Dear Friends

First of all, I hope you are all well – and I can add, at this stage, happily vaccinated. No doubt anticipating eagerly a degree of release from the restrictions which have been in place for months. Some of you have been fortunate to have your gardens open during this lockdown phase – for others where this has not been possible, I can understand your frustration. However, Friends’ groups have been active – considering the future and gradually adopting the ‘on-line’ format for meetings/events. The general view of the latter has been overall favourable – much larger numbers attend these talks and certainly in the future might well continue to be a feature of engaging with Friends and the wider population – potential Friends!

So what has the FBGF been up to during these seemingly longer winter months. We have not been inactive over the winter months. We had a zoom meeting in January where we agreed the format of the Logo (see frontispiece) and thanks to Kevin Matthew (Cruickshank BG) for working on a design to which we could all agree! You will see in this newsletter that we are about to launch our website. I must thank Lindsey Atkinson (Thwaite) for taking on this task and producing an eyecatching site. Now we need to populate it with information and use it as a means of sharing information about all your activities. We have also had a couple of meetings with Plant Network to discuss how we can work with that organisation in supporting Friends groups. To that end, we are proposing to host with Plant Network, a webinar in May 2021 on Friends/Members groups. More information will follow as plans evolve.

I am please to welcome Dorothea Morrison – the new Chair of the University of St Andrews Botanic Garden. She has contributed a piece about herself and how she became involved with the garden in this newsletter. I would like to thank Sabine Hotho, her predecessor. Sabine has been supporting the development of the Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum since the very beginning—many meetings ago! I hope we meet up in St Andrews at some point in the future when I can visit Fife again!

Hot of the press, I am delighted to announce that the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum have just signed up to the Forum. I am looking forward to learning more about the Arboretum and how their Friends support it.

Other ideas that are emerging from our members include a Speakers Register and a section on the website where we can promote events, talks etc. I am including a few events in this newsletter and this section could grow as more Friends groups recommence activities over the coming year. I am certainly looking forward to hearing what is being proposed to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Oxford Botanic Garden this year. Definitely an item for the next newsletter.

I am always looking out for new ideas as how the Forum can help and support its members. In the meantime, I hope, with the better weather, you are all getting out into your own back gardens if not the Gardens you support. Spring is coming – and the vaccination programme is progressing – so all good reasons to be hopeful.

Best wishes

Shiona

Photo: Shiona Mackie. Galanthus ‘Colossus’ with Ophiopogon planiscapus ‘Nigrescens’ RBGE

Frontcover: Shiona Mackie: Galanthus ‘Diggory’ RBGE
Glasgow Botanic Gardens

It seems that the phrase “challenging” is used increasingly regularly and so it is for many Friends Groups. Yet, those of us who value Botanic Gardens, always, like precious plants, emerge from the dark periods and flourish like never before.

I dare to suggest that we are now entering that rebirth period and in Glasgow that will involve a new Gardens manager, new projects at last begun with local teachers and dealing with the ever-lengthening waiting list for the Certificate in Practical Horticulture (CPH) course.

The World Climate Change conference takes place in Glasgow in 2021 with 200+ countries represented, and we are looking at ways that we can demonstrate the role that Botanic Gardens can play in community awareness and involvement.

The various discussions between Botanic Gardens Friends groups have demonstrated the wide variety of ways in which we support our own Gardens. In Glasgow we have education (as with the CPH) and the continuing development of the special collections ie Orchids and Begonias.

So, we know what went before the pandemic, but are we taking the time during this enforced pause in our normal hectic schedules to take a peek into the future and try to plan the way ahead for our support for Botanic Gardens? I have to hold my hand up and say, not sufficiently!

The ubiquitous Zoom meetings have been a help and hopefully none have been as fractious as the Parish Council meeting that went viral, although some vociferous discussions can create good results.

I suspect that all Gardens are going to have to take a hard look at our finances as the national picture will obviously impact on visitor income and partnership funding will be under pressure. I know that we all value our Gardens and their collections and yet I dare to suggest that many visitors view their visit as “nice walk in the park”. Now I am the first to enjoy a pleasant stroll through the Gardens on a summer day, but our Gardens are Botanic Gardens and part of a worldwide network of places that are critical parts of telling the message about habitat and plant conservation, climate change, how we live today and leave a worthwhile place for our children.

So, what are my ambitions for the future of Glasgow Botanic Gardens and in particular the role of the Friends?

I suspect that the City is going to be heads down fighting for funds to manage all of its parks, green spaces and Botanic Gardens and so we are going to need to plough a unique furrow, as representatives of the community to more forcefully tell the story of this world network of Botanic Gardens. They have the most amazing reservoirs of plant species and perhaps even more importantly botanists, horticulturalists and scientists who are at the forefront of environmental and climate knowledge.
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Friends groups must collaborate with the professionals and amateurs in helping to make their knowledge more easily available, and not just to the committed. Most of us have facilities and the ability to do this.

My promise to myself is to continue to support the development of our plant collections, promote our education work and to develop the Gardens as a broader Environmental Education resource, in partnership with others, where the public has access to important information to enable them to determine their contribution.

On a more pictorial front, all of the collections are outstanding, as are the staff that manage them, and yet I secretly marvel at the Carnivorous plants in the Kibble Palace North wing, and these are some of my favourite close-up photographs showing these amazing plants.

Brian Atkinson, Chair. Friends of Glasgow Botanic Gardens
Photos: Brian Atkinson
Google Earth
The Garden has been open right through the pandemic and many locals and visitors alike have used it as one of their daily walk venues. Many of them took advantage of the half price offer on annual passes in the early weeks. Drinks and snacks were served from a window in disposables and during the easier time in the summer suppers were on offer sitting outside and distanced. It is very pleasant to sit around the pond surrounded by echiums and figs.

The Long Border comes into its own in later summer with a great show of salvias, sedum, alstroemeria, helianthus, aster, inula, oleander,
Our Curator, although on furlough, was allowed to do the New Year Flower Count and was very pleased to come up with the figure of 212. The record is 287! He writes:

The reasons for the high number relate directly to the special microclimate of VBG whose long established warmth allows long growing seasons from the old year whilst ushering in the new growing season of 2021. Magnolia, Camellia, Narcissus and Acacia have coincided with the Rosa, Salvia and Lampranthus. Many southern hemisphere plants tend to flower during a British winter, so numbers are plumped up with Euryops, Callistemon and Melaleuca. Surprises on this New Year’s Day were the Aeonium from the Canary Isles and Puya from Chile, both very tender to frost and quite out of season.

We are pleased to report that our two apprentices can now work out their time until the end of June and the other gardener who has kept the Garden going with them since March has returned on an independent basis. Other problems are ongoing. Volunteers are still staying away and keeping to the rules for the moment although many of them have had their first vaccinations. Much work has to be done as spring will be on us very soon. We fear that the recent bad weather will have done some damage – maybe frosted the magnolias but we’ll see. I haven’t been there since before Christmas. We only had a sprinkling of snow and no more than -2°C but the east wind has been bitter.

Rosemary Stewart, Ventnor Botanic Garden
Photos: Rosemary Stewart
I took over as Convener of the Friends of St. Andrews Botanic Garden in October of last year. I became a member of the Committee in 2017 having served 10 years as an elected member of Fife Council. Like Sabine Hotho I am also a Trustee of St. Andrews Botanic Garden Trust and current chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. On becoming an elected member in St. Andrews I became a Trustee of a local Care Home which I have now chaired for around 10 years. I am currently Planning Convener of the St. Andrews Preservation Trust, Chairman of the St. Andrews Partnership and on the steering committee of a group working to save a historic building in St. Andrews. As you can imagine I am kept busy but I will gradually stand down from some of these organisations giving me time to concentrate on the Botanic Garden.

A year ago our Botanic Garden appointed a new Director, Harry Watkins who is very busy working on a five year plan for the garden. Harry has a vision which will create a rather unique Botanic Garden. The vision for the garden in 2026 is that St. Andrews Botanic Garden will be highly regarded for its plant conservation work, offering the people across Fife a window into a wider world. Although its size is relatively small compared to other botanic gardens, the Trust uses this to its advantage, focusing its energies in two programmes: urban ecology and conservation, with exemplar projects such as the Urban Forest Farm, the Tangled Bank Garden and the Brownfield Alpines which allow it to extend its conservation and community work across Fife, and internationally in collaborative in situ conservation projects.

The Tangled Bank Garden should start showing shoots this year and the Friends have a number of events organised to raise funds for the project. These events include sponsored walks, a Friends lunch with a talk from Harry and a celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the British/Sino Expedition to China. Friends will be kept busy over the summer making sure all our members are kept fed and watered with fizz, tea and lots of delicious home baking.

Dorothea Morrison
Following our meeting in October 2020, Lindsay Atkinson (Chair—Thwaite Botanic Garden) offered to explore options for setting up a Forum website. She was then able to share with the Forum at our January meeting a proposal for our first website—currently at no cost to members. Subsequently there have been a series of tweaks—and it is now possible to announce that the Forum will be launching its website on Friday, March 26th 2021. We decided on a domain name of www.fbgf.org. Now we have to work out how to incorporate the domain name into our nascent website. Contact details for all Member’s Friends groups will be held on the website—for ease of access for visitors to the site. And newsletters will also be posted on the website. Ultimately, we hope that we might have a blog and links to a Facebook and Twitter platforms. The logistics of running these platforms will be discussed at our next meeting in May. And we will need photographs from all our gardens to entice visitors and encourage memberships!

Shiona Mackie
TREBOROUGH BOTANIC GARDEN WOODLAND

During lockdown, the woodland at Treborth has provided a welcome space for local people to take their regular exercise. This semi-natural woodland is partly a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its oak/ash communities and scarce whitebeams, and is unusual in having a marine environment, the Menai Strait, on its northern edge. The main path through the woodland runs parallel to the Strait and is part of the Wales Coast Path. In winter time, when the trees are bare, there are views of the two iconic bridges that cross the Strait to Anglesey – Thomas Telford’s Menai Bridge and Robert Stephenson’s Britannia Bridge. In spring and summer there are carpets of attractive woodland flora including wild daffodils, bluebells, woodruff, wood anemones and ferns. In recent years red squirrels have - amazingly - crossed one of the two bridges from Anglesey and taken up residence in the woodland. In 2019 a life size bronze statue of Sri Chinmoy was erected along the path; he was a spiritual leader who promoted world peace through the Peace Run movement. You can also see Ynys Gorad Goch – an island in the middle of the Strait on which there is a house, medieval fish traps (the name means “red weir island”) and a smokery. In Edwardian times ladies would come down the path through the Treborth woodland in carriages, walk down some rough steps to the shore, and be taken by a ferryman to the island to enjoy a fine whitebait tea. The woodland path has, therefore, become a delightful place for people to enjoy some quiet recreation.

However, twelve years ago, it was a different story. The main path was very muddy and overgrown, and in perpetual gloom because of the thick stands of laurel growing on each side of the path. It was used only by some intrepid runners and welly-booted dog walkers. The Friends of Treborth were keen to improve the situation and make the woodland more accessible for visitors, and this proposal was supported by the Curator. So Gerry Downing, of the Friends, worked with the University to apply for two Wales Government grant schemes to manage the woodland: firstly Better Woodlands for Wales, and secondly, Glastir. Both schemes provided payment for management such as clearing laurel and rhododendron, grey squirrel control, seating and improvement of the minor paths.
Within a few years the woodland has become popular with a wide range of users, from Sunday afternoon strollers and dog walkers to runners and long distance footpath walkers. Like many public areas, the increased use has led to problems with litter and dog waste; despite bins being installed the Friends need to do regular dog poo and litter patrols. During lockdown our Curator, Natalie Chivers, and her partner started clearing some other paths in the woodland and the Friends paid for a contractor to resurface these. This work has improved access and provided some pleasant circular walks throughout the woodland. We have enjoyed meeting locals who remark how grateful they have been to have this woodland on their doorsteps so that they can escape the worries of the pandemic and enjoy the benefits of this natural environment.

Sarah Edgar
Chair
Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden
Photos: Menai Bridge. Gerry Downing
Woodland walks: Sarah Edgar

Much of the work was done by volunteers from the Friends, and by students, with laurel bashing work parties being fuelled by hearty Friends’ lunches! The Local Authority improved the main path as part of the Wales Coast Path project, and installed a wheelchair accessible gate. The clearance of unwanted exotics has also revealed intriguing features that date back to the 1850s when there were plans to build a big hotel and pleasure gardens on the site; the development never took place but we can see preparatory work such as ditches and a cascade that tumbles down the cliff to the sea. The Friends also paid for two interpretation boards. One of these is about the woodland generally, and one specifically about our splendid, and much admired, Lucombe Oak, and both boards include illustrations by our volunteer resident artist, Doreen Hamilton.
Leicester Botanic Garden

Leicester is on top of the world for its biodiversity success!

In 2015, the United Nations launched its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The aim is to end poverty, fight inequality and combat climate change by 2030. In order to accomplish this, 17 Sustainable Development Goals were identified, relating to a wide range challenges, including food security, climate change, poverty, economic growth and health. Two of the goals focus on the quality of ecosystems: aquatic (Goal 14) and terrestrial (Goal 15).

Institutions from around the world were invited to show how they were contributing to the Goals. The Times Higher Education Impact Ranking assessed the submissions in the education sector. The submission by the University of Leicester was ranked 21st out of 766 universities from across the world, a great achievement which saw the University rise 16 places from its 2019 position and places us in the top 3% in the world. This is all the more impressive given that the number of universities making submissions increased from 467 to 766 this year.

Most impressive of all, however, was our particular performance in Goal 15 (Life on Land: terrestrial ecosystems). Here we ranked 1st in the world!

This outstanding achievement was based on the way we have combined our academic expertise with undergraduate and community involvement to shape our commitment to protect natural habitats and encourage wildlife, as outlined in our Biodiversity Action Plan. Two undergraduate research projects won national awards and the way the Botanic Garden has integrated itself into both undergraduate teaching and the curriculum of East Midlands schools was also one of the key factors.

This globally recognised success is down to the hard work and dedication of the University’s operational (in particular the Gardens and Grounds Team), teaching and research staff and collaborations with the local community and charities. We hope these partnerships will continue to thrive and ensure that biodiversity will always be a priority on our campuses.

By Hannah Sellers, Social Impact Team, University of Leicester

Gay Dent writes: The garden is still closed to the public. A meeting between the Friends committee and the university on 1 March resulted in a decision by the university to produce a garden and arboretum opening plans within two weeks. The garden is being tended now by two full time gardeners, and is looking much better, more weed-free and less overgrown. The Friends have committed to make short videos of the garden. The two special Friends-run Crocus Sunday events in February and March that usually raise money for a charity have been Covid-19 cancelled.

Photo: UoL Gardens and Grounds Team
The new Global Medicine Garden in Belfast Botanic Gardens began life in October/November 2019 when a small team of volunteers carried out drainage works, soil preparation and the first phase of planting.

In Spring 2020 we were ready to resume work when life as we knew it came to a halt, due to the Pandemic. We were left with newly planted beds, many herbs unplanted, and a deep sense of frustration. In effect we have missed a whole season of planting and maintenance, all our plans have been pushed back indefinitely.

A garden abandoned provides a perfect opportunity for weeds and these germinated and flourished right through the spring and summer. It wasn’t until mid October that we were able to return on a limited basis. After an initial visit to see the extent of the problem, and cull some thistles, three of us were permitted by Belfast City Council and Garden staff to begin the rescue mission. Armed with our own tools, masks and observing social distancing, we spent a run of six Sundays clearing the weeds, and doing some more planting while lockdown was temporarily eased. Subsequently garden staff cleared weed heaps and hosed the paths.

The results were pleasing and once again the herb specimens stand out against the soil, rendering the garden in a fit state for normal maintenance: hoeing, sweeping, pruning, dividing, training.

We hope to resume work before the spring is out and have received more offers of help and of plants and long to get these into their new home. We know we have been missed by the regular visitors who would greet us over the railings. A group of us learned last year just how much fun working in the garden can be and the three of us rediscovered that this autumn.

A spread-sheet has been created to record various aspects of the garden, and a start has been made on accessioning. Planting of the garden and of some large troughs will continue as soon as conditions and regulations allow.

Barbara Pilcher
Friend of Belfast Botanic Gardens and researcher for the Global Medicine Garden
Photo: Barbara Pilcher
Winter with the Friends of Belfast Botanic Garden

The Belfast Botanic Gardens continue to remain open to the public since March 2020 although the Palm House and Tropical Ravine have remained closed since then.

The Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens have successfully met several times by Zoom since before Christmas.

We held our AGM in early December and discussed potential activities for the coming year. We are a small group compared to other groups of Friends but we have an active membership and successfully achieved charitable status in July 2020. A key focus has been maintaining memberships in our first year as a charity and currently we have renewed 27 single memberships and 11 joint memberships.

In February we jointly held our annual quiz, hosted by Vice-Chairperson Frank Caddy, and our annual ‘Picnic in the Bothy’, by Zoom. We renamed the event ‘A Picnic in Your Parlour’ to reference the Victorian history of the gardens.

In March Margaret Marshall, a member, gave a talk on John Templeton (1766 – 1825) a Belfast Naturalist and Horticulturist whose journals are currently being transcribed by members of the Belfast Naturalists’ Field Club for on-line access. It was Templeton who first proposed a Botanic Garden for Belfast.

Moving forward, Jonathan Pilcher, a member and curator of our website, is currently updating our website (www.fobbg.co.uk) to make it more accessible by phone users.

We also hope to work with Belfast City Council on proposals for the future re-planting of a former grasses and bamboo border that had to be removed. Another project will aim to identify possible Rhododendron species within the gardens that derive from seedlings received by Curator Daniel Ferguson in the early 1850s. These seedlings, from seed collected by Joseph Dalton Hooker, were sent from Kew.

Adrian Walsh
Chairperson, Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens
Throughout the year the Friends’ Committee organises a varied programme of events, income from which contributes to the ‘Small Projects Fund’ (SPF). This Fund supports a wide variety of projects which help further the mission of the Gardens. Applications for funding are invited and considered annually. There is an explicit expectation that successful applicants will be willing, if requested, to give a presentation in some form to members, during or after completion of the project. This is something recipients embrace with good grace, and over the years members have been treated to a wonderful range of talks, many of which have taken place at the regular members’ coffee mornings.

These coffee mornings perform a social, as well as a fund-raising, role. They also ensure that there is a daytime opportunity for those who are less likely, for one reason or another, to be able to attend evening talks. Some members attend regularly and meet up with friends, whilst others do so when they can or when the subject of the talk is of particular interest.

Until March 2020, these monthly events were held in a conference room at the Edinburgh garden. Those attending were able to mingle for half an hour or so over refreshments, before sitting down to listen to a talk of horticultural or botanical interest. Many of the speakers have been drawn from those working or studying at the Garden (with recipients of the SPF awards helping to create a pleasing cycle, as their talk on their project helps to generate funds which will assist other projects), but we have also enjoyed presentations from individuals representing a wide range of outside organisations.

Pandemic restrictions meant that the events programme had to be put on hold from March 2020. In the autumn, with no immediate prospect of restarting physical events at the Garden, the Committee started to look at trialling some online events, with a view to developing a programme for 2021. Recognising that the technology was new to many, and that there might be hiccups along the way, the first event was free.

For coffee mornings, we decided to try and replicate the social element by running the events as ‘meetings’ rather than presentations. This meant that members could log on and chat to each other for a short time before the speaker was introduced and then everyone was muted. Questions could be typed in the ‘chat’ function during the talk, or asked at the end by raising a hand (physically or with the on-screen symbol).

After the success of the trial events, we have now developed an online programme for the remainder of this season.

Photo: Axel Poulson
Over the years, one area which has received funding from the SPF is research into gingers. We were very pleased to welcome as our first speaker of the year Axel Dalberg Poulsen, a Danish research fellow at the Garden, who gave a fascinating talk on his research into the ginger family. As the coffee morning fell during half-term in a very unusual year, we decided to open the event to young people who might be particularly interested. Axel was enthusiastic about this and began with an interactive introduction in which he produced six gingers (all available in Scotland) with culinary uses, gave us a recipe for a ginger drink and explained a bit about the taxonomy and biology of the family – his talk was titled ‘Gingers: More Than Just a Root.’ During his presentation, Axel spoke of the practicalities of carrying out research in New Guinea (including journeys aborted because of landslips, reliance on little mission planes which might or might not return on the expected day to collect one, and how communication works in Papua New Guinea - a country with more than 800 indigenous languages). He then talked in more detail about the research he had undertaken, before leaving the younger members of the audience in no doubt that there were still plenty of geographical and subject areas left for them to study, should their interest have been piqued. Before the end of the session there was indeed a request from an interested student for information on how to volunteer in this field.

Whilst we all look forward to meeting in person, there have undoubtedly been positives in this different way of working. Our audiences for these coffee mornings (and for our online evening programme), have been more diverse: those who for any reason are unable to visit the Edinburgh garden can attend online events. Numbers have been buoyant. It has been lovely to welcome members who live in other parts of the country. We also have been able to secure speakers from much further afield, as no-one has to worry about the time and expense involved in national or international travel. We know we are fortunate in having the back-up of a membership team who have willingly adapted to the demands of using technology in this new way. When physical gatherings resume, we may want to consider retaining some online events for the benefits they offer. The coffee morning above was held on a day when Edinburgh woke up to deep snow and very disrupted transport services, yet the event was completely unaffected!

Katherine Bates, Friends Committee. RBGE

Photo: Axel Poulson
The Oxford Botanic Garden is the oldest botanic garden in the United Kingdom. Henry Danvers (1573-1644), first Earl of Danby, gave the University £250 in 1621 to buy the lease on 5 acres of land opposite Magdalen College and by the River Cherwell. Magdalen College remains the Garden’s landlord.

On Sunday 25th July 1621, the University’s Vice-Chancellor and other members of the University processed from the University Church, St Mary the Virgin, to the plot which would become the Botanic Garden. A stone was laid and the Garden officially opened. The site however was a mess. The official scavenger provided 4000 loads of muck and dung and the level of the garden was raised to make flooding less likely.

Danvers built the walls and the three monumental gates for £5,000 (£660,000 in today’s money).

This photo shows the Danby gate, the main entrance to the garden (though now you go in by the opening on the left of the photo).

The first superintendent, Jacob Bobart (1599-1680), was appointed in 1642, twenty-one years after the Garden was founded. In 1669, while Jacob Bobart was Head Gardener, Robert Morison was appointed professor of Botany, the first in a British university. Morison used the garden for his lectures and Bobart started the herbarium and a library, bequeathed to the University in the 1720’s.
Jacob Bobart was succeeded by his son (1641-1719), also a Jacob. The Elder Bobart compiled a catalogue in 1648, which mentions 1,889 plants and in 1676 Bobart the Younger compiled a catalogue of 1,113 plants, considerably fewer than were grown in his father’s time.

From the start the Garden was open to the public but in the eighteenth century the ‘public’ was redefined as members of the University. This of course excluded women, although prints from that time do include women. In the nineteenth century, apart from members of the university, entry to the garden was only allowed if it was ‘a source of interest or improvement’ for the visitor.

Now the public are encouraged to visit. Indeed, the ethos has completely changed from restriction to welcome. The vision¹ of the Garden was defined in 2018 as being ‘outstanding in research, education, conservation, and public engagement’. ‘Public engagement’ means to my mind, children and adults enjoying the garden in very personal ways and the staff of the garden or Friends providing varied activities to suit all tastes.

In 2020, even though the garden was closed for 3 months due to the pandemic, 61,000 visited the garden.

The Oxford Botanic Garden will celebrate its 400th anniversary with a week of events starting on 25th July, subject of course to regulations at the time about Covid.

Much of the information is this article is taken from Stephen Harris’ book *Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum: A Brief History* which is available from Amazon and other bookshops.

Harriet Bretherton

Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum

¹Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum - Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Photos: Harriet Bretherton
Friends of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden

After a long, cold wet winter I am writing this in mid February having just come in from my garden. The sun is shining, the temperature a positively balmy 10°C – no rain, no snow, no frost. Such a contrast from a week ago, although here in the coastal south-west we have had just a sprinkling of snow and only a couple of hard frosts, unlike some of the northern areas. It is so good to see the snowdrops, hellebores, primroses and first daffodils bursting into flower. By far the best time of the year, with the anticipation of greater things to come.

This year spring was more welcome than usual. The pandemic has continued to rage all over the world and we have retreated into our own little corners. The vaccine programme is now well under way and the possibility of some relief is on the horizon. We will all be so pleased to visit the people and places we have missed. I live some 12 miles from the Botanic Garden and so have been unable to visit since November. Although the staff regularly post highlights on social media, I am so looking forward to seeing it in person.

Bristol Botanic Garden has not opened yet this year. Usually it is open all year round, although in December and January only on weekdays and the visitor lodge and café is closed. The Garden opening depends so much upon the volunteer army of gardeners and lodge personnel, most of whom are in the high risk groups, and being a small garden with only five garden staff it was decided that the risk was too high to open after the New Year. The Curator, Nick Wray, is hoping that the garden volunteers will be able to return shortly to help prepare the Garden for visitors when lockdown restrictions ease, hopefully before Easter.

The annual Easter Garden Sculpture Festival will not go ahead as this needs preparation for many months ahead from both the artists and the Garden. It has been very successful over some 10 years, with a popular fund-raising Friends’ plant sale. It results in many visitors new to the Garden as well as bringing in new Friends. We must all look forward to holding it again in 2022.
One success has been the horticultural trainee, Irene Cambi, who finishes her two-year apprenticeship at the end of February, supported by the Friends Education and Training Fund. Irene is Italian, brought up on her parents’ organic fruit and vegetable farm and came to England to further her studies. She has completed the courses for RHS levels 2 and 3 to complete her Diploma – and all in a second language. During the last year she has been a godsend to the Garden with her newly gained knowledge, which has enabled her to support the permanent staff, some of whom have had Covid-19 or had to self-isolate.

During the long hot months last spring/summer there was unending watering to maintain the collections in the glasshouses and she was even the sole member of staff on duty over the weekends with full responsibility. Irene has written in the spring newsletter about how much she appreciates the Friends funding to enable to realise her dream of becoming a fully qualified horticulturalist. Although it would be lovely if she could work here permanently this is not possible at present and she is initially going to work on a beautiful garden in Italy, on the Ligurian coast near the French border. It was developed by an Edwardian English plantswoman and gardener, Miss Ellen Willmott VMH, owner also of Warley Place and after whom Eryngium giganteum is popularly called Miss Willmott’s ghost.

A new trainee is starting in early March, also fully funded by the Friends, for which, in anticipation, we had already set aside the necessary amount at the end of 2019. Steve Asman has already started his RHS studies with level 2 but will also hopefully complete his diploma with level 3 theory and practical during his traineeship. The courses are all run at the Garden, which is also an examination centre; although at present they are all virtual, once things are easier they will all return to face-to-face teaching.

Despite the pandemic causing some people to decide not to renew their membership in 2020, some are now upgrading their sole membership to joint for 2021 and we have a new Life member. Our numbers have dropped a little without the usual events at which we normally recruit new members, but not as much as we feared. We are sending out the annual accounts for 2020 with the spring newsletter followed by a virtual AGM at the end of March. Nick has continued to write articles about plants of interest for the fortnightly enews which have been met with great interest and even encouraged a number of people to join/renew their membership of the Friends.

As the post pandemic world speeds up again, let us all enjoy living more slowly,

Patti Davies,
Chair of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden

Photos: Andy Winfield, Horticulturist, University of Bristol Botanic Garden
For Your Diary
Botanic Garden Friends Events

Treborth Botanic Garden
Thursday 25th March, 7pm - Fergus Garrett
Great Dixter, Past, Present and Future
We are delighted that this year’s Len Beer Memorial Lecture will be provided by Fergus Garrett, the Head Gardener of Great Dixter in East Sussex, who manages the remarkable and extensive collections. This historic estate has a wealth of history and has been designed by some very influential individuals including Christopher Lloyd. The stunning gardens are inspiring and it’s a unique opportunity to learn more about the past, present and future of this special place.
The Len Beer Memorial Lecture is organised in partnership the North Wales Alpine Society.
WHERE: Through zoom communication software.
WHEN: 25th March. The talk will start at 7pm. Please log into zoom at 6:50pm.
COST: Free to join but there is a suggested donation for this event of £5.
BOOKING REQUIRED: Please email treborthevents@outlook.com with subject heading “Great Dixter - Len Beer Memorial Lecture” if you wish to register and receive the zoom link which will enable you to join.

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Thursday 25th March, 7 pm—Richard Baines, Curator, Logan BG
The A—Z of exotic plants at Logan, ‘Scotland’s most exotic garden!’
If you haven’t yet visited Logan Botanic Garden or have been able to take a trip there recently, you will enjoy this virtual tour of the exotic plant treasures that grow here. The Garden enjoys an almost subtropical climate which enables plants from Australia, New Zealand, South and Central America and Southern Africa to thrive. Curator, Richard Baines, will guide us through some of the highlights to brighten up early Spring.

Thursday, 13th April, Coffee Morning 10.30 — Callum Sinclair
Non– native Invasive Species in Scotland (exact title to be confirmed)

Thursday, 11th May, Coffee Morning 10.30—Greg Kenicer
The Magic of Plants
Friends of Sheffield Botanic Garden

For more information re: on line talks please head to the FOBS website
https://www.fobssheffield.co.uk/lecture-programme

I look forward to receiving more information re: Friends events as restrictions are lifted and planning becomes more straightforward. To finish this newsletter, a few photographs taken on 9th March 2021 at the RBGE—early rhododendrons—a taste of more to come!

![R. lanigerum](image1.png)

![R. barbatum](image2.png)

![R. mocupinense](image3.png)