

M**MANCHESTER BRANCH
NEWSLETTER MARCH
1998**

Hello again! The beginning of the new season is upon us. How have your plants fared in this unusually mild winter? There should be signs of new growth in your plants; there certainly is among mine.

PERSONALITY PORTRAIT

This month sees a new feature in the newsletter following a request to know more about our members. To open this feature our chairman, **Brian Darnell**, has fittingly agreed to supply information about his encounters with the hobby.

"The day my grandfather took me, an eleven year old, to see a friend of his, is one of my most vivid memories." So begins Brian's account of himself. He was fascinated and enthralled by the weird and wonderful plants, the like of which he had never seen before. He left the aforementioned house with a mini collection of potted plants, rooted cuttings and offsets, as well as cultural tips. Having been the cause of Brian's entry into the hobby, his grandfather allotted him some space in a cold frame. Brian spent many happy hours tending his plants. Every Saturday he went into Manchester to visit the well known garden emporia of the day and would come away clutching 2 or 3 plants that had cost him the princely sum of one shilling each. He would also attend branch meetings (NCSS in those days) with Mr. Gough, the friend of his grandfather, where he became a junior member with the number 4256. Next door to Mr. Gough lived another

member, Keith Robinson, who also helped nurture Brian's interest in the hobby.

At the age of 15 Brian received a splendid birthday present, a greenhouse, which was erected in the garden of the new house his parents had acquired. Now he was able to plant out his collection on top of a wooden bench.

He continues, "I left school at 16, went to college for 2 years, followed by 2 years National Service. Courting, getting married, moving to a new house and having children all took their toll on my hobby and only a few plants remained at my parents house. I had also lost touch with the Society."

However all was not lost. In 1969 Woolworths in Oldham came to the rescue. They had just had a delivery of thousands of cacti. Seventh heaven indeed. Brian spent every spare penny he had, even to the point of having to walk home with a dozen small plants. Regular weekly visits were made to spend what he was able. Truly hooked again he still had no idea how to contact the Society. Then occurred the second piece of good fortune. On a visit to Lewis's in Manchester he spied a beautiful *Parodia* in flower, bought it and as he was about to leave the stall he noticed a booklet about cacti costing 2 shillings. This he read avidly while travelling home on the bus and behold, on the final page, there was an application form to join the Society. He sent this off along with the £1 fee and was allocated to Manchester branch.

After attending a few meetings Brian was approached by Mrs. Kidd, a wonderful lady and then the Branch Secretary, who asked him if he would

be prepared to look after the library which consisted of about two dozen books. Not realising what he had let himself in for he agreed to her request. At the following meeting Mrs. Kidd asked him if he would be attending the next committee meeting. Mistakenly Brian thought he was not a committee member but by accepting the responsibility for the books he had also accepted the unspoken request to join the committee. He has served from that day to this, approaching 30 years.

Window sills full of plants, plants on the dressing table, spines in the children's hands, plants hanging by their hooked spines all contributed to some marital disharmony. It was time for a greenhouse. The first, an 8' x 6', was soon overflowing and, after 5 years, had to be replaced by a 12' x 8'. Last year the long-standing shed was dismantled to be replaced by a new one with an 8' x 6' in front of it.

Brian's collection consists of about 75% cacti and the remainder made up of a variety of succulent plants. In general he chooses plants for their looks (body shape, spine length, shape and thickness, colour of the plant). He is a rarity in that he rarely buys a plant for its name, admitting to having some difficulty with plant names. He loves his plants, getting enormous satisfaction from repotting them, growing seedlings and rooting cuttings and offsets - a true plantsman.

The greenhouses are heated with calor gas using Thermal Tempest heaters which provide a well controlled temperature. For the more tender plants he has a section that is heated by an under soil cable and encased in polythene to retain the heat, a greenhouse within a greenhouse.

His favourite plant is *Uebelmannia pectinifera*, a handsome, deep-coloured specimen with attractive spination. His favourite flower comes on the humble *Setiechinopsis mirabilis*, a slender, elegant, white bloom.

In 1987 he was awarded the Society's Silver badge and Diploma of Merit. His final comment on this is, "To me it was a great honour and I wear the badge with pride."

MARCH SPEAKER

Mr Ray Stephenson hails from the North East, from a small community called Choppington, which is situated about half way between Morpeth and the coastal town of Blyth. As the crow flies that is about 12 miles due north of the centre of Newcastle.

He is assiduous in his liking for the Crassulaceae and has been many years in the hobby as the title "Forty years of growing" indicates (and that was a title from a few years ago). The Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal for those wondering) has been visited, as have the Canary Isles. During his many years in the hobby he has grown a "bit of everything" but has confined his interest to the Crassulaceae, mainly, and Sedums, in particular, in later years.

He is Chairman of the Northumbria branch of the B.C.S.S. However his fame extends much further:

- a) He is editor of the Sedum Society Journal.
- b) He is Curator of the British National Collection Of Sedums.
- c) He is the author of the sole book about the genus *Sedum* since that written many moons since by Praeger

and Evans. It is called "Sedums, Cultivated Stonecrops."
Ray will have a variety of items on display for your perusal.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

MANCHESTER'S SUMMER BANQUET.

A real feast of plant material and information.

Featuring Mr Alan Craig talking and showing slides of "The Flowering Desert" following his visit to Chile after the first rains in living memory to fall on the Atacama Desert.

Co-partnered by Mr Ralph Peckover who is highly knowledgeable about plants in the southern African continent who will use the same format as above to enlighten us about "Ceropegias and Brachystelmas".

This feast will be ably supported by mouth watering delicacies in much the same style as last year's event to celebrate 50 years of Manchester Branch.

Cost: £3.

Date: 13th June at our normal venue.

Time: To start about 6pm.

TOO GOOD TO MISS. BOOK NOW.

NORTH WEST CACTUS MART

On Saturday 28th March, Warrington hosts the above event. It is rare for the North West to host such an opportunity for people to enjoy a wide range of Nurseries from around the country. Under the auspices of the Euphorbia

Study Group we will have this chance this month. Book it in your calendar or diary for fear you might forget and later regret. Should you require directions refer to the map in the hall **(NOT TO BE REMOVED)** or contact Daphne Pritchard or write to her at:

(S.A.E. Please)

Venue **WOOLSTON LEISURE CENTRE on HALL ROAD.**

Light refreshments will be available all day at the hall and a bar will be open during the lunch time period. Entry fee is 50p. per person. The event is open from 10.00 to 16.00 hours.

Nurseries in attendance include:

Brookside Nursery

J. Carr Plants

Croston Cactus (John Henshaw)

Richard & Wendy Edgington

Oak Dene Nursery (Gordon Foster)

Toobees Exotics

Woodside Nursery

Plantlife

I. Robinson

The Plant Lovers

as well as:

Terry Wingrove selling books

Philip Barker for pots & sundries

MARKETING THE SOCIETY

Bruce Maley, a name perhaps unknown to many of you, has been charged with the task of making the Society more widely known, appreciated and expanding. A questionnaire has been circularised to each Branch Secretary asking for help. He needs to know about each branch in the country, how we function, what we do to make ourselves known to the

public at large. Maybe we could do more to advertise the Society and **OUR branch** in particular. How many of you could take **posters** etc. to put in **shop windows, libraries, Garden Centres, Church Magazines** and the like. **PLEASE** speak to any Committee member if you would like to be of assistance.

Bruce also poses the following question, "**IS THERE ANYBODY IN YOUR BRANCH WHO WOULD BE PREPARED TO HELP ME IN THE LOCAL PROMOTION OF THE SOCIETY?**"

Are there any takers????

PLANTS I LIKE TO GROW

This is a new section to which absolutely anybody can contribute. You do not need a lot of knowledge and anything you want to know can be sorted for you. I will lead the way this month with a lovely plant that is rarely seen in collections because of the name it bears and the general lack of availability.

OPUNTIA PACHYPUS

All the books I have consulted agree that this is one of the choicer Opuntias. It grows in Peru and maybe just into Ecuador and is Cereus-like in its appearance. It grows to about 1 metre in height that means mine is approaching its maximum height. Only rarely does it put out any offsets. Mine has one growing from halfway up the body where I believe it first tried to flower but that aborted and became a side branch. It is suggested that it flowers in summer but mine still thinks it lives in Peru because it

persists in trying to flower from September onwards which would be right for the southern hemisphere. For the last five years it has produced flower buds which have all failed to open due to lack of decent sunlight. The flowers, when they do open are scarlet in colour and about 7 cms. in diameter. The flowers appear very close to the crown of the plant on that year's growth.

Like all the clan it has troublesome spines and glochids which find the human flesh a delightful place to nestle. However they are only 5mm. to 20mm in length and yellow in colour and grow from sunken woolly areoles. The trunk of the plant can be up to 8cm. in diameter and mine is half to two thirds of that girth. The columnar body is a cheerful palish green colour.

The plant was first described by the notable Karl Schumann about a century ago I surmise. Its cultural requirements are quite easy. It requires an open compost, miserly watering in the summer and some in autumn when the weather allows. An occasional feed is beneficial as with all plants. It loves hot, sunny conditions and would probably benefit from slightly warmer conditions in winter, though mine tolerates being in one of the cool houses.

There, wasn't that easy? Now please let me have some notes about a plant or plants you like to grow.

APRIL MEETING

PLEASE NOTE the date—**18th April**, the **THIRD** Saturday, due to Easter. We welcome **GRAHAM HOLE** back to Manchester for a talk about **Gymnocalyciums**.