

ventnorensis

journal of the ventnor botanic garden friends' society

*"Something exciting is happening
at Ventnor Botanic Garden"*



Volume 19 No. 1 Spring 2012

spring/summer opening times

10am to 5pm until 1st November 2012

For opening times for Visitor Centre, Garden Cafe, Plant Sales and Green House, please call the Garden on 855397



exhibitions/events

Unless otherwise stated, all listings are art exhibitions which may be viewed in the Visitor Centre throughout its opening hours.

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7 – 13 April | St. Lawrence Art Society's Spring Exhibition Art Exhibition with exhibits for sale. Located in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 10am to 5pm |
| 19 April | Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society AGM Held in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 7pm |
| 24 – 25 April | Craft Fair Local arts and crafts for sale. Located in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 10am to 4pm |
| 28 – 29 April | Art for Pleasure Exhibition Art Exhibition with exhibits for sale. Located in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 10am to 5pm |
| 5 – 7 May | "Turning Point" - Andrew Dowden Ceramic Designs Ceramic exhibition with exhibits for sale. Located in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 10am to 5pm |
| 13 May | Book, Postcard & Ephemera Fair Located in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 10am to 5pm |
| 15 – 16 May | Craft Fair Local arts and crafts for sale. Located in the Echium Terrace, Visitor Centre. 10am to 4pm |
| 19 – 21 May | Crafty Artists Craft Fair |
| 22 – 23 May | Medina Craft Association Craft Fair |
| 26 – 27 May | Castle Art Group Art Exhibition |
| 29 May | Medina Craft Association Craft Fair |
| 2 – 10 June | Ventnor Botanical Artists Art Exhibition |
| 11 – 17 June | Isle of Wight Art Club Art Exhibition |
| 23 – 29 June | 5 Artists Art Exhibition |
| 30 June – 1 July | Wellow Art Group Art Exhibition |
| 2 – 5 July | Black Cat Art Group Art Exhibition |
| 6 – 13 July | Janet Sheath Art Exhibition |
| 6 – 28 July | Inspired by Wight Art Exhibition |

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Curator's Notes

'We're absolutely sure we can do the things we've always aspired to, on top of all the things that we do really well now'

Let's think about the journey that we've had to get to the spot where we are now. From all that time ago when the bomb went up and we thought 'They're going to close the garden!' – to that huge uproar, the right and natural outcry – 'We're going to lose this fantastic resource'. To now, when we can clear that myth: the Garden is not going to close. It is not going to have houses built all over it.

So right now we've moved into something which is positive and is exactly what we all want – which is a botanic garden here at Ventnor. We don't want a park, we don't want an open space. This is a botanic garden and there are wonderful things about this that make it a botanic garden. We've really just started to scratch the surface of some of those things because we've never been able to do them in the past. Now, we're absolutely sure we can do the things we've always aspired to, on top of all the things that we've always done really well.

One of the great things I'm looking forward to is being able to blow our own trumpet about the Garden's internationally recognised work in biodiversity and conservation. We have in situ plants which grow nowhere else in Europe: we have fungi here which is nowhere else in the UK. Now, hopefully, we'll have the resources to tell everyone else about it.

I want to be absolutely sure that everyone understands that the plan worked on together with John, with Marlene, with Susyn Andrews from Kew, with the Advisory Group and with the Friends' Society is supported by everyone that has contributed to it. All the staff at the Garden really want this plan to work – they are 100 per cent behind it.

The Friends' Society, chaired by Phil, has supported this right from the very start and has been involved from the start in pulling it all together. But what is also vital to understand is that this is a community project, and that the point of view of the community is of vital importance. We want everyone to have the opportunity to come together with us and work out solutions to some of the problems which will come up as we make the transition from Council to CIC. We want you to come with us and be with us into the future into what will be the best days, and the best years of this botanic garden.

Chris Kidd

Vacancies filled – for now

In our last Issue an appeal went out for new Friends to sit on the executive following resignations. However, the Friends and the CIC are hugely grateful that current officers decided to stay on to see the handover process through.

John Curtis said: "Phil LeMay has been a real trouper to hang on as Chairman. There have been some less than fun moments but he's stayed the course, and put a very steady hand on the tiller through a tumultuous period. A big thank you should go to him. He had to deal with me, with other bidders, with a lot of chaos – and he never wavered, not for a second. Big applause needs to go to him."

Membership Secretary Virginia Newbold also volunteered to stay on, and Hon Treasurer Jean Kelley will be handing over to Vic Hickin after a 'handover' year.

In the last Issue we also appealed for a Minuting Secretary, and we have welcomed Tina Bailey to this role.

Ventnor Butterfly Group

Journal in the Visitor Centre

The Journal is for the use of volunteers, visitors and members of staff to record butterfly and moth sightings in the Botanic Garden.

Please write down the date, the species or description of what was seen, the area of the Garden where seen, and your name and contact details. Also make a note of any unusual behaviour etc. Photographs would be very greatly appreciated.

The intention is to compile a Species List as part of the Ventnor "Butterfly Town" Project, set up by the Isle of Wight Area Group of Butterfly Conservation.

For further information about the Ventnor Butterfly Town Project please contact:

Rob Wilson, Flat 10 Boniface Court, 84 Mitchell Avenue, Ventnor PO38 1DU
Tel or Text 07766906718

For further information on the IOW Area Group of Butterfly Conservation contact: Caroline Dudley 01983 754935, email: caroline_dudley@btinternet.com



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Chairman's message

Spring has sprung and for the Garden and the Friends in a very good way! At last the 'will they, won't they' worries are over and our wonderful Botanic Garden now has a secure future.

The new company managing the garden is Ventnor Botanic Garden Community Interest Company (VBG CIC).

The Garden has a financial shortfall, even with the reductions in staffing, of about £250,000 p.a. so the initial priority is to make it financially sustainable. This will be a balance of improved sales from the shop, plant sales, events, café and entrance charges.

The Friends are at the heart of and in full partnership with the CIC. The Friends and Volunteers are even more important than before: this will be reflected in a range of benefits to be announced as changes are made.

For the Friends the CIC partnership means a slight change of direction. In the past our main emphasis has been on plant purchases and even though this will continue, it will take second place. In line with our constitution we will be promoting Education as our number one priority. This will cover all age groups and the aims in conjunction with the CIC are to restore the RHS and C&G status. At present we are making an application for a grant from the AONB to start a year long course centred around the children of the new primary school opening in Ventnor using VBG as the hub. Obviously we will have to match some of the funding so if education is dear to your heart please send in whatever donation you choose.

I was expecting to hand over the chair at the AGM but as nobody came forward and also because the transition period is so important I will stay on until 2013.

All the talk is of John and Mylene Curtis and the CIC but in addition I'd like you all to raise a glass and toast the group of Friends who worked tirelessly for 18 months preparing a bid to take over the management from the Council. David Grist, Keith Leonard, Mike Fitt, Rachel Thompson and Jan Wyers should be proud of their work which clarified so many of the areas for negotiation. They were truly representative of the Friends as the supporters of the Garden. You will also notice, over time, that we will also be running more events at the Garden. These will be both for fund raising and opportunities to get together socially, so we would like to hear of any suggestions or preferences you may have. Please give us as much feed back as you can. It makes the committee's job easier and more importantly, rewarding.

Phil Le May

Let's do the show right here!

A brief encounter with John Curtis

"I remember walking round the garden with Phil, saying 'We're going to do this whole thing with the Friends right in the middle,'" says John Curtis, who with his wife Mylene heads the CIC which has officially taken over responsibility for Ventnor Botanic Garden. "The Friends are the longevity, they are the history, they are the dedicated custodians of the Garden. We should embrace them in full. That's the concept: I think we've got to bring it to life."



It is refreshing that it is the Garden which inspires the ideas which will sustain it. When we meet – during a break in one of his many nitty-gritty handover meetings – John begins to describe some of the initial changes he hopes to make: – to the entrance so it's more like arriving at a garden and less like a car park; to the hotchpotch of buildings, some of which have aesthetic value and some of which don't – and as he does so you can almost see the ideas running just beneath the surface of his forehead.

He is energetic and dynamic, personable and humorous – joking that, having had a home on the West Wight since 1998 he'd not been on many 'overseas trips' to Ventnor. Essentially though, he's American – in that he is not bound by doing things as they've always been done. He clearly believes that all things are possible:

"When the Gardens came up, I got wind there was a broad array of interest, some of it from developers, and that was where I got started. The idea of the Council selling the gardens for hotels and flats seemed abhorrent. So I started to ask if there is any potential to fix the problems the Council had encountered; to do the things the Friends were excited about; to listen to the community. And it all looked very doable. Not easy, but doable – fun."

John Curtis, graduate of Harvard, fixes companies. He has turned the fortunes of many household names such as M&S and Euro Disney. "I've done a lot of them, and boy have I made mistakes," he told the packed public meeting which made public the CIC's plans – "but," [thumping his chest] "that fixing thing is in here."

John Curtis

One suspects that the Council was rather taken aback by the nature of his application. "For the first time in my life when pitching for a job I put up absolutely nothing about my career. I put up a picture of my great grandmother, who was Conservation Chairman at National level in the Gardens Club of America in the 40s – and I put up a picture of my certificate from the Botany course I took at University. I got a B! I said to the Council I've been worried about that B since 1976 and I finally found a way I could fix it! So I've had a long thread of gardens and gardening in my family. My life went elsewhere but I pursued it enough to take botany and to work for the national park service. When this came up I thought "Yep! I'm interested in that, let's go!"

Mylene Curtis has a background in education, owning Fleet Education Services which is the UK's largest tutoring organisation for young people who have fallen outside mainstream



education, and a large part of the remit is for VBG to fulfil its obvious role as an 'outside classroom' for all.

John describes his financial injection as a means of "priming the

pump" to get VBG to become self-funding so his proposals for the Garden's future may be fulfilled. These come under three broad headings: Botanical, Educational and Social – improving the experience of the visitor. This magazine explains a little about the plans, but what is most striking is the breadth of ideas within each category.

Advisors have been recruited such as Colin Boswell of the Garlic Farm, links have already been forged with the IoW College, and with experts at Kew.

For all their expertise, however, they are determined to listen to the Friends and the public. "The best ideas come from informal chats, from walking and talking," he says. "Who better to talk to than the Friends, who know this garden backwards and have probably thought of so many ways to improve it over the years." A pause. "We could call it 'Friends on Fridays!'" It's almost the queue for a song and dance routine: "Let's do the show right here!"

And the show has already started. On Friday 23rd March the first idea-sharing walk took place – what John described as a Design Walk. At strategic points the group stopped and talked, about sight-lines, under-usage of areas and about changes in the buildings that could improve things. Ideas came thick and fast. "We've got a great team here!" said John.

Roz Whistance

Mylene Curtis

I run an education company. It's a national tutoring service, offering academic tutoring throughout the country. We operate a division to help re-engage young people who have fallen out of the education system. We work with Councils up and down the country, to try to get these young people back into education.

Prior to that I had a background in marketing, with Virgin, and with television.

What is the linkage with the garden? I have had a home here for 15 years. This is an opportunity to give something back to the Island. I think it is an incredible facility to engage young people in education – it is an outdoor classroom which will bring not only school children but young people into the gardens for hands-on learning. Just by enjoying being outdoors they are learning about science.

STOP PRESS Volunteer Tour Guides

Something exciting is happening at Ventnor Botanic Garden and we would love everyone to have a chance to be a part of it!

Are you interested in a role as a volunteer tour guide? Our first drop-in session to swap thoughts, air opinions and generally chat about the role takes place on Wednesday 11th April at 10.15 (meet at the Visitor Centre) but if Ventnorensis hasn't reached you by then, do contact me if you would like to be a part of this new venture.

Our ultimate goal is to have the most amazing team to offer the best tours of the Garden.
Please contact me on (01983) 855397 or email kate.ingrem@iow.gov.uk



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What role will the Friends have in future?

"At one level, nothing is going to happen to the Friends. It is a charity and will remain untouched, its mission unchanged. It just has a different partner to work with - the Council is handing the reigns over to an individual." John Curtis.

In the application to the Council by the CIC led by John Curtis the Friends' Society features extremely prominently. Its role, as Chairman Phil LeMay has said in his Message, has solidified and expanded, but all within the remit of the Friends' Society Mission Statement.

"Part of the Friends' Society mission is that it should raise funds," explained John Curtis. "So I'd love to see them have more resources to fulfil the education outreach that we have planned. There's a whole curriculum planner that we have put together that is fun and wide ranging, and the Friends are just delighted to take on that kind of spending. It's much more exciting than replacing a tire on a tractor!"

The Friends' Society has been built into the very structure of the finances of the CIC, as John explained at the public meeting.

"We've built a community interest company, a CIC. That's a form of social enterprise company - social being 'for the community', and enterprise being 'get the numbers right'. There's a feature in the structure called the Asset Lock – the Garden is the asset, and 'lock' means it can't be transferred anywhere. The only place the Garden can be transferred out of that structure is to the Friends. That's the only place it can go, and that is to protect the Garden for the future. The second thing in the charter of the CIC, which is now approved by the CIC regulator, is that 20 per cent of any surplus income will go to the Friends. So we're strengthening the Friends so they can protect the Garden."

Because the Friends' Society is a charity its role in applying for grants will continue to be a great asset to the CIC. As Phil said at the meeting, "The Friends won't change: we'll just work harder!"

There is more to being a Friend than raising funds and getting involved in advancing the education programme. Involvement at a fundamental level is crucial to grow the Society. Suggestions have been made of a "Garden Crawl" – organised trips to other notable gardens – and Friendly Fridays, where lunch and ideas could be shared.

John has already led the first of what he intends to be a regular feature, a Friday gathering to pool ideas and enjoy one another's company. Eighteen people met for a 'Design Walk', the idea being to look with fresh eyes at the Garden to see how it can be improved. Is the entrance enticing enough to draw in a passing motorist? Is the logo in need of a revamp? Once you're in, where do you go? It proved an extremely fruitful hour which gave rise to many helpful suggestions.

Special Offer from the RHS!

If you are a member of VBG Friends' Society you will be able to join the RHS for £35.70, **30% off the standard membership price: as long as you pay by Direct Debit.** In addition you will receive a £5 voucher to spend at any of the RHS shops and Plant Centres.

The Friends will get £5 for every member who joins.

Contact Rosemary for details: 292107 or email: rosemary@onwight.net

DISCOUNTS for members

The following suppliers have kindly agreed to give discounts to Friends' Society members. Please be aware that discounts and other benefits of VBGFs membership are subject to change. **Remember to take your membership card with you – a discount will only be given if you show it.**

Ventnor Botanic Garden 25% on all outside plants if you spend £10 or more.

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Ryde House Nursery Binstead Road, Ryde: 10% discount.

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Dear members...

"Anything could happen in the next half hour!", as every episode of Stingray would have it. And at the public meeting which introduced John and Marlene Curtis, there was a real sense that anything could. Some were clearly about to deploy their verbal missiles in a last-ditch rescue attempt: others were curious,

optimistic in response to the rally-cry of those 'in the know' on the Friends' Society committee – "It's good news, really!"

It was. It is. Try as I might I cannot resist that old cliché, rollercoaster; to



Crown Imperials Fritillaria Imperialis

describe the time that everyone involved with the Garden has had since the Council announced its intentions to dispense with it. No short sharp Blackgang thrill, either. The dips have been colossal and the ascent arduous. Jobs have gone and hair, doubtless, has whitened. This has been an Alton Towers ride at the very least.

This 'changeover special' Issue of *Ventnorenensis* sets out some of the intended changes to the Garden that John explained in interviews and at the public meeting, focusing in particular on the Friends. In future editions we will talk to other key players as the Garden's botanical, educational and public roles develop.

To mix my 1960s sci-fi puppet show metaphors – Thunderbirds are go!

Roz Whistance, Editor

Copy date for the next Issue: May 30th

Photographs: As always I am indebted to Rosemary Stewart for providing photographs for this Issue of Ventnorenensis

Kniphofia at VBG

'This second wild specimen was growing in an area being taken over by imported alien Pine trees, so almost certainly it has now died. This illustrates how easily a plant species can be lost forever'

Historically, VBG has never really had a huge collection of *Kniphofia*. The earliest plant records for the site are from 1986: the VBG equivalent of the Domesday Book. Compiled by the late Superintendent Roy Dore as his handover documentation to the incoming Curator Simon Goodenough, it is a handwritten list mentioning three species. The plant records for the subsequent ten years are held on cards in the nursery, and these reveal, from 1989 to 1995, a slow increase to 13 cultivars and eight species. The period from 2000 sees our plant records moved onto the VBG Living Collections Database, but little addition to our *Kniphofia* collection until 2006. However, a look at the database this morning shows we now have over 100 accessions representing 38 cultivars and 26 species! So, why the huge boom in *Kniphofias*? There are several reasons and a series of fortuitous events.

In 2005 the Garden, through the Friends' Society, was able to attain a grant from Living Spaces, an agency set up to use Lottery Funds through the Offices of the Deputy Prime Minister. This enables us to move and expand our South African collections from the tiny space they held before. This new site, when empty and ready for planting, was vast, and so we began building our collections initially with very colourful, blousy and quick-growing half hardy ephemerals and annuals. The result was simply stunning and a huge hit with the general public. This type of planting benefits from some accent planting to change the rolling effect which would override the terraces, so subtly we began putting in *Kniphofia*.

If ever there was a terrible price to pay for this success, it is the toll of a heavy winter, and since 2009 we have had a series of absolute stinkers. (Even now in 2012 we are reeling from a two week period of cold air that sat over Europe and dragged us down to -3C one night.) After our second consecutive poor winter we decided to plant more shrubby South African plants and began collecting them in earnest, bolstered by Friends funding once again. We very quickly exhausted the UK nursery scene and began importing seed direct from South Africa. Subtly, the range of *Kniphofia* was growing.

The next fortuitous event in this story was the transfer of Jason Melia to the garden from the commercial nursery. Jason has long had an interest in *Kniphofias* and so this led to us actively collecting them: they ticked all the right boxes to be plants right for Ventnor already. Jason was particularly keen on bringing in a cultivar he knew from Ireland at Powerscourt Estate, K. "Prince Igor", a giant among *Kniphofia* with flowers nearly 3m high. We searched high and low for this cultivar. More than one

plant we bought was either wrongly named, dead, or on the verge of death. Ultimately the easiest thing was for Jason's brother to just dig some up from Powerscourt and send them over.

Pretty soon we started to realise how large the collection was getting (it's easy to lose track when we add over 1000 accessions to the garden annually) and contacted the National Collection holder; who happens to be on the IOW at Barton Manor. We made a few swaps at this point and when comparing lists it was clear that we had far more pure species: because as a botanic garden our collection policy is always heavily weighed in favour of species over cultivars. We started to think about setting out an application for National Collection status for *Kniphofia* species, but in the melee of recent years it was put firmly on the back burner.



Kniphofia. Photograph by Julian Winslow

This all changed when Susyn Andrews reviewed our collections in 2012. Straight away she picked out *Kniphofia* and pretty well insisted we put ourselves forward for National Collection status as soon as she read through their accession notes.

We have many hidden gems in the Garden, one of these is *Kniphofia bruceae*. This plant was first collected in South Africa as a poor herbarium specimen in 1894. It wasn't collected again until 1954, this time by Miss Eileen Bruce from the National Herbarium of Pretoria. This material became the type specimen (the pressing on which the species description was based) and was named in her honour in 1968. Apart from one other collection in 1959, that is the entire story of man's knowledge of this species until 1964 when it was finally brought into cultivation by J C McMaster as seed from a lone plant. The cultivated offspring steadfastly refused to produce viable seed until another plant was found in 1998. This second wild specimen was growing in an area being taken over by imported alien Pine trees, so almost certainly it has now died. This illustrates just how easily a plant species can be lost forever.

The McMasters have built up stocks of their plants and we were fortunate to have seed sent to us in 2009. Our plants have now been distributed to Cambridge Botanic Garden and Tresco to ensure the risk of this species being lost altogether is minimised.

Chris Kidd

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION* / RENEWAL* FORM

*Delete as appropriate

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Membership Secretary **VBGF5** Virginia Newbold 4 Woodland Grove Bembridge PO35 5SG

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Weather in the Garden

(September to December 2011) by Chris Watts

The three weeks leading to the autumn equinox were very unsettled. All of September's rainfall fell in this period, and it was extremely windy at times. These winds caused damage in the hop garden and to eucalyptus in the Australian garden on the 6th; five days later the remnants of hurricane Katia arrived – but fortunately no further damage was reported. Following the equinox the weather became increasingly warm and sunny: the final three days of the month each registered over 10 hours sun, and by the 30th the temperature was 24°C.

This fine spell lasted for the first three days of October, and once again each day brought about 10 hours sun. The 1st saw a record all time high temperature for this month in England, reaching 25.4°C (78°F) in the Gardens, making it the second warmest day of the year (after 4th June). Even the 2nd was noteworthy at 24.6°C (76°F). Temperatures then remained well above average up to the year end, November in particular being mild, and also dry. It is interesting to note that the lowest temperature for November of 5.7°C was higher than the lowest in October (5.0°C); with just nine occasions on which the overnight value fell under 10°C, the average minimum of 10.8°C for November was only a whisker away from the 1921-50 average maximum of 11.1°C!

However, a benign November turned in to a volatile December, more or less as the month changed. The weather became wet and stormy, particularly from the 8th to the 16th. It is surprising that no damage was sustained in the Gardens, as the winds were so strong. During this period there were frequent showers of hail; thunder was heard on the 13th and sleet fell on the morning of the 16th. After a quieter interlude over the Christmas weekend, it started raining again up to and including the first day of 2012.

| | Mean Temp C | Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights) | Sun Hrs | Rain mm | Wet Days (1+ mm) | Rain Duration Hrs |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Aug | 16.7– | 0 (0) | 141.3— | 73.0++ | 10 | 25.6 |
| Sep | 16.7++ | 0 (0) | 142.9– | 47.5— | 9 | 23.5 |
| Oct | 14.6++ | 0 (0) | 119.9– | 42.1— | 8 | 19.8 |
| Nov | 12.7++ | 0 (0) | 67.5— | 23.4— | 5 | 14.2 |
| Dec | 8.5++ | 1.0 (1) | 55.5– | 123.2++ | 18 | 65.3 |
| 2011 | 12.4++ | 13.5 (4) | 1650.1— | 659.8— | 106 | 357.7 |

Note: Cols 2, 4, 5 No sign: about average
 ++/— : significantly above/below average
 +/- : modestly above/below average

Grow with Us

"We're going to make education come alive," says John Curtis. As with all the plans being proposed for the Garden, the education programme is dynamic and far-reaching – but far from unachievable.

It will start with the reinstatement of an Education Officer who will lead the 'Grow With Us' programme. This is a broad curriculum which, necessarily, will speak to everyone from the 'diehard gardener' to children brought along by their schools.

"Through apprenticeships, work experience, volunteer positions and courses we will aim to bring increasing numbers of young and old into the gardens. Over time we would like to extend the gardening done by VGB-trained apprentices."

The Friends will play a vital part in the education programme as set out in its Charter:

Every aspect of the workings of the Garden is potential fodder for learning. So John talks about bringing such things as the compost heap – currently hidden behind a barrier – 'on stage'. "Right now it's behind a metal gate that's like a car pound. We want to take down the gate, put signs on it, have people understand we want to get the food waste from the cafe benefitting the Garden."

The greenhouses, the propagation, the seed bank, the work of the gardeners, it's all going 'on stage'. "There's a wonderful weather station in a place that's got one of the most interesting climates on the Isle of Wight. That's going 'on stage'."

Part of this broad vision of education will be to have a botanical illustrator in residence. The provision of a studio – or studios – is something very much under consideration. It's a circular vision: botanical illustration links to the Garden's application for National Collection Standard for three plants (see Botany, P?). Prints of the work will be on sale in the Shop [Karen Saunders' prints are currently available, see the website], which adds to the revenue and will help fund the future for scientists and expert gardeners.

A Vision of the Future

To glimpse into the future, a visit to the Gardens should uncover teenagers listening to plant stories on their iPods, families picnicking on the lawn of the New Zealand Garden after a "Grow with Us" course, researchers teaching a trainee tour guide from the Friends about Kniphofia, a Green Gym group practising aerobic gardening, volunteers setting up for one of the curator's "Sleeping with Lilies" midnight courses, a work experience student heading out for a garden makeover under the "VBG @ Home" programme, a television crew interviewing a gardener on how biogas is harvested from the compost pile to heat the Greenhouse, the horticultural illustrator will be circulating amongst the easels of her class in the Palm Garden . . .

Botanical Programme

The Friends' Society will be at the heart of VBG's botanical and educational mission. The CIC will work with the Friends to increase donations and apply for further grants for educational facilities and programmes such as the 'Greenhouse Classroom', John Curtis explained:



Sophora, New Zealand Garden

"There are treasures here – we have the Kniphofia, Puya and Aizoaceae, and we'll try for National Collection Status for these. That's what any serious Botanical Garden is about – and we need that. That brings us a role where we can talk to other Botanic Gardens about those plants, and make sure they're protected. Ultimately that's

about botanical excellence and we'll use that as our flagship to improve the botanical standing of the Garden."

One of the people heavily involved with the Garden is Susyn Andrews, who is an advisor on application for National Collection Status of plants. Ever uppermost in the mind of John Curtis is that the Garden has to answer a very broad range of needs. "We have to cater for scientists, for the keen gardener, for the weekend gardener and for the person who likes to sit under a tree." Fortunately Susyn, who is based at Kew, has had a lot of experience with developing gardens on many levels. "You can take one garden, Ventnor, put in five trails, which all have a different experience," says John. "One could be history, another an eco trail, another could be for kids."

Annual General Meeting 2012

The Annual General Meeting of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society will be held on Thursday, 19th April 2012 at 7.00 pm in The Visitor Centre, Ventnor Botanic Garden. Mrs Margaret Morris, former chairman of the Clematis Society, will give a fascinating talk on clematis.

John is keen not to alienate the scientist or expert gardener by offering easy-to-digest routes: indeed he has that person in mind too. "We want to make it much easier for the expert to find that absolutely rare tropical plant that they won't find anywhere else in UK. We want them to walk in, check the programme of the day – say a talk with Chris Kidd about his lilies – so they can listen to an expert talking in detail on a given subject, while, later in the day, something utterly frivolous is happening which that scientist might not want to hear."



Lack of signage at VBG is often noted. "We need something to read. Who donated that palm tree? What species is that? Where else does it grow if anywhere? The signs we do have are for scientists, they're black and white and they've got Latin on them that no-one understands! If you're 12 you don't want to be reading all this Latin stuff! You want to read about the smelly things, the plants that eat things, that trap bugs..."

To alleviate the energy costs of the Greenhouse, there will be a Sustainability Hug which brings composting, biogas, solar hot water and other green technologies to the Garden. It is hoped a model vegetable allotment could be introduced, to enable students and locals to try growing things for themselves.

Give a Friends' Membership Subscription gift. Apply now!*



plus **Gift Vouchers**

for Plant Sales and Gift Shop
available at the Visitor Centre
Reference Library



*Contact the Membership Secretary or ask in the Visitor Centre.
Annual and Life Membership available.

Summer Gala

A summer gala fundraising event to include a plant auction, hosted by the CIC, is to take place in June.

Watch website for further details.

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Data protection

Our mail-out labels are printed electronically with a computer. This means that we are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Provided all our members agree to their names and addresses being placed on an electronic database it will not be necessary for us to register the list, thus saving us money.

The Executive Committee undertakes not to let the list be used for any purpose other than for promoting the activities of the Friends' Society. If, in spite of this undertaking, any member objects to his or her name being electronically recorded please inform the Secretary.

RHS Lecture

Anne Swithinbank: My Life with Plants

Knowing what you don't want to do in life is as good a start to a career as any, and Anne Swithinbank was adamant she didn't want to follow her school career advisor's suggestion and become a teacher, as she told a packed audience at VBG.



A leaflet about the Kew Diploma, however, fired her imagination, and with her A Levels in botany, zoology and art, and a year's Park's Department work experience, she secured a place.

She was 19 when she went to Kew, and one of her first jobs was as Glasshouse Supervisor at RHS Wisley. It was here that she met her husband, and they had a flat in the iconic building

overlooking the lake there. She was picked out by a television crew for filming work, and her media career began. The tricky business of juggling work with family was at one time eased when the TV company allowed her whole family to join her whilst filming in the Caribbean – a great highlight – but although lecturing on cruise ships should have been a dream job, Anne was too prone to seasickness to enjoy it.

Eventually the rise of glamour and celebrity culture meant she and colleague Geoff Hamilton felt their natural home was radio rather than TV, and we have for many years enjoyed her friendly advice on Gardeners' Question Time. For a while she had a regular gardening column on the News of the World – much to her parents' consternation – and was there at a time when cost of fuel on your 'expenses' was waved through with barely a glance, enabling her to drive half way across the country to visit something in order to have a topic for the following week.

Anne punctuated her talk with slides of favourite plants. The following day she enjoyed a tour round VBG with Jonyth Hill, where she met Della Pragnell and artist Karen Saunders.

Sally Peake

Thanks to Sally for hosting Anne during her stay on the Island.



A taste of things to come . . .

For a few seconds it was quite alarming. Women were marauding through the Botanic Garden with secateurs and armfuls of foliage while others browsed round the lovely Christmas Village. The marauders, of course, were taking part in the Friends' annual wreath making event, led by Sally Peake, and had permission to make free with their cutters. For the first time they were making wreaths during a festive market. The Christmas Village was a new venture for VBG last year and was a happy and successful occasion. Taking place over a weekend, it was blessed with excellent weather; the winter sunshine and mellow temperatures adding greatly to the atmosphere, and enabling visitors to enjoy their food inside and outside the cafe while listening to music. German market wooden chalets housed good quality local produce including wines, gifts and confectionary, and despite the high temperatures there was even snow!

Gardening volunteers meet every Wednesday morning at the far end of the car park. Bring hand tools and a drink to have at coffee break. All welcome. Ask for Kate.

Keep in the loop

Appeal for email addresses!

We don't necessarily have the email addresses of those of you who pay by standing order. There is so much going on in the Garden, and it is not always practical to wait for the next Ventnorensis. So do let the Membership Secretary know your email details. And if you change your email address don't forget to tell us! Leave details on the Contact page of the website: www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk/contact.php under Membership, or send directly to rosemary@onwight.net

Website news

I am pleased to report that we have moved on from the problems of the latter part of last year, when it was not possible to keep the revamped website we launched last spring up to date. Unfortunately, we lost the services of volunteer webmaster Craig Osgood, who has gone on to bigger things after taking up a post with Apple. Thank you Craig for the work you did and we wish you all the best for the future. We have now adopted a system that allows non-experts like myself to keep the website current, which we hope will mean we can avoid a repetition of the recent situation.

If you have not visited our website recently, please give it another go!
You will notice several improvements when you log on at

www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

- some design changes but also new features including a members' area* reserved for exclusives, special offers and links to member benefits.

V-lineSTUDIO was engaged to rebuild the website in its current form. As well as offering a professional internet consultancy, their front office in Pier Street, Ventnor, is open to the public and community groups for internet services and training (see v-line.co.uk or call 718287).

Jane Cheverton

**Your log-in instructions with starter password are printed on the enclosed insert. A new password will be sent to you annually with your membership card. If you lose this information please email membership@ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk and supply your name and postcode to verify membership.*

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Usually we answer your gardening queries on this page – so do keep sending them in to rosalind.whistance@btopenworld.com. But this time we are answering your questions about the new management of the Garden.

Has the Garden been sold by the IoW Council?

Answer: No, it is leased by the CIC as a long-term protected asset.

What will the CIC do with the Garden?

Answer: It will invigorate the Garden's finances, expand its educational remit and enhance its scientific status as a Botanical Garden by applying for National Collection Status.



Listening to the 'team': John Curtis takes questions and ideas on his 'Design Walks'

Why will VBG introduce an entrance fee?

Answer: The subsidy from the IoW Council will stop, which means we've got to make the garden financially sustainable on its own. The garden returns a revenue of £180,000 a year. Its spend is about £430,000. We have a deficit of £250,000. That's not sustainable, and if we don't fix it the Garden's buildings will continue to decline and we won't be able to deliver the programmes we've set out.

Will there continue to be a parking fee?

Answer: No. Our survey revealed 71 per cent of people wanted this dropped, so we've got to listen.

Will there be a fence around the Garden?

Answer: No. We will not police the boundary. We'll operate an honour system. A lot of us are making a lot of effort to try to improve this thing – we hope everyone who walks through will join us. Building fences is not the right tone for the Garden.

What are the first changes we are likely to see?

Answer: Probably making the visitor's experience much clearer from the start, with better signs and information about what is happening in the Garden. And our Friendly Fridays, when anyone can meet and we take a walk through the Garden to exchange ideas.

Open Gardens 2012

This year we have taken a different approach to the Friends' open gardens. We will now be helping some of the gardens which open under the National Garden Scheme by providing refreshment and/or plant sales. The programme is varied and interesting ranging from small town house gardens to large estates.

Sunday 6 May

1.30pm to 5.30pm

Blenheim House, Market Street, Ryde, PO33 2NY

Non-members welcome

David Rosewarne and Magie Grey

Artists' garden fantasy, developed over eight years, exploring the decorative qualities and long term effects of pattern making, colour and form in both hard and soft landscaping. This 116ft x 30ft plot uses many ideas, plants and materials from our Chelsea Silver Medal entry 'A Garden for All Seasons'. Featured on BBC TV Gardeners' World.

Directions: Market St entrance behind Ryde Town Hall/Theatre.

Sunday 3 June

2.00pm to 5.00pm

Nunwell House, Coach Lane, Brading PO36 0JQ

Non-members welcome

Colonel Aylmer and Rose Bonsey

Five acres of beautifully set formal and shrub gardens with Cornus kousa and old-fashioned shrub roses prominent. Exceptional Solent views from the terraces. Small arboretum laid out by Vernon Russell Smith, and walled garden with herbaceous borders. House (not open) developed over five centuries and full of architectural interest.

Further details: Nunwell Gardens were first documented by Sir John Oglander c1640 when he recorded that the parlour garden had 'all sorts of French flowers and tulips as well as a vine'. The gardens have developed over the centuries. A walled garden was added c1750, the front lawns enhanced c1896 and the lower garden planted about 1930. After the Second World War the long shrub border was created on land used as a wartime home guard ammunition dump and the steps leading to the old tennis court were bordered with lavender. In 1963 Vernon Russell Smith laid out a small arboretum to the west of the house. In 1998 Mrs Aylmer converted the inside of the walled garden to its present layout of lawns and herbaceous borders. The whole garden is in a very tranquil setting with some lovely views across the Solent.

Directions: 3m S of Ryde. Signed off A3055 in Brading into Coach Lane.

Sunday 10 June

11.00am to 5.00pm

Salterns Cottage, Salterns Road, Seaview, PO34 5AH

Non-members welcome

Susan and Noel Dobbs

A listed building from 1640, the cottage has a small garden, full of surprises, hidden behind the low terracotta roof and whitewashed walls. Salt was made here. The film rights of Dracula (written by Noël's great grandfather) paid for the original conversion in 1934.

Susan, who retired in 2005 and sold her kindergarten, has built a beautiful greenhouse and potager and turned what was a beach into borders filled with exotic plants.

Directions: Enter Seaview from W via Springvale, Salterns Rd links the Duver Rd with Bluett Ave.

Saturday 16 June

11.00am to 5.00pm

Ash cliff, The Pitts, Bonchurch, PO38 INT

Non-members welcome

Judy and Sid Lines

The garden was started from a blank canvas 8yrs ago and now contains many different areas of interest and a large collection of interesting perennials, shrubs and trees over approx one acre, part of which is a cliff.

Directions: From A3055 follow directions for Bonchurch. Follow signs for Bonchurch pond and park in village or continue, following signs for parking in Bonchurch Shute.

Thursday 21 June

11.00am to 5.30pm

Wayside, Carpenters Road, St Helens

Non-members welcome

Mr and Mrs B M Cole

Well-established informal cottage garden with a mixture of trees, shrubs, climbing roses and clematis and densely planted with many unusual plants (propagated by the owner). S-facing with stunning views across to Culver Downs.

Disability information: Some uneven paving stones, but area of lawn for wheelchairs.

Directions: Take the B3330 for St Helens and park on St Helens Green.

Sunday 29 July

1.30pm to 5.30pm

Blenheim House, Market Street, Ryde, PO33 2NY

Non-members welcome

2nd visit - see Sunday 6 May for details and directions.

Sunday 9 September

12.00 to 5.00pm

West Meades, West Green, St Helens, PO33 1XA

Non-members welcome

Patsy and Jack Thompson

The gardens which surround the revamped Art Deco style house have been almost completely re-designed and planted during the last eight years. It is full to bursting with perennials, shrubs, clematis and climbing roses which lead to an enclosed vegetable garden. The plan is to provide a garden of surprise and delight throughout the year.

Disability information: Garden accessible by wheelchair but gravel paths may be bumpy.

Directions: 3m SE of Ryde. Approach village from west along Carpenters Rd (B3330). On entering village take 1st L. House borders West Green overlooking Culver Down.

Admission £3.00 (except where stated) including refreshments

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New members

A very WARM WELCOME to these friends who have recently joined the Society.

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Mrs B Alsop | Westbury on Severn | Dr R Herrington | Horsham |
| Mr S Barnett and C Park | Ventnor | Mrs P Hunt | Bonchurch |
| Mrs C Billbrough | Shanklin | Mrs S Lax | Alverstone |
| Mrs R and Mr P Bingham | Shorwell | Mr D Lee | Yarmouth |
| Mrs J Bray | Crawley | Miss J Lennard | Culver Down |
| Mrs M Brettell | Totland Bay | Mr J Martin | Harpenden |
| Mr P Brown | Newport | Mrs M Morris | Totland Bay |
| Mr P and Mrs B Buggy | Shanklin | Mr J and Mrs M Noble | Portchester |
| Mrs R Cameron | Freshwater | Dr D and Mrs A Robinson | Ventnor |
| Mr C Carmichael | Godshill | Miss Z Sadler and Mr C Cripwell | |
| Mrs L Daly | France | | Freshwater |
| Mr M and Mrs A Dedman | St Lawrence | Mrs B and Mr J Sibbick | Shanklin |
| Mr M Eastwood | Rookley | Mrs J Soper | Ventnor |
| Mrs N and Mr B Ellacott | Ventnor | Mr R and Mrs D Smith | Shorwell |
| Mrs W England | Chelmsford | Ms M Streeter | Chichester |
| Mrs M and Mr M Erwin | Whitwell | Mr L Tiffany and Mr L Letchford | Lake |
| Mrs N and Mr M Evans | Ventnor | Miss D Walters | Shorwell |
| Mrs J and Mr R Gardner | Wroxall | Mr R Wetherill | Winchester |
| Mrs J Garlick | Ventnor | | |

Honorary member Alan Titchmarsh

Corporate members

We would like to thank our corporate members for their continued support.





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