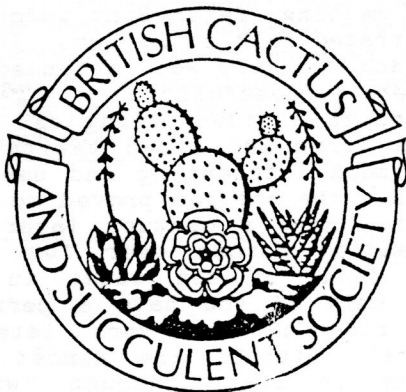


**Manchester
Branch**



NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 1988

Editor...Peter Schofield

The perceptive reader will notice that this issue is bigger; the very perceptive reader will realise that this has been achieved by larger print and by borrowing material from elsewhere. In other words, we still need contributions of all kinds. One request has been for a "who's who" of members, and I hope people will be willing to co-operate when asked for a short biography and indication of their interests. Who better to start with than our Glorious President, Harold, in the hope that he will forgive us for the centre spread.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

At the January meeting, Peter Bint informed and enlightened us with his illustrated talk on Lithops. It was our first meeting at Sutherland and was very well attended - close on 50 managed to navigate there successfully.

In addition to a wide-ranging set of slides illustrating the 36 families from 383 known habitats in southern Africa, Peter gave us much interesting and useful information. First recorded in 1821, the species proved so difficult to find that only three were known a century later. Habitats vary, from *L.lesleii* spreading across over 100 000 square miles, to *L.optica* only found on the coast in the diamond area of Namibia - and only if you have a permit to be there. This latter gives rise to the very late-flowering red-bodied cultivar 'Rubra'. Lithops are almost completely buried in habitat, taking in light through "windows" on the upper surface and directing this onto the chloroplasts down the inner side surfaces of the leaves. Seed pods only open when wetted, allowing the seeds to be washed out intermittently. Flowers are invariably yellow or white, apart from some pinkish forms of *L.verruculosii*.

In cultivation, watering normally starts around June, when the old leaves have withered to a papery sheath and split - if there has been enough sun ! They need maximum light but can scorch if unventilated too near glass. Flowering is from late June to September and growth continues into December. Seeds can be sown in March/April or September, sprinkled onto a medium with at least 50% grit, sealed in a polythene bag, left in light but protected from direct sun by gauze or paper. Heat is unnecessary but protect from frost. Watering the compost with Chinosol (potassium hydroxyquinoline sulphate) guards against damping off. Lithops seed is said to be viable up to ten years, and better not used for the first year or two.

Finally, for those whose interest had been whetted, Philip Barker expected to have numerous Lithops for sale around April, and Geoff Bailey may have copies left of South West Seeds catalogue.

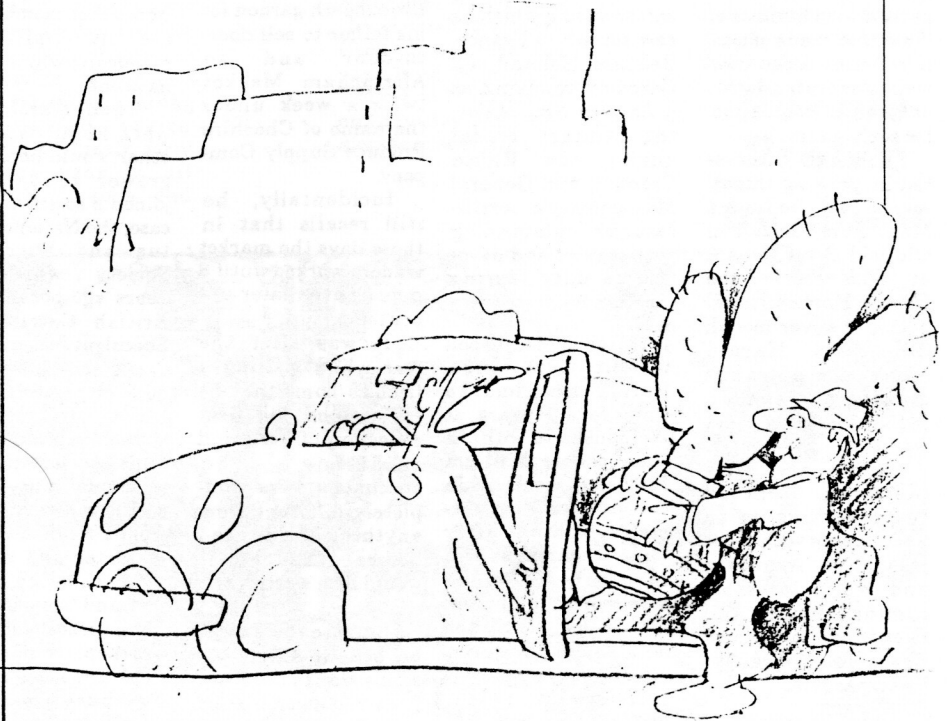
6 P. A LITRE No, not petrol, unfortunately... Compost... 80 litre bags of the stuff at £5 a time. Ask Philip Barker to bring to the next meeting. He is also able to supply Chempak fertilisers nos. 2, 3, 4 & 8 as well as the usual lines.

THANKS... to Lesley Bratkowski for her generous gift to the Society Library : the 1963 two-volume edition of "The Cactaceae" by Britton & Rose, in immaculate condition.

Cactus

Millions of years of adaptation to brutal desert conditions have made this family of plants ideal for the lazy gardener, since there is very little for him or her to do between purchasing the plant and discarding it (anywhere from a week to fifty years later), except to knock it over from time to time and break its pot.

Cactus (In Transit)



From: GARDENING: A gardener's dictionary, by Henry Beard & Roy McKie
Methuen 0 413 52690 9; £2.95 in 1984 and recommended !

Example: Gardening - the art of killing weeds and pests to grow
flowers and crops for animals and birds to eat.

Harold's passion is a prickly subject

WHEN I called on Harold Gaulton at his Sale home to see his collection of cactus plants, I must admit that while a plant and flower lover, I'd never had much time for what I'd always thought of as 'little spikey things' in equally small pots.

But I have to say that after being shown around Harold's three large greenhouses packed with hundreds, if not thousands of cacti varieties, I can now well understand the absorbing fascination for such plants.

Although interested in 'growing things' while at Seamons Moss Boys' School in Oldfield Brow, where at 14 he received the Royal Horticultural Society's silver medal, Sale-born Harold didn't take up cactus growing and exhibiting until after the last war.

Before and after that, he'd spent 29 years working as an upholsterer with what was then Armitage and Wolff, later becoming Wolff and Alexander and now Shaw and Alexander in Altrincham.

As a member of the Territorial Army, the Second World War forced a break in his career during which he saw service in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, receiving, as a Battery Sgt. Major, the Military Medal during the Rhine Crossing and General Montgomery's certificate for 'outstanding good service and devotion to duty' during the Campaign in France.

After his long spell in soft furnishings, Harold switched to work for 16 years at Wythenshawe with the shoe people William Timpson, working in the architect's department looking after floor coverings and furniture, before moving into laminated plastic at Little Hulton from where he retired aged 65 six years ago.

Widowed twice, losing his second wife last March, Harold has three married children, Les, Sylvia and Ron and seven grandchildren

Following his successful school gardening, when really he would much have preferred to have won either the second or third prize of a spade or fork than the first prize silver medal, Harold put his heart and soul into growing vegetables in his then Broadheath garden for his father to sell door-to-door and in Altrincham Market twice a week under the name of Cheshire Produce Supply Company.

Incidentally, he still recalls that in those days the market traders worked until 8 p.m. or even later under lamp light.

It was after the war while visiting a friend's home that he came upon his first collection of cacti and realising the specimens were completely different from anything he'd seen before, thought it would be a worthwhile challenge.

In those early days, he bought single-potted plants mainly from Woolworth's for as little as 3d or 6d, before discovering a specialist nursery at Burnage in 1960 since when, he says, he has never looked back.

While cactus are succulent plants, not all succulents are cactus', pointed out Harold, explaining that the main difference is the flower structure of the cactus which has arceoles.

Cacti can also be recognised by their seed leaves, distinguishing them from other members of the lily family and monocots which only have one.

Then Harold did what he advises any other would-be cactus grower to do - he joined a society. In his case, the National Cactus and Succulent Society, which four years ago became the British Cactus and Succulent Society.

As the years have gone on, Harold's collection has grown to unbelievable proportions and variation.

Explaining how a cactus can vary in size from a pin-head to 20" diameter and stretch to anything up to five feet and even beyond, his countless varieties are kept comfortable in greenhouses heated by paraffin with electric back-up.

His favourite variety of the plant one usually associates with the desert or Texas is *Mammillaria*, so named because of its mammils or nipples bearing big or little spikes. "Strangely

(with acknowledgement to the 'Sale Messenger')

enough", pointed out Harold, "very often the tiniest plants have the largest flowers." Interestingly, the Azteciumritteri takes 22 years to grow just half an inch while the cerei can add another six inches in 10 years.

Other fascinating varieties include Astrophytums, which have a star-like shape and quality; epiphytes, tropical forest plants whose exotic hybrids are usually referred to as orchid cactus and the rat-tailed trailing aporocactus, which flower profusely early in the year in all shades of reds and pinks.

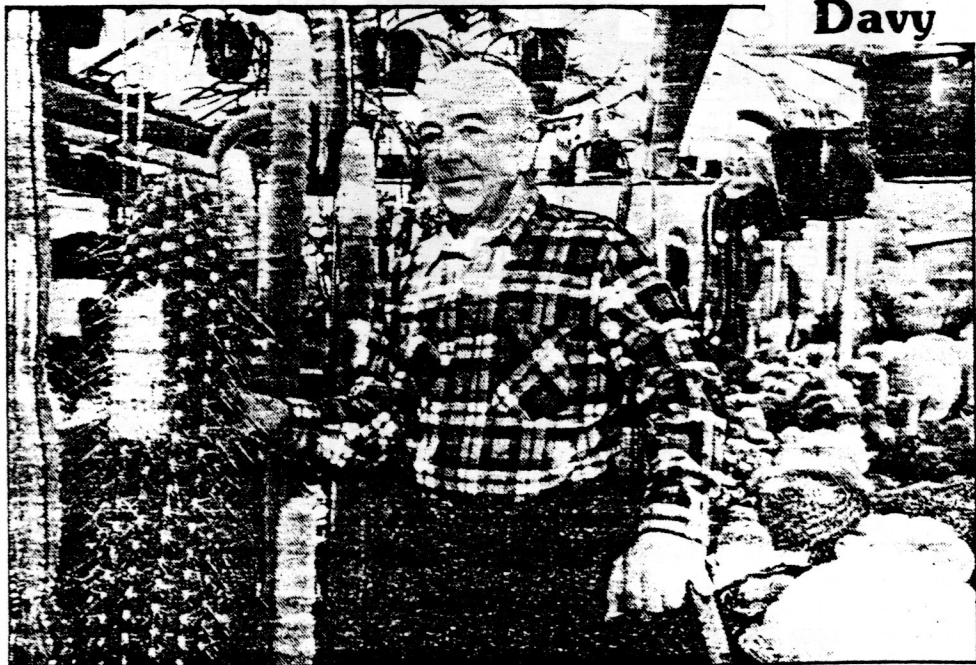
"Without exception cacti come from America", explained Harold," transported either by plant collectors, the wind or carried by birds. Incidentally, there are a host of most interesting plants in Africa, which though not cacti have grown by almost parallel evolution.

A winner of innumerable cups and certificates, Harold explained to me that everyone will have an excellent opportunity to see cacti they would never otherwise see at the British National Cacti Show, which this year is to be held at UMIST in Manchester on Saturday and Sunday, August 8 and 9.

Later in the year Harold himself is going to have the chance to see American cacti at first hand, having been invited to spend a month or to with his old friend Les Nyman, a former Manchester businessman, now living at Lauderdale Lakes, Florida, who plans to take Harold on a cactus-viewing journey of a lifetime to Tallahassee, New Orleans, into Louisiana and Texas, visiting Houston, San Antonio, the site of the Battle of El Alamo, the Rio Grande and the Big Bend National Park of Texas, a return trip of 2,500 miles.

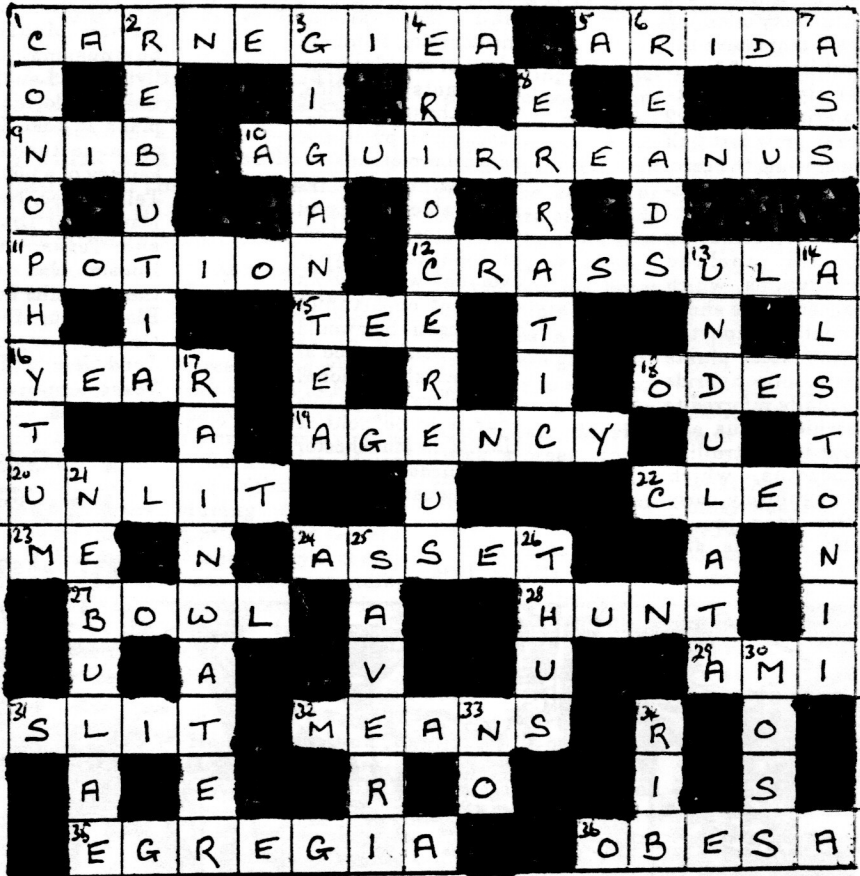
People Profile

by Joan Davy

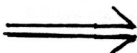


HAROLD seen in one of his three greenhouses with just a few of his fine specimens. AD 87/2/2.

Herewith the solution to our crossword of last month. Many thanks to Peter Bint for his effort - whose contribution is next ?



CONGRATULATIONS...to John Collins, newly elected Chairman of Bolton Cactus Society, following the resignation of David Ball because of work commitments.



LOOK UNDER YOUR PILLOW:

Is that the Library copy of The Encyclopedia of Cacti by Cullmann et al ? Can we have it back, please ! It has gone temporarily missing.

OUT & ABOUT

"Every man to his own...." is the saying; it came to mind recently when we paid the first visit of this year to Bloemendaal's garden centre at Charnock Richard. This is part of the Park Hall leisure complex with the Camelot theme park and a selection of exhibition/conference halls, just off the A49 north of Wigan. It's Big! Around 1800 metres of staging under a single roof enables it to supply wholesale as well as retail, and there is plenty of space to keep houseplants more suited for offices than humble homes. Examples include 6-foot Yuccas for £44.75 and 5-foot Kentia palms at £47.95, with a wide range of more modest items such as Hibiscus and Gardenia at, respectively, £5 and £10. By and large they are excellent plants, well presented and reasonably priced.

Then we come to the succulents. We counted 76 Jatrophas at £4.45 each, rows of Ceropogia woodii and Senecio rowleyanus, Kalanchoe "Thessa", the usual things, tending to run at around £1.50 for 3-4" pots. An unusually large number of large-padded Opuntias up to £9 for an 18" example, and getting on for a thousand 2" pots at 50p each. Fair enough, but the conditions! All the benches have standing water beneath them, in which a remarkable variety of fragments have grown into fully fledged aquatics. All the plants are liberally soaked and the atmosphere is distinctly humid. Some of the succulents seem unconcerned, but far too many of the cacti are rotting in algae-covered soil. We lifted up one soggy Ferocactus latispinus, once an attractive 6" specimen for £8.95. It had no roots at all, and was sheltering an understandably contented slug.

Over the cash desks is a disclaimer - "We have taken great care....highest quality plants....kept in peak condition....no responsibility for loss or deterioration once they have left the premises". For the bulk of their stock, yes, I'll go along with that, but I have to say that where cacti are concerned they really don't fill us with confidence.

In fairness, not all general nurserymen and suppliers make such a poor showing. Only a few days later we called in at Gordon Riggs at Todmorden for some compost and had a general browse. He's still got plenty of square pots, having apparently bought up the entire stock. Few people can beat him for range, quality and price, whether it be bulbs, bedding plants, houseplants or trees. His cactus are at least kept pretty well separate and sufficiently dry over winter. Anyone wanting to start a collection or to boost a young collector's stock could do worse than take a couple of dozen of the 2" pots at 30p each with a good selection of cacti and succulents. Names are not always present or reliable, but we've never had a bad plant from them. The only complaint - those damned implanted "flowers" are to be found even here. Over Christmas they even had some succulents sprayed with artificial snow - horror upon horrors!

ROUND THE SOCIETIES

- EAST CHESHIRE....Monday, 8th March, 7.30 for 8.00, Wilmslow Public Library: Norman Wilbraham's "Salta Safari Part One" Contact Mrs.B.McKnight on 061 431 8148
- BOLTON....Tuesday, 15th March (NOTE:one week later than usual) 7.00 for 7.30, Bolton Town Hall: John Henshaw "California & Nevada '87"; Table Show - Opuntia & Crassula. Contact Philip Barker on 0942 56440
- WARRINGTON....Wednesday, 9th March, 7.30 for 8.00, Penketh Leisure Centre: Keith Grantham (Luton) "South Africa Part One". Contact Mrs.Barbara Beesley on 051 424 9432
- WIGAN.....Wednesday, 17th February, 7.15 for 7.45, Independent Methodist Church, Stopford St., Higher Ince: Steve Jinks "A mixture"; Table Show - any cactus. Contact John Harrison on 0942 218465.
- PRESTON...Thursday, 4th March, 7.00 for 7.30, St.Andrews Church Hall, Blackpool Rd., Preston: David Rushforth "Land's End & Back." Contact Mrs.Jean Kendall on 077 473 2957

NORTHERN AREA WEEKEND

A reminder that, although residential places are booked up, day visitors will be welcome at Alston Hall near Longridge, NE of Preston, on the 18th - 20th March, The Saturday is the most obvious day to call, with four lectures from 9.15 to 20.00, and plant sales from 16.30 onward, No details of cost to hand, but information from Mrs.Joan Taylor on 0253 721968, A list of lectures is available from John Collins or from the Editor,

NEXT MONTH. . . .A new speaker, STEVE JINKS, speaking on *Gymnocalycium* & *Notocactus*...Table show: *Mammillaria*, *Echeveria/Pachyphytum* - no limit on size or quantity. Please do bring some plants along if you can to give us all the pleasure of seeing new specimens. It isn't really important "who's best"; it's a way to share our experiences...Saturday March 12th, 7.00 for 7.30