September 2020 and the reports reflected the major loss of income since March 2020, when the agreement for a £1 donation for every visitor to the Garden, on which we could claim gift aid, was withdrawn by the Community Interest Company running the Garden. We had had a generous response to an appeal to support the Apprentices, but with no fundraising activities possible our funds continue to deplete.

The usual votes were taken: - the accounts were approved, Rosemary Stewart retired as a Trustee, Jenny Parker retired as a Trustee by rotation and was re-elected, and the Committee was re-elected unchanged. Chris Kidd and Colin Pope remain as ex-officio members of the Committee.

That concluded the business of the AGM.

Two very important presentations of the Harold Hillier award followed. Chris Kidd presented the award for services to Horticulture on the Island for 2020 to Colin Pope and Sally Peake followed with the presentation for 2021 to John Harrison of Northcourt. See reports Pages 22 & 23.

Our Chairman then took the opportunity to update members on events since September 2020, [see report Page 4] and questions from the floor were welcomed. Members recognised the difficulty facing the Society and reminded the Committee that members need to know what is going on in order to offer help, support, and a mandate to move forward. Our deputy Chairman Peter Coleman explained we were faced with the double problem of the loss of income and changes to the apprenticeship schemes available on the Island. [See explanation, Page 24]. Our efforts to secure free passes to the Garden for local families unable to afford the entrance fee and vulnerable adults have continued successfully.

The Committee has agreed to fund Trish over the winter. We are working hard to find a way to continue our Apprentice Scheme and offer training to young people on the Island. In these difficult times we need support and advice from our members - and we will keep you informed. We look forward to hearing from you.

The next AGM will take place on 28th April 2022. Please put the date in your diaries.

Jenny Parker

Chairman's Message

We are in difficult times, **says John Bagshawe**

After the 'highs' during the First Lockdown where the Friends (and volunteers) felt that we helped keep the Garden going and looking good, came the subsequent 'lows' when the £1 Donation Scheme was replaced by the CIC with the 'Round Up for Apprentices' Scheme in July 2020. This unfortunately did change the relationship the Friends had with the CIC as our income was reduced to less than 10 per cent of the previous year's.

Monies received from the CIC for several months (as examples) from May 2016 to June 2017 as £1 donations from visitors for Gift Aid purposes were:

May 2016 (first month of introduction) £2,727.50
June 2016 £3,477.50
Apr 2017 £2,279.50
May 2017 £3,794.15
Jun 2017 £4,096.50

I believe that the receipts for April and May 2021 were a total of £771; the total from October 2020 to June 2021 was £1,851.06. Total donations given to the CIC to cover the costs the Apprenticeship Scheme from October 2020 until June 2021 were £23,695.88.

The income for the last full year of the Donation Scheme amounted to c£28,000 and donations to the CIC were c£34,500 including £2,000 from HMRC as Gift Aid. For the year ending 30th September 2020, we gave the CIC net of c£31,000!

We as Trustees of the Friends could no longer haemorrhage our reserves. We supported the Garden financially when needed but we had to make some hard decisions. The funding of the Apprenticeship Scheme was not sustainable. We were pleased that Indi Wyatt was able to complete her apprenticeship a couple of months earlier than expected and Ellis Gant completed his apprenticeship in 1 year and 1 day! We are very proud of what they did and are doing now.

Currently we are not funding any apprentices. [See explanation of the changed nature of apprenticeship schemes in the Isle of Wight College as dictated by the Government, Page 24]. We have tried on several occasions to find a positive way forward with the CIC without depleting our reserves, but to no avail. The Friends were appreciative of the Appeal through the CIC earlier in the year but this in no way replaced the vastly reduced of income.

An Apprenticeship Scheme or similar is so important for many reasons and we have to find a way forward to support a Scheme without the CIC's financial support that we successfully had for many years. We are looking at our options, but if anyone has any ideas we would be very happy to listen.

It has been a great shame that the CIC has not employed any full-time gardeners in the Garden during this very busy summer with visitors and it has showed. On a positive note and at the present time the Friends are still continuing to fund Trish Brenchley, who only works part time in the Garden. It is essential for the Garden that Trish has been there and without her I am not sure what the state of the Garden would have been!

Dear members . . .

Cream tea, provided by Sally and Jenny

There is a real sense of things coming back to life in this Issue, as illustrated not least by the exhibition of Emma Tennant's botanical paintings and film showing which finally happened, thanks to momentous efforts by Sally Peake and Jenny Parker. See front cover and Page 15. Botany Club had an outing, and what I might call 5-Star Botany Club had an unforgettable trip to Folly Farm, Page 31. Meanwhile other art has taken place in the Garden - Page 25 - and we have once again awarded the Harold Hillier Award for horticultural achievement. The Friends have been pressing the flesh again at outdoor events, spreading the word and trying to interest new volunteers. [Ventnor Day, Page 23].

We very sadly say goodbye to three people very important to the Garden. Our former president, Brian Kidd, is remembered by his son, [Page 8] and I defy anyone not to be moved when they read his words. John Hill has been a stalwart supporter and, more importantly, universally loved, [Page 21]. And Eric Everitt, former Treasurer, is a character much missed [Page 21].

There is sadness and worry too, about the effects on the Garden of lack of maintenance - despite everything our Friends and Volunteers do. See Chairman's Message, and Colin Pope's comment on receipt of the Harold Hillier [Page 22]. In addition, in his Weather report Chris Watts says the future of the weather station in the Garden is in doubt - and has confided that, as a result, this might be his last ever report for *Ventnorensis*. [Page 12].

However, hope springs eternal and we can celebrate the success of our graduated apprentices: I'm pleased to welcome Ellis Gant as a contributor [Tresco, Page 14], and it was great to be able to convey the following news to the IW Observer:

Meteoric rise of Apprentice Pearce

The Friends and Volunteers of Ventnor Botanic Garden felt like proud parents when our former apprentice and contributor to *Ventnorensis* David Pearce, from Niton, was chosen as the Mid West & South Wales representative for the Chartered Institute of Horticulture's Young Horticulturist of the Year grand final.

David, 24, cut his horticultural teeth on a two-year apprenticeship at VBG, funded by the Friend's Society, and from there studied at RHS Garden Wisley. Since graduating from there in 2020 his career could be said to be meteoric: he landed a job at Highgrove, the estate of the Prince of Wales, until, very recently, being appointed as head gardener at the luxurious Cotswold hotel and spa, Whatley Manor.

With thanks as ever to Rosemary Stewart for her tireless assistance with *Ventnorensis,* and her archive of photographs, and to the Committee for all their help. Please email or phone me with any suggestions for the Spring issue: ***contributions by April 1st 2022.***

Roz Whistance, Editor

PLANTING PROFILE

Planning Australia

By **Chris Kidd, Curator**

This is the second of a series of articles showing the Friends the guiding documentation for the future of this Garden's plant collection, area by area. The actual document behind this is fairly bleak and minimal, taking function over form, so I've tried to lubricate it rather – 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. In some areas we shoehorned some of Hillier's collection into the semblance of a modern botanic garden layout, and in doing so we lost integrity, but with Australia (and South Africa to a lesser degree) prior to our development there simply was nothing of note to remove. Next in the series is the Australian Section.

Flying coach: infrastructure for artificial rocks

Australia

Setting

Created starting 2004 in an area which Hillier referred to bleakly as Area O. This is an East/West valley with South and North facing slopes. No residual Victorian planting remains. The area was part of the wooded grounds of the Royal National Hospital and used by patients for walking exercise. A few moribund trees and unpleasant shrubs were clustered in the more fertile spots. The South facing bank was particularly challenging to horticulture, made from loose stone (resultant from tipped diggings from the hospital basement construction) covered with a thin skim of soil.

Development

This section was created as part of the Southern Hemisphere Garden, a Friends' Society-matched funding project with Living Spaces from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The project ultimately brought into intense cultivation 25 per cent of the Garden previously under utilised, stretching from the entrance to the cricket club.

A tricky topography, the solution started with landscaping and pathway construction to allow the vehicle access previously unavailable. The difficult steep bank was tamed with a new path position and artificial rocks created by Ecclestone George. A hiatus whilst retrospective planning permission was gained pushed back Eucalyptus planting by a year. An unexpected water cistern was incorporated, cold water sumps made, and a bridge constructed. Extension of the section followed in 2006, completing the planting on the North slope.

Catching the bus

Botanic Direction

The geographical scope of plants is far larger than space available in this section.

The mastery of the shallow, south facing valley side by Eucalyptus species is complete. The visuals of thin Eucalyptus trunks mimicking the temperate forest of New South Wales, with little understorey other than shed leaves and bark peelings will endure. The Eucalyptus host subterranean truffles and could be the basis for scholarly study. Over 10 years in, and some artificial rock edifices are failing, but should be repaired where necessary. The Dreamtime rock (see *Ventnorensis,* Spring 2017) completed the original vision and is a powerful and emotive tool in interpretation in an area now so dark as to be prohibitive for future planting. Notable specimens of *Wollemia* and Banksia are threatened with overgrowth. Consideration should be made to propagation and relocation.

The tree fern glade has been successful and hosts a colony of Tmesipteris. Other epiphytes should be propagated and spread, their provenance lends value to the collection. Self-regeneration of tree ferns is evident and to be encouraged. Further tree fern taxa should be sought. Surrounding shrubby material is reaching the point of taxa loss due to age and overcrowding: consideration should be made to extending the Australian Section southwards. This would require absorption of some remnant Mexican succulents and Puya, or ideally relocation of same – this area shows strong regeneration of self-sown Eucalyptus. A full expansion would include the incorporation of the most south westerly part of VBG known previously as The Americas. Such incorporation will create familiar dilemmas over the futures of champion trees from different geographical zones.

The north facing slope has some remnant plants from yore making a revival – these should be removed. Smaller shrubs are becoming lost beneath larger specimens and require propagation where possible, and relocation. Unsolicited paths are forming which may be adopted, a steep remnant tarmac path should be discouraged and mulched over. The crown of *Quercus ilex* atop this bank could be removed to allow more Eucalyptus planting in a very poor soil position. This could include further experimentation with red flowered Eucalyptus or expanding the palette already proven viable, with a view to possible future champion trees.

Western Australia is comparatively under-represented at VBG and nationally, despite hosting climate types akin to Ventnor. Initial investigations in 2004 revealed few taxa present in cultivation. It may be worth pursuing this line of acquisition further.

Sundowner in Australia

Memories of Brian Kidd, President of the Friends' Society

By **Chris Kidd**

Roz asked me some time ago if I'd write some memories of my late father for the Friends. I'm avoiding the term obituary and its connotations – the last pages of the newspaper summing up a stranger's life. Dad would have rolled his eyes and groaned at the thought. In his mind he has moved on to a different, special garden of a house with many rooms. If you knew my Dad, you'd have loved him, and you will have your own memories, worth more than anything I can write here.

If you knew my Dad, you'd have loved him

Dad was simply the kindest man I ever met. He told no lies, and wasn't afraid to tell the truth either. He cared for people and worked hard to improve people's lives, he would give anything he could from a kind word to wise counsel, and the most precious commodity – his time. Professionally he wanted to improve lives through improving our living outdoor environment, parks and gardens. He wanted every person in his home city to be able to see green life from their home, and every road should have trees.

To understand Dad, reflect on his childhood. In a city bombed during war, his family lost everything in an air raid. He saw a congested city, unguided by development, ablaze. To him this bleak canvass was readied for a new start, to enrich the environment and make a green city. He was an apprentice who rose to the top of his profession, 50 years for the same authority. Along the way he achieved so much, the highlight of his career leading the city of Portsmouth to winning Britain in Bloom. At the announcement he leapt in the air and shouted "Yes!" running the full length of Coventry Cathedral to accept the award before anyone could change their minds. There is a tree in every road and green shoots sprout everywhere.

Reading through his notes and journals and the pile of cards and letters, I have found memories from so many people. From the man who suffered a life-changing injury as an apprentice, whom Dad visited daily and guided through adversity to a successful career in horticulture. From the man in prison for a dreadful crime whom Dad taught; gaining special dispensation for him to sit his exams outside the confines. From the young men and women with no work prospects that were given a chance, and took it, as gardeners.

From the home gardeners whose often long letters WRITTEN IN CAPITALS WITH IMPORTANT PHRASES UNDERLINED: he replied in longhand. I found letters of appreciation and gratitude, from people whose names I knew from childhood, who had been adversaries or bosses, thanking him for his help and support. Cards to Grandpa from my children. All tucked away.

He loved all gardens, and especially Ventnor. He said he would be your president, if he was asked, and you did. He promoted the garden on the radio, in his newspaper, in lectures, in person. He raised money. Tens of thousands of pounds for charities, no fanfare. He gave advice and support during those inevitable times when the obvious thing to do isn't the right thing to do. Lately, I try to be like him, but I'm not half the man he was.

Dad's notes included thoughts and musings on Ventnor and its transformation. I found the following handwritten note, it starts with praise and then turns into the style he used for his newspaper features, telling the reader how to tackle a tricky job in simple style. I'll share it:

The reconstructed Japanese garden

I really was inspired by the project. The cherry trees were planted beautifully. The gate effect is interesting and could be made even more interesting by including a Japanese lantern on the left as this would indicate progression to heaven – a light at heaven's gate. The existing steps are (for) ordinary mortals to reach heaven. Ferns in rocks would be appropriate. The aggregate is too dull for this area, it would be more significant to use white sand. This could be achieved by removing 8cms of aggregate and replacing with 12cms of white sand or white chippings. White chippings sparkle after rain. White sand should be raked frequently as every line left by the rake is significant. A wooden rake grooves larger ridges which are softened by the wind. Other raked areas are treated with metal rakes which produce a softer texture, very important in Japanese gardens. Finally stones. This is essential. Rocks should be in 5 groups:

Japanese Garden: Brian gave simple instructions on tricky jobs

Group 1 – 5 stones Group 2 – 1 stone
Group 3 – 3 stones Group 4 – 2 stones Group 5 – 3 stones

Now, work this out. When any two groups are seen in juxtaposition the arrangement resolves itself into three groups of 7, 5 and 3. A numerical combination of special significance to the Japanese.

Thanks Dad.

A first flowering at Ventnor

Colin Pope was delighted to see decorations on VBG's Metrosideros - or New Zealand Christmas Tree

The New Zealand Christmas Tree (known to the Maoris as Pohutakawa), *Metrosideros,* is one of the most spectacular evergreen flowering trees that can be grown in this country. Sadly, it is very frost sensitive and can only be grown on the Isles of Scilly and one or two sheltered gardens along the western coastline of Britain and Ireland.

Detail of Metrosideros romexcelsa tree on the Azores

Anyone fortunate enough to have visited Tresco Gardens in the Scilly Isles during mid-summer will have been overwhelmed by the huge trees bearing splendid red flowers which self-seed abundantly where there is bare ground. Even here, they were badly hit by the frosts of 1987. There was a group of big trees up to 20m or more in height, with trunks flattened by layer upon layer of aerial roots but they were believed to have been killed by the extreme cold of 1987. They were cut back to the main trunks but, miraculously, nine large trees survived and regrew from the cut surfaces and trunks.

There are 12 species of Metrosideros which are native to New Zealand, of which six are trees and six are lianes. Three species have been grown outside in the mildest parts of the British Isles. The least tender, *M. umbellata* is growing in the sheltered Scottish gardens of Logan and Inverewe and in the extreme southwest of Ireland as well as sheltered gardens in Cornwall. The other two, *M. excelsa* and *M. robusta*, are now virtually confined to Tresco. The reason they have not survived in Cornish gardens is that, when young, they have very fleshy stems which are extremely cold sensitive, even at temperatures below +5 C.

Metrosideros robusta flowering at VBG

It has long been an aspiration to grow Meterosideros outside at Ventnor Botanic Garden and a number of specimens of both *M. excelsa* and *M. robusta* have been planted at different times. Unfortunately, they require acid soils, a commodity in short supply at Ventnor, in addition to mild temperatures. All were killed in a cold spell in the winter of 2008/9. One or two specimens of *M. robusta,* considered to be the less tender of the two species, were planted in 2011 and one of these has survived in the sheltered outside space alongside the atrium and lift shaft and is now around 3 metres in height.

On 2nd August, I was thrilled to see that our specimen was producing a few flowers at the top of the plant, the first time ever at Ventnor. A far cry from a spectacular fully flowered tree, such as can be seen from planted trees on the Azores, but it's a start. As plants grow older, they become more able to survive cold spells, as exemplified when VBG's specimen was hit by the 'Beast from the East' in February 2018, but recovered.

Metrosideros belongs to the Myrtle family. Its flowers are produced in copious bunches of scarlet flowers in terminal clusters. The petals are small and the colour largely derives from the long bunches of red filaments of the stamens. Abundant nectar is produced which attracts both birds and insects. In New Zealand, it is principally bird pollinated.

In addition, the Garden has a few potted plants of a bushy variegated Metrosideros, *M. umbellata* 'Moonlight'. You may have seen them displayed around the café during the summer. Two of these have been planted out in the Garden and have survived two winters. It remains to be seen how our New Zealand Christmas Trees can tolerate whatever the winters throw at them, and whether or not they become one of the spectacles of the Garden.

A 3D model of a sun recorder on top of the Victorian sun plinth in the south west corner of the Garden. The model was placed there in the late summer, and is a replica of the real recorder used in Victorian times, and up until to 1950. Photograph by Chris Watts

Weather in the Garden

(April to August 2021) **by Chris Watts**

This period kicked off with the driest April since 2007 (0.7mm). But despite the lack of rain and abundant sunshine, it was colder than average due to low overnight temperatures. May, in contrast to last year, was colder and wetter. June was a month of two halves, dry up to the 15th, wet thereafter with 95per cent of the total falling in the last fortnight. It was the wettest June since 2012. The 21st was a particularly poor day: maximum temperature 13.1°C, no sun and 10.4mm rain – more like a winter solstice! The highest temperatures of the year then arrived in mid-July, peaking at 27.2°C (19th).

The weather got very interesting at the end of July and beginning of August. Thunder had not been heard since April 2020; so it was like the proverbial No. 11 bus – nothing for 15 months and then five turn up at once: thunder every day from July 23rd to 27th! On the 30th storm Evert arrived, and felled a poplar tree on the western perimeter of the Garden. It came down at 2pm across a path used by visitors, but luckily no one was nearby. Then came the Ventnor deluge on the morning of August 2nd. An exceptionally heavy shower from 8.20am till 10.10am measured 43.7mm. Thereafter the weather became more settled, and a sunny and warm day arrived for Ventnor Day on the 14th. [Ventnor Day, Page 23].

The Island, along with other parts of the south east, has been singled out as having a very wet summer, twice the average rainfall. Data from the Garden confirms this: the table shows 309.6mm; the final 35 year average ending 1950 for the Hospital was 151.3mm. Five out of the 92 days of summer were largely responsible: June 18th (20.7mm), 28th (42.8mm), July 25th (36.9mm), 26th (20.2mm) and August 1st (46.0mm).

It is with some sadness to report that the future of the weather station is in doubt. It is situated adjacent to the eucalyptus forest which was planted several years ago, but well after the station was established in 2006/7. There was an understanding that the trees would be cropped at 2-3 metres, but this has not happened, and the variety is such that 30 metres in height can be expected. Their growth is now so rapid that they will soon overshadow the weather instruments – violating the rules on exposure set by the Environment Agency and Met Office. I am expecting the accreditation given by these two bodies to be questioned, and at a recent inspection the verdict was 'satisfactory, but . . . '

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
April	*8.2–*	*1.5—-*	*0*	*10.5*	*0*	*0.8*	*18*
May	*11.6–*	*53.3+*	*13*	*13.4*	*1*	*13.7*	*6*
June	*16.0++*	*128.3++*	*12*	*17.9*	*10*	*42.8*	*6*
July	*18.0++*	*106.5++*	*10*	*20.1*	*16*	*36.9*	*10*
August	*17.2*	*74.8++*	*7*	*n/a*	*20*	*46.0*	*10*

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

OBITUARY

Eric Everitt

Former Hon Treasurer and Volunteer

Eric at the Volunteer New Year party, Jan 2001

I've noted before when people retire or leave Ventnor Botanic Garden and I've been asked to say a few words, its easy when they are nice. Eric was one of the nicest people I ever met. But you could easily miss this, as I did for a long time, because of the protective shell some nice people build around themselves. It's fair to say this described Eric. My early dealings with him, as a Friend with a capital F, latterly with the more important lower case f, were as a volunteer gardener on Wednesdays. Eric spoke his mind. He shot from the hip. He told me how things ought to be done, with his dog Skipper at his feet. At the Christmas Friends' buffet lunches he would survey me through his glasses as his close friend Bob topped up my glass of ginger wine, and we burned our mouths on microwaved mince pies. Eric became the Treasurer of the Friends' Society just at a time when we were increasing the rate of development of the Garden.

One of our projects was transforming the content of the then Temperate House into the Tropical House. I'd promised the Friends we would grow giant waterlilies, but even though we went about the project using off-the-shelf equipment and cut corners (compare with the Victorian era bespoke glass ranges with heated pools) we very quickly used the budget allocated. A strong memory: it was a Thursday afternoon and Eric came to see progress, but we still didn't have a conclusion for half the paths. I explained to Eric our predicament. His glasses, reflecting the sun, hid his eyes as he considered me. His answer was "How much do you want?" Thus we put in a canal complete with fish and a wooden boardwalk from which to see them. Eric began to be a very good pal.

Eric attended the gardening classes we ran; he was very interested in grafting an apple tree in his garden. He walked in this Garden with Bob and Skipper, still told me how I ought to do everything, and told Simon how to behave too. When Bob and Skipper passed away it was incredibly sad. When Eric said he was leaving the Island I was amazed, but big decisions are made for big reasons and he promised to return from time to time, which he did, volunteering on Wednesdays when he holidayed on the Island. Some time after he moved, Eric threw a birthday party for himself and invited all the people who had been special, including his new dog Trudie. At the party in Somerset we had speeches from friends and family, including his former students whom he had taught at catering college. They had a picture of him in his chef whites with long white hat. Eric made the best shortbread in the world. I asked for some every time he came to the Island, even when he said each trip would be his last. Liz and I visited Eric and we went out for lunch, driving through the Somerset countryside to a seaside pub. He had become slow on his feet so we walked afterwards along the shingle with him watching. Back at his home we looked at his garden, he gave us homemade jam and we said our goodbyes. Eric last called me on the 21st of December, he was worried about his health, but he had been for all the time I'd ever known him, of which I reminded him. "Its time to get planning your hundredth birthday, Eric," was our parting line. The next phone call was from his daughter Sally with the news nobody wants to hear.

I miss Eric. I miss Skipper too, even though the latter was a bit nippy from time to time. If Eric was here today he'd be giving me advice. I'd probably take it. And ask for shortbread.

Chris Kidd

Being there

When the Friends offered former apprentice **Ellis Gant** the opportunity of work experience on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, he seized it with both spades

Tresco Abbey Gardens is a sub-tropical plant paradise nestled around the ruins of a Benedictine abbey on the island of Tresco, some 30 miles south-west of mainland Britain. The gardens were originally started in 1834 when philanthropist Augustus John Smith took up the leasehold of the Isles of Scilly and chose Tresco as the place to build his home. Through Augustus and the work of four successive generations, the gardens have survived through several upheavals to be the unique collection they are today.

View of the avenue of palms from the middle terrace

Through the Friends of VBG I was lucky enough to spend two weeks in July 2021 working in the Abbey Gardens, which make up some 17 acres. I was camping on the main island of St. Mary's and catching the 8am ferry across to Tresco island each day, which took a maximum of 10 minutes. This certainly has to be one of the best commutes to work!

Pebble garden

The gardens are set across several levels, with a series of interconnecting pathways that surround the abbey ruins. The location on a south-facing hillside, protected by shelter belts of Monterey pine and Monterey cypress trees, shields the gardens from harsh winter gales while the gulfstream-washed shores mean the garden is generally frost free. As a result the gardens are adorned with an eclectic mix of tender plants from across the world. The top terraced area has an array of South African and Australian plants that thrive in the hot and dry conditions in free draining soil. Many different species from the Proteaceae family grow along this terrace including Banksias, Leucadendron, Leucospermums and Protea. These plants are well established too and with the heatwave weather experienced during my time here and the sea view back across to the other islands, it felt like I was in another continent!

Although the King Protea, Protea *cynaroides,* had largely finished flowering by the time of my visit, the fading heads were still something quite spectacular to see. Towards the western end of the terrace are colourful plantings filled with the likes of Cape Heathers

and Callistemon. The fire heath, Erica *cerinthoides,* also took my eye shining in the hot sun. There is no question as to why it is called the fire heath with its striking red flowers but the name also boils down to this plant's ability to reshoot from its rootstock after a fire, a quality which actually keeps the plant in good health.

St Mary's, from the top terrace

The middle terrace features several different displays, such as the pebble garden, which was the first landscaped part of the garden, in a union jack design. Also growing through this terrace are several different types of palm tree that give the garden its iconic look. Phoenix *canariensis* growing over 10m tall are arranged in avenues in association with Araucaria *heterophylla* and Butia *capitata,* to name a few.

Striking: The Fire Heath

Below the middle terrace runs the long walk that spans the width of the garden. This area at the bottom of the hillside has deep soil which has allowed for mature trees such as the Pohutukawa, Metrosideros *excelsa,* to grow large, creating areas of shade. As a result the added moisture retention has allowed for the likes of Dicksonia and Cyathea *medullaris* to thrive, with the added benefit of no winter protection needed! The newer area, the Mediterranean garden developed in the 1990s, features a further mix of plantings with a fountain that has a sculpture of an Agave. Steps leading up from around clipped olives and succulents take the visitor to an ornate shell house and further plantings of Aeoniums and Protea. The vegetable and cut flower gardens are also situated next to this section of the garden so you really can have it all at Tresco!

My time was spent mixed between working with the tender collections and the vegetable and cut flower garden. A lot of work was put into tidying the gardens ready for a royal visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge: this enabled me to work in several parts of the gardens which led onto discussions about different plants and the regions they originate from. The head gardener, Andrew Lawson, took me around the garden, telling me about the different plant selections, many in which he has helped to source seed or cuttings through trips abroad. The dedication of the garden team and the Dorrien-Smith family can certainly be seen in the presentation of these gardens, carefully curated to create a sense of tropicality that I hope to get back to in the not too distant future.

Shell House, Mediterranean garden

Emma Tennant comes to Ventnor

Sally Peake describes the troughs and peaks - and ultimate success - of bringing a world class event to Ventnor

One damp February day in 2017, I was asked to show Sally Clegg and her friend, Emma Tennant, around the Garden with the view to finding something in flower that Emma might paint. At that time, my mind was focussed on the Secret Art project that the Friends had decided to make their major fundraiser for the year, so my thoughts turned to the prospect of, maybe, an item for our show. I was not disappointed (!!) and, following a warming bowl of soup in the Plantation Café, we chatted amicably and discovered a mutual friend in the late Dr Marjorie Reeves, Professor of Medieval History at Oxford. We parted company with me promising to send her a copy of a photo I had of Marjorie as a small girl outside her family home in 1910, a house that had become my family home in 1990. It was the start of a correspondence and association that fills me with delight.

You will have gathered that I had no idea (none whatsoever) of Emma's eminence as a botanic artist or of her place in the social history of 20th century England - my more socially adept friends soon acquainted me. But the easy rapport and correspondence continued. I received an invitation to attend the Garden Museum, in London, for an exhibition of her work in March 2019, where a new film was to be shown along with an evening conversation led by Alan Titchmarsh. Jenny Parker and I decided to go and were thrilled to be recognised by both Emma and Alan as having come from VBGFS. The evening was a wonderful occasion and we met Katie Pertwee, who has acted as Emma's agent for many years. Jenny and I were buzzing on the way home, wondering, just wondering if we might be able to host such an event at Ventnor . . .

The stars had aligned. We discovered that the film's director was Ben Wood, himself an Islander, and we already knew that Emma had good friends living on the Island; her exhibited painting of Acacia *dealbata* was of a specimen in her friends' garden. A date was set for March 2020 and arrangements were finalised when Covid struck, and we had to postpone everything. Little did any of us realise the impact this pernicious

virus was to have on all our lives; tentative plans were made for September 2020, March 2021, and finally it was decided that late September/early October 2021 would give us the best opportunity to plan a Covid-secure event. No longer was it imaginable to crowd 70 people in a room in a single evening. So a different event emerged.

Ben Wood needed the projection equipment to be of the highest possible quality and it was he that suggested enquiring whether Stephen Izatt at Ventnor Arts Club might be amenable to a joint venture where we could have a number of screenings over several days, allowing for social distancing as required. It then transpired that the Arts Club had hosted a major fundraising Exhibition for Mountbatten - a re-purposed bank is a naturally 'safe' place for valuable artwork - and suddenly our worries about the risks and cost of insurance vanished.

I will gloss over the challenges involved with publicity and ticket allocation; suffice to say that our loyal supporters were wonderfully understanding and generous. I need to acknowledge the fantastic support from Ben Wood, Katie Pertwee and Ventnor Arts Club and, not least, from Jenny Parker who was always supportive and even supported my crazy idea to do the catering ourselves when it became obvious (to me) that supermarkets might be 'out of stock' of quality canapés on a Thursday in September.

And so it was that on a Thursday afternoon, our first matinée screening of the film got underway following individually prepared cream teas and then, a couple of hours later, guests were welcomed with wine and canapés to preview the film. Repeat the following day. The film is stunning, beautifully shot and portrays with great sensitivity Emma's talent and dedication to her art, as well as her deep knowledge of the plants and their stories that have so gripped her since childhood.

By the time the Exhibition opened the following week, word had spread and the Exhibition was very well supported and successful. Our only sadness was that Emma had tested positive for Covid over the weekend and her planned trip down from Scotland to be with us was not to be.

So it is with relief and pleasure that I can report to you all that not only did VBGFS fulfil our wildest dreams of bringing a world-class event to Ventnor, but there are plans afoot to welcome Emma to the Island in 2022.

The making of Northcourt's gardens

John Harrison won this year's Harold Hillier Award for his extraordinary achievements at his magnificent Jabobean manor house. He tells its story

I was honoured to get the Harold Hillier award this year from the Friends, especially following in Colin Pope's footsteps. True our 15 acre garden in Shorwell has been open for the National Gardens scheme for some 50 years now, on and off, 38 years under our custodianship, and enjoyed by some 25,000 visitors over these years.

Butterfly bush: Cassia corymbosa or Argentina senna

I was captivated as a teenager when in 1963 my family (two uncles and my father) bought the house, dating from 1615, and subdivided the house and garden into three. Already a keen gardener I saw the potential from such a variety of soils and microclimates in such a picturesque setting: I felt we somehow had to keep hold of it.

The estate once stretched to 1,700 acres and the Gordon family had estates in Scotland, and other properties as well, but in 1938 the then owner Lord Burgh was forced to sell. With the army in residence during the war and just one part time gardener most of the time, the gardens became derelict, except for a productive kitchen garden. So from 1963 we set about the work of clearance, finding much of the soil was rich from years of leaf-mould accumulating virgin soil in a sheltered valley, with a stream to go with it. What more could one hope for?

We started buying out the relations from 1983, and finally bought out the interests of the last of 10 female heiresses in 2010, and then we had all of the garden under our management - giving us a partly blank canvas. This proved an opportunity to fully exploit the different soils and microclimates the garden presented as well as to theme with different atmospheres in each to reflect far parts of the world.

I must have planted nearly 20,000 plants - of which 75 per cent should have been perennial plants, shrubs or trees, but inevitably there have been casualties. Because I am too mean to pay for help, it has virtually all been planted by me, each plant carefully chosen to be sustainable in a given location. This has included around 35 different magnolias, over 100 camellias, and at one point I had 99 different hardy geraniums - but stopped when I learnt there were about 350 available. After the camellias come the hydrangeas, of which I have about 20 different forms, which have greatly enjoyed this year's rainfall. Sixteen different primula candelabras line the steam at their best when the 120 roses (mostly shrub roses) come into flower. But I cannot resist the more

tender plants, having six different acacias, and leptospermums on the upper greensand terraces. At the time of writing my Cassia *corymbosa* (the butterfly bush or Argentina senna) is in full bloom, defying English winters to stay in flower until the end of December, and the collection of salvias now also in full bloom gets larger and larger each year. I have lost track of how many different plant species or varieties are now held, but my guess is it is around 8,500. Maybe if we have another lockdown I will work on it!

It is now so pleasing to see so many shrubs and trees reach maturity. My favourite is the magnolia *campbellii* which starts flowering in the second week of March, heralding the arrival of spring (generally two weeks later than at VBG) and today the Dogwood Cornus Norman Hadden is in full autumn fruit.

Dogwood Norman Hadden

Inspiration has come from much garden visiting. These have been especially those in the South-west with a similar climate, especially those in Coombes, a bit like our valley, Caerhays Castle and Lanhydrock in Cornwall, Tresco on Isles of Scilly, Overbecks and Coleton Fishacre in Devon; Powis Castle in Powys; and West Dean, West Sussex, are all gardens I could visit time and time again, but one learns from all gardens. This is how I have learned, as well as from 60 years of trial and error. And from VBG of course, which I have known since its inception.

Other than a day's grass and hedge cutting we have managed with minimum help. This is only possible with a sustainable choice of plants, with no watering and minimal staking. A driving force is having paying guests – now mostly self-catering. The garden is a selling point, so we have to keep it up to a minimum standard and make it as interesting as possible. Fortunately we have plenty of bedrooms to be filled and a very picturesque, very natural setting, making it easier to sell!

Fortunately, too, wilder gardens like ours are now all the rage, and we have our own wilderness garden along the stream, accessed via a boardwalk, with an amazon jungle feel.

But we have our disadvantages:

Surrounded by downs and trees we are a bad frost-pocket, so I envy those coastal gardens three or four degrees warmer on those frosty nights.

The height difference is some 120 feet from bottom to top, so it is harder to manage and there is constant hard work climbing up looking for forgotten tools.

We lack the hot dry terraces, but instead have lots of deep shade, which is good for my subtropical plantings.

We have a one-acre walled kitchen garden, which is wonderfully open and a joy to work in but it does take up more than half our time.

I find it so hard to delegate, and having been born in 1948 one lacks the energy and strength of 38 years ago, but I have a very fit slightly younger willing wife!

Over the next few years I must make the garden even more sustainable, and try and delegate further, but I would also like to share the garden more widely with visitors. We do have permission for a tea-room and to open to the public but we are reluctant to lose our freedom and privacy too much.

However, we do welcome people by appointment so do not feel shy to contact us, and I very much hope we can also do a couple of special opening days for the Friends. Then you will find out if I have managed to buy those extra two acres of downland and extend the garden to widen the plant range even more. We have now run out of space!

johnandchristine@northcourt.info

[See Harold Hillier Award, Page 22]

Favourite: Fruit of Magnolia campbellii

A hidden gem

A long-standing and sharp-eyed Friend shared this photograph of an unusual bluebell she spotted on a visit to VBG in May. Intrigued, I cast around for more information. Colin Pope advised that it is *Hyacinthoides non-scripta 'bracteata'* the bracteate bluebell. It is a freak form of our native bluebell, with elongated leaf-like bracts between the flowers, which is occasionally found in wild populations of bluebells. The flower is sterile but the bulb continues to produce bracteate flowers and it multiplies vegetatively. Consultation between Chris Kidd and Simon Goodenough (present and previous Curator) revealed, however, that it came to Ventnor as a bought-in cultivar some years ago.

Hyacinthoides non-scripta 'bracteata': the bracteate bluebell

An old university botany friend of mine filled in the picture by finding references to it being recorded by plant groups in Somerset in 2011 and Devon in 2012 and that it was exhibited by a nursery (Avon Plants) for the first time at the Malvern Spring Show in 2013. Best of all, she sent a clip of Carol Klein waxing lyrical in her inimitable way about it at that show for Gardeners World. *In the recording, Carol describes the plant, which she had never seen before, as something 'so special, unusual and graceful . . . the sort of thing to put into a secret corner of your garden and go there occasionally to commune with it.'*

And thus it remains at Ventnor! One of the many hidden treasures waiting to be discovered by the observant visitor to our Garden.

Special thanks to Audrey Greenleaf for sharing her picture.

Val Pitts

OBITUARY

John Hill

The death was announced in August of John Hill, a member of The Friends and long standing volunteer.

John was always very interested in horticulture, developed three gardens and would really have loved to have taken up forestry but was called to run a family business in Ryde. He studied horticulture at Portsmouth Polytechnic in the early 1970s under the tutelage of our late President Brian Kidd.

Volunteering at VBG: he always liked to make things look tidy

Whilst living in Ryde he planted and kept tidy the corners of Bullen Road, planted and cared for the beds in the High Street on behalf on the Ryde Business Association and bought and planted the main border at the Riverside Centre on behalf of the Isle of Wight Botanic Garden Society. He and his wife Jonyth had become members in the early 1980s and this was their introduction to Ventnor Botanic Garden when Sir John Hillier was so involved.

On moving to Niton in 1989, he maintained the garden at St John's Parish Church for nearly 30 years. Both John and Jonyth joined the Friends' Society in 1994 where they both volunteered, and John even pruned the hydrangeas this year at the age of 92 years.

John was always at hand to support Jonyth with all the social activities and plant sales from 1997 until 2010, when she was Social Secretary. He was a member of a number of Societies, both garden and history, and was also a keen golfer even to this year.

John was past President of the Niton and Whitwell Horticultural Society, and a member of Niton Photographic Club. He was a keen photographer, particularly on his many travels - which always included landscapes and gardens.

John was a man quietly committed to supporting his family, friends and community.

Gardening Volunteers

Help is always required in the Garden and we warmly welcome new recruits to work with the Garden staff and existing volunteers, either in our friendly group on a Wednesday morning or at other times to be arranged. No qualifications or previous experience is required – just bring your own hand tools if you have them, a flask of refreshment and wear from sensible clothing. [See Soup lunches, Page 24].

For further information on Garden volunteering, please phone Bridgette Sibbick - 867739

Harold Hillier - Two into One

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Presentation of the **Harold Hillier Award** for Services to Horticulture on the Island

Colin Pope receives the 2020 Harold Hillier Award from VBGFS Chairman John Bagshawe

John Harrison of Northcourt House with the 2021 Harold Hillier Award

Two years were rolled into one at the AGM in July. Each year the Friends' Society (VBGFS) honours an Islander with the Harold Hillier Award for Services to Horticulture on the Island. For 2020 Colin Pope was chosen, not only in recognition of his lifetime of horticultural research but in particular for his support for the Botanic Garden and for curator Chris Kidd.

But the 2020 AGM didn't happen, so Colin Pope was given his award just minutes before it was taken back and given to 2021's recipient, John Harrison of Northcourt House.

Presenting the award – which bears the Rudyard Kipling inscription 'Glory of the Garden, it shall never pass away'– Chris Kidd said his job was a lonely one, but since Colin Pope had retired from his job ecology officer for the IW Council he had been working with Chris, giving the benefit of his vast horticultural knowledge to VBG. He said: "Colin's knowledge of ecology is second to none on the island, and has enabled us to see worlds within the Garden that we just weren't aware of, ranging from obscure fungi, through to getting us introduced to the Iberian ants which now bite us regularly in our office space and in Signal Point. Honestly and truthfully I couldn't think of anybody who was more worthy and deserving of the Harold Hillier award for last year."

Accepting the award, Colin Pope said: "It's great to have the award, but it has been a privilege for me to come and to learn about the place and the plants here." He said that lockdown had meant he had had a gap away from the Garden, and added: "Looking forward I hope the Garden will develop, I hope it will deserve the title of Botanic Garden. I've got my fingers crossed for moving forward."

Moving on to 2021's presentation, Sally Peake for the Friends' Society said: "Here is a man who has built his garden from scratch. Every plant, tree and shrub has been carefully located to thrive and he is responsible for most of the manual labour involved though he now employs some professional help - fair enough, he has 15 acres and is supposed to be 'retired'." She praised his chairmanship of the IW Gardens Trust.

Receiving the Harold Hillier Vase, John Harrison said it was a particular honour to follow Colin Pope whom he has known for 30 years. He described how, as a teenager in Hertfordshire who grew plants to sell to his parents' neighbours, his uncle bought the property. "Ventnor's given me lots of inspiration as to what could grow on the Isle of Wight. Except it's so frustrating that it is so much warmer [at VBG] in the winter." He explained how he had gradually taken over all of the garden in order to fulfil its potential, and how he and his wife Christine have opened it to the public every year under the National Garden Scheme for 38 years.

[See Northcourt, Page 18]

Ventnor Day

The Friends spread the word

On a warm and sunny Saturday in August, Ventnor celebrated summer and the return to social activities with an afternoon of music, dance and fun organised by the Town Council and the Carnival Committee. The Friends took their place among the many busy stalls representing community groups, charities and arts and crafts people in the award-winning Ventnor Park, and we enjoyed talking to Islanders and visitors about our Society, and the Botanic Garden. For a bit of fun, we held a "Guess the number of ...." competition; in this case, to keep a botanical theme, the number of florets on an 'Incrediball' hydrangea head, which I carefully dissected the next day. The winning guess was only four adrift of the actual count of 1396 and the worthy winners were delighted with their prize of an annual Garden pass, kindly donated by the CIC.

Many thanks to Sue, Maggie, Norma, John and Bob for their help.

Val Pitts

A hot and steamy invitation

The first Wednesday of each month sees a gathering of our hardworking volunteers round a pot of steaming soup in the Nammet Room, after the morning's work. We give the Friends a donation of £3, which helps pay Trish's wages.

The tradition started a few years ago when our then President, Chris's Dad Brian Kidd, brought a bag of £1 coins to the AGM to give to members, who were then challenged to use them to make money for the Friends. The volunteers were happy to stay for a bowl of homemade soup after work on the first Wednesday of the month in the winter - a good way to play their part and also have a chance for a chat and to get to know others.

Soup, bread and butter is provided. Please bring your own bowl and spoon/knife. (If you forget there are bowls/spoon available.)

Rosemary Stewart

Change to Apprenticeship criteria

Government criteria for apprenticeships have changed.

It appears that the College will need a minimum cohort of five apprentices across the Island to make it economic; with us having two there has been only one other for several years. The College also feel that, with no interim testing or College moderation, the numbers who actually 'pass' the A-level style exam at the end of two years will be very few. This seems a retrograde step as most youngsters prefer continuous assessment unless they are academics looking for progress to university.

The Friends had hoped to use Ellis' second year to explore in more depth with the College how to move forward, but the unilateral cessation of funding by the CIC made this unviable. We still hope to be able to support education in some way but it requires a co-operative partner to have a successful future.

Sally Peake

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

Artists in Residence

It is a natural fit for art to be created amid such beauty. Two artists describe their work and how it was influenced by their surroundings

GUY EADES

Artist in Residence April - June 2021

I returned to the Ventnor Botanic Garden Studio in April for three months during Spring and early Summer to create paintings inspired by the ideas and images of the Garden's unique location and character. My ideas for paintings arose whilst out drawing in the Garden and I then developed them in the studio. I opened the studio to visitors three times a week, to talk about the work.

Caption: Guy Eades: natural inks on paper

The paintings I made are all painted in artist inks I made from oak: galls - black; walnut - brown; eucalyptus - sienna; indigo - blue grey; and coloured calligraphy inks. The inks oxidise and the final colours evolve over 24 hours. The inks are applied to watercolour paper that has been moistened, which influences the marks made by the brush and the final resulting image when dry.

These new works are not botanical paintings, but rather paintings about a botanical garden, and here is one of the most special of places on the Isle of Wight to visit.

If you would like to know more about the paintings, framed with UV glass and conservation board, and to view them, contact Guy on: guyeades@me.com

ALICE DAWSON

Artist in Residence July - September 2021

My interdisciplinary practice is concerned with ecology, environmentalism, feminism, and natural science. I seek to raise awareness of environmental and social problems. Scientific research is the basis of my creative expression.

My two months as artist in residence at Ventnor Botanic Garden was magical and transformative. It allowed me to immerse myself in a thriving eco system and experiment with new materials and methods of creation. I focused on 'the unsung heroes of nature' - ants, spiders, root systems, trees, fungi and seeds, exploring how they work in symbiosis from birth to death to decay, to maintain a balanced and healthy eco system. I explored these subjects through writing, drawing, collecting found objects, casting, documenting, filming, painting and experimental sculpture, before refining my findings into two main works *Specimens of a Heroic Nature I* and *II* which remain in the Garden.

Now based in London, I am studying for a Masters in sculpture at the Royal College of Art. Please follow me on instagram and visit my website to stay updated on my work.

Alice Dawson: Unsung hero of nature

A generous sharing

Peter Coleman updates us on the CIC/Friends scheme of Wellbeing Passes to local schools and communities

Tranquil: 'Delight at the chance to visit'

The Garden, as a peaceful and attractive green space close to the sea, has great potential for improving the wellbeing of visitors. It is a key shared objective of the Director of the Garden, John Curtis, with the Friends, to develop and exploit this potential for all visitors, and in particular the local community.

The Friends are pleased to have been able to give annual family memberships to some families in Ventnor and in the last year were able to give these memberships to eight families, with children attending St Francis School, who have no access to outside space in their own homes. We hope that this gave some relief to these families during the terrible times, including lockdowns, that we have all experienced during this pandemic.

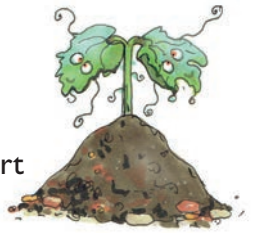
With the kind agreement of John Curtis I have been able to liaise with departments at St Mary's Hospital Trust, Sevenacres Hospital, and The Mountbatten Hospice to offer certain groups of patients free three-month wellbeing passes, allowing entry to the Garden to enable them to benefit from the experience of this wonderful green space.

The most recent developments to this scheme have been directed to supporting people who have suffered from Covid infection. Last year Wellbeing Passes were made available to patients attending the Covid rehabilitation service at St Mary's Hospital. The team at St Mary's have now developed a service for patients suffering from long Covid, and I am delighted to say that Wellbeing Passes are now being offered to patients referred to this service. Already one recipient has responded with delight at the opportunity to visit this beautiful and tranquil setting, which holds many happy memories for them.

The team at St Mary's are confident that this scheme will make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of this group, and have expressed their sincere gratitude for this opportunity.

As we look forward, with hope, to the constraints of the pandemic easing, we hope that we will be able to continue to develop the benefits of the Garden towards improving wellbeing for the local community and all visitors.

Courgette Triffids



Formula 1 has nothing on the race **Rosemary Stewart** witnessed in her garden this year

Growing courgettes for the last couple of years in my garden has been a disappointment, with leaves getting infected with powdery mildew and poor crops. So I found a climbing one in the Organic Gardening catalogue, thinking that growing up would give the leaves more air around them.

And they're off! July, and courgette plant reaches top of the posts (giant rhubarb in background)

In June, I gave two plants nice tall posts and helped them climb up - but my ageing brain had forgotten that the blurb on the packet said they would be ideal for a trellis or fence! Hence they got to the top, dropped down and set off on their journey with lovely healthy leaves and beautiful male flowers.

On and on they went relentlessly. One stem set off smartly with the other racing to catch up across the bed, turning the corner, skirting the spinach, blocking the path and advancing across the grass with long tendrils . . .

There were a few early fruits, then it took a while for a regular crop to appear, but then there was a good supply with the last ones picked in early November. Every now and then I marched out with my tape measure and by the end of September it was 20cm short of 8 metres! The second stem eventually caught up to be the same length.

Rampaging ramblers: Mid-september and they've trecked across the lawn

The other plant set off the other way and decided to climb right over my giant rhubarb leaves and make a beeline for the runner beans.

What an entertainment it has all been for my visitors! And no mildew. If you want to try them they are called Wave Climber (Ola Escaladora).

All is safely gathered in . . . The Seed Ladies (minus two), collecting ripened seed in mid-October. Jan Caunt, Jennifer Hague, Jonyth Hill and Anne Orlik. Photograph by (other Seed Lady) Rosemary Stewart

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Great Friends' Recipe Swap

Jan Caunt, one of our loyal Seed Ladies, says: This recipe is from Good Things to Eat by Lucas Hollweg, one of my favourite and well-used cookery books. All sorts of good things in it!

Gluten & Fat-Free Go-With-Anything Cake

3 medium eggs, separated
150g (5 ½ oz) caster sugar
175g (6oz) ground almonds
Zest and juice of half a lemon
¼ - ½ tsp ground cinnamon
Icing sugar to dust

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/ Gas Mark 4. Butter a shallow 18cm (7in) round cake tin. Cut a piece of greaseproof paper to fit the bottom and push it in.

METHOD

With a wooden spoon beat egg yolks with 125g (4½) oz of the sugar until pale and creamy. Fold in the ground almonds, zest, juice and cinnamon to make a stiff paste.

Whisk the egg whites until they form soft peaks. While they're peaking gradually add in the remaining sugar. Keep whisking until the mixture is glossy and the peaks are stiff when you remove the whisk.

Stir one third of the whisked whites into the mixture to loosen it slightly, then, using a metal spoon, carefully fold in the remaining mixture in two batches. Don't worry if there are a few flecks of white left in the mixture. Better that than lose all the air you've whisked in.

Transfer the mixture to the tin and bake in the preheated oven for 35 minutes. The cake should be lightly risen, with a chewy crust, but still quite soft inside. It will be a darker brown around the edge than in the middle.

Leave it to cool a little. It will probably sink or crack slightly. Then turn out the cake, remove the greaseproof paper and flip it onto a plate so that the brown side faces upwards. Sift some icing sugar over the top and serve while slightly warm.

Ale of Wight - Hop Harvesting

It was a beautiful sunny morning - before the weather arrived - with a cooling breeze blowing in off the sea. We (staff, volunteers and Friends) were joined by some holidaymakers who were intrigued to know what we were doing and had a go at hop-picking. The photographs show us all enjoying a refreshing drink of Botanic Ale at the end of the morning's work. And note the tubs full of hops!

Steve Newberry

BOTANY CLUB

Folly Farm

A trip to the Jekyll/Dan Pearson garden surrounding its Lutyens house

The morning after the trip to Folly Farm I told my friends: "I went to the most perfect garden." "Oh, I don't like perfect gardens," came the response.

Which made me think about the difference between faultlessness in a garden and the sublime. The 'measuring between daffodil bulbs' (some people do) and the sheer celebration of creation. The garden of Folly Farm is very much the latter.

Day trippers: returning after a visit to paradise

We were extremely fortunate to be among the less-than 300 visitors a year, thanks to Simon Goodenough, our former curator and now the estate manager at Folly Farm. Our two-minibus coach party was divided between Simon and head gardener, Isle of Wighter Tim Stretton, and they began by taking us along a meandering path through acres of wildflower meadow until more formal gardens, adjacent to the Lutyens Arts & Crafts house, were heralded by a key-shaped pond. From here time seemed to stop as we were led from one garden 'room' to the next, each its own creation - each perfect in its architecture, colour and design.

An example: Before going from the splendiferous White garden to the next, we were stopped and told that this one was designed to reflect the colours of the room which looked out on it. Through the arch we went - to a garden of mahogany browns, rich yellows, ochres, burgundies and burnt orange. You knew that just through the wall there was a library or drawing room, heavy in oak and leather.

I need to say there are no photographs of the Friends and Volunteers' trip to Folly Farm: they are strictly not allowed, and neither will I go on because if you get a chance to go there I wouldn't want to spoil all the surprises.

One surprise was that all this - ALL this - is looked after by just eight gardeners who clearly love their work. A dedicated team who, under Simon's watch, maintain a garden with not a bit of soil in sight, nor a weed, who edge each path to perfection, rake the gravel paths even, yet find time to welcome strangers to eat sumptuous teas in the acre-square walled garden.

The day was perfect. The place is perfect.

Roz Whistance

Membership News

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

Christopher and Dianne Davis of Little Atherfield
Jonathan Fisher of East Cowes
Ellis Gant of Cowes
Anne Hornett of Ryde
Lindsey James of Tettenhall
Sara Nevil of St Helens
Indi Wyatt and Adam Cooke of Ventnor

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 so an easily achievable New Year's Resolution, to tick off straight away, is to renew for 2022! Friends' Membership cards and complimentary single-use entry tickets (two for Individual Membership and three for Joint Membership) will be posted on receipt of payment. Please remember that your card also entitles you to 25 per cent off the cost of an annual ticket to Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Ways to pay

The enclosed leaflet has a renewal form, which shows rates, payment options and our bank details if you want to pay by BACS or set up a regular payment.

If you already pay by **Standing Order,** you don't need to do anything unless any of your contact details or Gift Aid instructions have changed, in which case please let me know by post or email.

BACS payment: again, there is no need to send the form unless your details have changed but please do add your postcode to the payment reference so we can be sure where the money has come from when Members share surnames.

Cheques: please fill in and post the form with your cheque

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

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

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

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 also obtain 10 per cent discount from Deacons Nursery at Godshill, and at The Coastal Gardener, Seaview, if you show your Friends' Membership Card.

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

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