

ventnorenensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'We have a climate that allows us to grow the subtropical plants for which we are renowned. But then there is weather, climate's evil cousin.' – *Chris Kidd, Curator*



VOLUME 25 NO. 1 SPRING/SUMMER 2018

Summer/spring opening times

10am till 5pm daily

For opening times, and for information about special events for adults or children in the Visitor Centre, *edulis* Restaurant and Plantation Room Café, and for Plant Sales and Greenhouse, please call the Garden on 855387 or check website, www.botanic.co.uk.



Exhibitions/Events

APRIL

1st 1pm – 2pm Shrewsbury Brass Band performance outside *edulis* restaurant. Listen while you lunch.

6th 12 noon Design Walk. Walk through the Garden with Curtis and Kidd.

15th 11am Home & Garden Fair: Inspiration from interiors and garden suppliers.

19th 7pm VBG Friends' Society AGM and presentation of Harold Hillier Award at The Visitor Centre.

MAY

4th 12 noon Design Walk.

6th 1pm – 2pm Of One Accord Choir performance outside *edulis* restaurant.

16th 2pm Café Botanique. Talk on *Echium*s by Rachael Graham of Southampton University.

18th – 26th Ventnor Botanical Artists exhibition featuring native flowering plants.

27th Summer Party featuring music by JC and Angelina Grimshaw with family and friends. Paintings and prints exhibition by John Grimshaw.

20th 11am – 1pm Plant Sale, Top Lawn.

23rd 2pm Botany Club walk through Alverstone Mead Nature Reserve with Dave and Hazel Trevan. £5

30th 8pm and 31st from 8am Botany Club Moth Night with moth men James Halsey and Iain Outlaw. £5.

JUNE–AUGUST

Evenings in *edulis* Enjoy a culinary treat at one of our popular themed supper nights. Booking advised.

JUNE

1st 12 noon Design Walk.

2nd – 10th Half Term Events. See website and press for details.

8th – 10th From 12 noon Yoga Vibe. Yoga, meditation and wellbeing classes.

20th 2pm Botany Club. Afton Down to look at chalkdown plants and butterflies. £5.

8th – 10th Yoga Vibe. Three days, beginners to advanced, healthy eating and relaxation.

JULY

6th 12 noon Design Walk.

21st – 22nd TO BE CONFIRMED Cinema in the Garden. Saturday: *Bridget Jones' Baby*; Sunday: *Disney's Moana*.

21st – 2nd September Summer Holiday Activities.

JULY/AUGUST

Flowering of the Amazonian Water Lily

Witness midnight Lily opening, Tropical House pond, with Chris Kidd. Booking advised.

AUGUST

3rd 12 noon Design Walk.

8th 2.30pm Theatre in the Garden *The Reluctant Dragon* by The Festival Players.

25th – 26th The Healing Festival. Over 40 healing and wellbeing exhibitors and therapists.

SEPTEMBER

7th 12 noon Design Walk.

16th Hops Festival: Celebrate VBG Botanic Ales and hop picking. Live music, real ales, barbeque.

All dates and booking correct at time of going to press

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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Vice Chair

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Treasurer

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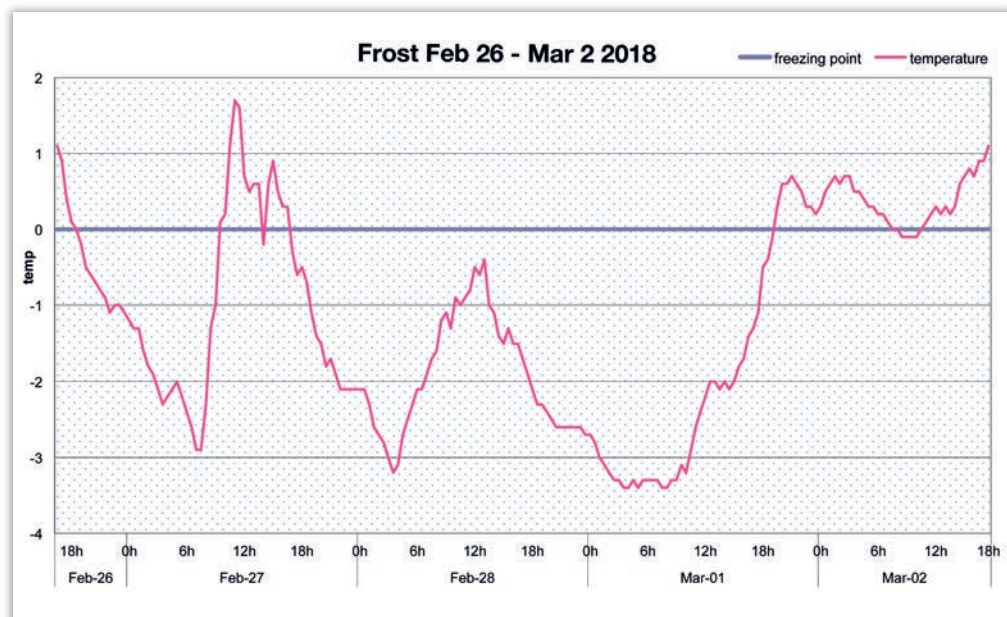
Curator's Notes

Climate's evil cousin

The Curation of Britain's Hottest Garden is a fraught business. On the one hand we have a climate that allows us to grow unhindered the subtropical plants for which we are renowned. On the other we have weather, climate's evil cousin, throwing temper tantrums. As climate changes, the tantrums are getting worse. Whilst looking for a file from 2002 I found the first draft of a manuscript I prepared with the working title: "Hardiness of Plants at Ventnor Botanic Garden". It was an absorbing read: 16 years later it is clearly a chapter in a larger book. The manuscript gave a good representation of the Garden picture at the time, but we have moved on considerably since that point. Whilst some collections are the same, some plant groups and their planting areas have simply exploded by comparison. It is clear that we are growing more, and more successfully, than before.

A rule that I often use to explain gardening here at VBG is as true now as it was then. To paraphrase, I break each winter down into sections to make milestones we need to cross to survive unscathed and frost free:

- Get to Christmas. We rarely have frost before then.
- Get to New Year's Day. Usually lots in flower.
- Reach the end of January. Only four more weeks to survive.
A good low pressure or two from the west should see us fine.
- Survive until the end of February. That leaves only the first week of March.
- March.



This year we got all the way to Number 5. March. We were within touching distance of survival unscathed. But climate had an impact on our weather. On the other side of the world a few weeks previously an interruption in the Madden-Julian Oscillation (described by John Curtis, see Page 8) ultimately blocked the jet stream over northern Europe, allowing Siberian Easterlies into Britain. The Garden plunged to -4°C and stayed there for two days.

Seeing this weather event in process was jaw-dropping. A 50-mile per hour blizzard raged through VBG on 1st March. No preparations, fleece, straw or fan heaters can save you. At one point we lit a fire in a wheelbarrow to move through the garden in a desperate attempt to do something. It might have seemed futile to be here at midnight changing gas bottles, but looking at the aftermath there are a lot of positives.

We are documenting the survival of the plants; this has been the harshest test ever for about half of the Garden's accessions. Intriguing cases are apparent; plants that can turn black with a hoar frost are shaken – but alive. Shrubs that were cocooned in ice lived; those exposed to air are freeze-dried.

Though there is much to replace there will be more to see. Whilst mainland neighbours plunged below double-digit degrees Celsius, we remained Britain's Hottest Garden. Comparatively.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Ventnor Botanical Artists

The inaugural Botanical Art Worldwide Day takes place this year on 18th May, and thanks to the Friends' Society we will have a taste of this international event here at VBG.

Over 24 hours somewhere in the world there will be an exhibition of paintings of native plants by botanical artists from the 25 participating countries. For the UK the exhibition will take place in Lancaster and at Kew, but inspired by this event are Ventnor Botanical Artists:

"We are staging an exhibition celebrating British native flora to coincide with the worldwide event," says Sally Whibley, group leader.

Ventnor Botanical Artists meet once a month at VBG to be inspired by the surroundings and to help and support one another as they practice the meticulous skill of botanical art.

Each year the group engages a professional artist to lead a workshop – "That's so we don't get lazy," says Sally. This February the artist was Mally Francis who lives and teaches at The Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall.

It was thanks to the Friends that the group obtained a grant to fund the exhibition, Flora in the Garden, to take place 18th – 26th May.



Chairman's message

Volunteers I cannot believe how fast this winter has passed. This supposedly quiet season seems to have been filled with so much to keep your Committee busy. One thing that has proved immensely rewarding, and of huge value to the Curator and his team, is the large number of volunteers who turn out regularly to help with a variety of Garden-related tasks. There are often upwards of a dozen people cleaning seeds, clearing beds, potting on, etc – all jobs where many hands make light work during the short winter days. (See Volunteering, Inside Back page.)

CIO Your Treasurer, Tim Woodcock, has been working quietly to set up new bank accounts for the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). At some point those of you with Standing Orders, or who make regular (and much appreciated) donations, will be asked to transfer these to the new bank accounts. Tim will appreciate your help in this matter.

Magnolia news Curator Chris Kidd has been busy on the southern edge of the Garden clearing the old windbreak holm oaks and clearing space for new planting to extend the Japanese Terraces. I am sure Chris will be taking time over the next few months to explain his vision for increasing the Far Eastern content, but I want to tell you about one plan that fills me with excitement for the future:

Chris plans to plant a line of magnolias along the southern bank – eventually spanning nearly half a mile – that will be visible from the opposite side of our valley. Each year we wait for the first magnolia blooms in spring and to rejoice. Imagine standing on the Plantation Café Terrace looking south and seeing a wall of flowering magnolia! Sadly this vision will take some 30 years or more to materialise (our current beauties were planted in the late 1980s) but what a legacy for our generation to hand on to the next. (See Page 20.)

In order to start building towards this vision we shall transfer the current memorial project, where people have remembered loved ones by sponsoring an olive tree, to the new project – The Magnolia Walk. If you know anyone who might be interested, do contact a Committee member for more information.



Magnificent magnolias: Sponsor a tree

Apprentice success Our apprentices, David Pearce and George Tyler, continue to thrive in the Garden under the superb tutelage of Trish Brenchley and Chris. This spring both boys have had the opportunity to spend two weeks on Tresco on the Isles of Scilly, working alongside Mike Nelhams, curator of the 17-acre Tresco Abbey Gardens. The Friends were able to pay for their travel, and free accommodation was provided, enabling the two apprentices to gain valuable experience working in a different environment. David will complete his two years with us this summer. As I write, we have heard that he has had interviews at Kew and RHS Wisley and been offered a place at the latter. I am sure you will join me in wishing him every success with his next career move. Meanwhile George has the chance to join a group of Royal Parks' apprentices (thanks to our Patron, Mike Fitt) and participate in a year-long project called *From Battlefield to Butterflies* ... to commemorate the sacrifice made by gardeners employed by The Royal Parks during the First World War. Two of the wartime gardeners were Islanders – Osborne was, of course, a Royal Park – and George will join the two Osborne apprentices to represent the Islanders at various public events throughout the next year. (See Island Hopping, Page 16.)



Our apprentices: George and David

Art and music in the Garden Back to events closer to home. I am delighted that a grant application to the Finnis Scott Foundation on behalf of the Ventnor Botanical Artists' group was successful; the money will enable them to support workshops leading to an Exhibition at VBG which will concentrate on native flowering plants, to coincide with Worldwide Day of Botanical Art. The exhibition will run from 18th – 26th May. Do come and support these talented artists. (See Pages 3 and 30.)

I am also delighted that Bridgette and John Sibbick are our latest Artists In Residence. (See Page 19)

Over the next few months a number of projects will receive their finishing touches: an opening ceremony, complete with didgeridoo, for the Australian 'Dreamtime' rocks; the placing of the model sun recorder back on the obelisk; and a Buddhist-style feature for the Japanese Terraces. (Photographs, Page 25.)

There are also events planned to help raise more funds for future projects. Our major fundraiser for this year will be a combination of art, music and good food – an irresistible combination. The multi-talented Grimshaw family has agreed to support us on Sunday May 27th. An Exhibition and Sale of paintings and prints by J R Grimshaw, and a musical delight, featuring JC and Angelina Grimshaw joined by family and friends on many and various instruments is not to be missed – dancing will be encouraged! Watch out for tickets shortly. (See Page 25.)

Talented Friends Whilst talking of fund-raising, I am hearing of ever more unusual ways in which our members are using their £1 'talents' from the 2017 AGM, from soup lunches to Boxing Day swims. Please bring your 'talents' to the AGM; we shall rejoice in them and in your company. (See AGM, Page 21 and Talents, Page 29.)

Sally Peake

Aristolochia

Chris Kidd describes his personal experiences with this genus which is notable for its spectacular scent as for its theatrical appearance

Aristolochia is a large genus of over 300 species distributed around the world in the tropics and temperate zones. The genus sits in its own plant family, the Aristolochiaceae, which is hardly surprising when one considers the intricate structure of the flowers, described by that most sober of organisations, The Royal Horticultural Society, as “fantastic”. Modern botany at a molecular level is showing some intriguing relationships with other plants that conventional examination would never have revealed. For us gardeners at Ventnor prepared to overlook whether each species has or has not got an annulus at the junction of the tube and limb, what we have is an intriguing group of plants that are often called Dutchman’s Pipe because of the resemblance of the inflorescence to an exciting smoker’s calabash.

Another common name is the Birthwort; the plant is supposedly valuable in childbirth, though this is undoubtedly a case of a visual similarity to a human body part suggesting a latent use in medicine. Aristolochia has indeed been used in modern herbalism, but when it has been found as an adulterant in some dieting preparations it has caused great illness. What is certainly true is the botanical name comes from the Greek *aristos*, best, and *lochos*, concerning birth.

The most dramatic Aristolochia are certainly to be found in the tropics. At Kew as a student in the late 1990s I grew from seeds donated by Terry Sunderland an example of *Pararistolochia*, the national flower of Cameroon. In the Princess of Wales Conservatory it was a spindly vine with the stature of a runner bean; seeing it in the lower rainforest of Mount Cameroon was an altogether different experience. The vine itself is as thick as a leg, all foliage was scores of meters high in the canopy amongst epiphytic Orchids. The flower is produced solitarily and cauliflorally at ground level. It is as big as a man’s chest and resembles a badly cleaned toilet bowl on its side. The scent is appropriate too. It is rarely seen and is never forgotten.

Also at Kew I grew *Aristolochia grandiflora*, collected in Vera Cruz, Mexico, by Phil Brewster. This is another giant, which can measure over 2.5m from the top of the calyx to the tip of the tail-like limb. I remember well awaiting the inflorescence to open, walking past it daily, as the bud, resembling a crouching monster in profile swelled in the half light, its corpse-white skin with varicose venation. Once open the scent was putrid, so I simply had to



Chris Kidd when a student at Kew, nurturing *Aristolochia*

bring it to a lecture by Roy Lancaster at the Jodrell Laboratory. Roy held it aloft for all to see before placing it fully over his face, like a scene from the Alien franchise.

At Ventnor we grow several species. One of the larger flowering vines is *Aristolochia gigantea*. Not as large as its tropical cousins, it is impressive, and able to withstand the 45°C temperature swings of our Tropical House. The flowers are held high on the vine, which itself has leaves that when crushed smell like a Terry’s Chocolate Orange. The flower’s scent is quite nasty, but nothing compared to its nearby neighbour. *A. trilobata* has an odour very close to fresh human faeces, emitted from a tiny flower the size of a mouse. When teatime family favourite TV show *Countryfile* visited, we introduced the flower to a curmudgeonly John Craven who almost inhaled the whole thing, annulus and all, expecting an altogether different experience.

Out of doors we have the extraordinarily resilient *A. californica*. Whilst not commonly considered hardy, this winter flowering creeper has survived since before 1986, probably since the early 1970s, growing through a knot of *Osmanthus* and *Viburnum* at the end of the Mixed Border. Despite the best efforts of every gardener ever able to root a cutting it has steadfastly refused to be propagated, and I’ve never once seen a seed pod either.

We have records of having grown other half hardy species at VBG since the 1980s and I’ve found if an Aristolochia makes it through two winters it’s a good prospect for several more. It’s just getting the damn thing through the first one.

The final species to be mentioned is *Aristolochia delavayi*. This is a Chinese species which is CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) listed. It has a wild population exhausted and annually punished afresh, as is the moth whose larvae depend upon it. It is not supposed to be in cultivation, though I once found it in a Cornish nursery and persuaded the owner to part with one. I learned it had been collected from the wild by a well-known eccentric Cornishman. This man, of no inconsiderable means as it turned out, had been a garden labourer on a large estate managed by a man who can only be described as a fool. One day, upon receiving foolish instruction, the Cornishman pushed off with his barrow of tools. After a short while he pushed off himself – not just from the estate, but from the county and indeed the country. Thereafter he extensively toured China on a botanical pilgrimage, collecting seeds to fill his own personal estate, which has now become a living treasure house of rare, though often ill gotten, gains. Upon word of this man’s passing, and fearful of the fate of some of these gems, our heroic nurseryman carried out a midnight raid on the garden, *Aristolochia delavayi* being part of the booty. (The garden is quite safe, and held by one of Britain’s great plantsmen).

Our *Aristolochia delavayi* succumbed when the huge *Griselinia* it used as a climbing frame fell over; killed by the mass of Aristolochia. Like *A. californica* it never seeded or gave a root to a cutting, but I hope one day to be able to prize one away from Cornwall again.



Dramatic: *Aristolochia* study by Julian Winslow

The Omniscient Gardener

Why the Beast from the East showed its claws and what we can learn from the reaction of VBG's Living Collection



*Future shock? Freezing our Living Collection.
Photograph by Ian Pratt*

The 'Beast from the East' originated in the West Pacific in late January as a system of record-breaking thunderstorms. The knock-on effects of these storms caused the polar vortex which circles 30km over the Arctic to change direction and spill cold air south into Siberia. Sudden Stratospheric Warming then occurred, as warmer southern air from the South rushed into the Arctic to fill the gap and pushed Arctic temperatures 10 to 20°C over average temperatures. The Arctic weather pattern nudged the jet stream south and ushered Siberian chills into Europe, heralding readings 7°C less than average. At VBG this means the mercury dropped from the benign 3°C level to -4°C. Now that is really *pushing the boundaries of half-hardiness*.

We look forward to studying our Living Collection to understand each species' reaction to these freezing temperatures in each location. We are exposed to the East, because the shelterbelt created after the 1986 freeze was largely designed to interrupt weather arriving from the southwest.

And so we continue: the landslide of 2014 which cut visitor numbers by 24 per cent that year; the sudden death of our incline lift in 2017, the big freeze of 2018 ... Resilience is a mark of character.

We will not know what the 'Beast from the East', this winter's cold snap, did to the Living Collection at VBG for some time, but we do know that the Ventnor MethodSM has made the Garden more robust.

We do know that successive generations of self-managing plant populations tend to produce a more robust gene pool suited to our microclimate. Our tame microclimate only dips below freezing during rare weather patterns. The last such prolonged dip in the Garden occurred in 1986. The weather acts as an omniscient gardener, weeding out those species or plants whose genetics cannot manage in our climate.

We also know that unsettled and erratic weather patterns are a hallmark of climate change.

As we look to the next five years, it is important to raise our sights and contribute to the international community of botanic gardens. We are close to signing our first international collaboration and we look forward to describing our aims in more detail in a future issue of *Ventnorensis*. Broadly we want to support *in situ* plant conservation in one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, a place where a high percentage of endemic species are under threat of extinction.

You will see many new faces at VBG in 2018 as we continue in our set direction to establish a financially self-sustaining Garden. Your continued support is vital: as plant and seed buyers, as volunteers, as donors, as coffee connoisseurs, as Botanic Ale drinkers, as gourmets, as "shopoholics" and even as Yoga nidra or Tai Chi practitioners. Every penny helps.

NOTICE OF THE Annual General Meeting of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society *to be held on Thursday, 20th April 2018 at 7.00pm in The Visitor Centre, Ventnor Botanic Garden*

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 30th April 2017
4. Report of the Executive Committee
5. Financial Report and Accounts for 2017
6. Membership Report
7. Subscriptions for 2019
8. Closure of the business of the present Charity Account with resignation of officers and members of the Committee
8. Election of Officers for the new Charitable Incorporated Organisation: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer
9. Election of Executive Committee (not more than 10 members)
10. Meeting closes

Rosemary Stewart, Hon Secretary

We shall follow the meeting with the Presentation of the annual Harold Hillier Award for Services to Horticulture on the Isle of Wight.

We shall call in the profits earned by those who were successful in their efforts to fulfill our President's Talent challenge last year. Curator Chris Kidd will give a talk about the latest achievements and projects planned for the future in Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Best job in the world

This year's Harold Hillier Award is to be presented to journalist Richard Wright. **Roz Whistance** meets him



Richard reporting on Secret Art, 2017. With his partner Kate Cranwell, and Rosemary Stewart

On his final gardening page for the County Press, Richard Wright wanted his readers to understand why he would no longer be writing the column he'd penned for 16 years. It wasn't that he'd had enough of writing the garden and horticultural stories that had so fascinated him over the years: it was that the column could no longer be guaranteed. "I said I didn't want it to be a shadow of its former self," says Richard, adding: "Trouble was, that line was cut out."

Richard was with the CP for 30 years in total: he wrote the gardening column for 16. "My aim was to keep it fresh, never generic. I liked to support organisations like VBG and the National Garden Scheme, run on a shoestring by people who care."

He's always found gardening to evoke great passions: "A lot of important stories hardly had any reaction, but people always engage when it comes to gardening. Readers would bring in cuttings or seeds that they couldn't identify. One lady brought a huge cannabis plant! A chap who developed his own tomato often came in to chat. You develop relationships with people and I miss that."

He took the column on for two weeks to cover holiday, and ended up keeping it. "I've been interested in nature since I was a young boy. My father very gently introduced me to gardening with my own little patch." He still has Virginia Creeper leaves from Puckpool Park pressed in a book made from X-ray paper that his father, a chiropodist with a small mobility equipment business, would get from his hospital visits.

Richard was just 16 when his father died. "I took on his garden tasks and enjoyed even the mundane jobs. When we got our first greenhouse it was a revelation."

He began propagating tomatoes or wheeling barrow-loads of seaweed from the beach for his veg patch, and a lifelong fascination with horticulture ensued. "I did have normal teenage interests as well, like motorbikes and girls," he adds quickly.

English was his best subject at school and he landed a job on the CP. After qualifying he moved to the Portsmouth News as chief reporter for the IoV. He also lectured at Camp

Hill Prison, where he started a newspaper with the inmates. "I learnt computer technology, then in its infancy. In return I taught the prisoners to improve their skills."

Moving to the Weekly Post Richard eventually became News Editor, and turning freelance he ran the Isle of Wight News Agency. "The biggest story I did was the Parkhurst Prison escape, when a rapist, a robber and a burglar went on the run. I was fielding calls from across the world, getting the copy out at the same time."

With the birth of his first child Richard returned to the CP, and while the gardening page was an adjunct to his main job it has given him a great sense of satisfaction – with a tinge of regret: "Writing and gardening are the best jobs in the world. If I'd had put those things together earlier who knows where I'd have been."

His knowledge of horticulture certainly suggests he could have done a Titchmarsh and trained as a gardener first before taking his interest to print and beyond. "I'm fascinated by plant development – the hybrids, say, that replace traditional plants and sometimes do the same job better."

While he wasn't looking to leave the CP for another couple of years, he's hardly finding time hanging heavy. Richard has projects.

"I've always been busy. Years ago I did up an explosion-damaged house at the same time as my then-wife and I converted a Victorian water tower into a house. I now live in a garage – well I say garage, it's a three-storey, two-thirds scale replica of the water tower. Now I'm restoring a 1953 Arcon prefab."

The 'restoration' was more of a Meccano construction writ large. To transport it from the mainland he and his best friend cut it up and numbered the parts, but the numbers were washed off by the time they came to assemble the metal frame.

"Actually it was that prefab restoration that was the catalyst for my retirement. That friend died suddenly in November. I started to think time is precious: – do I really want to continue working 9-5? Probably not."

When most newly-retirees say, as Richard does, that they've an interest in classic cars, in motorbikes, that they do a bit of woodturning – the implication is they are ready to dabble. For Richard though, it's a case of first make your man-cave. "I'm clearing the workshop in my 'garage' to be a kitchen. I've got some reclaimed boards from Ryde pier; I want to make a suspended table ..."

The garage-come-three-storey watertower-lookalike is surrounded by a meadow, but gardening projects are on hold until his workshop is done. "I've got two allotments which need doing, and I ought to pay a bit of attention to my partner [Kate Cranwell, lead feature writer on the CP]. So it'll be nice in a year or two to get back to creating a proper garden again."

His commitment to supporting our Garden with all the years of reporting its many events will be rewarded when he is presented with the Harold Hillier Award this April. "I feel tremendously honoured," he says. "A little embarrassed, but tremendously honoured."

Hear Richard speak about writing and horticulture following the AGM on April 20th

Weather in the Garden

(September 2017 – March 2018) by Chris Watts

The wettest day of this seven month period came early as 25mm of rain fell on the 3rd September. No other day came near, but it did not follow that the weather was dry. December, January and March were quite wet, but rather than heavy falls to boost the totals it was mainly light rain falling over many days. Named storms came and went although luckily Ventnor was never in the direct line of any of these, and to date G (Georgina) has been the last storm to pass over, this in late January.

Many of us may remember the peculiar dark skies of the 16th October which brought threatening clouds and a strange red glow to the sun. That was storm Ophelia dragging up Saharan dust and detritus from forest fires on the Iberian peninsula. A few days later storm Brian arrived and the Garden lost an Olive tree. In the first week of the New Year the Garden lost an Acacia trineura and a Heteromeles plant as storm Eleanor passed by. The loss of the Heteromeles was sad, since it was quite rare and the largest specimen of its kind in the UK. Chris tells me it is unlikely to be replaced.

Of note in December was the first air frost for 21 months (7th March 2016), when -1.0°C was registered on the 12th. The number of plants in bloom on New Year's Day was 185, following the December mean temperature of 7.2°C. This reflects the downward trend of December temperatures over the past three years: 206 plants last year (mean 8.9°C) and 287 plants the previous year (mean 11.9°C).

There is a little verse which goes 'as the days grow longer, the cold gets stronger'. How true that was for February and March! Snow, ice, frost and bitter easterly winds hit the area on February 6th, 26th-28th, and March 1st, 2nd, 17th-19th, the 18th seeing snow cover of two to three inches. The last day of February was an ice day (highest temperature below freezing), and the first day of March started with -3.5°C, the lowest value since 12th February 2012 (-3.8°C). The duration of air frost over these two months was 84.5 hours. Unfortunately as a result there will be significant effects to the Garden; other articles in this magazine give more detail. (See Curator's Report, Page 2, and John Curtis, Page 8. See Graph, Page 2)

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
September	15.2	98.3++	13	16.5	8.5	0	24.6
October	14.1++	32.2—	8	14.7	4.3	0	7.4
November	9.4	52.6—	9	10.8	0.3	0	11.9
December	7.2	111.0 ++	16	7.4	-1.0	1	17.6
Year 2017	12.0	801.0	109	13.1	-1.0	1	34.1
January	7.9++	92.3++	18	7.5	1.8	0	14.5
February	4.9—	35.7—	7	5.8	-3.3	4	12.9
March	6.5—	107.3++	19	6.6	-3.5	5	14.5

[1] Lowest temperature °C

[2] No of air frosts

[3] Wettest day rain total in mm

Dear members . . .

The same point seems to come up again and again in this issue of *Ventnorenensis* – the overwhelming draw of growing things – and this despite the weather that hit the gardeners hard in February and March as Chris Kidd and John Curtis describe, Pages 2 and 8.

Journalist Richard Wright, just retired from the County Press, says on Page 10 that he covered all sorts of important stories in his 30 years there but it was his gardening column that evoked readers' passions. Mike Nelhams, curator of the Abbey Garden, Tresco, mentions on Pages 26-27 that over 50 per cent of the people interviewed for a training scheme were in their 40s, looking for a desk-free career change. Indeed, you only have to look at the healthy numbers of our own volunteers to see that people really want to be out there with their trowels and spades as John Bagshawe testifies, Inside Back page.

Our two apprentices know this all too well and on Pages 16-17 David Pearce vividly describes how, thanks to Friends' funding, he and George Tyler benefited from working on Tresco. Further down the academic line is Rachael Graham who gives a fascinating preview of her Café Botanique talk about her island flora evolution studies on page 31; and Dr Colin Pope on Page 14 is evangelical about the insects that have, uninvited, taken up residence among our plants, drawing experts and enthusiasts to come and take a look.

You don't have to wield a spade to appreciate being in the Garden of course. Our Summer Party (Page 22-23) will feature wonderful music to complement the (hopefully) balmy evening as well as displaying art on canvas. The Ventnor Botanical Artists are back, Page 3, and our Artists in Residence Bridgette and John Sibbick are not only multi-talented but stalwart volunteers too – Page 19, and Page 21 for Bridgette's fundraising swim.

All in all this is a bit of an island-themed Issue. Now if you were washed up on a desert island, which eight pieces of music would you hope you'd remembered to pack? See Page 29.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please let me have contributions to the Autumn edition by 30th September 2018.



Gardening Volunteers

Help is always required in the Garden and we warmly welcome new recruits to work with the Garden staff and dedicated volunteers, either in a friendly group on a Wednesday morning or at other times to be arranged. No qualifications or previous experience is required and apart from sensible clothing and a flask of refreshment, bring your own hand tools.

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

See John Bagshawe's story, Inside Back Page

Beastly residents attract welcome guests

Our Garden is home to minibeasts unseen elsewhere in Britain, says **Colin Pope**, so now it's a mecca for insect specialists too

In the last few years, Ventnor Botanic Garden has become a magnet for visiting specialists looking for strange and unusual minibeasts that have been accidentally introduced over the years with plant material. It all started in September 2016, when Tony Barber, who is a national expert on centipedes and millipedes, visited the Gardens, hoping to find some interesting species. A number of these creatures have been accidentally introduced into gardens with horticultural material and they tend to be from warmer climes and often on the borderline of hardiness in this country, surviving mostly in greenhouses and outdoors only in the mildest parts of south-western Britain. Tony was successful in his search. In particular, he found three millipedes which are greenhouse or botanic garden specialists including one which was new to Britain. He also came across Land-hoppers, terrestrial shrimp-like creatures originally from Australia, living in the leaf litter. Since the news of his discoveries, experts who specialise in obscure groups have been attracted to the Garden to see what else they could find.

These unexpected finds have included the ants which can be abundant around some of the buildings in the Garden causing something of a nuisance. They have developed a peculiar habit of clustering inside electrical sockets. Visiting ant expert, Phil Attewell, collected specimens and these proved to be *Tapinoma ibericum*, a little-known species which is native to a restricted area of the Iberian peninsula. This is the first (and only) record from this country. They probably arrived in the Garden in the soil ball of one of the large olive trees. This is one of a group of continental ants which are known to form large super-colonies. Other, closely related species, are known to be highly invasive when introduced outside of their native range. There are no known colonies of *Tapinoma ibericum* outside of its native range apart from ours at Ventnor. Colonies at Signal House are being effectively controlled.



An Iberian Ant, *Tapinoma ibericum* in the Tropical House

Another visiting insect specialist, Mark Telfer, was attracted to the Garden to look for the rare millipedes and ants. Whilst here, he also came across a tiny flightless insect living under large boulders with the ants. This was a type of Thysanuran, a primitive group of insects that includes Silverfish, which you may have seen in a dark, damp area of your house, scuttling away when exposed to light. The one Mark found was yellow in colour and unlike anything he had seen before. A few days later, and quite independently, local expert Stephen Plummer came across the same insects. Both were convinced that this was a new species for this country and it is believed to be *Atelura formicaria*. Formal



Yellow Silverfish, *Atelura formicaria* new to Britain



Rosy Woodlouse, *Androniscus dentiger* sieved from leaf litter

confirmation of this is awaited. The Yellow Silverfish spends all its time living underground in ants' nests, scavenging debris. It has lost the use of its eyes but is very sensitive to touch. It is a remarkable fact that for over 60 years the number of species in this group known in the UK remained static at nine species before a new species was discovered in Berkshire in 2014; and now a second new species, this time at Ventnor.

The silverfish Mark found was yellow in colour and unlike anything he had seen before

In September 2017, local expert Stephen Plummer and visiting fungal expert, Alan Outen, visited the Garden to re-find and to photograph some of the Garden's speciality minibeasts. They found all of the creatures mentioned above but they also found lots of interesting things. These included the first flatworm recorded from the Garden and a rarely seen Ear-shelled Slug. The terrestrial flatworm, *Kontikia ventrolineata*, was living under stones in the Mediterranean Garden. It is an Australian species for which there are only a handful of British records. Fortunately, unlike many introduced flatworms, this one is not known to cause problems in gardens. Some introduced flatworms are predators of earthworms; this one consumes slugs and snails.

The Ear-shelled Slug, *Testacella haliotidea*, belongs to an unusual group of air-breathing, carnivorous slugs which have a small shell situated towards the end of the body. Being carnivorous, these slugs are remarkably active but they are mostly subterranean and they are rarely seen.

There must be more as yet undiscovered rare minibeasts living in the Gardens. However, so long as visiting experts continue to make good finds we are likely to continue to remain a hot spot for visiting experts.



An Australian Flatworm, *Kontikia ventrolineata* under stones in the Mediterranean Garden



An Ear-shelled Slug, *Testacella haliotidea* under stones in the Mediterranean Garden

Island hopping

VBG's apprentices, David and George, had two weeks' work experience in the Abbey Garden, Tresco. **David Pearce** describes his trip - and the affect it has had on his future

Drive, walk, ferry, walk, bus, train, walk, train, walk, bus, plane, bus, ferry, golf buggy. After 11 hours of travelling I arrived on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, 28 miles south-west of Land's End. The island is the second most populated of the 145 that make up the archipelago, notable for crystal clear water; white sandy beaches and a utopia for flora and fauna.

The Abbey Garden curator and island manager, Mike Nelhams, showed me to my accommodation, then almost immediately I was cycling along the rough, unlit road to badminton practice. The island is devoid of snakes, badgers, foxes, streetlights, cars and pensioners, but there was plenty to keep me busy!



Tresco: Utopia for flora and fauna

I had packed all the horticultural and botany books I could lay my hands on, predicting two weeks in a cold cabin with just the seals and squirrels to keep me company (not unlike the VBG internships). How wrong I was. I should have packed my swimming trunks, tennis racket and 12 different sports outfits: badminton, table tennis, circuit training, gig rowing, tennis and Zumba were just some of the post-work activities popular with many of the 100 island residents.

After an hour and a half of hitting a shuttle-cock out the court I cycled back to my luxury cottage in the woods, which I shared with Ben Martin, a garden designer based in north London, and Nuala, a horticulture student from up north.

My first day's work at the gardens started at 8am on Friday 2nd Feb, after a five-minute cycle around a lake, across a sand dune, past the Abbey and past a whole row of spectacular, 20 ft tall *Leucadendron argenteum*.

I met Mike in the Tresco equivalent of VBG's Nammet Room, where I was introduced to the staff: John (Assistant Head Gardener), Emma (Fruit and Veg) and Steve (Nurseries). The students were Barbara Griffith, Matt Payne and Julie Embury, and Willow, who was on the Tripos scheme, a one-year rotational training at Cornish gardens Heligan, Eden and Tresco.

On Tresco hedges create a much-needed windbreak against the constant onslaught of wind from the Atlantic Ocean. My first job was to cut a couple of these from a seemingly

endless labyrinth of hedges. Working with a large workforce gave me something I don't often experience at VBG; the time to do my job properly and thoroughly.

For the majority of the two weeks we were clearing what is known as 'The Old Abbey', which includes ancient tombs, archways and the stone remainder of the monastic settlement circa 946 AD. This involved weeding around the peculiar *Musschia wallastonii*, cutting back Australian ferns and clearing entire areas for planting the next week. My jobs included mowing the majority of the gardens, cleaning the glasshouses and completely replacing the soil in the fruit cage with nutrient-rich compost.

Now, I could write a 50-page essay on all the spectacular plants that I discovered in Tresco Abbey Gardens, but I'll leave that pleasure to next year's apprentice.

One plant that caught my eye was the huge vines of *Clianthus puniceus*. Our examples at Ventnor are small, moderately boring plants: the flowers, however, are certainly not boring with huge clumps of bright red lobster claws. *Clianthus puniceus* are classed as nationally critical in the wild so it was a real pleasure to see such a beautiful, inflorescence-covered specimen. One day I hope to see it in the wilds of North Island New-Zealand.

It was intriguing, from a botanical point of view, to see *Lotus bertelotti* loving the February sun and flowering in small container pots. Originally from the Canary Isles, like a lot of the rare specimens at Tresco, *Lotus bertelotti* is extinct in the wild and believed impossible to re-introduce as it is only able to be reproduced asexually (cuttings), which suggests only one sex of the plant is in cultivation (that we know of).

I was influenced immensely by *Dendroseris litoralis* – The Cabbage Tree. Growing under the shade of gigantic *Metrosideros excelsa* trees on Tresco, it is an exceptionally rare plant from Robinson Crusoe Island, in the Juan Fernandez Islands. It is iconic in modern plant conservation as botanists brought it back from the brink of extinction.

One of the most exciting and inspiring parts of my trip to Tresco were the two phone calls I received from The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and RHS Garden Wisley, both inviting me to interview for the extremely prestigious diploma course they offer. Since then I attended the interview at RHS Wisley and have been offered a place. My trip to Tresco was crucial to nailing the interview, as I was surrounded by people with exceptional plant knowledge, and we did weekly plant ident tests. Since starting my two weeks in Tresco I have successfully learned three plants a day.

I have learnt a huge amount from my two weeks on Tresco, but a standout point was the realisation of how lucky I am to be gaining a prestigious horticultural qualification from a botanic garden of international importance. I also realised how fortunate I am to have such amazing support from my colleges and from the VBG Friends' Society, who, on top of paying for my trip to Tresco have funded a chainsaw qualification, a spraying qualification and educational trips to Kew Gardens and The RHS Chelsea Flower Show. The Friends' Society has helped me hugely in my apprenticeship and without doubt contributed to helping me gain a place on the Wisley diploma.

Among the things I brought back from Tresco Abbey Gardens was an overflowing bag of cuttings, a rucksack of seeds and a refreshed appreciation for my apprenticeship.

See Tresco's Curator Mike Nelhams, Page 26

Botany Club

An early programme for members of our Botany Club has now been planned. The events are run on an informal basis for the Friends and volunteers with a donation of £5 each time towards the funds. We welcome anyone to join us. We always learn something new and interesting from our expert leaders. For outings we meet on a Wednesday afternoon at 2pm.

On 23rd May, Dave and Hazel Trevan will take us on a walk through Alverstone Mead Nature Reserve to look at wild flowers, birds and squirrels.

On 20th June, Andy Butler will lead us up Afton Down to look at chalk down plants and butterflies.

On 30th May we have arranged with moth experts James Halsey and Iain Outlaw for a Moth Night at VBG. They will put out traps in the evening and see what is caught early on then

next morning. 31st May we can go back to see what has been lured in overnight to our special plants. This is planned for half term. Your £5 will cover both visits.

On the evening of 16th May we have arranged another of our unique Café Botanique talks. Rachael Graham is a PhD student from Southampton University studying echiums in the archipelagos off North Africa and Southern Europe so I am sure we will learn more about our ubiquitous plants at VBG.

Later we shall arrange some more outings. I shall send out more details in due course. If you are interested in going on the mailing list for Botany Club please let me know. rosemarystewart@icloud.com or 292107 / 07779477101. You will be very welcome.

Rosemary Stewart



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Artists in Residence

John and Bridgette Sibbick are looking forward to taking up residency in the Garden from mid April to October



"I have been illustrating for over 40 years," says John, "books, TV, stamps for the Royal Mail, dinosaurs for the Natural History Museum gallery. A large part of my output involves reconstruction of all kinds of fossil creatures and environments from invertebrates to birds and human evolution – which will be perfect for people watching in the Garden.

My main aim is to produce drawings and paintings of the 'prehistoric' fossil plants – including cycads, magnolia, ginkgo and monkey puzzle, which are relatively unchanged from Jurassic and Cretaceous eras.

You may find me bobbing about all over the Garden wherever these plants are found studying their growth patterns in detail."



Bridgette says: "I've worked in mixed media for many years, concentrating for some time in transforming float (window) glass in my kiln into bowls, plates, jewellery and small sculptures. I've also studied ceramics, metalwork and printmaking.

Lately I've turned my attention to making experimental pieces from natural materials and this is what I hope to progress in from my time in the Garden. I also hope that the Garden will provide me with ideas to take into glass and printmaking.

We won't be in the Garden every day but when we are, the studio will be open and please visit to see what we are up to."



Clockwise from top:
Washingtonia by John
Woven and painted shield by Bridgette
Pine needle baskets by Bridgette
Canary palm by John



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Intrepid: Bridgette and Linda

the mass of swimmers charged into the sea. Our two kept well away from the crowd and were soon up to their necks enjoying every minute – they seemed reluctant to come out!

The Friends, and friends, gave generously and over £400 was raised which will go towards purchasing magnolia for the refurbished Asian terraces.

Boxing Day Swim

Wet wet wet . . . all for a good cause

The day was cold with a leaden sky and raining but Small Hope beach in Shanklin was seething with spectators wrapped up in woolly hats and puffer jackets. Our two intrepid swimmers, Bridgette Sibbick and Linda Davis emerged before the beach huts and hardly had a moment when

Friends get festive

A record number of Friends and Volunteers enjoyed an excellent Christmas lunch in December. Chris Kidd gave us an update on the Garden and the Chef and staff looked after us very well.

Spirit of Christmas: Luscious lunch



Botany Club Moth Night

Join the Moth Men, James Halsey and Iain Outlaw to learn about the moths that inhabit our Garden and set traps for them. 30th May 8pm. Return next morning, from 8am, to see which species have been caught. £5. Meet outside Visitor Centre.

A Summer Party to remember

Don't miss the music and art of the remarkable Grimshaws, says **Roz Whistance**

The Summer Party this year will take something of a different turn. Following a delicious *edulis* meal, singer songwriter sibling duo JC and Angelina Grimshaw, with their family Fun Band, will provide the music. It'll be a change of direction from previous years, certainly – but exactly what sort of atmosphere we can expect depends very much upon the night.

"If the guests are quietly drinking and they want a concert we'll do that," says JC. "If they want a bit more of a hoedown, we'll take it there."

It isn't just the mood JC, Angelina and the band will pick up on. The range of styles and genres of music they can turn their hand to is vast, to the extent that JC's wife Cathy, herself a classical violinist and pianist who plays fiddle in the Fun Band says she still finds it hard to answer the 'what sort of music?' question. "It's world music, a bit of jazz, blues, ballads – it's such a mixture." She adds, smiling: "I'm used to it now but when I was first with JC people would ring up and say 'I'm looking to book a Mexican band,' and JC would say 'Yep, I can do that!' or 'I'm after a Scottish band' and JC would say 'yep yep fine I can do that'. And he can."

The ability to turn his hand to so many genres arises from a lifetime of being steeped in music, and an unquenchable interest in stringed instruments of all kinds. JC grew up in Ryde, in a house "quite eccentric and mad, full of art and music and friends."

It was a good starting point for JC and his younger sister. "I got my first guitar when I was 10, and a neighbour showed me three chords. I went home, wrote six songs, went back the next day and said 'I've learnt that, can I have some more chords please?'"

Within a few months JC had taught his younger sister Angelina some chords and they were playing in the folk club. "I don't know how people put up with us, but it was a starting point!"

So began a lifelong interest in instruments old, rare and unusual. Long before the current popularity of the ukulele JC had brought back vintage instruments from America. "I love gear, I love equipment and knowing where it comes from. I love collecting old vintage instruments – mandolins, guitars and banjos."

He had only had a mandolin for about a year when he saw an advert for a mandolin player for Midge Ure's band. A glance at JC's website is enough to show the many



Capturing the mood: JC Grimshaw

connections made and places and people that his music has brought him to: that old expression 'Jack of all trades and master of none' is about as inappropriate as could be. JC is master of every beautiful, well crafted instrument he picks up – while Angelina's extraordinary voice ranges from ballad songbird to dusky husky blues.

The Grimshaw family talent pervades all generations: 17-year-old Sol, who will be part of the Fun Band at the Summer Party, is currently studying jazz guitar at the prestigious Purcell School in London, and 14-year old Tilly is a skilled piano and violin player.

The patriarch of all this talent makes quite an entrance. Johnny Grimshaw, father of JC and Angelina, is tall, wearing a paint-spattered beret that barely tames his wild hair. It is Johnny who paints the images that appear on the duo's CD covers – but he'd rather not describe himself as an artist: "I call myself an oil paint poet," he says. "I write songs and poetry, and I'm actually composing the ideas I have in my head all the time I'm painting, rather than copying something I'm looking at."

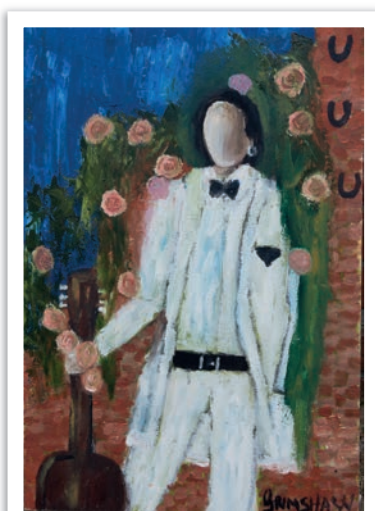
While the subject of his paintings is clear, their non-representational style suggests as much a mood or ambience, music in fact, as a picture of his singing offspring. "I used to sing in folk clubs years ago," adds Johnny, "and had a go at writing a few books, and I published some poetry anthologies, too."

All quite surprising given that his parents were farmers in Hampshire. "They were the sort of people who liked to keep a low profile," says Johnny – who doesn't. "I was the first generation to go down the music and art route. I was really stepping into the unknown, but for my grandson now it's just normal."

While Johnny's move to CD cover art 20 or so years ago curtailed his instinct to paint large, each image is vibrant within a controlled colour palette. At his exhibition at VBG he will be selling limited edition prints and some originals, including miniatures. "The whole point about prints is that two people buy the same image for two different households and it becomes a very different image, depending on the way it's viewed and the setting it's in. In different abodes it's seen through very different eyes."

Looking with a critical eye at one of his paintings of JC's band The Dance Preachers he recalls how it 'called its own colour.' "Greens would not have worked with it – the painting itself taught me that."

Johnny Grimshaw's exhibition will be at VBG on Sunday May 27th. JC's Fun Band will be playing at the Summer Party on May 26th



Guitar and Roses: Painting by Johnny



Oil Paint Poet: Johnny Grimshaw

Plant Sale

Come and buy something new to refresh your garden

Plant sale on the Top Lawn, May 20th, from 11am to 1pm.

Contact Bridgette for more details - 867739



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The lovely VBGFS logo can be embroidered on any garment of your choice – a t-shirt, sweatshirt, fleece or gilet, says Caroline Peel who bought a plain gilet and took it to Kids and Co, 22 High Street, Ryde. Kids and Co hold the artwork for the logo, and charge around £6 to put it on any piece of clothing.

Incidentally, our logo was designed by Shaun Cuff, aka The Constant Doodler, who you can read about in March/April's Style of Wight magazine.

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Projects come to fruition

Photographs by Rosemary Stewart

November saw the final touches being added to the Dreamtime terraces in the Australia garden, and by the time you will be reading this, the terraces will be officially opened, an occasion marked, appropriately, to the sound of the didgeridoo and a burning herbs ceremony.



*The Wight Hand:
John Sibbick adds his mark*



Project done: Hannah George, the artist



As for Japan, the terraces envisaged such a long time ago progressed with Japanese-styled architecture and sea of stones feature. Now the planting is blossoming and the effect visualised at the start now coming to fruition.

*Photographs by
Rosemary Stewart*

We don't do devastated

Mike Nelhams is curator of the Abbey Garden, Tresco, which, like VBG, rose from the ashes of the Great Storm of 1987. Look at it now, says **Liz Norbury**

Subtropical plants have flourished in the sunshine and shelter of Tresco Abbey Garden for well over a century – but 30 years ago, the island paradise suffered catastrophic damage when ferocious winds battered Britain. Tresco was one of the first places to be hit by the Great Storm of 1987, and by the early hours of October 16th, 90 per cent of the Abbey Garden's trees had been felled.



The island from the air: Mike looks forward to the return of the helicopter service

Some of the hundreds of lost trees were part of the original shelterbelt of Monterey pines and cypresses planted by Augustus Smith when he established the exotic garden among the ruins of a 12th century priory, after leasing Tresco from the Duchy of Cornwall in 1834. Other specimens dated from the days of his nephew Thomas Algernon Dorrien Smith, who enhanced the plant collection.

Head gardener Mike Nelhams must surely have been devastated by his first sight of the ruined garden. "I couldn't quite believe so many plants had died so quickly and in such profusion," he says. "But I don't do devastated – it's not in my nature." Just over two years later, the Burns Day storm of January 1990 wreaked further havoc, and some of the trees which had survived the earlier storm toppled over newly-established plants.

Even after this second disaster, Mike did not despair. "It was exciting to have the task of putting the garden back together. We have links with the best gardens around the world, and many wanted to help. The Dorrien Smiths are a well-known horticultural family across the world, and having trained at RHS Wisley I had lots of contacts. We collected lorryloads of plants from Kew Gardens – more than we asked for. Bringing them back to Tresco was quite difficult, but still very satisfying."

Thirty years on, the garden is as glorious as it has ever been, and is now home to plants from over 80 countries. As Mike says: "Tresco is quite extraordinary. Even in winter, there are more than 300 different plants in flower. We'll have plants from both sides of the southern hemisphere in full bloom. Australian gum trees – *Eucalyptus ficifolia* – and South African amaryllis are the two things which bring the garden alive in September, because we have so many of them. You'll find plants from the southern hemisphere in some Cornish gardens, but we have them all together, from 40ft plants from the Canary Islands to great clumps of South African succulents. And because we're an evergreen garden, it's not just about the flowers but also the leaf shapes."

Five generations of the Dorrien Smith family have lived on the island, all making their own contribution to the garden. "Many of the planting records have been lost, but we do have some from the 1850s. In 1987, we were going to put the information from a 1960s card index on computer – but the storm came, and we had to concentrate on restoring the garden."

Mike arrived on Tresco in 1976, as a student on a scholarship from the Studley College Trust. "I came for a year, but I stayed for two and a half – I didn't want to leave," he recalls. He went on to run High Beeches in Sussex until he was asked by Robert Dorrien Smith to return to Tresco as head gardener in 1984. He is now garden curator.

Every year, three Studley College Trust scholars come to the island, just as Mike once did. "It really assists us to have them here, because we only have a small team," he says. "Every couple of years, I take the whole team to Italy, to the Hanbury Botanical Garden – Tresco had links with it in the 1860s and 70s, when there was a plant exchange. Going to a garden which is comparable to Tresco really enthuses the gardeners and the students, and they come back with lots of seeds and fresh ideas."

Recent work included creating a wildflower meadow by the garden's beehives, and making space on the top terrace for South African and Australian proteas. "If a 100ft bed is looking tired, we re-do a section at a time: if you put in young plants without protection from established plants nearby, they'll all wave around in the wind."

He is delighted that Tresco has become a magnet for cruise ships. "We have Americans, French, Australians – they often say they chose the cruise because it came to Scilly, which is nice. It's also nice for our gardeners and students to help with guided tours."



Seeds and ideas: Mike Nelhams

Mike now leads garden tours all over the world. "In the last few years I've been to Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, and California. I wander round wonderful gardens, have a few glasses of wine, and point out a few plants. I never realised that being a gardener would give me the chance to travel the world."

He certainly never imagined that he would become an air traffic controller, a role he took on in the days of the Penzance-Tresco helicopter link. The service finished in 2012, but Mike is confident that current proposals to reintroduce it will go ahead. "It will help the garden tremendously," he says. "We used to get 5,000 people a year coming on the helicopters, and I'm looking forward to them coming back."

With the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan Tresco runs the Tripos Programme. "It gives two students the chance to work in all three gardens over a year. We mentor and assist them to move into the next stage in their careers," Mike explains. "More than 50 per cent of the people we interviewed were career changers, some in their mid-40s. It's extraordinary – but maybe not, when you compare sitting at a computer for eight hours a day with being outside in the open air, doing something you really like."

Tresco Abbey Garden is open daily all year round. For more information, visit www.tresco.co.uk

A version of this article was published in *Cornwall Today* in 2017

See Apprentice's Story, Page 16



Isle of Wight
Rare Plant Fair
MAY 2018

SATURDAY 26TH MAY
ISLAND SPEAKERS

SUNDAY 27TH MAY
MAINLAND SPEAKERS



**HEADLINE SPEAKERS NICK HAMILTON OF BARNSDALE GARDENS
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Our Talented Friends

Many rose to Brian Kidd's challenge when he asked us to 'grow' £1 coins in aid of VBG, like the biblical Parable of the Talents. **Patricia Smith** asked Friends to her own Desert Island

Sally made soup for hungry volunteer gardeners; Caroline sold packets of herb tea; Dean sold doughnuts; Jonyth hosted a coffee and plant swap; Bridgette and Linda swam in the sea on Boxing Day. There was as much imagination as talent, and Patricia's idea was a different take on a coffee morning. "I love the BBC Radio 4 programme *Desert Island Discs*," says Patricia, who with husband Colin hosted two consecutive coffee mornings. "Music is important to us as a family - I sing in a choir; I tap dance, Colin and I dance rock 'n' roll - so selecting music and telling friends about my choices was fun, but hard."

The premise of the long-running radio show is for the guest to imagine they are shipwrecked alone on a desert island. Washed up with them are eight records. Why did they choose to take those particular discs on their imaginary voyage? If they saved just one, what would that be? Choose a book, choose a luxury.



Washed up for coffee: Palm trees helped evoke the mood

When Patricia's guests arrived they had coffee and cake - the Smith's £1s were invested here, and in a couple of inflatable palm trees just to set the mood. "I also decorated the room with LPs and CDs. People might have got an inkling of my choices as they wandered around the room. Each piece of music becomes so precious because you're only allowed eight (though actually I had nine!) You can't have just one reason for choosing a piece."

Then while Colin did the digital equivalent of spinning the discs, Patricia told the stories of her choices. "My parents would have danced to 'In The Mood' by Glen Miller in the war; mother played it on the piano; and now I tap dance to it," she says. "I chose Prokofiev's *Dance of the Knights* because, aged 15, I saw Nureyev as Romeo; then as a teacher I encouraged children to hear robots, dinosaurs, monsters in the piece - it's so powerful."

Patricia is self-deprecating about her choice of event - "It's so egotistical!" But she clearly entertained her friends who went off thinking about their own choice of eight - or nine - records. And she and Colin raised £165.

Patricia's Discs: In the Mood - Glen Miller; Beati Quorum Via - Charles Villiers Stanford; Heatwave - Martha Reeves and the Vandellas; Dance of the Knights from the ballet, Romeo and Juliet - Prokofiev; Night Fever from the film, Saturday Night Fever - The Bee Gees; Elgar's Cello Concerto - First Movement; Simply the Best - Tina Turner; Black Magic Woman - Santana; Make You Feel My Love - Adele. **She would save from the waves:** In the Mood - Glen Miller. **Book:** A Huge Book about the History of Art, from Cave Paintings to Contemporary Pieces - with lots of illustrations. **Luxury:** My personal collection of Photograph Albums cum Scrapbooks which at present takes up one and a half shelves in a big cupboard. It is a record of my life and contains many special memories.

See Bridgette & Linda's Boxing Day Swim, Page 21

Roz Whistance



The Finnis Scott
Foundation

ART EXHIBITION

‘Flora In The Garden’



Celebrating British Native Flora
at

Ventnor Botanic Garden

FRI 18th MAY - SAT 26th MAY

10am - 4pm

FREE ENTRY



VENTNOR BOTANICAL ARTISTS

CAFÉ BOTANIQUE

Evolution of the Island Echium

Rachael Graham of the Natural History Museum and University of Southampton says her studies of our iconic plant help us understand how floras of islands evolve

Regular visitors to Ventnor Botanic Garden will be familiar with the iconic sight of the towering blue flower spikes produced by *Echium pininana*, which flourishes in the warm climate of the Isle of Wight. However, they may not realise that this species is a rare and elusive plant endemic to the island of La Palma in the Canary Islands, and is just one of many *Echium* species that have evolved in the volcanic islands of the North Atlantic Ocean. Much like the famous finches of the Galapagos Islands studied by Charles Darwin, *Echium* has undergone a process of rapid adaptive radiation. In a few million years an initial colonising species, which most likely arrived from the Mediterranean, has diversified as it moved into different habitats and dispersed between islands, producing twenty-nine species.



Measuring up: Investigating how the species colonised harsh environments

From a relatively small herbaceous ancestor, an astonishing array of morphological diversity has evolved, with a variety of flower colours, leaf shapes and growth form represented on the islands. Most of the island *Echiums* are branched woody shrubs, but three species (including the giant *E. pininana*) have evolved an unusual “monocarpic” form, which means that each plant flowers only once in its lifetime, producing a single massive inflorescence, before it sets seed and the whole plant dies. In the Canary Islands, the centre of *Echium* diversity, the genus has successfully colonised almost every type of habitat, from dry coastal scrub to the humid laurel forest in the “sea of clouds”, and the extreme sub-alpine zone at the top of the highest mountains on Tenerife and La Palma.

The three *Echium* species that are endemic to this sub-alpine zone are the focus of my PhD research at the Natural History Museum in London and the University of Southampton. My project aims to investigate how these species have colonised this harsh environment that subjects plants not only to extremes of cold, but also arid volcanic soils and strong UV radiation. Current evidence suggests that these species represent at least two independent shifts to the sub-alpine zone from lower altitude, meaning that multiple *Echium* lineages have evolved in parallel along the same gradient in altitude. Using cutting-edge next generation DNA sequencing techniques I will be reconstructing evolutionary relationships between the Macaronesian *Echium* species, and ultimately aiming to discover if the same genetic changes are responsible for parallel adaptations to high altitude.

In my talk at Ventnor Botanic Garden, I hope to share with you my passion for this diverse and fascinating group of plants and to explain how studying *Echium* (and other island-endemic plants) can help us to understand how the unique and diverse floras of islands have evolved. I will also discuss oceanic islands as “natural laboratories” for scientific research, where we can investigate the fundamental processes that drive adaptation and new species.

Rachael's talk will take place on 16th May, 7pm

New members

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

Mr David Barratt & Ms Arielle Essex, Shanklin
Ms Carol Bliss, Ventnor
Ms Teresa Glover, Ventnor
Mr Hugh & Mrs Felicity Griffiths, Sandown
Mrs Lisa Jessel, Bembridge
Mr Ian & Mrs Sally Pratt, Ryde
The Hon Patrick & Mrs Susannah Seely, Brook
Mrs Fiona Smith, Bembridge
Dr Belinda Stuart-Moonlight, Folkestone.

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse



Watch this space!

We are hoping that Simon Goodenough will come in the early Autumn to tell us about his work at Folly Farm. This is considered one of the finest collaborations between Lutyens and Jekyll and the modern reinterpretation of the Garden is highly acclaimed. Watch this space!

DISCOUNTS for members

Friends should always carry their membership card. The Garden has agreed that VBGFS members are allowed two free entries per year, with immediate effect. Look out for other benefits, such as 10% discount from Deacons Nursery, Godshill, on showing your Friends' Membership Card.

Bank Account Changes

We are really grateful for all the support Friends offer. Those of you who use standing orders for subscription payments might like to note our new account details:

Nat West, Shanklin 54-41-31
Account Number: 49647717
Account Name: Ventnor Botanic Garden
Friends Society – CIO 1174751

Those who contribute to our **Foundation Account** should note its new number:

Nat West, Shanklin 54-41-31
Account Number: 49648292
Account Name: VBGFS – Foundation Fund

We would be most grateful if you could change them over for us, either online through your internet banking or by changing the details next time you visit your bank. Thank you!

Sally Peake



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Giving something back

"I came to live on the Island by mistake," says John Bagshawe. "I bought a house at auction which I didn't expect to get!"



Giving back: John Bagshawe (far left) enjoys the heavier work and never minds the weather. Photograph by Rosemary Stewart

John and his wife Karen already had an attachment to the Island and accidentally buying a house in St Lawrence was all they needed to convince them to move from their home in Kent. "I was fed up with everything being rushed and the people not being particularly friendly," says John.

He decided to try volunteering and attended the Volunteers Fair at VBG in January 2017. "I met people including Chris Kidd there and thought, yes, this is exactly what I want to do."

So John is now one of the regular crew who meet on Wednesdays at 10am to work in the Garden. "We're told by Chris what we're going to do, usually the apprentices and some of the gardeners are with us, and we all get stuck in and blitz an area. It's amazing what you can do with a lot of people."

These days around 15 people come to volunteer on Wednesdays so can really make an impact. "We've just created a path between the olive trees in the olive grove – it was fantastic. A couple of weeks ago I was felling banana trees in the Tropical House – but my favourite thing is pulling down the dead echiums," he laughs. "It's very satisfying pushing them over. Weeding on a grand scale!"

John is retired from his career as a commercial insurance broker, but being only in his fifties he has plenty of energy and particularly likes the heavy jobs. More than just the work though is the camaraderie. "They are all nice people and it's a pleasure working with them."

Volunteering gives John a huge sense of satisfaction. "You look back at what you've achieved and it's great," he says. "It's nice to be able to give something back to something that is really worthwhile."

If you would like to volunteer, whether you prefer to be in or out, meeting and greeting, propagating or pushing over dead echiums, contact Jane Cooper 861459, Jonyth Hill 730532, Bridgette Sibbick 867739 or Rosemary Stewart 292107.

Roz Whistance