

MANCHESTER BRANCH NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 1997

Christmas is upon us and accordingly our AGM takes place as has been our custom from time immemorial. Alas, few of our members think it important enough to turn out to attend and that is sad. All societies must hold such an event to uphold the democratic status of the group. Many good ideas have emanated at such gatherings. As a branch we need the input from you, its body.

This year Brendan has been doing his best to put together a memorial of one of our founder members from those early days of 1947, namely Harold Gaulton. After the AGM he is going to present the fruits of his labours. The main difficulty he has encountered is finding a slide showing the venerable gentlemen. To some of you this name does not mean very much at all. Though Harold has been dead only a short time he was not able to get to Branch meetings due to increasing illness. But to those of us who were privileged to know him in his heyday he was a tireless worker at branch level for the promotion of our hobby. When I joined the Society in the late 1960's and came along to the meetings which, in those days, were held in a church hall near the Salford Precinct, Harold was chairman. His whole demeanour was one of gentleness and punctuality. He believed that people deserved the best and that was what he gave. With his notepad in his hand he would

bring the meeting to order. Nothing was ever forgotten as he made notes before each meeting to ensure no mistakes were made.

He had a wonderful helper in his wife, Muriel, who, along with Ethel Marshall, ran the kitchen tirelessly and efficiently. We never had to worry a jot about preparation of the tea break or clearing up afterwards; it just happened like clockwork.

Harold was a plantsman through and through. He started off with one large greenhouse in his long back garden in Sale. It had two benches, one on each side of a central bed in which grew several tall Cerei and a trailing vine-like "Queen of the Night" that flowered with profuse regularity and also provided shade for the globular cacti that grew in pots beneath it. The other plants grown in this house were mainly cacti along with some Lithops and Haworthias. He soon ran out of space and proceeded to erect a new greenhouse. Being a carpenter and shopfitter for Timpsons the shoe firm by trade he had no difficulty in producing a structure to his own requirements. He had the glass, saved from various refits in the local stores. So he made the framework fit the glass rather than the other way about. The glass was something special. I lost count of the number of times he brought a shriek of disbelief as he picked up a whole brick and threw it at the glass. The unsuspecting

viewer would gasp as the brick bounced off the glass without so much as a scratch appearing. Then he would explain that it was armoured glass and thus undestructable. We all said he would come unstuck one day but he never did.

In this large house he kept many desirable plants, none less than his adored TCP's (Turnips, Carrots and Parsnips as the caudiciform plants were irreligiously known in those early days). It was possible to 'lose' hours on a visit to Harold's. A small greenhouse was added at the bottom of the garden to house his Echeverias and seed raised sales plants. There was a small conservatory-cum-vestibule outside the back door which housed yet more plants and the back living room always had a copious number of warmth loving plants on the large windowsill and tables placed prominently by the window. I repeat, he was a plantsman. He had no favourite group. They were all his favourites.

His Open Days were phenomenal. People thronged the greenhouses, the garden, the tea room. The tables were always laden with goodies and Harold and Muriel always greeted visitors with warmth and a cheery smile. People who had little or no interest in the plants would always accompany their plant crazy spouses to these days because they knew they would find convivial company, especially Muriel. If you were new to the hobby you would never leave Harold's empty handed. There were

always loads of propagations he had been beavering away at through the spring months.

At our shows he would always put in a large entry and have hundreds of small plants for sale. At the Salford Show especially he would mesmerize the hundreds of customers with the vast array of shape and colour. Many times I heard customers state they looked forward to seeing his stall each year.

Harold had a very loyal side as well. When senility befell Colin Partington, another of our founder members, following his illness and marriage breakdown he had to enter Prestwich Hospital as an inmate. Harold was a constant visitor.

After the sad loss of his beloved Muriel he was never quite the same man again.

In later years heart problems caused Harold to have to enter hospital himself. Then gangrene set in and he was robbed first of one leg then later the other. This did not stop him from attending meetings whenever he could. If any one day stands out in my mind it was one Society AGM in Leicester. Such was his independence he struggled on crutches up two flights of stairs to go to the toilet rather than bother anybody to help him use the lift because his wheelchair would only fit in with difficulty. Sadly ill health soon made him a prisoner in his own house where he was rarely without some company very often his war veteran chums. Then death claimed her prize. RIP.