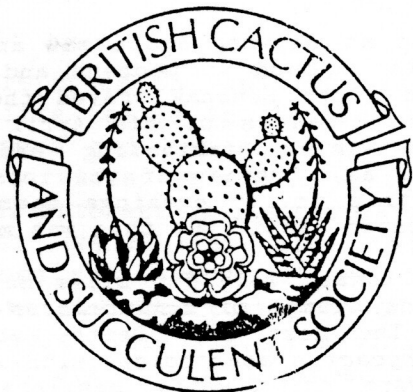


**Manchester
Branch**



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 1988

Editor...Peter Schofield

Things are looking up ! Contributions have been pouring in. Well, two have, anyway. Many thanks to Brian for his article and to Annette for a cartoon which most of us would have missed otherwise. Do, please, keep an eye on the papers for usable material: our centre page this month could possibly change your whole life - whether for the better is open to question ! Drop a note if any places you visit seem worth comment, to make the 'Out & About' feature less of a monologue. Do join in.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Our second meeting at Heywood again saw an excellent turnout for a winter month: around 45 members and friends with some newcomers welcomed. John Henshaw braved the storms, with his wife Norma, to show slides of his April trip to Nevada & California. This was a fascinating and quite beautiful travelogue as well as a review of the local succulent flora; some of the "My trip to..." evenings seem to be an endless sequence of desiccated cacti, but this was much better fare.

Starting from Las Vegas, only 5-6 miles out of the city were to be seen six-foot clumps of *Echinocactus polycephalus* with two foot heads. The next day, Death Valley revealed many football sized *Ferocactus acanthoides* with *Agave utahensis* and the magenta flowers of *Opuntia basilaris* overlooking the baking salt flats. They sought and successfully found *Echinomastus johnstonii*, just too early for flowering. Travelling east toward Utah, coryphantha (including *C. vivipara*), echinocereus and agaves were found among the junipers of South House Rock Valley - a site covered by snow in winter. A search for *Feddicactus peeblesianus* proved fruitless.

After a visit to Zion National Park we followed the trip south from Vegas into southern California, with *E. johnstonii* even closer to flowering but not obliging after a several hour wait. *Mammillaria tetrancistra*, identified by its characteristic seed, was widespread in very hot well-drained areas and showing considerable variation. *Opuntia bigelowii*, one of the "jumping chollas", presented almost a small forest with its pale green-yellow flowers, and lots more of the "firebarrels", *F. acanthoides*, were seen. More *E. johnstonii* were declining to open their buds.

A search north of Barstow for *Sclerocactus polyancistrus* eventually revealed a very few survivors from an extensive habitat site - not the first evidence they had had of continued denudation of sites. Moving now to the coast north of Los Angeles we saw opuntias on the hillsides, dudleyas among the rocks, and a red floating cloud of *Foucqueria splendens* in flower. An increasing number of cream-flowered *Mammillaria dioica* were seen, including cristates, but a massive cristate *F. acanthoides* was less expected. The desert here was described by John as "a natural cactus garden", with so many in flower so close together.

Finally a sad note on which to end. Their visit to Huntington Botanical gardens, after a ten-year gap, revealed a general deterioration with children running around, visitors walking on the beds and an absence of the guards formerly present. The conservatory was worth a five-minute visit, though, if only to see a cristate *Ariocarpus retusus* !

OUT AND ABOUT

A site not often reported on, and not widely known among cactophiles, is Cliffe Castle in Keighley, West Yorkshire. This is now a museum and art gallery run by the Leeds recreation/leisure services; it's well worth a visit at any time for the general interest of its displays, although when we called in last month they also had a travelling exhibition on "Mosses and Liverworts" entitled "The Secret Garden". If you have the opportunity to catch this on its rounds, the photographs alone justify a visit. The site has a small zoo & aviary, and a large L-shaped conservatory. One wing of this contained massed flowering and foliage plants - hyacinths & daffodils, cyclamen & gloxinia, with assorted begonias, peperomias, clivia overshadowed by banana, cymbidium orchids and the red 'bottlebrushes' of callistemon

The further wing is for us - an established display of cacti and succulents. Six foot or more in height are *O.subulata*, *Cereus peruvianus monstrose* and other cerei, a very woody opuntia and a ten-stemmed *C. straussii* which has obviously been flowering. There are the usual signs of neglect arising from limited manpower - slug trails, a rotted *M.caespitosa* and a badly damaged *E.grusonii*, but also signs of attention in the form of new planting, e.g. clumps of *M.elongata*. The mammillaria included *M.bocasana*, *bombycina*, and *zeilmanniana* together with *Noto buiningii* & *magnificus*, Aloe aristata, Crassula argentea as a 3-foot tree, gasterias and several *Agave americana*. In other words, all very ordinary, but a bonus to an interesting alternative day out for the family.

Other visits recalled how delicate an economic balance is held by many garden centres. Prettywood, on the Heywood - Bury boundary opened a few years ago with a fanfare of great promises; half of it is now given over to bathroom suites and wall tiles, whilst Ivy Lea in Nelson, very much a cactus Mecca in the past, is devoting much more space to propagation of more profitable lines such as alpines and conifers, with a corresponding reduction in the range of succulents offered.



MUSIC FANS pricked up their ears last night when a duet on an *Opuntia Scheeri* buzzed through the auditorium of Liverpool's University Theatre.

The tonal range of prickly cactus may not be wide, but combined with the amplified crushing of fresh oranges, made its point with listeners.

The use of six cacti ranging from the 4 ft *Euphorbia Grandicornis* to a thumb-sized specimen was part of a Department

Variations on a cactus

By Colin Brady

of Music interpretation of works by the American avant-garde composer, John Cage.

Sound was picked up and magnified by contact microphones. Music students Elizabeth Ford, 22, (pictured above testing the cacti) and David Sheppard, 21, used a variety of implements to "play" the

spikes, but sometimes wincingly, used their bare hands.

A conch shell, partly filled with water, and the amplified sound of oranges being liquidised and swallowed by a performer, accompanied the cacti.

The organiser of Opus, as the 110-minute performance — which also includes several

visual effects — was called, was Mr James Wishart, music lecturer at the department.

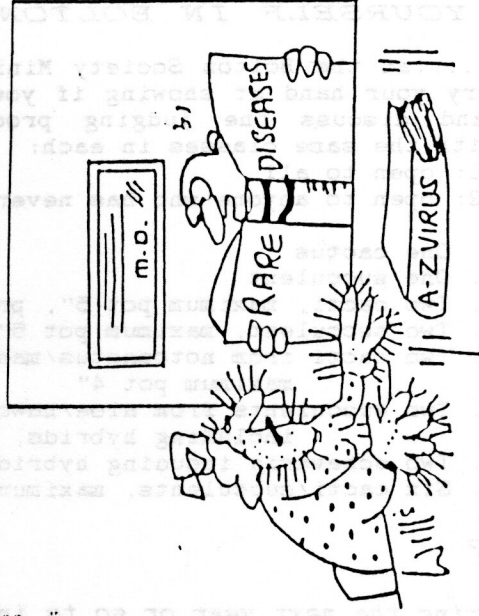
He said: "Cage's idea is that music can be produced from anything. I decided on cactus rather than other plants. It was not meant to be too serious. I wanted to make people laugh."

The cacti were borrowed from the university's own botanic gardens at Ness, Wirral.

The director, Mr Kenneth Hulme, said: "They asked for an early delivery so they could be tuned."

From the *Daily Telegraph* of 20th February 1988
Yet another significance of "Prick up your ears"

SEED; Costly but highly nutritious form of bird food sold in handsome packets printed with colourful pictures of flowers and vegetables.



"Why didn't you tell me you'd been re-potting cacti?"

Thanks to Annette Black who found this in one of the morning papers

EXPOSE YOURSELF IN BOLTON

....at the Bolton Society Mini-show on May 10th: a chance to try your hand at showing if you haven't before, and to study and discuss the judging process. There are two sections, with the same classes in each:

Section 1: open to all

Section 2: open to anyone who has never been a prizewinner

- Classes... 1. One cactus
2. One succulent
3. Two cacti, maximum pot 5", preferably different
4. Two succulent, maximum pot 5"
5. Two cacti from notocactus/mammillaria/rebutia, maximum pot 4"
6. Two succulents from aloe/haworthia/gasteria including hybrids, maximum pot 4"
7. Two echeveria including hybrids, max. pot 5"
8. Six cacti/succulents, maximum pot 3"

WHO'S WHO ?

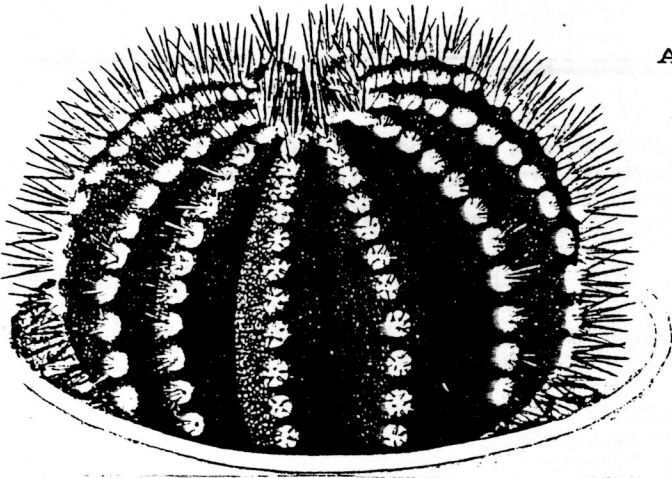
We hope during the next year or so to introduce our members, many of whom see each other at meetings but might otherwise inhabit different planets! Last month we began with Harold; this time, for ease/laziness, it is the Editor's turn. Four and a half years ago I married Judith, who had been widowed - and inherited in the process a son, two daughters, a border terrier and an *Opuntia robusta*. Actually, Judith and I both had a handful of "casual cacti", but somehow they got together and bred. Very quickly the infection entered our system, and after a couple of years the 10 by 8 looked less than sufficient. Something had to go. Friends suggested it was our sanity when we put up a 20-foot Alton - I think it was probably the sanest thing we've done (which isn't saying much). Judith likes *mamms*, I like small *opuntias*, and we both still tend to take anything that looks interesting. Both working fulltime, we struggle to provide even basic tender care to the collection. One useful investment - a 3kw thermostatted fan heater which keeps it over 40F all winter, without the wretched bubble-film, for less than £100; we run it continuously for 3 - 4 months for ventilation as well.

NEXT MONTH... *Asclepiadaceae* (I'm glad I've got a word processor for titles like that; it saves a lot of Tippex !)
The speaker is GEOFF HEDGECOCK. The table show for April is of *Rebutia* & *Crassula*; any size, any number - bring them along and give us all a chance to admire them

Saturday April 9th...7.00 for 7.30

A SURVIVOR OF

BYGONE DAYS



Brian Darnell

Once upon a time, many of our older members liked to take the family for a day outing to Blackpool. Every time, mysteriously, without fail, after leaving the A6 at Garstang they would become hopelessly lost in the country lanes around Woodplumpton. Suddenly they would find themselves in the driveway to Blackburn's Cactus Nursery. This happened to me at least three or four times a year, and other members have told me of this same phenomenon.

I recall one occasion when there had just been a delivery of grafted *Ubelmanniana pectinifera*, quite a rare and sought after species at that time. They were expensive but I bought two, one for myself and one for a friend who prided himself on being able to acquire every rarity in the book. These plants had been grafted onto unsuitable tender stock and in his greenhouse it was soon overtaken by the cold of the following winter. Fortunately the scion itself was saved and put on one side for re-rooting in the spring. Three years and many rooting methods later he had failed to re-establish it. In desperation he asked me to have a try.

Over the next two years I tried various ways of rooting it, without success. As a last resort I filled a jamjar with water, sat the plant on top with the base just in the water, and popped it into the hot box. Four days later it had six roots half an inch long. In two weeks the roots were two inches long, and I carefully re-potted it into normal compost. After five rootless years a plant had been saved. I have tried this method on two other plants which were reluctant to root, with 100% success; I think, though, that it must only be used as a last resort. Have any other members a rooting method for difficult plants ?

Editor adds: Readers may recall that Les Percy published in an earlier newsletter a method which had been found very successful for echeveria: to put the rootless rosette onto the drainage hole of an upturned clay pot in a tray of wet gravel. I had seen this technique used at Wythenshawe, but have not tried it on any cactus yet.

ROUND THE SOCIETIES

- BOLTON... Tuesday, 15th March, 7.00 for 7.30, Bolton Town Hall: John Henshaw "California & Nevada '87"; Table Show - Opuntia & Crassula. Contact Philip Barker on 0942 56440
- WIGAN.... Wednesday, 16th March, 7.15 for 7.45, Independent Methodist Church, Stopford St., Higher Ince: Chris Dawson "Epiphytes"; Table Show - any epiphyte. Contact John Harrison on 0942 218465.
- HESWALL... Monday, 21st March, 7.30 for 7.45, Heswall Hall Mr. Meikle de Loeze, visiting from Holland Contact Mr. P. Robson on 0244 537393
- PRESTON... Thursday, 7th April, 7.00 for 7.30, St. Andrews Church Hall, Blackpool Rd., Preston: Geoff Bailey (who?) "North American Cacti". Contact Mrs. Jean Kendall on 077 478 2957
- EAST CHESHIRE... Monday, 11th April, 7.30 for 8.00, Wilmslow Public Library: Mr. G. Foster "Plants at Oak Dene" Contact Mrs. E. McKnight on 061 431 8148
- WARRINGTON... Wednesday, 13th April, 7.30 for 8.00, Penketh Leisure Centre: A. Mann of Crewe "Rebutias" Contact Mrs. Barbara Beesley on 051 424 9432

KEELE STUDY DAY... Saturday 4th June at Keele University
£8.25 with lunch £4.25 without lunch
9.30 a.m to 4.30 p.m.

Tutors: Phil Goodson (Exeter) & Peter Thomas (Keele)

This course... will give the raw beginner an insight into these fascinating plants. By looking at their biology, and where and how they live in the wild, we can understand their cultural requirements. During the course, we will be studying basic pollination, the biology of plants and the environment in which they live. Then their culture: composts, pots, watering and feeding, and where to situate them. We will look at pests and diseases, their control and correct use of chemicals, plus how to propagate plants from seed, leaf and stem cuttings and grafting. What to grow where, and how to identify them, will be followed by a 'surgery' on the plants which you bring in.

Applications by May 26th; Editor & Chairman both have application forms