

# ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'Having enjoyed, and sometimes endured, every year so far in the 21st century, I find it hard to remember one with such weather extremes as 2018' – Chris Kidd, Curator



VOLUME 25 NO. 2 AUTUMN/WINTER 2018

# Autumn/winter opening times

10am till 4pm 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](http://www.botanic.co.uk).



## Exhibitions/Events

### NOVEMBER

**2nd 12 noon** Design Walk. Join us for a topical walk through the Garden with CIC Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd. Have your say on changes being made in the Garden.

**2nd 7pm** Folly Farm, a talk by former Curator, Simon Goodenough. Followed by supper in *edulis*.

**17th 1pm – 4pm** Yoga Workshop Weekend with Julie Cole

**18th 10am – 4pm** Yoga Workshop Weekend with Julie Cole

**30th – 2nd Dec** Ventnorville Christmas Fayre. Visit VBG's stand and those of other local organisations for shopping and inspiration.

### DECEMBER

**1st 10.30am – 4.30pm** Christmas Wreath making workshop with artist Carol Ann Eades. Book your place.

**2nd 10.30am – 4.30pm** Christmas Wreath making workshop with artist Carol Ann Eades. Book your place.

**12th** Friends' Society Christmas Lunch. Three courses, to include a glass of wine or beer, costing around £20 per head. See details Page 21

**7th 12 noon** Design Walk with Director John Curtis and Curator Chris Kidd. Have your say on changes being made in the Garden.

**21st 7pm** Classic Christmas Party Nights. £40 per person, includes

welcome drink, three course dinner, DJ, Disco, Cash Bar

**22nd 7pm** Classic Christmas Party Nights. Celebrate with friends or colleagues at VBG. Let your hair down and party the night away.

### JANUARY

**12th January 1pm – 4pm and 13th, 10am – 4pm** Yoga Weekend with Julie Cole

### FEBRUARY

**27th** Time to be confirmed Mike Fitt and George our apprentice will give a talk on the Battlefield and Butterflies project.

**For the Wellbeing Schedule** – Yoga, Chi Kung, Meditation etc, visit the following address for the most up-to-date schedule:

<http://www.botanic.co.uk/wellbeing/wellbeing-classes/>

The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) means that we cannot pass your details to the Garden marketing staff so, to hear ALL the Garden news and events taking place at VBG please go to the website and scroll down to the bottom of any page to find the SIGN ME UP box. You can also read their Privacy Policy. [www.botanic.co.uk](http://www.botanic.co.uk)

*All dates and booking correct at time of going to press*

# Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

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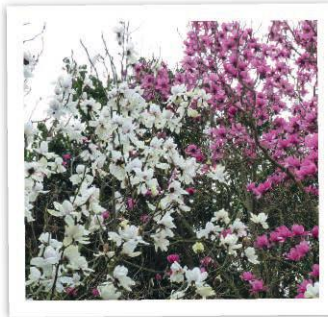
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## CURATOR'S NOTES

# Resilience in extremis

No two years are the same at Ventnor Botanic Garden. Having enjoyed, and sometimes endured, every one so far in the 21st century, I find it hard to remember one with such extremes as 2018. At publication of the last *Ventnorenensis* we were still in shock from the hardest winter for 30 years. At the point of compiling this edition we have emerged from the longest drought since 1976.

The resilience of VBG to climatic extremes is well documented; it is arguable that we are already prepared for the challenges of profound climate change, having created a garden in the image of regions significantly warmer than the UK. Elsewhere on the Island, gardens participating under the National Gardens Scheme (old Yellow Book) remained closed for 2018. On the mainland our comparator sub-tropical gardens had hurriedly planted areas blackened by cold, only to be pouring water in survival mode as drought kicked in. The Silver Trees at the Minack Theatre, West Cornwall, died. They even had snow on Treviso, a blizzard trapping our apprentice George for a week.

I am pleased to say we lost only a handful of accessions to cold, and our water usage in the Garden itself remained modest in the heat. The Garden sward was a challenge: areas cleared for sward in the spring were difficult to re-green, since grass seed refuses to germinate at temperature extremes, profligate irrigation or no.

The most interesting effects have been in our collections' response to the extremes. Our Silver Trees survived, cleverly sited and with only the most modest of fleece shrouds, albeit frozen into iced balloons with snowy dusting. Mainland gardens hosted rare trees in flower; flower records for *Emmenopterys henryi*, (Chinese Wilson's favourite tree) happened in two gardens. We had regular flowerings of what are considered unusual: *Firmiana simplex* was glorious. Maturity seemed to come early in some plants, the Wayne Cahilly collection of *Catalpa bignonioides* from Burlington County, New Jersey, fruited properly for the first time this year at just 14 years old. Its botanic cousins *Campsis radicans* fruited in patches, an unusual occurrence in an open position.

Plants of the subtropic rainforests were tested. New Zealand *mesophanerophytes* don't like the drought; Tree ferns were locked into a single flush of fronds. Perhaps the most profound growth was seen in our palms, but you could easily have missed it. Washingtonias probably doubled their leaf production (alas no flowers), the Nepalese *Trachycarpus martianus* sprung into growth the like of which is unknown (it has been referred to as agonisingly slow) and, extraordinarily, *Sabal mauritiformis* flowered.

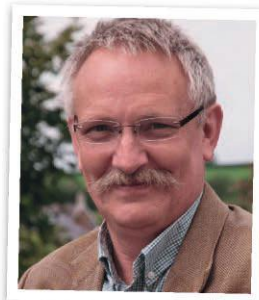
If I found disappointment it was the non-flowering of the Flame Tree, *Brachychiton acerifolia*. We'll have to wait. I still hope to see the white *Puya ferruginea*, but these slow growing Andeans initiate flowering in their meristems perhaps years prior to emergence. Similarly, *Cycas revoluta* meristems are only active above our normal summer median temperature, so there may well be Flame Flowers and Cycad cones in 2019. See Weather, Page 12; John Curtis' Autumn Update, Page 8.

Chris Kidd, Curator

## FOLLY FARM - Lutyens and Jekyll revisited

We were delighted to welcome back former Curator and Honorary Member, **Simon Goodenough**, to talk to us about the remarkable house and garden where he now works, Folly Farm, near Reading. It was Simon whose vision transformed our Garden from hospital grounds to the unique Botanic Garden we have today.

This is a flavour of his talk:



When I arrived at Folly Farm, the hard landscape and layout of Lutyens's design still existed but was in dilapidation; the Jekyll planting was, however, non-existent. The starting point was to make good the bricks and mortar to remove any later additions that were incongruous, and thus redefine Lutyens's work. This was done with a huge degree of sympathy for the original materials – not as a 21st Century blitz. Original materials were used wherever possible and any new materials were bespoke copies of originals.

Once the hard landscape was restored the planting was considered, and it was decided not to recreate Jekyll's original planting, but rather to take a modern look at the garden and utilise plants that reflected the palette that Jekyll worked with, while offering the owners a garden that delivered seasonally to the needs of the family. The wider estate that had not been part of the original design was linked to the garden and a transition from formality to wildflower meadows is the result of clever design elements created by garden designer Dan Pearson.

The individual areas of the garden are seasonally themed and successional, each area having a series of heightened display periods, with quieter moments between times, the aim being to be able to revisit each of the areas at numerous times of year yet the display to be ever changing. As a highlight in one area fades, a new one begins elsewhere and then moves backwards and forwards throughout the seasons. It is predominantly in the Spring Garden that this happens, but there are moments of drama in the summer and autumn too. The Flower Parterre is especially good in high summer but here too spring bulbs give early highlights, and autumn colours close out the year.

The Walled Garden was never designed as such, as it was for fruit, vegetable and cut-flower production. The Walled Garden still retains all these elements but is now a designer garden, strongly and ornamentally themed with clever nods to the linearity of Lutyens's landscape.

Currently the emphasis is to keep all of this at a high level of horticultural excellence and to continue to provide innovative and seasonal displays, to produce fruit and vegetables, cut-flower and ornamental display.

# Chairman's message

I suppose it's my age but the seasons do seem to roll round with increasing speed; no sooner have we stopped bemoaning the 'Beast from the East' that caused such havoc just as spring arrived than I am considering the fact that, apart from a very wet day a couple of weeks ago, we don't seem to have had any rain since I don't know when. The Lion King musical referred to the Circle of Life and this is so very true of the natural world to which we are inextricably linked.

My life has been joyful this year with the birth of our first grandchild – members may recall that our family celebrated one of the New Zealand Garden's first wedding receptions in 2013. I am pleased to report that one of Herbie's greatest delights is to watch the wind blowing in the trees from his buggy. I shall enjoy sharing the delights of the botanic world with him as he grows.

At the other end of the life timescale, I was sad to hear of the death of a past Chairman of the Society, Tom Harman-Smith. Tom was Chairman when I joined the Committee and was involved in steering the Society's work in the Southern Hemisphere plantings, which involved complex grant applications. I cannot recall who said that we all stand on the shoulders of our predecessors but nothing is more true. Rosemary Stewart and I were able to attend Tom's funeral service in Reading on behalf of the Friends' Society. (See Page 29)

The latest rejuvenation project in the Australian garden, funded by the Friends, was given an auspicious welcome by Joe Caudwell and his didgeridoo this summer. Joe also re-enacted an aboriginal-inspired ritual aimed at blessing the rock artwork. The installation has certainly attracted much interest, particularly amongst the schoolchildren who love its tactile properties. Artecology's use of handprints on the rock surfaces gives the work a very human touch that reaches down the ages.

Fundraising takes many forms. Our main focus this year has been the Horticultural Apprenticeship Scheme. I am delighted to confirm that David Pearce has graduated from Ventnor to continue his training at RHS Wisley. He was our first (in the modern era) true apprentice and has been followed by George and now Adam. It is a life-changing opportunity that we are able to offer young people. The Garden CIC is rightly proud of the support given to Conrad Williams a few years ago: Conrad is now an Arborist at Hilliers Gardens at Romsey and has just become a Member of the Friends' Society, his way of helping us support other young people. Another circle of influence.

Other fundraising has come from the proceeds of our Summer Party, our President's talent-raising, plant swaps and sales plus regular walks and talks. To everyone who has contributed and supported these events – thank you! A couple of years ago we launched the Foundation Fund in response to our Vision for the Future and a need to provide long-term financial security for the Society. This has become even more relevant as we have moved to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status, where the need to prove financial and professional competence is rightly expected by the Charity Commission. For those of us able to spare a few pounds on a regular



basis, the rewards to the Society are clear; please consider whether you could be one of those precious individuals who are steadily helping us build for the future. If so, a Standing order and an email to our Treasurer would be most welcome. Over the years we have had many generous donors; most are very British and prefer no outward recognition. Those who give their time, skills and money are so very much appreciated: Ventnor Botanic Garden is what it is today because of people like you.

However, sometimes it is right to sound a fanfare! One such occasion will have taken place by the time this edition goes to print. John Hill, the quiet other-half of Jonyth, celebrated his 90th birthday on 7th October. The regular Wednesday volunteers are hoping to help him celebrate many, many Happy Returns. John, a knowledgeable plantsman, has been an unsung hero of the path-sweeping, chair-stacking, car-unloading, door-manning variety ever since VBGFS was formed. We also hope that he and Jonyth will be our Guests of Honour at this year's Christmas lunch – don't forget to book your tickets!

Sally Peake



*Unsung hero: John Hill, knowledgeable plantsman and path-sweeping, chair-stacking, car-unloading, door-manning birthday boy*

## Ladies who pack a bunch



*Seed sorting: A heartfelt thank you to our volunteers who fill the VBG seed packets*

## Agave

**Chris Kidd** busts some myths about this admirable genus, celebrates its tenacity and offers a *Mea culpa*

The genus *Agave* in the family *Agavaceae* has about 300 species, all of which are herbs modified to cope with the arid regions of North America and northern South America.

The name *Agave* is derived from the Greek *agavos* meaning admirable, in reference to the handsome, statuesque nature of the plants in flower. To cope with inhospitable arid conditions with high light intensity coupled with diurnal chill these plants have used the same morphological tricks as other plants, related or not. Stems are much reduced, causing the plants to form a rosette. Leaves are simple and space saving, often leathery or thick, surculose basally and tipped with points, all in order to reduce water loss. Roots may function annually for water and nutrient uptake, withering to sinewy ropes during dry seasons for stabilisation purposes only. While some species can be considered multiannual or perennial where such lifestyles suit the evolutionary niche, the majority that concern us in horticulture, specifically at Ventnor Botanic Garden, are monocarpic.

*Agave* in cultivation has long been grown in colder climes under protection from glasshouses, often ornate grand designs of earlier eras. Botanic gardens of these times showcased the wealth of empires, extraordinary plants from around the globe presented as trophies. For a period, any public glasshouse that endeavoured to show plants of the desert would have an *Agave americana* within the showcase, large and dramatic, evocative of far-off scalding tropics. Periodically, one of these magnificent specimens would flower – an unusual event for the time. A giant flower spike would emerge up to 3m tall, bracketed with candelabra arms holding clusters of curiously puce flowers. Sometimes this would necessitate the removing of a glazing pane to allow the spike an exit hole. The relative unusualness of this, coupled with the expectation that desert plants must grow painfully slowly (it's the dryness, you know) gave rise to the (still) popular myth that these plants flower once in a century.

In the milder parts of the UK *Agave americana* was trialled outside, often to great success. Lithographs and pictures from Tresco, Isles of Scilly, show *Agave americana* alive and well: the more adventurous southern gardens would have grown it too. In Ventnor, a plant grew on the Cascades Garden and famously flowered, drawing headlines and visitors in droves. Certainly by the advent of Steephill Pleasure Gardens, *Agave americana* was in the collection developed by Hillier. We don't know if it was Sir Harold



*A. oaxacaensis* in the wild in Mexico.  
Photograph by Nick Macer



or his superintendent Roy Dore who introduced it here, but through the 1970s there were plants in this Garden. Of equal certainty is that none survived the winter of 1986, but will have been replaced by Simon Goodenough through the 1990s, including a specimen at the very entrance to the Garden. This specimen flowered early in the first decade of the 2000s as a great relief to us all; by this time *Agave americana* was considered passé, too easy in other words – and there were 299 other species to experiment with.

Our early experiments with *Agave* other than *A. americana* arose from the repurposing of the Temperate House. We moved out the dreadful cacti and succulent collection with a view to disposal. The lone voice of then-VBG gardener and photographer Julian Winslow saved the plants from the compost yard. Against my judgment they were planted on the south facing bank outside to do or die (I expected the latter).

The following year a very surprising percentage had survived, in particular *Agave*, *Aloe* and *Opuntia*, indeed given light and moisture these dusty relics thrived in the spring and summer. On this evidence we decided to increase the collections and the direction was set for the creation of what became the Arid Garden, opened by HRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall on 17th July 2009. In the meantime we began investigating what species of *Agave* were possible in our microclimate.

Quickly avoiding the various variegated clones and monsters, we alighted on *Agave salmiana* from Central Mexico. Fortuitously, some Friends of the Garden had in 2005 flowered a plant in Ryde they called *A. salmiana* var *crassispina*. Dagmar and Walter donated three seedpods, which had many seeds; we grew these on and planted out dozens in 2008. Other accessions came from gardens throughout Britain during the great expansion of collections to fill out the new garden areas we had created.

Seeds from other botanic gardens were the source of new plants too. Ian Miller was particularly proud to germinate *A. franzosinii* from Monaco Botanic Garden. Specialist collectors shared their plants that would grow better out of doors than in pots. Nick Macer ultimately transferred most of his private collection of Mexican *Agave* to us over a period of years: known source material from Bob Brown followed. Ultimately our *Agave* accession list held nearly 100 accessions, with maybe 40 species presented.

Some species of *Agave* are still beyond our ability. Ironically, the two species with the highest non-horticultural commodity value, *A. sisalana* and *A. tequilana*, the sources of sisal and tequila respectively, have defeated us, despite many attempts.

As usual with non-documented commercially sourced plant collections, an awful lot of what is sold as one thing turns out to be another. I lost count of plants offered in the trade as *A. harvardiana* that turned out to be small *A. americana* or worse, its variegated idiot cousin. The success of the palms throughout the Arid Garden has taken its toll on the collection, as has the last severe winter; theft and death where seeds failed to set or new plants arose from offset. Colin Pope and I began a stocktake in August to better understand the collection as of 2018, which will guide the accessions policy onwards.



*A. oaxacaensis* by Nick Macer

# Eat the Garden!

What our Living Collection teaches us about climate change, actions taken and our blueprint for future survival



*Profuse: how the Garden reacted to the record hot summer*

Years ago when I first started working on climate change issues, I asked a meteorologist: "Can you simplify it for a layman?" He said: "Wetter wet periods and drier dry periods." "Is that it?" I quipped. "Oh and storm severity and frequency will increase."

So the winter 2018 brought the Beast from the East, a record cold snap, followed by another record hot, dry summer. The display of *Eucomis* (Pineapple flowers) in the South African Terraces presented a stark

contrast to the general dieback of our South African plants in the cold snap. You could also see the Crepe Myrtle bushes (*Lagerstroemia indica*) in the Walled Garden flowering more profusely than usual due to the summer heat. I often tell Garden visitors that our plants are telling us more about climate change than we can perceive ourselves.

We find it increasingly easy to connect the dots between global climate trends and the Living Collection at VBG where we can flower outdoors what grows under glass elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Since 2012 when we took on the challenge of saving the Garden, over a dozen trees have been blown over in our shelterbelt, a nod to storm frequency and severity. We have planted *Eucalyptus globulus* on our western border as seedlings to provide future cover from winter storms. From seedlings they have a better chance to build the root systems required to withstand the higher wind speeds we have been experiencing.

This spring we also acquired a range of Magnolias to be planted out for the next generation on the north facing slopes along the Coastal Path. In the same way that the *Magnolia cambellii* 'alba' planted in the 1980s above the Hydrangea Dell are now delighting us each spring, we hope these new arrivals will titillate visitors by 2050.

As the impacts of climate change are accelerating we can expect the Living Collection at VBG to be very different by 2050. The North Atlantic Oscillation, a weather pattern created by pressure differentials from Iceland to the Azores, drives our standard westerly wind system. When the differential drops and westerlies are suppressed, we

see hotter summers in northern Europe. Contrast this scenario with reduction in the Gulf Stream, which would bring colder weather to the UK, and you can understand why climate science has many open questions. But the direction of travel is clear: we will experience more weather volatility than previous generations.

It is my personal view that a modern botanic garden must try to enlighten visitors about the environmental changes underway and the potential impact on the plant and animal kingdom. When you are next at VBG please visit The Hub, an interpretive area in front of the Tropical House, where the climate story is spelled out in the context of VBG.

We had our usual challenges with summer staff in 2018, but it seemed that the volatility was higher just like the 2018 weather: unsettled, unpredictable, and not without impacts. Nonetheless, the season's highlight for many of us was the launch of our ***Plant Based Dining evenings in edulis Restaurant with Head Chef, Brad Roe***. In our view the rediscovery of plant based nutrition by society is a food trend to watch and one a botanic garden should engage in. We are reading up on the ethnobotanical uses of our Living Collection. We ate *Solanum villosum* leaves and berries (one of the few edible nightshades), young white Canna seeds, rowanberries, Sea Buckthorn berries and made a pepper-like spice from the bark of *Drimys winteri*. We even found that fresh Yucca flowers jazz up a salad. Given that the modern global food system contributes up to one third of greenhouse gas emissions, we wanted to demonstrate that plants and fine dining go together. I look forward to telling you in future issues where the 'Eat the Garden' strategy has taken us.



*Plant based dining: A salad by Head Chef Brad*

## 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.



# Hoppy talk

**Jeff Sechiari**, Chairman of the IW Brewery History Society, came to help with our hop picking – as he does every year



*Speedy: Early start for the pickers*

Ventnor Botanic Garden established a hop yard in 2009 and since then Volunteers have joined the staff in hand-picking the crop, which is then whisked off to Herefordshire to be dried and packaged while still fresh. This year the volunteers arrived early on the morning of 12th September, raring to go. The weather was grey and threatening rain but the intrepid band got stuck in to pick as much as possible before Chris Kidd, the Garden's Curator, had to head off to the ferry late morning with the precious crop.

Although the strange weather this season has had an impact on the crop there were still plenty of cones of Boadicea to pick and the morning fortunately stayed dry for us until it was time to bag up the results of our efforts. We said farewell to Chris as he set off for the ferry, leaving us to refresh ourselves with a cask of some excellent Ventnor Botanic Ale. We look forward to sampling the results of our efforts in the months to come.

*This article first appeared in Wightwash, the magazine of the Isle of Wight branch of CAMRA*



*Liquid assets: Reward for pickers*



*Hopping off: Chris takes hops to the ferry*

# Beer with balance

**Darren Norbury** of Beer Today reviews VBG's latest brew from its very own soil – a lager with a hint of eucalyptus



I was describing this year's vintage of Ventnor Botanic Garden beer to a friend and explaining that it had eucalyptus in it. "Eucalyptus?" she exclaimed. "Ugh."

I suppose it does sound more like I should be bathing in it rather than drinking it. Unfortunately, they didn't supply enough of it for me to try the former, but I can report that the tasting of Botanic Lager with a hint of eucalyptus went well.

The eucalyptus does come through on the aroma, against some light sweetness and a little spicy hop. On the palate, there are hedgerow hop flavours, good biscuit malt to balance and a top layer of eucalyptus freshness which makes its mark, but which doesn't overpower the beer's natural balance.

A pleasant and refreshing beer, made all the more palatable by the thought that the Boadicea hops have all been hand-picked in what has become now an annual Island tradition. Goddards actually did the brew, and it's a good job, nicely packaged as well, and sure to adorn a few (adult) Christmas stockings come December:

[www.beertoday.co.uk](http://www.beertoday.co.uk)



Welcome refreshment:  
VBG's Botanic Lager, from  
last year's crop



*Hop Festival: Bridgette with Friends' stall*

# Weather in the Garden

(April 2018 – September 2018) by Chris Watts

What a rollercoaster of a year we are having! First of all, the deep freeze in February and March, followed by the deep heat and drought of summer. We have heard how this kind of weather has badly affected farmers, and although it might follow that gardeners have been similarly affected, the Garden itself has not fared too greatly. So over the summer the jet stream was far away to the north, thus allowing high pressure areas to stagnate further south, ie. over us, and this situation became familiar for the best part of ten weeks.

The months of April and May passed without too much trouble and not much of a hint of what was to follow. Then June, July and the first half of August brought a lack of rain and plenty of warmth which surpassed even the summer of 1976 – a year which seems to have become something of a benchmark. The five top temperatures of this summer were: 28.4°C (July 8th), 28.3°C (July 2nd), 28.1°C (July 1st, 7th and August 4th). This July along with July 2006 – which had almost identical temperatures – were the warmest months since August 1995. Temperatures returned to normal in September following five months being well above average.

As for rainfall, June was the driest month since April 2007, and the driest June since 1925 when there was no rain at all. Although several days had some spits and spots, the only measurable rain duration was 20 minutes at around 10am on the 14th. Then a little rain that fell on July 27th ended 39 days during which no day measured over 0.1mm of rain, and 56 days during which no day measured 1.0mm or more.

While August and September brought a modicum of rain, the weather was still basically dry, and the number of rain days remained low. It was only courtesy of two days that totals approached anything like normal, 25.1mm on 26th August, and 29.4mm on 22nd September. The latter provided over 70% of September's rain. It rained for over 17 hours, and it was the wettest day since 12th January 2017.

	Mean Temp °C	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Soil Temp °C 1ft depth	[1]	[2]	[3]
<i>April</i>	10.7+	68.1++	10	11.2	2	14.1	5
<i>May</i>	14.5++	50.0	9	15.3	12	17.1	9
<i>June</i>	16.9++	0.9—	0	18.5	16	0.3	13
<i>July</i>	20.2++	21.0—	3	22.0	28	11.3	26
<i>August</i>	18.3+	54.9	7	19.9	20	25.1	6
<i>September</i>	16.0	40.3—	3	17.0	11	29.4	7

[1] No. of days over 20°C

[2] Wettest day rain total in mm

[3] Longest spell (in days) without rain



# Dear members . . .

There's a real sense of everyone pulling together in this Issue of *Ventnorenensis*. I had the great pleasure of interviewing Gary Steptoe, the new but very experienced gardener; as well as Andi Finch, an exceptionally hard working volunteer. Both said how much they enjoyed working with everyone involved with the Garden.

Volunteers are vital, and Page 28 covers a special lunch given by John Curtis in recognition for their role. As we go to press we are looking forward to celebrating Christmas with a Friends' lunch (Page 21) as well as to welcoming back former curator, Simon Goodenough – and sharing a spot of supper with him too (Page 3).

Food is becoming ever more synonymous with VBG, as John Curtis reflects in *Eat the Garden!* (Page 8) He also explores the effect of climate change, and Chris Kidd describes being at the coalface of this year's extreme temperatures (Page 2).

To wash down the Garden's produce there is the beer produced here, and as well as enjoying the Hop Festival (Page 11) it is nice for all the hardy hop pickers – who picked in one of the rare wet mornings of the summer – to know the results of their efforts. The newest brew produced with VBG hops is reviewed by [beertoday.co.uk](http://beertoday.co.uk), one of the most read websites for alcohol (Page 11).

While it's easy to get to know people you see in the Garden, there are behind the scenes folk who we've dusted off and brought to the fore. The Friends' Society Executive Committee shapes events, steers money-raising activities and allocates funds to the Curator for his vital work. Find out a bit more about them on Pages 24.

Lastly, in the Spring Issue we focused on the apprentices and their links and weather-related adventures on Tresco, Isles of Scilly. To read more about this and other Cornish gardens, visit [www.cornishgardenstories.co.uk](http://www.cornishgardenstories.co.uk), a cornucopia of tales from that county.

Roz Whistance, Editor

*Please let me have contributions to the Spring edition by Feb 28th*



## 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 Inside Back Page



## The Beast from the East

**Colin Pope** reflects on the devastation caused by the cold snap – and the surprising resilience of some species

The cold weather in late February/early March this year and the generally late start to the spring affected gardens everywhere. Here at Ventnor, where we rely so heavily on growing plants that are at the edge of hardiness, it was particularly worrying. Initial indications were that the Garden had been hit very hard.

Having experienced a long run of mild winters with very little or no frost, it is easy to be become complacent and to assume that we should be pushing the boundaries of growing half-hardy plants ever further. Then, in late February, a sudden stratospheric warming event over the Arctic disrupted the flow of westerlies that bring mild air from the Atlantic. Easterly winds took hold, bringing in very cold air from the Continent, and Britain became the victim of a northern polar jet stream. The UK has not experienced such low temperatures since 1991, 27 years ago.



Extensive die back on the Echiums this spring

At Ventnor, conditions were less extreme than for many parts of the country but nevertheless, temperatures in the Garden dropped to an average of  $-3.4^{\circ}\text{C}$  for many hours, whilst temperatures remained below freezing for 48 hours. This was followed by a second shorter cold snap when snow fell and lay. The easterly winds proved to be particularly damaging. The Garden is well protected by geography and by shelterbelt

planting from winds from the north, south and west. However, it is exposed to winds from the east, and these can be particularly damaging, causing dehydration and scorching of evergreen foliage.

The effects of the cold can take some time to become apparent. Whilst some plants are killed outright, others take weeks or even months before the damage is apparent. Initially, for instance, most of the Echiums seemed to have been killed whilst most of the succulent Aeoniums survived intact.

Sadly, the Giant Herb Robert (*Geranium maderense*) which had provided a stunning show along the roadside opposite the entrance to the Garden were all killed, and they failed to survive elsewhere in the Garden. Another casualty was the early blooming Magnolias, *Magnolia campbellii*, and relatives. They normally provide a spectacular display in the Hydrangea Dell in February and March but this year the flower buds were frosted

and dehydrated and failed to open. The trees themselves are unaffected and this summer we were surprised to see that some of them were making the effort to produce a late flush of flowers. All being well, next spring's display will be as good as ever.

By the time the hot, dry summer kicked in, it was apparent that a surprisingly large number of plants had survived. Some, like the splendid flowering bushes of

African Hemp (*Sparmannia africana*) on the South African Terraces, and the Red Angel's Trumpet (*Brugmansia sanguinea*) which has persisted since Hillier's days in the Walled Garden, were cut to the ground but are re-growing with vigour. They will require several mild winters if they are to achieve the impact that they had until recently.

As already mentioned, the succulent *Aeonium* species appeared to have come through unscathed but subsequently started dropping leaves and it was clear that they had not survived. These will be replaced by others overwintered under glass but, nevertheless, a few did get through the winter and may be seen around the waterfall and on the bank beneath the Plantation Room café.

The Macronesian *Echium* species, one of the flagship plants of the Garden, appeared at first to have suffered badly. Indeed, many of the *Echium pininana* plants which were due to flower this year were killed, but enough survived to make a show. Younger plants of this species came through largely unscathed and there are many new plants growing from the seedbank. The more tender shrubby species and their hybrids did less well and only a few of them survived. However, we still have one or two bushes of the intense blue flowered Pride of Madeira (*Echium candicans*) which have survived.

An unexpected bonus has been the extreme heat experienced in July and early August. Many of the plants we grow here in the Garden really relish the sun, and the heat will help to ripen wood to provide better resistance to winter cold. Our Oleanders (*Nerium oleander*) have never flowered better in the Mediterranean Garden. Normally, they produce plenty of flower buds but many of these fail to develop and drop off. This year, we had bushes smothered in deep pink, pale pink and white. Similarly, the Campsis Arbour has been spectacular this summer, helped also by the removal of trees that were casting a dense shade. The Crape Myrtle bushes (*Lagerstroemia indica*) in the Long Border, a legacy from the Hillier days, normally produce a few flowers towards the end of the summer but this year they are loaded in blooms.

If you visit the Garden this autumn you will see that it is a riot of colour and you would not be aware of the effects of 'The Beast from the East'. Indeed, autumn stretching through to Christmas is an ideal time for a visit as the autumn flower display is spectacular and usually (fingers crossed!) not cut back by the frost.





# Botany Club

Botany Club has only had four meetings this year but we enjoyed varied walks, despite the wind and heat. Our grateful thanks go to our leaders this year, **George Greiff, Dave Trevan, Andy Butler** and **Colin Pope**.

## VENTNOR DOWN

In March an enthusiastic group assembled on the top of Ventnor Down wearing woolly hats in a howling gale to look for bryophytes and lichens with young expert George Greiff. We found an impressive variety of these non-vascular plants on the ground and on tree trunks, and diligently examined them through a hand lens. George had explained on a previous outing how they reproduce from spores and play an important part in the ecosystem. Some of these were very different to the ones we saw at VBG.

George has built up an impressive knowledge and has also been working with the Arc ecology team over the summer introducing children to a variety of water bugs and plants through a microscope. We were delighted to hear that he had gained a place to read Biological Sciences at Oxford University and we trust he is now enjoying his first term.



*Hats and hand lenses: outing led by George Greiff*



*Bryophytes and lichens*

## ALVERSTONE MEAD NATURE RESERVE

I was unable to go on this walk but Bridgette says: "We had a lovely visit on a hot day to Alverstone Mead with Dave Trevan. We saw a great many different species of wild flowers, including lots of lovely Queen Anne's Lace and purple and white comfrey. Some of us were lucky enough to see a red squirrel at the hide in Youngwood's Copse. I shall certainly make a return visit."

I believe the group also said hello to some Highland cows. This makes a really lovely peaceful walk taking you along the cycle path and through the carefully managed wildflower meadows, wetland and woods. A board walk helps on wet days. Good for birds, too.

## COMPTON CLIFFS

Our planned walk to look at chalkdown wildlife along Afton Down with Andy Butler was again hampered by the wind, but it was a good day so we walked along the cliff from Whiteways car park towards Compton looking at the plants and the view – birds and butterflies were hunkered down in a safe spot! It had been so dry, so the many varieties of grasses had turned brown but there were still sea pinks, bees on the thistles and the chunky wild carrot in a variety of stages. We climbed back up with that great feeling of wellbeing after a walk in a beautiful place with the wind and sun on your face.



*Wellbeing: Andy Butler leads the group*

## GOLDEN HILL COUNTRY PARK

For our last visit Colin Pope had offered to take us round the extensive nature reserve around Golden Hill Fort at Freshwater. Well, it was on one of the hottest days of the year so under beating sun we donned our hats and searched for interesting wild flowers and trees. We learned about red bartsia, melilot, agrimony and dyer's greenweed. We learned that the hairy orange bunches on wild rose are galls called Robin's Pincushion and are caused by a type of wasp which lays its eggs in the bud of the plant. We saw a few butterflies. Finally, we were relieved to find ourselves in the shade of the wood and marvelled at the size of the bulrushes in a nearly dried up pond. A lovely day and a rewarding walk to retrace, perhaps in cooler times.



Gift to Nature looks after several important nature reserves all over the Island and loves to have visitors who appreciate our precious open spaces.

<https://gifttonature.org.uk>

Please let me know if you would like to hear about our programme next year:

[rosemarystewart@icloud.com](mailto:rosemarystewart@icloud.com)

Rosemary Stewart

*To excite and inform: Gift to Nature*

ADVANCED NOTICE OF THE

# Annual General Meeting

of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

*To be held on Thursday 21st February 2019 at 7pm  
in The Visitor Centre, Ventnor Botanic Garden*

**Please note the date, which is earlier in the year than is customary.**

Following the meeting, the annual HAROLD HILLIER AWARD for Services to Horticulture on the Isle of Wight will be presented to a person who has given significant service to horticulture.

If you would like to nominate somebody to receive the award please email Rosemary Stewart on [rosemarystewart@icloud.com](mailto:rosemarystewart@icloud.com)

Also, Curator Chris Kidd will update us with Garden news.



THIS FESTIVE SEASON

## Christmas opening times:

Open everyday from 10am to 11pm except:

- **Christmas Eve** 10am till late
- **Christmas Day** 12noon–2pm (drinks & carols only)
- **Boxing Day** 10am–11pm
- **New Years Eve** 10am till late
- **New Years Day** 10am–11pm

Food will be served 12noon to 9:30pm everyday over the festive period, except Christmas Day.

We have live entertainment everyday, so after a bracing walk along Ventnor Seafront pop in, warm up and enjoy some great food and local live music.

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# An Evening with the Grimshaws

**Jenny Parker** reports on an unforgettable musical Summer Party



The summer of 2018 started very late but when it got going it was a classic! By the end of May we were having long, hot, sunny days and the Garden was making an unexpectedly good recovery from a cruel winter.

So, it was the perfect time for a summer get together to raise essential funds to pay our apprentices, who have proved such an asset for the Garden and such a worthwhile project for The Friends. To watch young

people blossom as they find their feet in a potential career – when they had no idea what to do when they left school – is a privilege well worth all the fundraising.

Sally Peake had long hoped to get the talented Grimshaw family together for an evening entertainment. Johnny, the charismatic head of the family delivered lots of paintings to the Gallery for an exhibition to accompany the musical evening. Sally and I were not too daunted by hanging an exhibition, having learnt so much from Secret Art 2017, but helped by Colin and Patricia Smith, and David and Kay Grist, with Steve Peake's quiet attention to detail, the result was a professional looking exhibition: Johnny's distinct style and use of colour filled the gallery.

Johnny in his flamboyant style welcomed every guest for pre-supper drinks. There is no better place on a perfect summer's evening to sip wine, meet friends, wander through the art and stroll through the Garden before supper.

Brad provided a lavish buffet, including lots of VBG's produce. Three generations of Grimshaws joined us for supper: 17-year-old Sol, currently studying jazz guitar at the Purcell School, came over especially.

After supper John Curtis drew the winning note-draw envelope, then more guests arrived for the Family Fun Band. JC had said they would perform a mix of music to suit all tastes and they did. He played all his beloved string instruments, Angelina sang and Sol did some amazing guitar solos.

During the band's break John spoke of the hope that the Garden can work with Kew to help preserve the native plants of Madagascar. Among the raffle prizes was a Madagascan silk scarf, available in the shop, which is made without killing the silk worms

Our apprentice, George, who has just finished his first year, asked if he could say a few words. We were so surprised – and so proud when he spoke of all the things he has done and learnt this year, and his love for the Garden. He has blossomed from a shy young man to a confident gardener, guide and organiser of the Wednesday volunteers!

Then our own Colin and Patricia got the dancing started, showing us all how it is done! An energetic end to a fun evening.

Thank you to all the Friends who helped to organise the event, and everyone who supported this evening so generously to swell our apprentice fund.

See Secret Art, Page 31

# Gary the Gardener

If you ever take tea at The Royal Hotel you may recognise the new gardener here at VBG. **Gary Steptoe** brings experience and not a little precision to his work. He's a good chap to have around

Gary Steptoe hasn't had to change his route to work too much. Until June this year he was working just down the road at The Royal Hotel, where he had been for 13 years. But the new gardener at VBG has had a far more varied career than that might suggest.

"I started as a welder in a factory when I was 16," he smiles. "I didn't really like it – I didn't like being inside. That was in the early 80s when there was a big building boom with lots of shopping malls being constructed. Steel work would be brought in on a lorry and invariably there was a piece that wasn't right, which would be sent off to the fabricator. Then the guy I was working with realised we'd got the mobile equipment, so could go out on site to put it right."



*Keeping it neat: 'First impressions stick,' says Gary Steptoe*

That was the start of Gary's outside working life and he's never worked inside since – "Oh, except for a year when I worked in a clothes shop," he says, unexpectedly. "When it was quiet I'd go outside and read my book!"

The late 1980s' recession hit the building industry, and Gary landed a job with a golf course construction crew. "I went all over the country constructing courses," he says, "and then became a green keeper."

His experience has already proved useful to Chris Kidd and the VBG@home team, when an immaculately level and striped lawn delighted the paying customer. "Chris and Dean said 'Ok you do what you want to do and we'll follow you.'" He adds: "So they've found some use for me!"

Gary came to the Island as a self-employed gardener in 2000, and it was being taken on to work on the garden of the Royal Hotel's owner that led to him being offered the job at the hotel. "He liked the way I worked."

Chris Kidd, VBG's curator, had also worked with Gary and had suggested he'd like to do so again. Thirteen years on – during which time Gary's responsibilities had spread to designing and maintaining the hotel itself – Gary needed a change and Chris needed a gardener.

Surprisingly, given that The Royal Hotel gardens share the same microclimate and similar plants, Gary says he's got a lot to learn. "My plant identification is terrible! But I've been working alongside Chris – that man has talent – and am learning so much, and from Trish who is really knowledgeable too."

Talking to Gary you realise he is a good man to have around. He talks about making things look good and tidy, and is constantly aware of the need to keep things looking good. "I've been trying to concentrate on the car park area. It's been drummed into me that first impressions stick. If you drive in and it's vibrant, clean and tidy it sets you up with a good impression before you go any further."

He is enjoying working with all the staff and the volunteers, and is happy to help anyone out who is unsure. "I don't mind leading people, I'm quite confident that way," he says.

As hot October comes to a more seasonal end he is involved with preparing for winter. "There's a lot of propagating, keeping a stock for plant sales that could be wiped out in the winter, there are back ups in the greenhouses."

But whatever this winter throws at the Garden, Gary won't mind. "I don't mind cold or wet or snow. I just like being outside."

Roz Whistance



## Christmas at Ventnor Botanic Garden

A three course Christmas Lunch for Volunteers and Friends is planned for Wednesday 12th December. You may, of course, bring your friends too – everyone welcome. We do hope you will be able to join us, the cost will be in the region of £18 – £20 per head and will include a glass, or two, of wine or beer.

*The Menu hasn't been finalised yet, but if you would like to be kept informed, then please contact Caroline on either*

*07836 573814*

*or [carolinepeel@aol.com](mailto:carolinepeel@aol.com).*



# 2019 Calendar now available!

A beautiful calendar produced from photographs taken in the Garden – some winners and runners up in the 2017 Photography Competition – is now available in the VBG Shop. £1 from each sale goes to the Friends.





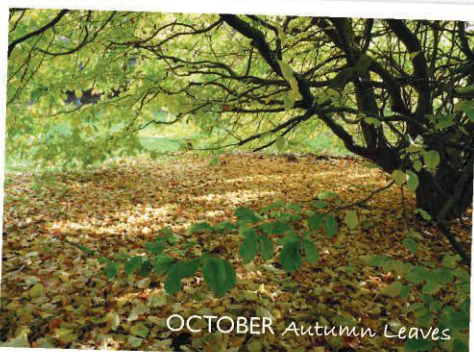
JULY Terrapins



AUGUST Agapanthus 'ventnor Hybrid'



SEPTEMBER The Palm Garden



OCTOBER Autumn Leaves



NOVEMBER Red Squirrel



DECEMBER Lepiota sp.

If you would like a photograph of yours to be considered for the 2020 Calendar, get snapping. We need pictures that represent each month of the year, so you might want to explore your back catalogue too.

Make sure they are: good quality, at least 1MB (larger if possible). Landscaped-shaped (not portrait). Cover any aspect of the Garden. Represent any (or all!) seasons, particularly Autumn and Winter: **Further details about submitting images will follow via email.**





# Meet your Exec Committee

**Sally Peake**

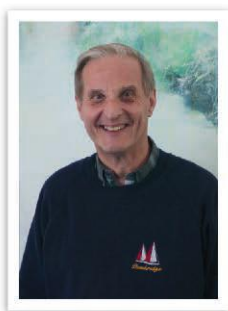
**Role:** Chairman

**Occupation:** Retired. Previous jobs: dairy microbiologist; building development company director & secretary; ditto family motor business; teacher. **Why involved?** Moved to Island 2003, needed a garden space to learn about new habitat. **Favourite thing in the Garden?** The New Zealand Garden – my daughter's wedding reception held here. South African terraces – warmth & colour. **Hopes for its future?** A passion to ensure that the Garden will be run for the benefit of the Isle of Wight and the botanic world in general long into the future.

**Jane Clark**

**Role:** Vice Chair

**Occupation:** HR consultancy company director; part time student for doctorate at University of Southampton. **Why involved?** Furthering interest after studying at Chelsea Physic Garden. **Favourite thing about the Garden?** Opportunity the Garden gives for us all to work together – as volunteer, apprentice or committee. **Hopes for its future?** That it remains a beautiful and special place for years to come.



**Tim Woodcock**

**Role:** Hon Treasurer

**Occupation:** Domestic branch banking; ongoing bookkeeping and accounts business; treasurer for many of Island's high-profile voluntary and charitable organisations. **Why involved?** Asked by Caroline Peel – happy to add this successful IOW operation to my portfolio. **Favourite thing?** The Garden in its beautiful coastal setting. **Hopes for its future?** To be preserved & enjoyed by all for generations.

**Rosemary Stewart**

**Role:** Publicity/Liaison/Volunteer CIC admin. Hon Sec until 2017

**Occupation:** Retired secretary, BBC Outside Broadcasts; Ski-Plan holiday rep and PA to MD; chair IW Music Centre Friends; Sec of VBG Friends and Treasurer/Mem Sec Friends Cowes Medical etc. **Why involved?** Joined happy, pioneering volunteer group supporting Simon Goodenough with his plans for the Garden. **Favourite thing?** Keeping photo archive of people, plants and events for 22 years. **Hopes for its future?** I care sincerely about this unique Garden and hope to be part of a bright future.







## Jenny Parker

**Role:** Hon Sec

**Occupation:** Retired. Ran Harley St private medical practice.

**Why involved?** New to IW, joined committee as start to new life here.

**Favourite thing?** Trees and herbaceous border; its link to the artistic community; role in conservation; supporting apprentices in career in horticulture. **Hopes for its future?** Its vital role in encouraging Island youngsters, when they have no idea of what to do when leaving school.

## Caroline Peel

**Role:** Membership Secretary since 2014

**Occupation:** Ex-company director and charity fundraiser. **Why involved?** Impressed on John's initial Design Walk by his enthusiasm and that Garden was to be saved. **Favourite thing?** The Garden is heaven; I love the whole place. **Hopes for its future?** Any small thing I can do to help ensure its future is worth it.



## John Bagshawe

**Role:** Committee Member

**Occupation:** Ex-Marine Insurance Broker; broking in London, UK and overseas. I'm a Freeman of City of London and a Liveryman; churchwarden; play hockey, IW Hockey Club. **Why involved?** Became a volunteer gardener, March 2017 after Volunteers Fair at the Garden. **Favourite thing?** Working with such lovely people in wonderful environment. **Hopes for its future?** Honoured to become a Committee Member; looking forward to seeing the Garden going from strength to strength.



## Roz Whistance

**Role:** Editor; Ventnorenensis

**Occupation:** Freelance journalist & photographer; previously on Daily Telegraph. **Why involved?** Approached by Phil le May to take on Ventnorenensis. **Favourite thing?** As much the passion of the Exec Committee as the Garden, which have since come to know and love. **Hopes for its future?** For every Islander to visit it and come to love it.



## Colin Smith

**Role:** Editor; Friends' Website and email system

**Occupation:** Electrical engineer. **Why involved?** Family involvement with the Garden going back to days of the Hospital. **Hopes for its future?** The Garden to be integrated into the community again.





# Christmas Wreath Workshops at Ventnor Botanic Garden

**Saturday 1st December and Sunday 2nd December  
10.30am – 4.30pm with break for lunch**

**£25 per person per day**

Explore your creativity using a mix of foliage from the Garden to create your own unique Christmas wreath with artist Carol Ann Eades. The workshop includes all materials with free festive refreshments and Garden admission on the day of the workshop. Participants must bring secateurs or sharp scissors and a pair of gloves.

Lunch will be available to purchase from the café and restaurant.

Booking essential just 15 places per day. To book your place please contact us on 01983 855397 or email [info@botanic.co.uk](mailto:info@botanic.co.uk).



# Our Artists in Residence in the hottest Garden

**John and Bridgette Sibbick** have enjoyed their stay in the Studio. They took a break in August due to the very hot weather but otherwise have been there since April. Their inspirational stay culminated with finale drinks on October 31st

## Bridgette

As a volunteer Wednesday gardener I decided to take up the challenge of using natural material I found in the garden to experiment. I have used pine needles, grass (wound into string) and vines to make containers, baskets and insects, and prickly agave for



*Bridgette: Weaving with nature*

rather evil looking sculptures. I've discovered that eucalyptus leaves are good to paint on and I have used their variously shaped seed pods on a lovely piece of cork bark. I shall be going away with lots more ideas to try in the future. Working in the Garden has been inspirational.

## John

I started off by drawing and painting some smaller studies of plants in the Garden, before deciding to concentrate on a larger painting depicting the living 'prehistoric' plants in a Mesozoic landscape (the period of dinosaurs for which the Island is famous). As my day job is an illustrator of palaeontology it has been a rare pleasure to get up close to some of the living plants – Wollemi pine, tree ferns, cycads, monkey puzzle and magnolia – which are all very like fossil material found in our museums and have remained virtually unchanged for millions of years.



*John: Going large*

We have been keen to encourage visitors to come into the studio to talk about what we are doing, and about various techniques in painting and drawing. Hopefully we have encouraged people to see the plant collection in a wider context – and be inspired to get creative themselves.





## John's tasty thank you to our volunteers

Director John Curtis invited the regular volunteers to a tasty buffet lunch to say a big Thank You to us all for our help this year. In the bright October sunshine beside the pond he asked us to try and spread the word about VBG to everyone, and to chat to visitors while we are working or strolling in our beautiful Garden.

Don't forget that we are always looking for more help. We are a friendly bunch and would really welcome new gardeners to the Wednesday morning group and any other time by arrangement. New tour guides would be given training. Could you take your turn in the information kiosk? Help is also needed in the shop (but not on the till). Or could you do some DIY? See Andi Finch, Inside Back

<b>Gardening contact:</b> Bridgette Sibbick	<a href="mailto:bsibbick@yahoo.co.uk">bsibbick@yahoo.co.uk</a>	867739
<b>Tours and Information:</b> Jane Cooper	<a href="mailto:kjanecooper@yahoo.co.uk">kjanecooper@yahoo.co.uk</a>	861459
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## OBITUARY

# Tom Harman Smith 1933-2018

**Tom Harman Smith** was Chairman of the Friends for around eight years. A dentist by profession his love of jazz and gardening featured strongly throughout his life

Tom grew up in Loughborough, where his father was a market gardener.

He was introduced to jazz at school and with his cousin formed the group The River Soar Jazz Club, with Tom on banjo. An early record of their attempts has the family grandfather clock in the background, chiming off key every quarter hour.



To his father's disappointment, rather than tomato growing, Tom studied dentistry – a family tradition of four generations. At Birmingham University he was a founder member of the Mermaid Jazz Band.

After qualifying in 1956 Tom became an assistant dentist in Brentford, London. He lodged in Ealing and married Caroline, the landlady's niece. The rundown practice they bought in Finchley in 1960 was a large Victorian detached house. Inspired by a Sunday Times article, Tom transformed the garden, finding an enthusiasm for plants that he never lost.

Eventually he formed an alliance with other dentists to move the surgery out of the family home into a multi practice in North Finchley. Then he saw an advertisement for a job on Ascension Island, in the South Atlantic, for thirteen months. Tom, wife and three children arrived there by charter in December 1970. Here Tom inspired the creation of an island newspaper The Islander, which exists to this day and can be read online. For the newspaper's 1000th edition he was flown to Ascension by the RAF. Tom also gave talks on the island radio about jazz, and directed an open air production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, using the surgery's supply of Plaster of Paris to build the severed head of John the Baptist.

After the return from Ascension in 1972 Tom helped create the British Dental Health Foundation, an independent charity dedicated providing free and impartial dental advice. He was also an active member of the British Dental Association.

With his second wife, Elizabeth, Tom and her son Sam lived above the Ravensdale Avenue practice, where he worked until Tom retired in 1998 and moved to the Isle of Wight. As well as becoming a locum at HMP Albany, with Elizabeth Tom created an amazing garden at their house in Whitwell, opening it annually for the National Open Garden Scheme. Tom loved VBG, becoming Chairman of the Friends for about eight years from 2002, using his organisational skills to help raise funds under Simon Goodenough's curatorship.

Even when Elizabeth died and Tom's health declined he never lost his love of New Orleans Traditional jazz. The last jazz concert he ever went to was just six months ago. He died of Parkinson's Disease, aged 85.

# Trapping moths at VBG



*Traps in the Mediterranean Garden*

Expert moth trappers Iain Outlaw and James Halsey offered to set up their moth traps in the Garden at the end of May and show us their 'catch' next morning. We were delighted to welcome some children in the enthusiastic group who gathered in the evening to learn about the different ways of attracting the moths, hoping to see some of the early specimens. James gave us a comprehensive introduction to this fascinating hobby, then they set up the traps in different areas, some attached to the mains and some on battery.

How wonderful it was to wander around the Garden at dusk! The white flowers shone, the bats flew, the tree silhouettes stood out against the darkening sky and the moth lights lit up the surrounding vegetation. It was magical ... and there were spooks round every corner!

Next morning we gathered in the Temperate House to see what they had caught. Egg trays are placed beneath the lights and the moths find a safe place to perch once they are trapped. Then it is easy to lift them out, inspect them and take photos before they are released. James and Iain told us the names of each one and we could inspect them up close. Some of our party had the extra thrill of having a big hawk moth sitting on a hand. The names often describe their patterns and colours, such as Burnished Brass, Buff Tip, Green Carpet, Peppered, Silver Y, Orange Footman, Cream Spot Tiger and Buttoned Snout (which feeds on hop leaves).

Iain reported that we had caught 300 moths of 86 species. He told us that one of the micro moths had not been seen on the Island since 1929. Iain was very pleased with the result and we plan to have another session again in the future. Thank you so much Iain and James!

Rosemary Stewart

*Burnished Brass*



*Photo Opportunity – Moth posing on James's hand*



20 – 28 July 2019



Shhhhh  
.....It's a Secret

*Following the success of the 2017 event,  
The Friends are delighted to invite entries for*

## Secret Art 2019

All proceeds from the Secret Art sale will go to fund our Horticultural Apprenticeship Scheme which supports young gardeners starting their careers.

Are you a professional, amateur or budding artist? We are looking for donations of A5 size artwork, to exhibit and sell anonymously. The work can be in any medium and must be signed on the reverse only, to authenticate the work.

All the work will be displayed via The Friends' website by our sponsors, The Arty Card Company, alongside a list of artists' names.

### **How do the Friends benefit?**

Each piece will be sold at £60 unattributed, the name of the donor artist only revealed on the website after the exhibition.

### **And for the Artist?**

The opportunity to support young Islanders starting a career: to exhibit your work in a professional exhibition, attracting a wide audience; to network with other donor artists and sponsors at the preview evening.

To be involved, email [secretart2019@gmail.com](mailto:secretart2019@gmail.com)

**Saturday 20 July – Sunday 28 July 2019**  
**At The Gallery, Ventnor Botanic Garden**



## Best Dressed Ditch at Osborne Horse Trials

Thanks to the generosity of a couple of Friends who had privately sponsored a cross-country fence at the Osborne Horse Trials in July, VBG was well represented with a marvellous open Ditch, flanked by agapanthus and hydrangeas. Most of these were sold off after the event at the Garden.

# Membership News

We are delighted to welcome the following new members as Friends:



John Curtis, Ventnor  
Helen Daniels, Rochester  
Evi Dunphy-Nicopoulos, Ventnor  
Pamela and Kelvin Edwards, Shanklin  
Virginia Fortescue, Bembridge  
Laura Jennings, Ventnor  
Clare Martin, Niton  
Charles McGregor, London  
Matthew Rivers, Bembridge  
Steven and Maggie Smith, Reading  
Linda Sullivan and Christopher Innis, Niton  
Conrad Williams, Newport

## Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh  
Simon Goodenough  
Brian Kidd

## Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE  
Penelope Hobhouse

## However

The Executive Committee has decided, very reluctantly, that the time has come to put up the subscriptions. These have been held the same for at least six years, and with the increased cost of postage, the move to becoming a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) and the change in bank accounts that this has created, it was felt that this was the right time.

**PLEASE, do not abandon us!** The subscriptions and donations go a long way to helping with the Curator's accessions and the cost of running the apprenticeship scheme, and without your help, we cannot continue as before. You will see that they have gone up to £20.00 p.a. for a single membership and £30.00 for a joint. As well as receiving two copies of *Ventnorenensis* a year, you will also receive some free admission passes to enable you to bring friends.

A new form is enclosed, and I would ask you to complete and return this to me. For those who are on email a form will also be emailed out to you.

Caroline Peel

## 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.

## Satisfaction guaranteed



*Any time, any job – Andi enjoys everything*

Andi Finch is in his second year as a Gardening Volunteer: "I love being outside, there's a really friendly bunch of volunteers meeting on Wednesdays, and the staff are great. It's beautiful being in the Garden – I really recommend it," he says.

Such is Andi's enthusiasm that he works most days, from 8am until 4pm. "I do what the staff do – I just don't get paid," he smiles.

That level of commitment is above and beyond any call of duty, and Andi stresses that even if you can only offer an hour or so whenever it suits you, you'll be welcomed by the staff and other volunteers alike. "I can't fault the staff, they are so helpful, right from the apprentices right up to Chris, the Curator. I have learnt so much since I've been coming here."

Although, as Andi is keen to stress, you don't need any horticultural knowledge to be a VBG volunteer. He used to be a landscape gardener, but a serious illness caused him to lose his knowledge of plant names. "So if a member of the public asks me or anyone else a plant name I refer them to Chris."

Interacting with the public is one of the many things he enjoys about the Garden. "An elderly couple told me they'd been coming here since 1972 but had never seen a red squirrel. I said 'Look, there's one behind you.' We watched as it ran up a tree and down – and when I looked at the man again, there were tears in his eyes."

He likes to point out the lizards too. "I see about two red squirrels a week and the lizards all the time. It makes people really happy when I point them out."

Andi will turn his hand to anything, be it watering new grass over the hot summer, clearing paths or propagating. "I've always been embarrassed that I couldn't grow lettuce in a greenhouse," he confesses. "But Trish showed me how. She asked me to do some cuttings recently and I told her 'They won't grow.' A few weeks later she said 'D'you want to pot on your cuttings. All of them had taken! You pot them up, pot them on again then see them going for sale. You think I've achieved this – I've brought life into the world.'"

With satisfaction levels that high it's hardly surprising that his health and happiness has been positively affected. "My friends have noticed I'm more full of life," he says, adding "You get a suntan too," pulling back his sleeve to show the contrasting white skin. "Ok, it's a gardener's suntan!"

Gardening volunteers meet each Wednesday morning, but are welcomed at other times too. Give it a try and see what a difference you make to the Garden – and it makes to you!

***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.***





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