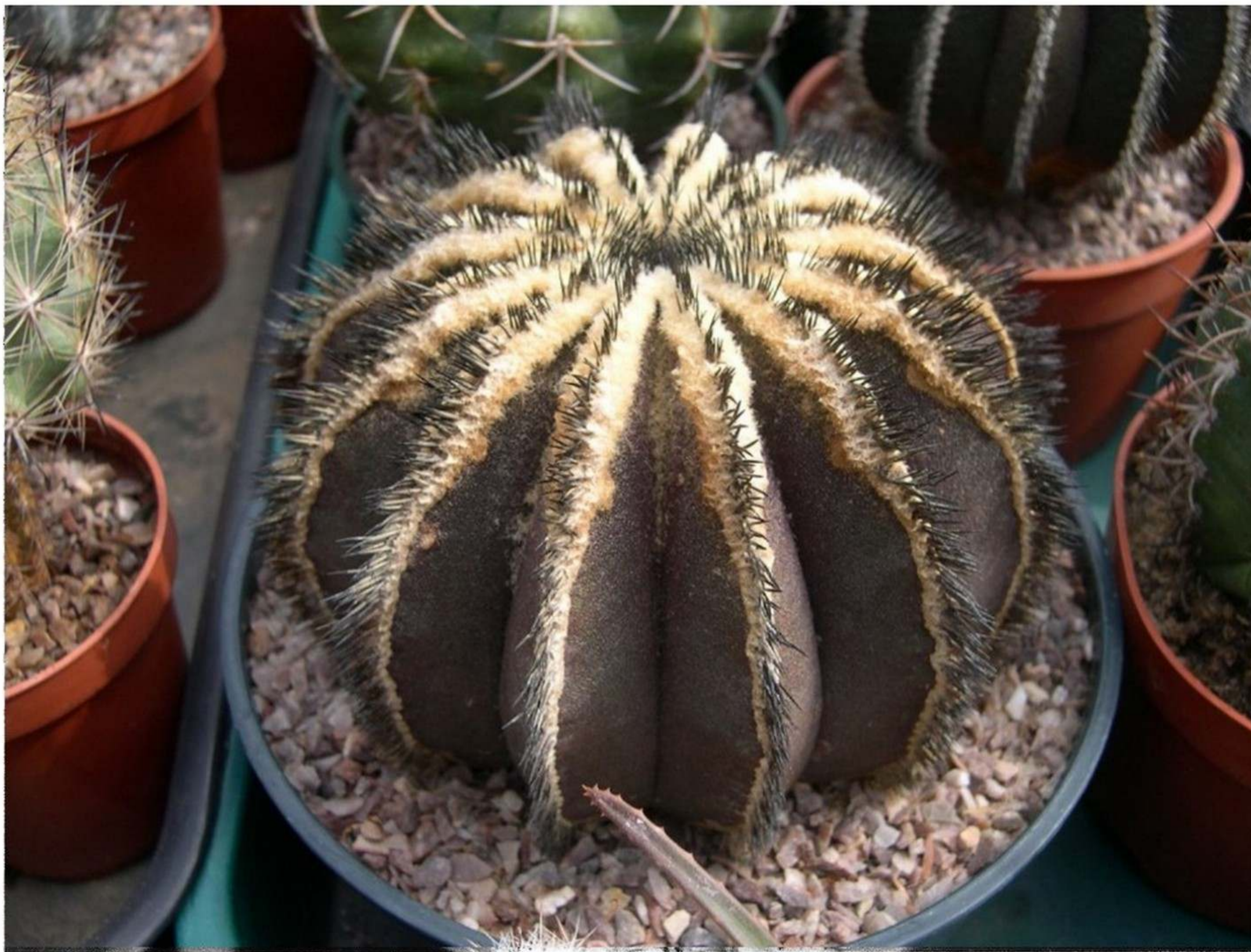


Gaultonia

Newsletter of the
Manchester Branch
of the
British Cactus and Succulent Society

Summer 2005.



Uebelmannia pectinifera
In the collection of Mr David Rushforth
Photograph taken on branch trip to his collection

WHAT WAS HAPPENING 50 YEARS AGO?

By Peter Bint

This is an occasional series looking at cactus and succulent life 50 years ago. The society was in its infancy and then known as the National Cactus and Succulent Society. It had a sister society, the Cactus and Succulent Society of Great Britain, which had been formed before the Second World War. The society we know began its life in 1945 in Bradford soon after the War ended but it was to be a while before various clubs formed themselves into a cohesive group under the title of NCSS.

The Journal has been an essential element of the Society from the outset though the early production was but a shadow of today's computer produced image. Nonetheless it was an outstanding way of imparting knowledge to the growing band of enthusiasts. The war had interfered enormously with the hobby and slowly plants were becoming available again. Many of the varieties that are common nowadays had not been discovered in 1955. However the hobby was growing and people were hungry for information.

Looking back at volume 10 for the year 1955 we find some illustrious names, many of whom were responsible for the formation of the Society. The President was Mrs Vera

Higgins who was a veritable fount of knowledge about succulents in those days. None of her books are in print these days but they can be found in Branch Libraries. Founders and Life Members numbered four, namely A. Baynes, F. Ives, V. W. Kane and H. M. Roan. The latter lived in Rochdale near the boundary with Royton. The Chairman was Mr J. H. V. Hampshire of Sheffield, the Secretary was Mr S. H. Scott of Nottingham with his assistant, Manchester's very own, Mr Stan Parkinson. I never had the pleasure of meeting Stan because debilitating illness forced him off the scene in the mid to late sixties. The Treasurer was Mr. R. Smith from Bradford. Many of the officials in those early years were from the northern midlands because the Society had its roots there.

Even in those early days the question of how much water was a vexing one. In her June 'President's Notes' Vera Higgins wrote: "I once wrote that many people were not giving their cacti enough water in the growing period; recently I have seen plants that seem to be getting too much water but perhaps that is not the only reason why they are so soft and green. I think one of the troubles may be ventilation. I am quite sure that the chief reason that plants do so well when put out of doors in the summer is that they have fresh air all round them." She goes on to stress the value of ventilation, both above and below the bench level, stressing its usefulness on cold but sunny days. She also had a word of advice for those who were not fortunate enough to own a greenhouse. "Just a word to the people who grow their plants on the window sill. The room will be ventilated for the benefit of the human inhabitants, not the plants. A wide open window does no harm but if either a casement or a sash window is opened just a crack, it may cause a draught and plants dislike

Pictures from our Branch Trips this spring.

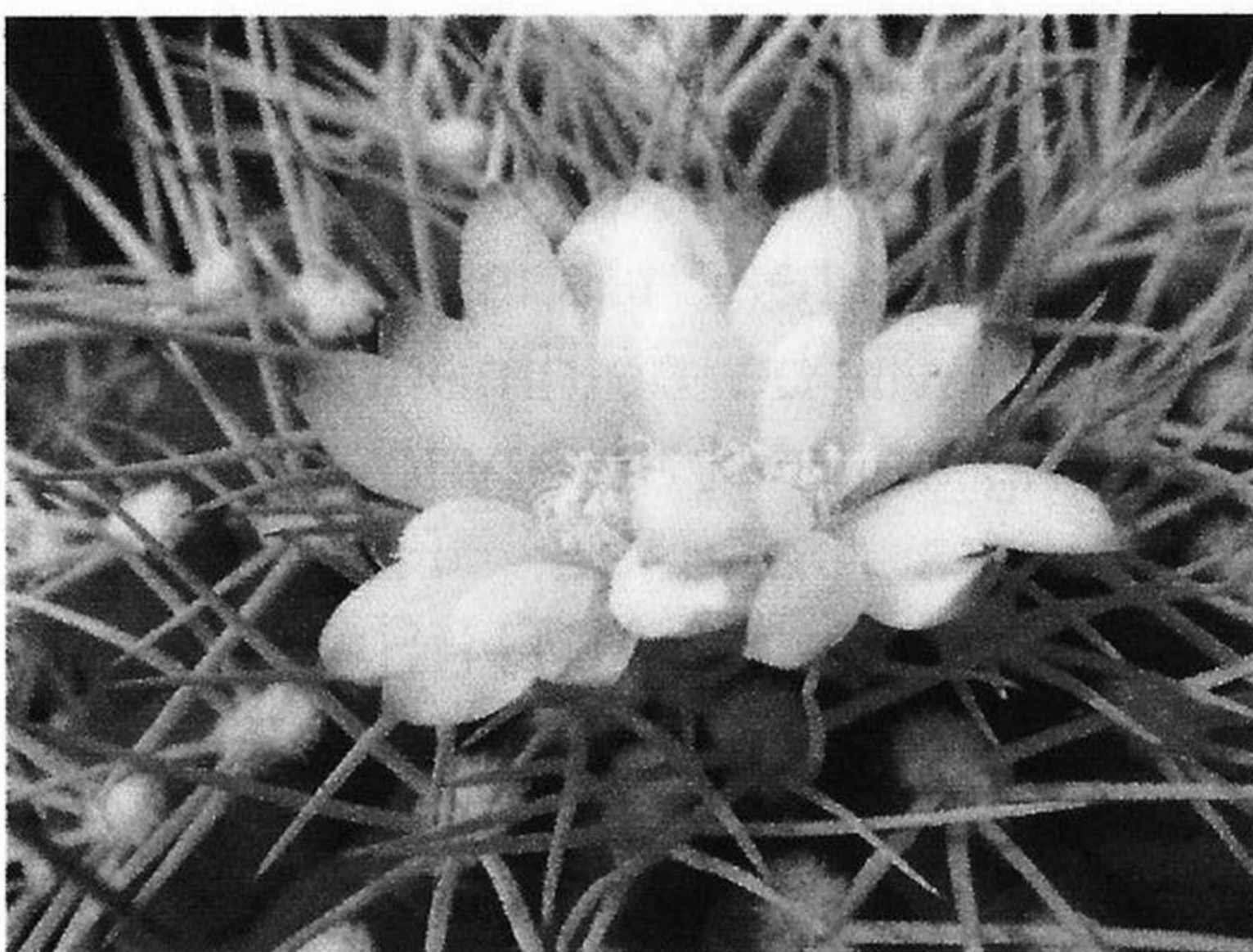
David Rushforth's collection



Time for some lunch in David's garden.

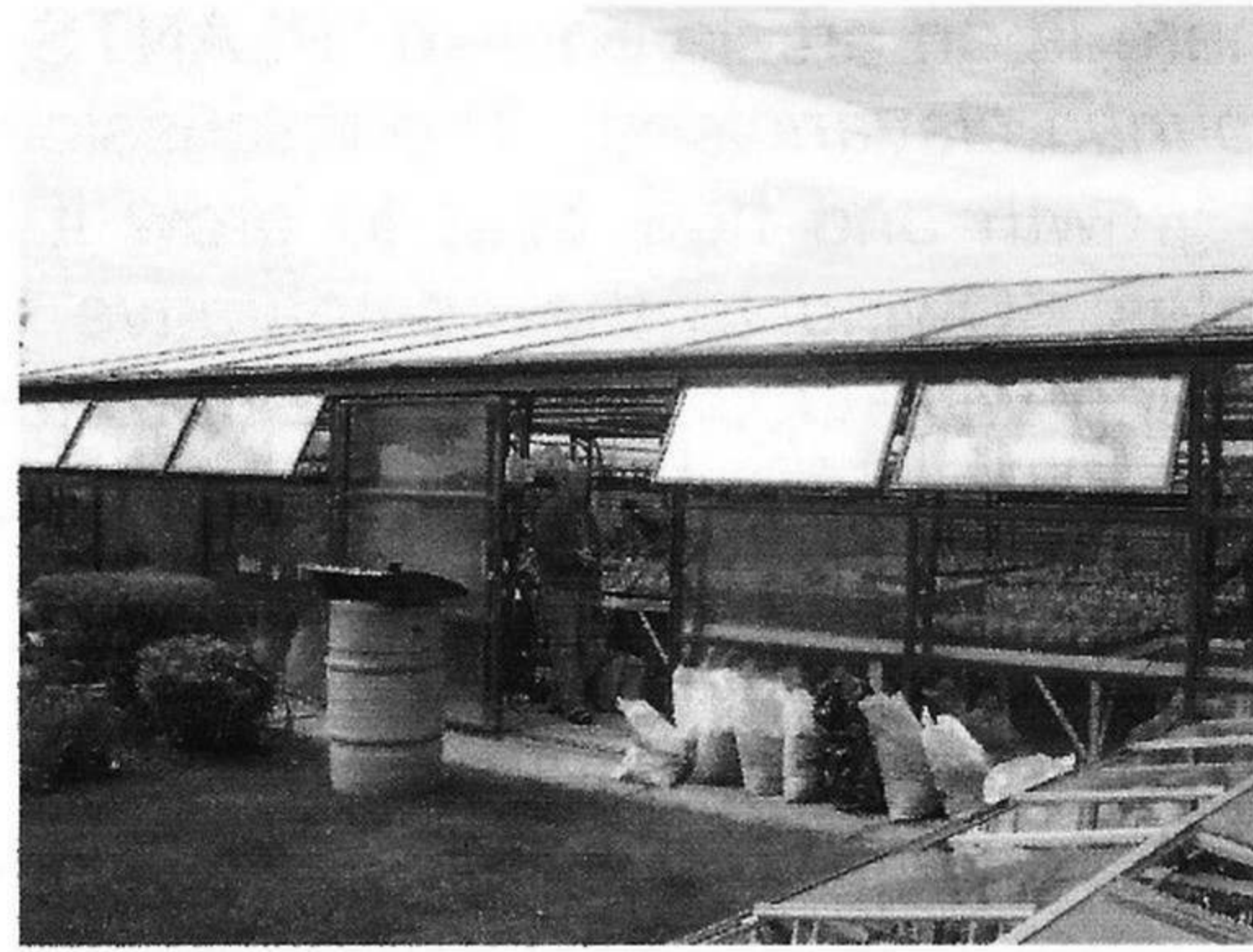


Ariocarpus!!!



A cristate flower on a normal plant

Harry Mays' collection



Entrance to the greenhouse



Peter contemplating some of Harry's plants



Phillip inspecting the aeoniums

draughts as much as or more than we do. So remember the plants when you open your windows and move away temporarily any that may be in a direct draught."

There is an article entitled "PLANTS WITH PERSONALITY" which deals with *Opuntia clavarioides*. The discussion centred round its rarity, monstrous form of growth and how best to grow it. The author of the article, R. S. Byles states; "Owing to the comparative scarcity of cultivated specimens, writers dealing with *Opuntia clavarioides* have been largely compelled to copy from earlier literature. However, there is reasonably general agreement concerning the following; the plant is rare in collections, but becoming commoner; grafting is not essential, but growth appears slow everywhere in own-root examples; no record can be found of an ungrafted plant flowering in cultivation; unlike most *Opuntias*, it prefers a combination of warmth, moisture and at least partial shade. The most popular grafting stocks for working it on are *Opuntia ficus-indica*, *Opuntia tomentosa*, *Selenicereus nycticalus* and *Eriocereus jusbertii*." Do any of you grow this plant? Do you agree with the statements made 50 years ago?

H. Jacobsen and Gordon Rowley, yes even in those far off days Gordon was a well known expert in the field of cacti and succulents, dealt with an ever present phenomenon, "*Some Name Changes in Succulent Plants*." The opening two sentences state, "The 'Handbuck der Sukkulanten Pflanzen' includes the names of 308 genera, 7003 species and 4852 synonyms of succulent plants other than Cactaceae. In compiling this, the most extensive encyclopaedia of succulents ever undertaken, many inconsistencies and contradictions in nomenclature came to light and must be amended. WHAT'S NEW?????? Following it was an article in several parts which went on to name the various groups accepted in 1955. Many of the names mentioned there are no longer accepted e.g. Eriocactus, now part of Parodia along with Notocactus, Euescobaria, a split off from Escobaria, Hamatocactus, now split between Ferocactus and Ancistrocactus to name but a few.

Dr. Franz Buxbaum from Austria was a leading name in cactus culture and he had an article entitled "New Ways in Cactus Culture". He discusses the effect of alkaline soils versus acidic ones. One conclusion he reaches is that soils of alkaline nature caused by chalk in their make up will be detrimental to the growth of most cacti. He also recommends keeping salts at a very low level in the soil, making sure only essential trace elements are used. He has an advert in the Journal recommending his "World Famous HEALTH SALTS for Cactus and all Succulent Plants". He states; "We do not yet know which species are sensitive to alkalinity and which are less sensitive. But it is best to cultivate all cacti in a soil of at least pH 6, i.e. a little acid. The "Christmas Cactus" (*Zygocactus truncatus*) has an "upper death point" of pH 7 (neutral soil) whereas *Pereskia* can bear up to pH 8 (alkaline). This argument still gets aired in 2005. It is well known that many species do grow better in a soil that is slightly acidic (e.g. South American species) whilst many people now advocate growing Mexican species (e.g. *Ariocarpus*) in a slightly alkaline soil. I personally feel the important factor is not to stray too far away from neutral.

E. Elkan, then very well known, is pictured sitting in front of this plant (a very rare picture of the gentleman). He goes on to give a very interesting account of a visit to the famous Exotic Garden of Monaco, Le Jardin Exotique. An interesting quote from the article goes as follows; "We naturally came to the question why only such enormous plants were grown in the gardens. The answer, alas, was the same they might have given us in Manchester (the Alexandra Park collection): it is impossible to enlist sufficient staff to prevent the constant disappearance of any plants small enough to go into a pocket – never mind the spines.....". What a world we live in!!

An article by D. E. Watling about "White Spined Plants" concentrates on *Oreocereus trolli*, *Opuntia floccosa*, *Cephalocereus senilis*, *Espositoa lanata*, *Opuntia vestita*, *Mammillaria bocasana*, *Notocactus haselbergii* and *Mammillaria candida*. These are all pictured and several other plants are also mentioned. The opening remarks of this article are as follows: "Despite the huge variety of colour and form of cactus spines there is something very attractive about white-spined plants and few collections are without some examples. Unfortunately, people living in industrial towns in the Midlands and North are at a great disadvantage here, as industrial smoke soon begrimes and disfigures these plants." At least we have made huge strides forward in the last 30 years and the second sentence should no longer be true.

The Third Congress of the IOS (International Organisation for Succulent Plant Study) was held at the Normandie Hotel in Knightsbridge from September 5th to 9th 1955 and Gordon Rowley reported on this event. A show was also staged, a very early forerunner to the National Shows now held every 4 years. No less than 14 eminent speakers from around the world gave talks on far ranging and widely different subjects. Two Manchester members were prominent at the event, Stan Parkinson and a Mr Parker, both of whom were responsible for the design and erection of the NCSS stand at the show. The former manned the stand throughout the event.

The article "Plants with Personality" was about *Hatiora salicornioides*. I doubt this plant would get more than a paragraph in a Journal nowadays. However it is an interesting plant worthy of growing and the author goes on to give very clear instructions about the best way to maintain a healthy plant. He stresses the need for good light levels, diffused not shaded in the hot summer months, watering in moderation through the winter months and normal soil conditions.

Edgar Lamb, of the Exotic Collection in Sussex, visits the Canary Isles and gives an interesting article accompanied by many photos (obviously in black and white in those days) about the endemic plants of those islands.

Two more books were reviewed:

THE ILLUSTRATED REFERENCE ON CACTI AND OTHER SUCCULENTS by EDGAR LAMB. This is the first of five that will eventually be written and can be found in our library. It received a glowing review.

GROW CACTI – A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK by C. MARSDEN. Again a review commending it as a good book for all growers is given though a few words of caution are noted.

Two books were reviewed in the June journal, namely:
CACTI by A. BERTRAND and A. GUILLAUMIN at the amazing price of 16 shillings (80 pence for those not versed in old coinage).
THE FLOWERING OF YOUR CACTI by E. LAMB a volume of 80 pages including 50 pictures or illustrations, 2 in colour, all for 6 shillings (30 pence).
Both are given good reviews and recommended particularly for the inexperienced grower.

Adverts were not plentiful in those days but one advertiser has been more responsible than most for the introduction of new species of cacti. This was H. Winter who supplied seed of many new discoveries from South America. Ritter was travelling extensively in Bolivia, Peru and Chile from whence he sent many plants and seed. Part of the advert states; "Several very beautiful new Oreocerei, new Espostoa with red and black spines, Browningia, Copiapoa, Denmoza, Erdisia, Eulychnia, Eriocyce, Islaya, Matucana, Mila, Morawetzia, Maihuenia, Neoporteria, Oroya, Parodia, etc". This was indeed an exciting time for the cactus world, the opening of a new era.

Other advertisers included:

F. W. Lealan and Son's Nursery in Pattingham (near Wolverhampton),
Blackburn's of Woodplumpton (near Preston).....been there many times in the far past.

Henry Cork of London SE 23 who sold a wonderful range of books about Cacti and Succulents which were available at that time.

W. T. Neale & Co. who offered plants, seeds and books. They were in Worthing and closely connected with the "Exotic Collection" belonging to the Lamb's.

Succulenta Nurseries in Cape Province, South Africa offered Succulent plants.

J. W. Churchman & Sons welcomed Branch parties to their Cactus and Succulent Nursery in Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire.

Worfield Gardens of Bridgnorth, Shropshire held an Open Weekend in June, welcomed parties and claimed to stock interesting and rare plants.

Dunmore Nurseries of Teignmouth offered a choice of 18 plants from which you chose 4 for 11/6 as an introductory offer.

By the time we reached the December Journal Vera Higgins was saying; "This wonderful summer has been very good for succulent plants, including cacti; they have made good growth, many have flowered well and should be in good condition to stand the winter. Not much can be done in a greenhouse for the next month or two but one can always make plans." Only partly true I feel nowadays with all the winter growing plants we have, the essential heating and tending of those more touchy plants and the care of seedlings that could easily die without daily attention.

Have you ever heard of "Mother-in Law's pillow? I'll give you a choice of 3 plants that might fill that description:

- a) Ferocactus wislizenii
 - b) Echinocactus grusonii
 - c) Homalocephala texensis
- all answers at the next meeting!!!!

Photographs from the branch trip to Ray Alcock's Open day in Liverpool



Ray's home-made greenhouse is officially recognised as the 8th wonder of the modern world. The upper shelves are not for the faint hearted!



Frank inspects some plants in Ray's latest addition. A polythene covered frame.



Phillip taking time to mull over many of the mature plants.



An aknowledge expert cultivator Ray still grows and flowers plants in the famous Liverpool brickdust mix.

Diary Dates

Sunday 14th August 2005.

Manchester Branch Open Day.
Four collections and auction
See Peter for full details

Sunday 28th August

Oak Dene Cactus Nursery Open Day
Gordon Foster's nursery at Royston, near Barnsley
Details on notice board

*** Saturday 24th September 2005. ***

Zone Symposium

'Best of British' Speakers: Louise Bustard - Plants, gardens and deserts of Southwest USA Graham Charles - Brazil, Susan Carter Holmes - Plant hunting for Kew in Tanzania.

Time: 9.30am for 10.00am start Venue: Royal British Legion, Grove Avenue, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5EG. (Detailed map provided, including parking facilities, with all tickets) Plants and Sundries on Sale. Hot Meal and Tea/Coffee included in the ticket Price: £15 (£14 if booked before 31st August 2005)

Remember this is your zone symposium-please try and support this event.
See Phillip or Ivor for tickets.

Saturday 8th October 2005.

Mid Cheshire Mesemb Show,
Hartford Methodist Church Hall, Beach Road, Hartford, Cheshire. 12.00-16.00.

Usual end of season car boot sale and afternoon lecture included.

Friday 21st to Sunday 23rd October 2005.

Haworthia society Convention- Hilton Hotel Leicester
Principal speaker David Cumming from South Africa
See Harry for further details

Saturday 29th October 2005.

Zone 3 Rally: Seminar and Sales: Carlton Village WMC, Rothwell, near Leeds. 10.00-1700.

Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th March 2006

Northern Area Weekend: Alston Hall near Preston
Speakers: Bill Keen, John Henshaw, David Porter and Roger Ferryman
Details Dot Little at Alston Hall

Thursday 17th to Sunday 20th August 2006.

BCSS International Convention Loughborough
Details in the journal-several top class Internationally renowned speakers.