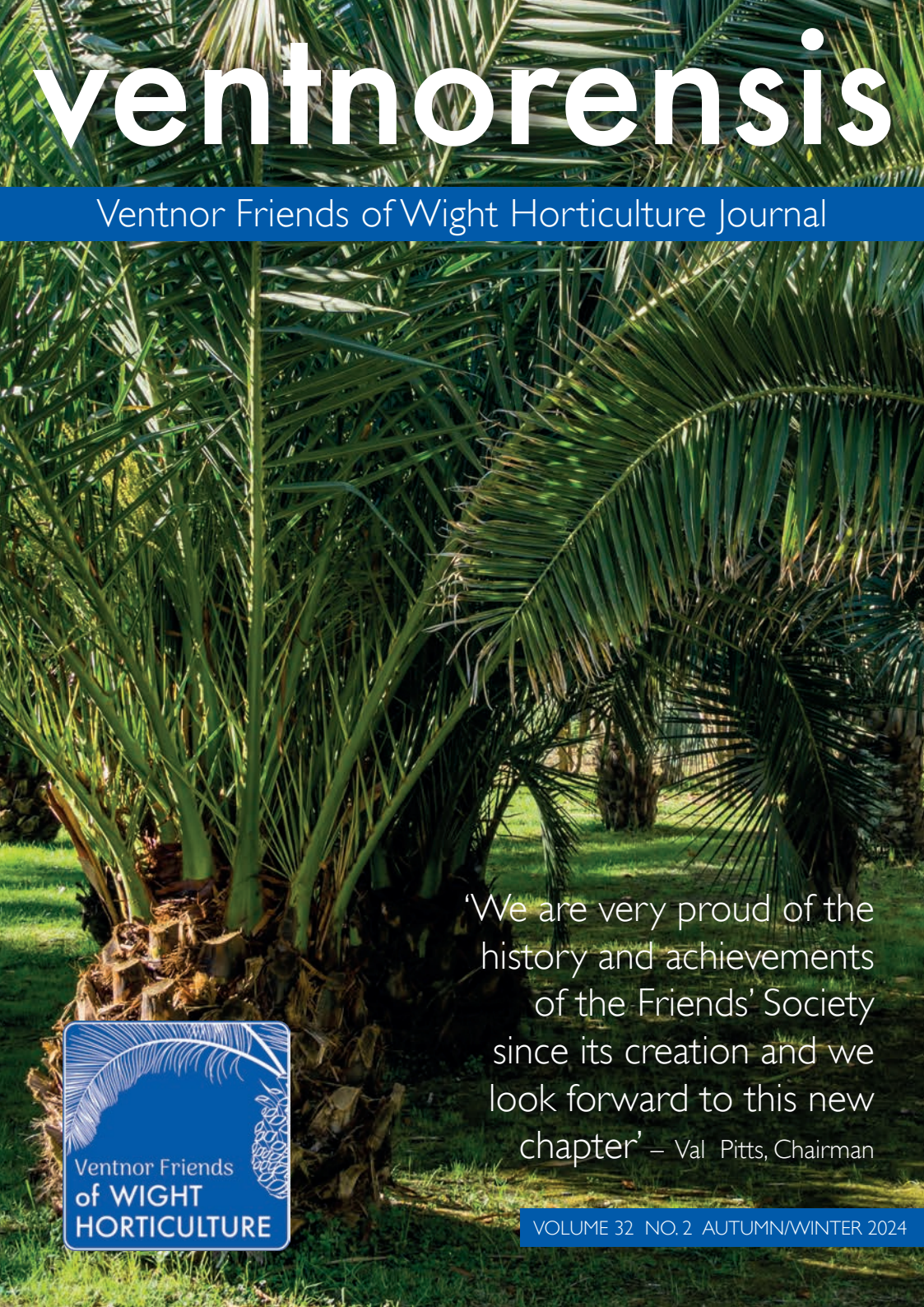
ventnorensis

Ventnor Friends of Wight Horticulture Journal



'We are very proud of the history and achievements of the Friends' Society since its creation and we look forward to this new chapter' – Val Pitts, Chairman

Ventnor Friends of WIGHT HORTICULTURE

VOLUME 32 NO. 2 AUTUMN/WINTER 2024

Save the Date – details to be announced

Thursday January 23rd

New Year, New Beginnings: We are trying something new, so beat the January blues and please join us for a convivial Souperior Lunch, 12.00 pm at Rookley Village Hall – homemade soup, bread and dessert, quiz and raffle

Mondays February 10th and March 10th

Café Botanique At Ventnor Arts Club 6.30 for 7.00 pm

News

Promoting horticultural education on the Isle of Wight

The crucial part the Friends played in the apprenticeship programme at VBG is well known, and continuing to support IOW students in pursuing a career in horticulture will be a key object in our developing role, *writes Val Pitts.* Our ongoing relationship with the IW College will be very important in achieving this aim. For many years the Friends have sponsored a prize for one of the horticulture students at the College and it was my privilege this year to present a High Achiever Award to Jacob Brett, [see Page 26] who completed his Level 2 Diploma in Practical Horticulture and is now enjoying a placement at C.A.R. Gardens to support his ambition to work in the industry.

Encouraging the next generation of horticulturalists is of prime importance to the Friends' President, Mike Fitt OBE FCIHort FCMI, who, in his role as Chairman of The Royal Parks Guild, founded and organises an inspiring annual Discovery Day for young people at major venues such as Kew, Wisley and Hampton Court Palace. This year, a group of young people from the Island, including Jacob, attended the event entitled "A Green Legacy – Growing the Future together" and we thought you would enjoy reading about their day. See Page 26

RHS Award for Farringford Garden

After the Friends' trip to Farringford Garden in Freshwater, [see Page 21] it was announced in OnTheWight on 11th November: Farringford, the former home of Alfred, Lord Tennyson on the Isle of Wight, has picked up a prestigious accolade in RHS Partner Garden of the Year Award.

The Team at Farringford are delighted to announce they have won the 2024 Regional Partner Garden of the Year for South East and Channel Islands. In a joint statement, Ellen Penstone-Smith, Walled Garden Manager, and Alastair Penstone-Smith, Garden Manager, told OnTheWight: "Farringford are honoured to be a regional winner. We are so pleased our visitors have enjoyed their time here and voted for us. For such a young garden it is a huge achievement for the garden team."

Front Cover: Phoenix Palm - Shutterstock

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Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Registered Charity No. 1174751

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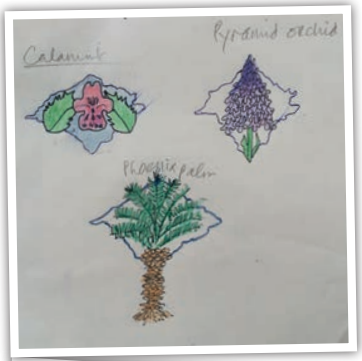
New name means . . . New Logo

We're still Friends but our remit is expanding. **Bridgette Sibbick** and **Simone Dickens** explain their thought process which has led to our smart new insignia



Bridgette writes . . . Now we have a new name we had to come up with a new logo. After a brainstorming session we came up with ideas that would represent us as a Friends' Society for horticulture in Ventnor and across the Island.

We needed a plant to represent us. Calamint is uniquely found on the island. Pyramid Orchid is an Island delight but has been previously used. Both were also dismissed as not being horticultural.

However, *Phoenix canariensis* is a palm that rises from the ashes, and this is what we settled on as eminently suitable. Originally we had the idea of using the Island outline as a background but this proved to be a distraction.

I offered to do a few sketches as a starting point but I am no graphic designer and I soon ran out of steam, so we passed it on to Simone Dickens who came up with the final design, which we all think looks really good.

EVOLUTION OF THE DESIGN

Having settled on the plant, Val and Bridgette exchanged ideas as Bridgette's lovely sketches proliferated.

Val wrote: "I like Phoenix, apart from the inference of the name which amuses me, because of how its fronds curve out and look soft and feathery, even though they aren't. There are two magnificent ones at the bottom of our road and I love to watch them wafting in the breeze.

However, I think the logo needs to be as simple as possible and so the tree or its fronds more stylised against the Island outline.

So – something with simpler, softer, more arching fronds but from the bottom of the Island. Maybe don't need the flowers."

Val also suggested perhaps making the trunk a bit smaller but moving it to the right so the branches radiate out from Ventnor.

Phoenix canariensis. Shutterstock

Simone writes … I began with some initial draft logo ideas based on the notes and ideas sent from Bridgette.

I played with ideas until I started to refine them, working to a shape that will work when reproduced on printed materials, websites etc.

I have a bit of a personal aversion to the idea of using the Island shape, having been asked to use it many, many times over the years when designing logos. As 'Wight' is in the title, is the island shape really required?

Having a long word such as 'Horticulture' can also cause problems when trying to keep a logo nice and compact (for use on sweatshirts and flyers etc.). So, bearing all that in mind, I sent a variety of shapes and fonts to the committee using a solid green to get the overall shape and style working before any colour was added to the mix.

Bridgette says: Simone's finished design was very much liked for its attractive reference to the *Phoenix canariensis* and its spacious simplicity. It doesn't resemble any other Island logo, and has avoided the cliché of using the shape of the Island. We hope you agree.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear Members

I am writing this during an exciting period of evolution for the Friends. We have our new name and are delighted to unveil our new logo in this issue. By the time you read this, you should have received the details of the new Objects to which the Charity Commission has given its prior consent. Once approved by our members, while not excluding VBG, the Objects will widen the scope of our activities, so that, with your help, we can extend what we do to promote and support parks and gardens and, particularly, horticultural education on the Isle of Wight.

We set out the reasons for this change to you in our report on the AGM in 'The Way Ahead' letter which we sent to you in August* and we were heartened by the understanding and encouragement shown in the responses that we received. We also set out some of our ideas for the future.

We are very proud of the history and achievements of the Friends' Society since its creation and we look forward to this new chapter. Please come with us on this important journey.

My deepest gratitude to all the Committee for their unfailing and united backing and positivity, and to Mike Fitt, our President, and many more for their support, advice and encouragement (you know who you are and you are much appreciated).

Congratulations to Ros and Simone for another splendid edition of *Ventnorensis* and we look forward to reporting on our progress in future issues.

Val Pitts
vbgfs.chairman@gmail.com

* *We send out our letters and notices by email to those of you who have given us permission to do so and have a short list of members who receive these through the post. It is possible that our email list is not completely up-to-date, so if you are reading this but have not received any emails from us recently and wish to do so, please get in touch so that we can update our records.*

Nursery News

Gerry Price of the Coastal Gardener is moving on, but her wonderful nursery is being taken on by our own Michelle Cain – see Page 15. For several years we have had reason to be grateful to Gerry. As well as offering discount to anyone showing their Friends membership card, she employed our apprentice Indi, giving her the experience which doubtless helped her application to Kew's Diploma Course.

We wish Gerry all the best in her new endeavors, and look out for more details about Michelle's plans for the nursery in the next *Ventnorensis*.

A view on *Ventnorensis* …

Welcome to this edition of *Ventnorensis*. In this packed edition we reflect the changes to which Val refers on the opposite page, not least in the tale of how our new logo came about [see Pages 2 and 3]. But the foremost impression you will take from this Issue is how coherent, how friendly and how united the Friends are.

There have been many lovely outings, near and further afield. Dave Fairlamb led a fascinating Botany Club walk on West High Down [Page 6], the trip to Farringford Garden was enjoyed by all [P21], and the visit to Calbourne Mill reminded us how rooted we are in ancient industry [Page 24]. It was unfortunate that the trip off-Island was on a day when the heavens opened, but as you will see on Page 28, West Dean proved delightful, despite the torrential rain.

Our Society has education at its core, and we report on the Discovery Day at Kew, which utterly inspired young gardening newbies [Page 26]. Michelle Cain revels in what plants teach us [Page 13], while Ruth Taylor recounts the story of gardener Peter Good, collector of over a hundred species new to the UK and sent to Kew Gardens, on a voyage with the sea captain who mapped the coast of Australia. Only since excavations for the notorious HS2 railway line have the remains of the captain been found and the history of the trip been celebrated [Page 16].

But ultimately as a Society we are friends, and we celebrate one anothers' achievements, [see the AGM Pages 10 and 11] the Harold Hillier Award to Simon and Debs Goodenough [Page 8], and my interview with Rosemary as she steps down after 25 years [Page 18]. She is an utter inspiration, and we will miss her. But not before she has proof-read this edition of *Ventnorensis*. Thank you Rosemary!

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please send me any contributions for the Spring edition, including reports of other botanic gardens you may have visited, by March 24th.

FRIENDS' OUTINGS

West High Down autumn ramble

Dave Fairlamb of Natural Links brightened a dull day with his brilliant knowledge

Cinnabar moth catapillar on Ragwort – not so camouflaged!

With the rain lashing the windscreen as I drove west along the Military Road in September, I wasn't too sure that our walk would live up to the promise on our poster of early autumn being a wonderful time in the natural world.

Luckily it dried up as we gathered in the car park and Dave assured us there would still be plenty to see. Sure enough, as we set off along the lane, with Dave setting the pace and level perfectly for our party, we were soon spotting some late treasures in the hedgerow. We moved on up to the open down and across to the cliff top to see what seabirds were about, all the while with Dave naming our sightings and relating interesting facts. Going back up through what Dave called 'Dingley Dell', a Dartford Warbler briefly appeared above a gorse bush right on cue as we were hearing about their lifestyle. As we returned along the lane, the sun attempted to shine and the temperature rose a little so that, finally, butterflies were indeed 'still on the wing' as promised.

It had been a wonderful excursion and is a route to remember for more walks as next year unfolds.

Val Pitts

Yellow footed bumblebee on Scabious

Schönbrunn Palace Gardens, Vienna

Some of you may be familiar with these wonderful gardens and park in Vienna. The BBC broadcast the summer concert from there. The formal beds in front of the palace are amazing in their traditional design. The baroque statues behind them are wonderful to behold. Some trees are clipped – what a job that must be! We had tea and cake in the Gloriette on the hill, allegedly built to improve the view from the palace. Worth climbing up though, just to see the city spread out below you.

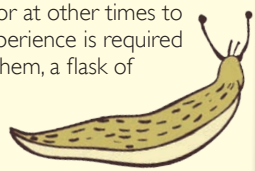
Bridgette Sibbick

Formal beds with baroque statues

Gardening Volunteers

Help is always required in the Garden which warmly welcomes 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 sensible clothing.

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



Harold Hillier Award for Simon and Debs Goodenough

Photos by Rosemary Stewart

A "huge gap" in the history of The Harold Hillier Award, which honours an Isle of Wight horticulturist each year, has finally been filled.

Private Ceremony: Former VBGFS Chairman Sally Peake, Simon Goodenough, Debs Goodenough and VBGFS Chairman Val Pitts

Simon and Debs Goodenough were presented with the Award by Val Pitts, Chairman, along with a former Chairman, Sally Peake, and the long time Secretary, Rosemary Stewart.

Simon Goodenough was for 25 years the Curator of Ventnor Botanic Garden. His wife Debs was Nursery Manager at VBG, also looking after the Volunteers, sharing skills and enthusiasm and, in particular, establishing the seed collecting and packaging group, which continues to this day. Debs moved to Osborne as Head Gardener and later became Head Gardener for (the then) Prince Charles at Highgrove.

When Simon took up his role at Ventnor, he instigated the Friends of Ventnor Botanic Garden (VBGFS), a charitable organisation which raised money for projects within the Garden for which the Council (then owner of the Garden) didn't have the budget.

Val said: "You created something very special indeed: not just the wonderful and innovative Botanic Garden, which gained an international reputation, but the huge group of loyal and passionate supporters, The Friends, who have, during their 37 years, raised huge amounts of money for their beloved garden and had lots of fun along the way."

She added that more than £330,000 has flowed through the Friends to VBG in donations in the last 12 years.

The Harold Hillier Award was set up by the family of horticulturalist Sir Harold Hillier to honour somebody for their outstanding contribution to horticulture on the Isle of Wight. It has been presented almost annually since 1980. Val said: "In presenting the Award to Simon and Debs, this fills a huge gap in our Harold Hillier Hall of Fame."

The couple were both working at Kew Gardens in London when, in 1986, the VBG Curatorship job came up. They came to take a look, and fell in love with the Island.

The job was Simon's.

Soon after Simon and Debs arrived, the Island had a summer drought, followed by the first of two hurricanes in the winter of 1987. The Botanic Garden was devastated, losing much of its content. So Simon took the opportunity to develop a garden very different, with naturalistic planting of flora from their place of origin. The regional gardens which now exist were the result – Mediterranean, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and America (for which Simon commissioned the much-loved and missed VBG totem pole).

Simon Goodenough with the VBG totem pole he commissioned for the American garden at VBG

Simon went on to be Curator of The National Botanic Garden of Wales and then Estate Manager at Folly Farm in Berkshire. Since retiring to Chillerton the couple have made quite an impact on the local scene. Gillian Belben of Chillerton said: "Simon and Debs set about looking after the borders on our Village Green, inserting all sorts of exotic and interesting plants. Once retired – and unable to stop working! – they now help a team of gardening volunteers on four more community sites across the parish, sharing knowledge, giving seeds, cuttings and at times entire trees!'

Veteran VBG Tour Guide Jonyth Hill said: "I will always think of this as Simon's Garden, with his insight and passion. It is a privilege to have benefitted from his knowledge over 30 years and to thank both him and Debs for their friendship."

Toby Beazley, now himself Head Gardener at Osborne, thanked Debs for her encouragement in his gardening career.

The Harold Hillier Award is a glass and silver vase made by Isle of Wight Glass. It will be held by the Goodenoughs for the year, and they were each presented with a certificate.

As the Harold Hillier Vase has to be handed back by its annual recipient, certificates have recently been produced as a permanent keepsake. At the AGM, also presented with certificates marking their status as Harold Hillier Award Winners were Pat Luckett, who received the award in 2004; Rosemary Stewart in 2016; John Harrison, received in 2021; and Mike Fitt, in 2022.

Pat Luckett: Awarded in 2004

Rosemary Stewart: Awarded in 2016

John Harrison: Awarded in 2021

Mike Fitt: Awarded in 2022

THE 'EXTRA MILE' RHS CERTIFICATE

Awarded to Bridgette Sibbick

Jenny Parker writes . . . As an Affiliated Society of the RHS we have a certificate to present annually to a member of our society who has gone the extra mile. This year the committee have chosen one of their number and managed to keep it a surprise! Or I hope a surprise!

We wanted this certificate to go to Bridgette Sibbick, who joined our Committee knowing the troubles we faced but was willing to come and help. Not everyone's idea of fun but for Bridgette with her love of the Garden and her upbeat, positive personality much appreciated.

Surprise surprise! Jenny presents to Bridgette Sibbick

Bridgette has always had a pivotal role at VBG not only in gardening but taking on "Artist in residence" with her husband John, and donating art work to the Garden. Her philosophy is that everything has potential and she is often to be seen taking home "rubbish" to produce ever more interesting bespoke works of art. She was a generous contributor to Secret Art, and nurtured neglected plants and grew cuttings for the successful fund raising plant sales, along with welcoming new volunteers. This year she has made wooden signs for the Garden (naturally using unwanted tree prunings) and used her calligraphy skills to fill in all the backdated Harold Hillier certificates. I hope she approves of the writing on this certificate, which in the fullness of time can become a paper aeroplane no doubt.

Finally, I must share with you that volunteering is always the greatest of fun when, at coffee break, which is the most important part of volunteering, Bridgette shares her life experiences: – you can't believe the places she has been, the things she has done and the jobs she has had. There is quite a lot of intriguing history and lots to be learnt from this extraordinary lady.

From the Committee on behalf of the Friends, thank you Bridgette.

Weather in the Garden

April to September 2024 **by Chris Watts**

Just when it looked as though April would be a significantly dry month, the first since last September, along came three consecutive days (25th-27th) with heavy rain; this totalled 64mm, and shot the overall total to around twice the average! So it was left until June to end the seemingly endless falls of rain which had persisted over the autumn/winter/spring period.

Dry June: But rain never far away

The data in the table below essentially tells the story of the weather over these six months. Rainfall was above average, but two months, June and August, were reasonably dry. But rain was never far away, as shown by the last column. Temperatures stayed close to average, nothing extreme, and the top temperature of the year came on the 30th July with 27.4°C, a fairly modest value.

Regarding damage to vegetation in the Garden, two consecutive days in August are worthy of mention: on the 20th, a branch of a eucalyptus tree came down over the road, and the following day saw the loss of a limb from an Indian bean tree. However, there is some debate over whether either event was actually weather related: winds were not particularly strong on the first day, but the 21st did see winds strengthening from the south west.

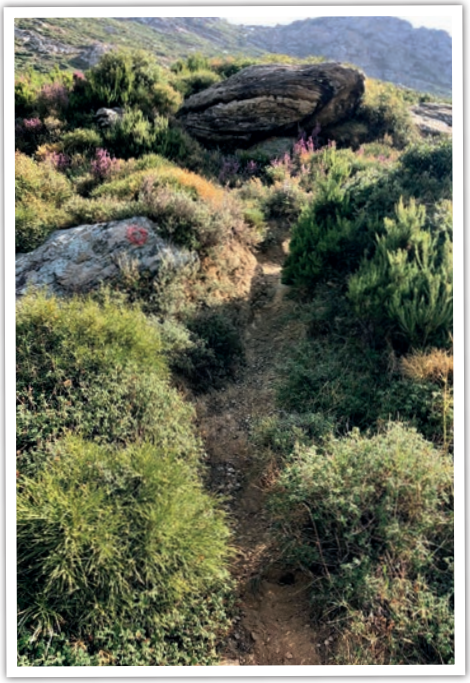
A heavy fall of rain came on the 5th September, almost 37mm, and at the time of writing (mid-October) remains the wettest day of the year so far.

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
April	10.4+	100.6++	10	11.3	0	28.3	5
May	13.8+	64.6++	11	14.9	1	16.0	6
June	15.3	19.6----	2	17.4	11	11.3	9
July	17.0	70.6++	11	18.1	12	14.6	5
August	18.0+	46.7--	7	18.4	23	15.9	6
September	15.5	127.3++	15	16.0	7	36.9	8

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

Nature's Own Garden Part II

There is much to learn from the mysteries of plants, says **Michelle Cain**



Epiphany moment: A walk up Mount Oshi through the scratchy landscape

In the last issue, I began a story about how my horticultural trips to the Mediterranean inspired a shift in my perspective and a re-evaluation of my approach to gardening as a whole.

After spending time in the Côte d'Azur in 2021, Southern Evia in Greece was my next destination later that year – a place where I have returned several times since. Evia, by the way, is actually Greece's second largest island after Crete, but nobody seems to ever have heard of it. You may remember seeing coverage on the news in August 2021, when devastating fires swept across the northern part of the island, destroying over 500,000 hectares of forest along with homes and livelihoods – a horrible example of climate change in action if ever there was one.

I headed South and my first impression of Evia, being much drier than rainy Corfu (which actually has higher rainfall levels than London) was that the landscape was much more barren, but on closer inspection, the island is clothed in an abundance of plant life. Squirting cucumbers *Ecballium elaterium* and wavy-leaved *Verbascum undulatum* grow by almost every roadside, along with silver-leafed *Ballotta pseudodictamnus* and *Phlomis fruiticosa* (Jerusalem sage), punctuated by the odd bright blue flower of *Chicorium intybus,* or if it's the right time of year the tall flower spikes of the bulb *Drimia maritima,* which looks a bit like a fox-tail lily *(Eremurus)* and was previously known as *Urginea.* (Have you noticed how plants change their names more often than pop stars?) Common and giant fennels, *Foeniculum vulgare* and *Ferula communis* respectively are regular sights, as are Greek cyclamen *(Cyclamen graecum)*, Autumn crocus *(Crocus sativa)* and colchicums *(Colchicum autumnale)*.

The landscape in general is that of the phrygana, characterised by low, dome-shaped shrubs, made up of combinations of some of the aforementioned plants along with heather, lavender, rosemary and thyme *(Thymus capitata)*. As well as the usual water-conserving tactics of silvery foliage and stunted growth, thorns or spines seemed to be the survival technique of choice here, the most common plant being *Sarcopoterium spinosum* or Thorny Burnet, one I'd first encountered whilst planting up the Delos

Garden. From a distance it's almost identical to *Euphorbia acanthothamnos,* the Greek Spiny Spurge, both prickly, but with ever-so-slightly different leaves.

Whilst on a walk up Mount Oshi, passing through the scratchy landscape (in shorts as usual) I witnessed the perfect scene, which together with everything I had previously seen in Southern France, brought about my epiphany moment (pictured), but even with my GCSE A* in Photography, the snap doesn't do justice to the reality.

It might sound obvious, but what struck me is how, without intervention, these plants had arranged themselves into something far more perfect than even the greatest garden designer could ever hope to create. Just like in France, this was *nature's own garden,* but this is about far more than just an aesthetically pleasing scene. In both of these 'wild' settings, plants were all happily co-existing, but I started to wonder how was it that they were all in the right proportions, no one plant in particular dominating? How exactly does this happen? And *why,* for example, do the lavender and cistus grow together in such abundance in France? I would never have regarded them as perfect partners in a UK garden setting, but of course they absolutely are – they're best friends, but what makes them so? What is the relationship between them?

'Without intervention, these plants had arranged themselves into something far more perfect than even the greatest garden designer could ever hope to create'

In part it could be due to plants enjoying the same conditions such as soil type, pH, aspect, light and water levels, but there are many other factors at play here, such as genetics, plus ones not yet fully understood, like the symbiotic relationship between plants and underground mycelium networks, or the fine tuned and highly efficient sensory capabilities they use to communicate with each other and insects via sound waves or chemical messages.

Plants still hold many mysteries, but have been proven to form alliances with other plants, emit and respond to sound frequencies, and their hormones and genes perform similar functions to those in humans. *The Secret Genius of Plants,* a two-part series about recent scientific investigations into just this subject has appeared on *BBC iPlayer.* I would urge you to watch it – it's quite mind-blowing. A sweetcorn plant, for example, when attacked by a particularly ravenous caterpillar, emits a 'volatile' chemical compound that 'calls' specific predatory wasps to come and eat them.

I sometimes share my own (scientifically untested) theories (call them 'crackpot' if you will) with my gardening clients, one of which is that 'weeds' often grow next to plants that they look like in order to somehow conceal themselves. People initially think that this assertion is very much 'out there', but when they start to observe in the way that I do, they see it. Go out into your garden and have a look if you don't believe me. Apologies if of course your garden is extremely well-kept and you don't have any weeds, but you'll just have to trust me on this one.

[It seems, writes Val Pitts, that Michelle is not so far 'out there' after all. Vavilovian or weed mimicry is a known phenomenon in crop plants. Google Weed Science 2014 **62**:207–216 *Vavilovian Mimicry: Nikolai Vavilov and His Little-Known Impact on Weed Science,* J. Scott McElroy. A fascinating story of the clash between science and politics in Stalin's Russia]

Another of my crackpot theories, if you're interested, is that of roses being 'allergic' to metal and plastic. Have you ever bought a rose with a plastic label, where the stem that's tagged is either dead or dying back? I bet at least some of you have noticed this!

I now seem to be referred to as 'The Rose Expert of Bembridge', which is quite funny, as I'm no Charles Quest-Ritson or Michael Marriot, but I do know a thing or two about pruning them and I am absolutely positive that they don't like being tied up with plastic or wire. You should always use string or twine, or thin rope if the stems are really thick and old. It's fine to tie the roses to metal wires or structures, so long as the twine is a barrier in between. I attach the plastic loop tag either to a horizontal wire on the fence or wall, or to a separate label in the ground.

Anyway, I digress somewhat, but hopefully I'm managing to convey to you that there is still so much that we don't fully understand about plants, the relationships between them and their responses to external factors.

'The debate - the act of gardening alone disturbs wildlife to an extent and also interrupts the functions of the plants themselves'

Having spent the majority of my career gardening primarily from an aesthetic perspective, I realised on the side of that hill in Greece that going forward I wanted to take a more thoughtful and ecologically sound approach. The debate in my mind rages on as to whether or not I achieve that on a daily basis, because the act of gardening alone disturbs wildlife to an extent and also interrupts the functions of the plants themselves. I continue to be curious about the unanswered questions and as well as valuing the benefits to wildlife of our own native plants, I now appreciate their aesthetic merits within a garden setting (I leave the wild irises well alone).

However, I also know that biodiversity, both within soil and plant life is key, so when introducing plants from other climatic regions, we must bear in mind that our climate is not that of the Mediterranean, South Africa or anywhere else in the world and the plants will therefore perform somewhat differently. We should consider their care within the context of our own local conditions and so modify our management of them. For example, plants from Mediterranean regions will grow much larger and more lushly than they would in their natural habitat, so in a garden setting should be kept clipped, otherwise they become overgrown and can spoil the aesthetic.

At *Sissinghurst,* we knew this at the time of planting the *Delos Garden.* Olivier Filippi came to visit us and was critical of the close placement of plants, telling us that some of these would grow to three times the size they would in the Mediterranean. We decided to adopt the concept of 'goat pruning': regular clipping emulating what would happen on the hillsides of Greece, whereby goats would nibble off fresh young growth, keeping plants contained and managing the hummocks and domes that are so ubiquitous in such landscapes. Whether you choose to do this depends on what you are trying to achieve, but environmental context bears an impact and should at least feature in your thought-process.

And yes, Beth Chatto had it right with the adage 'right plant, right place'. Some of you may know that I recently bought *The Coastal Gardener* nursery in St Helens and in thinking of a name change, I must admit I was tempted by *Wight Plant, Wight Place,* but don't worry, I didn't run with that one. It's currently a toss up between *Botany Bay Nursery* and *Plant Island* (answers on a postcard please). Open every Saturday and Sunday from March 2025. Watch this space!

The Captain and the Gardener

In July this year the village of Donington, Lincs, celebrated the life of their 19th century forebear, Matthew Flinders. Largely unsung in this country, the sea captain was responsible for mapping the coast of Australia. His ship carried botanist Robert Brown, and gardener Peter Good – whose collecting and cataloging successfully introduced over 100 new species to Kew Gardens. But it was not an easy voyage, as **Ruth Taylor,** author of a book on Flinders and Brown, describes

Poor Peter Good died 'of the dysentery' in June 1803. Kew's humble but highly capable gardener circumnavigated Australia with Matthew Flinders on HMS *Investigator* from 1801 – 1803. He had been taken aboard in England through the auspices of Joseph Banks, botanist and President of the Royal Society. Good's job was to collect, catalogue and care for over 1000 seeds and plants on the voyage, alongside botanist Robert Brown, botanical artist Ferdinand Bauer, and labourer, John Allen. According to Flinders, the day after HMS Investigator completed her circumnavigation Peter Good was taken into Sydney's colonial hospital, but died before recovering from dysentery which had been caused by contaminated water from Timor. His death 'a zealous, worthy man … was regretted by all' stated Flinders in his *Voyage to Terra Australis* (1814).

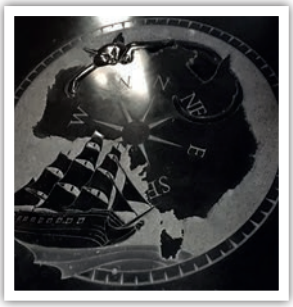
Flinders remembered: Window of Donington Church

Flinders returned to England in 1810 after an agonising six years imprisonment under the French after he docked in Mauritius, not realising that the French and English were at war. He survived Peter Good by 11 years. In 1814 Flinders died of renal failure, aged just 40. Neither would have died with modern medical management.

Peter Good's last resting place was St. Phillips Church, Sydney. His seed and plant collection were enlarged by Brown and Bauer in Sydney, Tasmania, northern New South Wales and Norfolk Island before they returned to England in 1805. Many of Peter Good's seeds propagated and occupy a permanent place in British horticulture.

Flinders' burial took place in St James's Churchyard, north London. Forty-five years later, in 1859, his sister-in-law, Isabella Tyler visited to find that the churchyard had been closed to make way for the building of Euston Railway Station in 1837 and its enlargement in 1846. Flinders' grave was effectively lost.

Whilst digging under Euston Station in preparation for the HS2 line in 2019 Flinders' coffin was discovered. Its lead coffin plate bore the inscription: *Captn Matthew Flinders RN Died 19 July 1814 Aged 40 Years.*



Grave symbol: Unearthed during HS2 excavation

It took five years for eight local committee members of the Matthew Flinders Bring Him Home group to organise Flinders' re-interment on Saturday 13 July 2024. Attendees at the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood in Flinders' birthplace, Donington, Lincolnshire, included 100 of Flinders' descendants, 80 Australians from Adelaide, Tasmania and Sydney, 10 guests from Mauritius and two Indigenous descendants of Bungaree, the Aboriginal ambassador on *Investigator.* The church bells rang out, the sound echoing off rows of neat terraced houses.

Flinders' new coffin was built by Robert Hartle, one of the archaeologists who unearthed Flinders' grave in the old burial ground under Euston Station. He made a handsome replica with a studded metal pattern on dark wood. Brought into the village by hearse it was followed by Royal Navy and Merchant Navy flag bearers, then carried by Royal Navy sailors and officers to the church where an eighteen-gun salute sounded. The Bishop of Lincoln introduced the service followed by a welcome from the Governor of South Australia.

All the tributes referred to Flinders as a fearless explorer, meticulous cartographer, leader of men, someone dedicated to duty, to selflessness, and to humanity. Flinders was assisted in his arduous endeavours not only by his crew but by his vital Aboriginal companion, Bungaree, who smoothed relations with coastal Aborigines; not to forget Flinders' beloved cat, Trim.

Once the coffin was set on trestles by the grave the specially designed British-Australian flag covering it was ceremonially folded and presented to Rachel Flinders Lewis, Flinders' three-times great-granddaughter. Sailors lowered the coffin into the deep grave within the church.

Holy water was sprinkled on the coffin followed by handfuls of earth from Australia, Mauritius, Donington and London, denoting Flinders' life's journey. The magnificent black ledger stone designed locally by a husband and wife, lay next to the grave to be placed on top after it had been filled and levelled. The stone was engraved with the map of Australia under which sailed *Investigator* and atop which curled Trim.

Flinders wrote in his journal that if anyone was to propose a voyage of discovery by his graveside he would rise up and embrace the challenge. If only someone had spoken up.

Details of Peter Good's life from Peter Good *edited by Alex S. George and David T Moore. Details of Flinders' life from* The Cat and the Captain *by Ruth Taylor www.ruthtaylorauthor.uk*

Roz Whistance writes: I noticed in the report of the Donington celebrations that a rare Wollemi Pine has been planted in recognition of the Australian connection, see Michelle Cain's article, Issue Autumn 2023.

BBC News reports: Speaking about the tree, Eleanor Stevenson, a volunteer involved in planning the reburial ceremony, said: "We're ever so lucky to have this. Kew Gardens has asked the team at the church to collect mature pine cones for propagation".

Educating the UK: Ruth Taylor's book

The incomparable Rosemary Stewart

Roz Whistance hears her story as she retires from the Friends committee

'Helping' Grandpa: Garden in Newport, 1941

'Do it while you can,' says Rosemary Stewart, showing me photos of her trekking through the jungle in Malawi. As life lessons go it's a pretty good one it seems, because she never seems to stop. Now after 25 years, she has stepped down from the Committee of the Friends' Society. Her curiosity, enthusiasm and sense of adventure have made her a rich asset to everything with which she is, and has been, involved.

Rosemary has led a fascinating life, shaped by some difficult circumstances. Her father died in 1940, when she was just three, having contracted meningitis in the forces, and she and her mother moved from Bournemouth to live with her father's parents in Newport. This was wartime and she recalls: "I was going to tea with a little girl from school. Overnight they were bombed and she was killed."

Flower picking in Newtown: with grandmother and a friend

Her mother's love of wildflowers was an early influence. "After the war we would catch a bus on a Saturday and go into the countryside, picking primroses, snowdrops and bluebells. Mother would make small bunches to take to old people."

Rosemary went to the Talbot Heath school in Bournemouth. "My mother thought going to school there would open up the world to me – though it must have been hard to send me away." She loved it, and her days were filled with music: "I played the piano and became head of the choir." On leaving school her mother sent her to school for a term in Switzerland! "It was very posh, and there were just a handful of ordinary girls like me. But we skied every afternoon, and studied French. And I did German, and thoroughly enjoyed it."

She did a bit of au pairing in Florence, then in Germany, then to London to Mrs Hoster's Secretarial College in South Kensington. "It was just like boarding school," she grins. Her skills got her a job at the BBC, for "a funny little woman who edited a magazine called *London Calling Europe*. So I learnt all about printing and proof reading." She moved then to Outside Broadcasts Sound, on *Down Your Way*. "There was a lively office next door with Brian Johnson and Raymond Baxter. I went to Wimbledon with Max Robertson, who used to commentate. And once I had a lift back with Fred Perry!"

But age 23 she had itchy feet. "I saw an advert for a 'ski hostess' able to speak German. That was me!" It was a small firm, Ski-Plan, and she helped write the brochure, then after four winter seasons she was offered was offered a holiday in Andermatt in Switzerland. "Our ski rep there said: 'That chap at the lift is the one we had all the trouble with. He booked late, there wasn't any accommodation but he said I'm coming anyway! Even his passport was out of date, but he was waved through: 'That's alright Doctor, just make sure when you come back you get a new one!' Imagine that now!"

There was more. "When he got there he found he'd forgotten to pack his trousers! So he bought new knickerbockers. A week later I came, and I was wearing knickerbockers, and no-one else was. So I introduced myself and we skied all day, and within two days I knew he was the one for me!"

Doctor Gordon Stewart and Rosemary Fry were married within a month, at St Mary's Church, Carisbrooke. It was World Cup Day, 1966.

Gordon was a psychiatrist, and an interest in new therapy trials in prisons led him from the NHS to join the prison service. They lived at first in prison accommodation but having their own home near Bicester "got me started with growing petunias, and as it was near an allotment, I grew stuff to eat."

The birth of James, then Robert, meant little time for gardening, and when a job came up at Parkhurst they moved to the Island. Rosemary threw herself into supporting the Friends of the Isle of Wight Music Service, which helped shape her sons' love of music, over years using her travel and language skills to help when the youth orchestra toured abroad. Within a couple of years she was Chairman. In 1996, looking for a change, she saw an advert requesting help at the Botanic Garden.

Young family: With Gordon, James and Robert, Bicester 1972

"Gordon was off sailing, so I went and there was Deb [Goodenough] and Jonyth and other people, all deadly keen. And we weeded and planted and gathered seeds. Deb would say 'Look at this special seed, isn't that a really interesting shape!' She did seed courses, and grafting and all sorts of interesting stuff." The Friends grew, and the secretary retired. "And I never looked back. It was life really."

Intrepid hiker: Malawi

The Garden linked a lifetime love of travel with horticulture — she went on many wildlife tours in her 60s and 70s, after Gordon had died in 2005. "The exotics at VBG led me to seek out the special flora on my travels. Our small houseplants grow huge in Malawi and I marvelled at streptocarpus clinging to tree trunks among ferns and mosses."

She is very proud of her sons, who followed in their father's footsteps. Robert, also a psychiatrist but specialising in peri-natal problems, also qualified in Edinburgh, and James is a senior researcher/lecturer in socio-technology at the University. "I love to be in that wonderful city and especially to visit the Royal Botanic Garden, though now I hire a buggy to get round!" [See Edinburgh Botanic Garden, Issue 31 No 1]

She's been spending more time in Kelso recently. "Robert found the right girl and I have another delightful grandson now 7 months!"

At the recent AGM Rosemary stepped down from the Friends' Committee after 25 years. Sally made a presentation, referring to responsibilities of helping to run a formal Charity, such as applying for grants to enable large projects in the Garden. "Rosemary infuses an infectious delight in all she embraces – who has not learned to love her cheerful messages exhorting us all to get involved in walks and talks." Sally also pointed to Rosemary's invaluable IT skills, embracing everything new despite being the eldest by some years on the Committee! "However, unlike some IT nerds, Rosemary is a genuinely warm human being, so she has also been the 'point of contact' to so many of our members – everyone knows Rosemary, so news of our wider community can be passed on."

With Gordon, 2003: He died in 05

With Robert and James 15 years ago

Retiring as Secretary of the Friends 2018 - with Caroline Peel

Sally making the presentation to Rosemary, 17th July 2024

All the Friends say thank you to Rosemary, and hope to see plenty more of her.

FRIENDS' OUTING

The 'careless-order'd Garden'

Rosemary Stewart and Friends visit Tennyson's Farringford

Careless-order'd garden: lovingly recreated

On a very hot day in June I was so looking forward to joining the visit to Farringford with my son, wife and their three-month old baby. After a friendly lunch at Dimbola we were met at beside the greenhouse by head gardener Ellen Penstone-Smith. In 2017, she and her husband Alastair took on the huge task of turning a field of old bricks into a replica of the Walled Garden so beloved of Alfred Lord Tennyson and his wife Emily – and what a success it has all been!

In 1854, the poet wrote of his 'careless-order'd garden' ['To the Rev F.D Maurice'] and they have recreated the landscaping and relaxed planting schemes from those early days, while improving the habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. Two 4m-wide mixed borders are planted with colourful flowers and shrubs, with the far side primarily for vegetables and fruit, with cordons around the walls.

Roses were intermingled with tall clumps of old favourites such as diascia, monarda, poppies, lavender and mallow, spilling over on to the paths and topped by giant cardoons, their heads silhouetted against the blue sky. On the far side giant nasturtium flanked the netted clumps of healthy kale. Sweet peas abound. Emily could sit high at the house end in a cool little arbour, taking in the planting and the view. Today's visitor sitting there can also admire the cleverly-planted beautiful yellow rose called *The Poet's Wife*. By the wall were plant 'theatres' overflowing with pansies and bacopa, sweet peas and gypsophila, and there were big slates chalked up with some of Alfred's poetry. A very special award-winning garden for the Island to be proud of.

Plant 'theatres': Overflowing with pansies and bacopa

You can explore the copse with its woodland perennials, and walk round the recreated historic parkland with lovely views of the house and downs.

Some of us took the superbly-organised house tour as well. Everyone had a headset to hear the details but knowledgeable guides in every room were ready to answer questions. The care and quality of the restoration from furniture to near original wallpaper is impressive and you really could imagine Alfred sitting at his desk, relaxing by the fire or looking at the stunning views from the windows.

If you haven't already been there then plan to go next year and take your visitors!

Boredom busting, olives and animals

Jonyth Hill resumes her tour, interweaving the fascinating Hospital history with its later development

Where the potting shed is located on the downward path away from the dry river bed near the large greenhouse, was originally an isolation ward for male patients on full bed rest. They were pushed outside daily often with rubber sheets to protect the bedclothes, and all the windows and doors open all the time except in fog. Returning patients have commented about the many clothes they had to wear in bed to keep warm, including hats, scarves and gloves!

Proceeding down the path beyond the potting shed, there were three horse chestnut trees, but two became diseased and had to be removed. As olive trees had been successfully grown in the Mediterranean garden since 2001, it was decided to create a Greek Olive Grove in this area. One beautiful Greek olive was then about 700 years old but has sadly died. Chris had found it outside a greenhouse in Belgium, and contacted the Friends of the Botanic Garden' who always supplied a lot of money for projects, asking could they buy it. They agreed to it, but Chris didn't tell us how much it cost to get it back here!

Following the original paths from the Hospital time downwards, the path divides. The one leading to the meadow was originally cultivated with garden produce for the Hospital, and only when becoming a public space did it become the meadow, where the playground is now situated. In front is the original Japanese Garden, developed in the early 2000s, with its red bridge, and some wood from the demolished Ventnor Pier used during its construction. At the top of the dry riverbed is the 'Torri Gate', added later with more cherry trees and other Asian species. Since then the whole top area has been extended eastward and is now called the East Asian Project.

In the bushes above the gate can be seen the remnants of the measuring device for the sunshine hours. This was in place during the time of the Hospital as the pharmacists kept almost continuous weather records. In fact, as well as soil samples, these records were taken into consideration when Sir Harold Hillier was proposing growing Southern Hemisphere plants.

One must remember, when next following the main path through the garden, that all this area right up to the coast was cultivated with fruit, vegetables and patches of fruit trees. The walled garden had espalier fruit trees and strawberries, and the wall was constructed by the male patients sometime between 1909 and 1923.

Grade 5 manual labour was introduced to help build up their immunity and helped with boredom. There was also Grade 4 exercise for the female patients also working in the garden but in their area only, away from the men! The wall constructed by the male patients amazingly has only ever had one area that fell down, otherwise only needing re-pointing.

Along the main path there are late day plants grown, including *Fuchsias* and *Salvias*. These are flora that flower later in the season. Frustrated bees can be seen trying

to pollinate the species *Fuchsias,* because originally when these *Fuchsias* were in flower in New Zealand, and because NZ slipped away from the main continent very early on, they didn't have big pollinators – the first flowering plants were pollinated by wind, water or insects including beetles. In fact the large *Magnolia grandiflora 'Charles Dickens'* in the Walled Garden would still be pollinated by beetles. Inside the beautiful white waxy flowers there can still be seen a small cone-like structure, reminiscent of the pine cones that would have been growing on the early pines. This particular *Magnolia* was chosen by Simon because Charles Dickens stayed in Bonchurch and wrote some chapters of *David Copperfield* here. The variety of Salvias are all related to the common sage – *Salvia officinalis* – and their leaves all have a distinctive smell, some more pleasant than others!

Building immunity: Male TB patients constructing the wall

The Walled Garden was used in the early days to grow more tender plants such as *Romneya californica* (the first logo for VBG) and *Melianthus major.* These, with warmer temperatures, no longer need that extra protection. Even banana plants will now fruit here. Also growing here is one of Harold Hillier's trees – *Firmania simplex* from China, the wood often used for musical instruments.

On the opposite lawn, the cultivated area was once used to grow blackcurrants and raspberries but now there are two Champion trees. This means they are officially the largest in the UK or England. *Arbutus xalapensis – 'The Madrone'* – is thought to be from seed that Sir Harold Hillier brought back from his honeymoon in Mexico. It has the most tactile trunk, being so smooth a surface, and in Spring peels its cinnamon coat to reveal patches of lime green. The other Champion Tree is *The Alpine Cider Gum – Eucalyptus archeri* which also has a colourful peeling bark but smaller leaves than most of this species. It is here that one is most likely to see one of our delightful red squirrels in Autumn, because of the walnut tree.

Mid-way along this path divides but the herbaceous border ahead was once where the pigsties were housed, as well as hutches for rabbits, a stable for the pony and a garage where the Medical Superintendent kept his car. This colourful area, with a great mix of species, comes into its own in July and August, having originally been the Flower Arrangers' borders in the 1990s.

From here one can go in two different directions. Facing south one can see a metal gate, a glimpse of the sea beyond, and on each side some steps. The gate is the entrance to a 350 foot tunnel with the original idea as early as the 1870s that it would be a way for the patients to get down to the beach. The money was not forthcoming until the 1880s when, because it was in fact too high for access to the beach, metal rails were laid and it was used as a conduit for garden rubbish, which the Victorian gardeners could not compost for lack of tools. The Hospital had a pony and cart to carry rubbish to the entrance.

FRIENDS' TRIP

Flour Power

Val Pitts relates the story of Calbourne Water Mill

The Friends' last visit of the year was to Calbourne Water Mill. After a convivial lunch in the excellent tearoom, we listened to a fascinating and enthusiastic talk by Sally Chaucer, the owner, followed by a tour of the mill buildings, where the history of milling through the ages was unfolded – not as a museum piece, but as a living, working history and an important part of the Island's heritage.

Sally Chaucer: wide ranging talk

Calbourne was in the top 20 per cent of most populated places in Norman England, and in the Domesday book of 1086, the Water Mill is recorded as a big mill, with two mills, two sets of working stones, a malthouse, a brewery and a bakery. It therefore has a history of at least 1000 years and it has continued working with an unbroken record of ownership up to the present day. Sally explained how the happy combination of landscape and geology, taken together with archaeological evidence from the surrounding area, make it likely that milling has happened here for much longer, possibly back into prehistoric times.

The source of the mill's power, the pretty Caul Bourne stream is fed by three springs and the local flint, gravel, sand and clay geology is perfect for creating clay-based pools, or cauldrons, each higher than the other, to store the water. Water, controlled by wooden sluice boards or gates, is fed down from pool to pool to turn the water wheel, which can quickly produce more power than many men or horses to drive the pit wheel within the oldest part of the mill. The surrounding woodland would provide the mill with the timber needed for tools and machinery.

The pit wheel, which recently suffered a catastrophic breakage, has now been repaired and, following the fitting of metal balancing wedges sourced by Vectis Archaeological Trust, we were the first group to see the wonderful sight of it turning again. Soon, once new wooden teeth and wedges can be fitted to the wheel which turns the stones, the mill will be producing its flour again, continuing that long history.

Sally showed us the two types of stone used: the Derbyshire Grit stone, which completely mills each grain of wheat into a fine wholemeal flour – nothing added, nothing taken away: and the other precious French quartz Burr Stones which mill a large flake wholemeal flour. When sieved, this gives unique stoneground white flour.

Moving on in time, the Victorians needed to find a new way to mill white flour for the growing number of elite classes. In 1878, the Weeks family, recognising the demand for white flour by such as Queen Victoria and Tennyson and other eminent people,

Water wheel: powering the mill for centuries

decided to a put in a cutting edge, three-storey red brick building, called a Roller Mill, attached to the original ancient water mill, still to be run on water.

Very quickly there was an increasing demand for this high quality fine white flour, produced by metal rollers which, compared to the dressing of the old mill stones, could be quickly replaced. The roller milled flour was sieved 6-8 times producing a beautiful fine white flour for luxury foods. In many places the old mills, with their rough stoneground wholemeal flours, were no longer in demand, and the majority closed down. The stone water mill at Calbourne continued, however, as it used the stones to mill animal feed.

With the increase in production, new power sources were needed to supplement the water power and in turn they bought a Standing Engine to provide steam power, then a diesel engine and, in 1916 installed a Stockport Gas Engine which used anthracite to generate the gas. Sally related a story of a boy who worked in the engine room, but who would have to frequently rush outside for fresh air as the fumes made him sick. As the 'boy' was in his nineties when he told her this tale, we can assume that, remarkably, it had no longterm effect.

Health 'n' safety? The 1916 Stockport Gas Engine used anthracite to generate gas

Sally's talk ranged widely, covering the politics of flour and control of the food supply through the ages, with stories of Corn Laws and Clipper Ship races, food regulations and additives and the takeover of bread production by the big milling companies, leading to the closure of most local mills. Through all this, Calbourne has survived and we are blessed to have one of the oldest examples – unspoilt, in situ, with its range of evolving technology making The Water Mill unique in the world. As Sally says, it is the living culture of the Island, embodying the ethos of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve showing the interconnection between nature, people and places.

Please go and support this wonderful place in its idyllic location. Check the website for opening times and events. **www.calbournewatermill.co.uk**

With thanks to Sally Chaucer for providing notes

If anyone reading this article has any family connections with or stories and pictures about the mill, Sally would love to hear from you to preserve the social history of the place. Please contact Sally on ***thewatermill@hotmail.co.uk***

The Royal Parks Guild Discovery Day 2024 at Kew Gardens

Catrina Richardson, Horticulture Tutor, Isle of Wight College, describes an unforgettable day for her students

1st October 2024

We were really lucky to be invited to attend this great event for trainees, apprentices and horticulture students from across the country. We got the chance to see cutting edge innovation and technology being developed in horticulture, to meet a wide range of industry professionals as well as inspirational young people at all different stages of their training.

During the morning, our students participated brilliantly with industry peers in break-out sessions on questions such as: How can we make horticulture a more accessible career?; What are the potential opportunities for horticulture for technological development?; and How can we help horticulturalists to make a positive environmental/ecological impact?

Some of the ideas and opinions generated from this Discovery Day will be fed back directly to key industry stakeholders and government.

The students also saw some amazing presentations by innovators, developing green solutions to improve our environment. Who knew that you can now generate green electricity from soil; use smart technology that listens to bees worldwide to monitor and improve biodiversity; or grow modular living walls from fungal mycelium?

The students were able to explore some of the 300 acres of the Royal Botanic Gardens – a living 'museum of plants' from across the world. They were guided by trainees, apprentices and staff from Kew. One tour learnt about the alpine houseplants critically endangered by climate change, that can survive with little more than rock dust and just the right amount of water. Other tours looked at woodland management, tropical plants, vegetable gardens and herbaceous borders.

Inspired by horticulture: Discovery Day group from the Island

There was an inspiring talk on the future of garden design from RHS Chelsea award-winning garden designer

Ann-Marie Powell, and school children spoke eloquently about the importance of growing and the environment, and performed in the Tree Council choir.

Throughout the day, speakers and participants discussed how they got into horticulture and then how they developed their career paths – it was so positive for the students to hear how much they are needed in the industry, and the breadth of opportunity that is out there for them.

The students came back tired and a little soggy, but all wanting more chances to explore this world class, botanical garden in the future.

Many thanks to Mike Fitt (OBE, Chair Royal Parks Guild) for inviting us and making the IW contingent feel so welcome. With Hort. trainees from Osborne House and some of our past IW College Hort. students supported to attend by Craig Ratcliff (C.A.R. Gardens), Horticulture on the IW was very well represented!

Quotes from students

Barnie: "My favourite bit was at lunchtime when I went in to the Princess of Wales conservatory, because I had never seen plants like that before . . . I wish we had more time to explore it."

"We were asked questions about horticulture . . . In the afternoon staff from the National Trust had put them all up so we could see everyone's ideas. We all thought horticulture should be taught in schools."

Jack: The morning lectures were about emerging innovation. The one that interested me the most was Bactery, because the green energy [that their technology produced] came from soil."

"When my Horticulture class visited the gardens at Kew, the place was so big you would not be able to visit the whole garden in one day!"

"On our tour we found out from Kew staff how seasonal jobs are a huge responsibility."

"I enjoyed learning about the different approaches in addressing environmental issues in garden design; and having the opportunity to visit Kew and I look forward to visiting it again, to explore more areas."

Sponsored by The Friends: Val presenting a High Achiever Award to Jacob Brett

Blakely: "Kew was amazing! (It's huge!")

"All the speakers were really inspirational and have really amazing ideas that could help the world in the future with climate change and pollution."

Tyler: "We went to the woodlands area and the guide spoke about thinking about the future and how when they plant a tree they need to think one year ahead, five years ahead and even 100 years ahead."

"My favourite part of the day was the presentations on innovations and technology . . . I enjoyed the day very much."

FRIENDS' TRIP

West Dean downpour

Jenny Parker and **Bridgette Sibbick** recount a soggy but satisfying day

Edward James (1907-1984) was a 20th century visionary. He was a patron of the arts and had creative partnerships with the Surrealists. When he came of age he inherited West Dean and in 1964 set up a charitable trust to nurture traditional crafts, music and the fine arts. In 1971 West Dean College opened as a centre for education and training in conservation.

A visit to West Dean came very highly recommended by Friends who had visited in the past and who were keen to return. Everyone knew the weather forecast was poor but, with the intrepid British spirit, were all determined to make the trip memorable – despite ominous clouds.

The journey over the water, in a very comfortable 16 seater minibus, was stress-free. Several pick up points offering all-day parking at the best rates were appreciated, with a few joining us in the car park at Wightlink's Fishbourne terminal. We left in perfect time for coffee and chat on the good old St Faith.

We arrived at West Dean and following a warm welcome, discovered the excellent gift shop while waiting for our guide. Luckily some of the group had the foresight to purchase pretty, reasonably priced, umbrellas!

Our guide arrived, dressed in every piece of waterproof clothing she had. She started by praising us for our resilience and promising to soldier on with the full tour, despite the heavy skies. It was then that the heavens opened with what can only be described as continual biblical rain, straight from the heavens. It was unremitting.

But even that could not stop us and we were all entranced by the garden of West Dean.

Totally tropical: Val lingering to dry off

Some of our highlights included . . .

Seeing the self-sown seedlings of Tetrapanax, the Chinese rice paper plant, growing under the trees like miniature versions of their parent.

Labelling, fencing and ingenious plant supports, and the artistic use of tree stumps.

The beautiful cyclamen.

A wonderful walk under the pergola, with its amazing mosaic floor and walkway created entirely from horses teeth.

We then arrived in the walled garden and met the gardener in charge of the original Victorian greenhouses. (At last, some relief from the continual rod-like raindrops!) The abundance of greenhouses make it possible for West Dean to house species according to their climatic needs. We were taken through the larger houses, and saw figs, apricots and peaches among other specimens. From our dry vantage point, rows of flowers and vegetables outside were pointed out to us.

Apparently the second crop of delphiniums were not as good as the first – but it was impossible to believe they could have been any better. They were stunning with every possible shade of blue.

Dry Jenny: in the orchard

Playing chicken: French cockerel

We ended in the orchard with the full range of fruit trees heavily laden with appetising fruit.

By this time we were all desperate to get inside – so we made a run for the café. This was the saving grace, it was warm and inviting with lots of space, and we settled down, dripping all over the floor, to hot soup and a full range of dishes using the garden produce.

We did linger over lunch but were determined to revisit parts of the garden, and had our eye on the other greenhouses – it was still raining! These proved very interesting, and it was lovely to meet the student gardener in the cacti and succulent house checking over her charges. Two French cockerels, who have free run during the day, were a charming addition, going in and out of the houses, pecking around on the floor and surprising visitors by hiding between the plants on the benches.

Getting our teeth into the visit: mosaic created with horses' teeth

Feeling a bit drier we forsook the long walk through the arboretum, unable to face a further deluge.

As ever in a lovely garden we were sad to leave and could only speculate on how wonderful a hot sunny day would have been. One bonus was there were few other visitors, so we felt privileged to have had a "private visit" to West Dean.

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Great Friends' Recipe Swap

Bridgette Sibbick writes: When we visited our daughter-in-law's parents in Bregenz her mother made this cake. She always makes this to greet new arrivals and on special occasions. I made it for the first time recently when I discovered a bottle of egg whites in Lidl.

Bosnian cake

You need:

8 egg whites
80g icing sugar
280g ground almonds
120g dark chocolate buttons
60g crystallised lemon peel
(I used mixed peel)

Whisk egg whites until stiff and gently fold in sugar. Add ground almonds, chocolate and peel. Pour into a prepared tin and bake in a slow oven (140-150° fan, gas 1-2) for 30-40 mins.

Serve with whipped cream.

Roz Whistance writes: I couldn't resist having a go at crystallising lemon peel, then went the whole hog and made Nigella's Margarita Cream, which complements the cake very well.

Margarita Cream

60ml fresh lime juice
1tbs tequila
1 tbs cointreau
75g icing sugar
250ml double cream.

Mix the juice and liqueurs together, add sugar, then whisk in the cream till it's thicker.

Membership News

We currently have 268 members.

If your friends and family would like to join us, please see below or look at our website for details.

Ways to pay

The renewal form on the page opposite shows rates, payment options and our bank details if you want to pay by BACS or set up a regular payment. If you are already paying 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 in our new venture supporting Wight Horticulture.

If you have any payment queries, please get in touch with Anne Hornett, our Membership Secretary. Anne can be contacted by email at:

annehornett.gardens@gmail.com
or by post:
Anne Hornett, 63 West Hill Road, Ryde PO33 1LG

Patrons

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

Christmas gift idea

Many of you on the Island will know Paul Armfield, singer songwriter who also runs Medina Bookshop in Cowes. I recently heard him sing from his collection of songs 'Beneath the Trees', and they are truly evocative. His voice is rich but gentle, which perfectly complements the subject, *writes Roz Whistance.*

Environmental group Gift to Nature commissioned Paul to compose a suite of songs about five trees that grow in Sibden Hill, a small but diverse copse in the middle of Shanklin housing estate. His EP is available digitally and on CD, and on the Gift to Nature website. www.gifttonature.org.uk/songs-beneath-the-trees-the-oak/

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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL* *Delete as appropriate CIO number 1174751

Please send the completed form to: VFWH Membership Secretary Mrs. Anne Hornett,

63 West Hill Road, Ryde, Isle of Wight
PO33 1LG

Title:	First Name:	Surname:
.....	.....	.....
Address:		
E-Mail:		Telephone:
Second Member at the same address:		
Junior Member/ (under 18) & dates/s of birth		

Membership Rates **Membership year runs from 1st Jan to 31st December**

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior – under 18	Non UK
£20.00	£10.00	£2.00	£20.00
New Members after 1st July pay reduced rates in the first year:			
£10.00	£5.00	£1.00	£10.00

Individual Membership £
2nd Member at same address £
Junior Member/s £
Non UK Member £
Optional Donation £_____

TOTAL: £_____

Signature: Date:

DATA PROTECTION: By ticking this box I/we give consent for the VFWH to hold my/our personal information and understand that they may contact me/us by email, telephone or post with information about my/our membership and other activities organised by VFWH The information will be securely held and not shared with any other organisation. I/We may ask to see a copy of the Privacy Policy at any time. **Please tick** ☐

Gift Aid it: **By completing this Gift Aid declaration you enable Ventnor Friends' of Wight Horticulture to claim tax back from the Government at no cost to yourself.**
I/We would like Ventnor Friends' of Wight Horticulture to reclaim tax on any eligible membership subscriptions or donations made by me/us until further notice.

First Name ..... Surname .....

First Name ..... Surname .....

House name/number Postcode.....

Please be aware that you must have paid an amount of income and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the amount of tax reclaimed by all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs on all your donations in the tax year (6th April one year to 5th April the next)

WAYS TO PAY – please tick your choice

1. **STANDING ORDER** ☐
   Please arrange with your bank to pay the appropriate membership fee immediately and then every succeeding **January 6th** until further notice ☐
2. **BACS**
3. **CHEQUE** ☐
   Please make out to **Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends*** and enclose with this Membership form

BANK DETAILS FOR OPTIONS 1 AND 2

Account: Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends **Sort Code: 54-41-31** **Account number: 49647717**
Reference: Your Surname and Postcode **(*please note the account remains in our old name for the time being)**

Queries to: Anne Hornett: annehornett.gardens@gmail.com 07958 114019

Goats for fun, fibre, meat and conservation

Simone Dickens and David Yates were married at the Botanic Garden in September 2014. Three months earlier they had purchased a house with a six-acre field in Kingston near Shorwell. Little did they realise that over the next 10 years the field would become Kingston Smallholding Goat Farm. They currently stock around 65 goats, sheep and 30 hens, and they finish a handful of pigs each year. Maggie the farmyard cat and her little gang keep the number of rats and mice under control. The bare field is gradually evolving into a more wooded enclosure, with lots of native wild plants and goat willow trees. Bird, insects and bat populations have seen a considerable increase, as Simone and David have sought to work with nature - rather than against it.

Goats were one of the first livestock to be domesticated about 13,000 years ago near Egypt. From there, they spread around the world, providing milk, meat, skins, clothing, footwear and shelter. Their horns used for tools and weapons, their fat used for candles.

Known for their bizarre eating habits – and yes they will eat the washing if allowed to roam free in the back garden – they are very inquisitive and like to test everything with their mouths!

Goats are browsers, so prefer an environment where they can nibble a bit of this and that before taking a rest in the sun, taking time to chew their cud. They mainly like to eat leaves and branches, but they will also graze on grass and other plants (docs, nettles & brambles are a firm favourite).

As well as producing *Ventnorensis* and other graphic design and illustration work, Simone sells a variety of frozen goat meat from her EHO-approved farmhouse kitchen (by appointment). They also supply whole carcasses to butchers in Cowes, Newport, Harvey Browns and Its About Thyme in Shanklin.

Their produce is also sold at Brighstone Village Shop and Afrowight, Newport. If you prefer to try goat already cooked for you, The Crown Inn (Shorwell), Viv's Cooking (Sandown) and The Crab and Lobster (Ventnor) all have Kingston Goat on their menus.

Kingston Smallholding
Goat Farm

*Poisonous plants such as Yew, Rhododendron, Pieris and many other evergreen shrubs found in domestic gardens are not suitable for goats.

For more information on goats, fibre or meat : 01983 551527 | 07530 867318

Kingston Smallholding Goat Farm, Kingston Road, Shorwell, IW. PO30 3LP

kingstonsmallholding@gmail.com kingstonsmallholding kingstonsmallholdinggoats