

Gaultonia

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

Summer 2006.



Plants in the greenhouse of David Quail
Taken on the occasion of Bradford Branch Open Day
Photo: Peter Bint

VISIT TO ALAN HART'S COLLECTION

By Peter Bint

Sunday 11th June and 5 intrepid travellers set off for the Cheshire town of Northwich to visit a very interesting collection belonging to Alan Hart. Arriving at 2pm we were greeted by Alan on his front drive. Set in rural Cheshire he enjoys good light and fresh air which are appreciated by both plants and Alan and Dorothy, his wife. Alan has been collecting for more years than he cares to reckon and has had some splendid plants during this time. He was much taken by the TCP's that were the vogue in the 70's and 80's. TCP was the rather ignominious name given to all succulent plants that sported thickened root stocks and swollen bases, being supplied by a gentleman who considered them to be ugly monstrosities and the name stuck. The aficionados who enjoyed growing them accepted the name gracefully for the prized specimens they lovingly grew. Not many of these plants remain in Alan's collection these days but those that do remind him and those that view them of those heady days, long gone.

Alan does admit that his main love is the Other Succulents rather than cacti though there are quite a few of the latter in evidence. As with all of us as we progress through the years you have to cut the cloth according to the means and this is in evidence at Alan's where he has reduced his collection to manageable proportions in the form of two greenhouses, one large the other smaller. The first greenhouse we reach is the larger one where all manner of plants are gathered together, vying for space and light. The first plants to catch the eye are cacti, *Mammillaria hahniana* sporting a bright ring of flowers, two different forms of *Lophophora williamsii* and a splendid *Mammillaria plumose*. Two *Melocacti*, *bahiensis* and *matanzanus*, are resplendent with their highly colourful cephalia. The former was a gift to Alan in 1972 when it was still immature but it started to grow its cephalium shortly after he received it. That makes the plant no less than 35 years old, not bad going for a plant that is not the easiest to grow.

Other Succulents abound; *Bulbine frutescens*, *Yucca endlichiana*, *Sedum frutescens*, and many others. But Alan has a great love of Aloes and Gasterias and these are plentiful wherever you look. *A. peckii* from Somalia, *A. capitata* from Madagascar and various African ones such as *A. vigueri*, *A. erythrophylla*, *A. rebmannii* and *A. bakeri* to name but a few. However what is quickly evident is his love of hybridisation. At a period of history when creating hybrids was frowned on by the 'purists', Alan was

experimenting with plants he enjoyed growing because of the beauty of their form. Many crosses reach out to you with the splendour of their form soon after you enter the greenhouse: *A. rebmannii* has been crossed with *A. laeta*, *A. juvenna* with *A. aristata*, *A. descoingsii* with *A. bakeri* and one other with double hybridisation, namely *A. descoingsii* which has been crossed with a form from hybridising *A. bellatula* with *A. parvula*. Not satisfied with these crosses he has crossed Aloe with *Gasteria* to create some splendid plants. *Gasteria* adds a chunkiness to the plants so that they remain reasonably compact. A few of these crosses are *G. batesiana* with *A. variegata*, *G. nitida armstrongii* with *A. rauhii* and *G. verruculosa* with *A. thompsonii*. There are a multitude of hybrids bearing cultivar names such as *A. 'Grande'*, *A. 'Sparkling Burgundy'*, *A. 'Winter Sky'*, and *A. 'Versad'*.

Progressing into the second half of this greenhouse the eyes are regaled by many old plants lovingly nurtured. There is a magnificent column of *Euphorbia abdukkuri* which is unmarked, a plant that is anything but easy and it is flanked by *Euphorbia unispina*, another challenge to the grower. TCP's in the form of *Xerosicyos* like *pubescens*, *Brighamia insignis*, a member of the Cucurbit family from Madagascar and *Bombax ellipticum* are all nestled together looking very happy with life. There is also a small seedling of *Idria* (*Fouquieria* for the purists) *columnaris* sitting in a large pot. Remember a mature plant can be 40 feet high so a plant of 2 feet height, including its branches, is a baby. The final plant to mention from this house is *Dorstenia gigas*. This is the giant of its genus and something of a rarity in collections but in Alan's collection it is prospering.

Thirst and heat drive us out of the greenhouse to some welcome refreshments though I am tardy arriving as the urge of photography kept me searching for more gems. I could have taken well over 300 pictures and still left many unphotographed in the first greenhouse. The refreshments, delightful scones, freshly baked sponge cake and pots of tea, quickly refreshed all present and very tasty they were. Accompanied by reminiscences the refreshments made time pass quickly. Having discussed the 70's and 80's we returned to the serious matter in hand and made our way to the smaller greenhouse.

More of the same greeted our eyes but there were different genera also to study. Many mesembs were present here and a hanging pot of *Sphalmanthus* in full flower was an immediate eyecatcher. There was a splendid form of crested *Euphorbia lactea* up on a high shelf. *Echeveria*

and *Dudleya* were very noticeable, particularly E. 'Topsy Turvy' and D. *cymosa*, both of them coated in the highly attractive white coating which is spoilt by wandering fingers brushing the surface.

Time was running out fast and there was no more time to browse and wonder. We gathered our belongings together, thanked Alan and Dorothy for a splendid afternoon and prepared to depart. That was when yours truly suddenly realised his purchases were still sitting outside the first greenhouse and a hasty recovery took place. For those of you who missed this great visit there are as many pictures as Ivor can fit into the magazine. I hope you enjoy the images as we enjoyed the real thing.

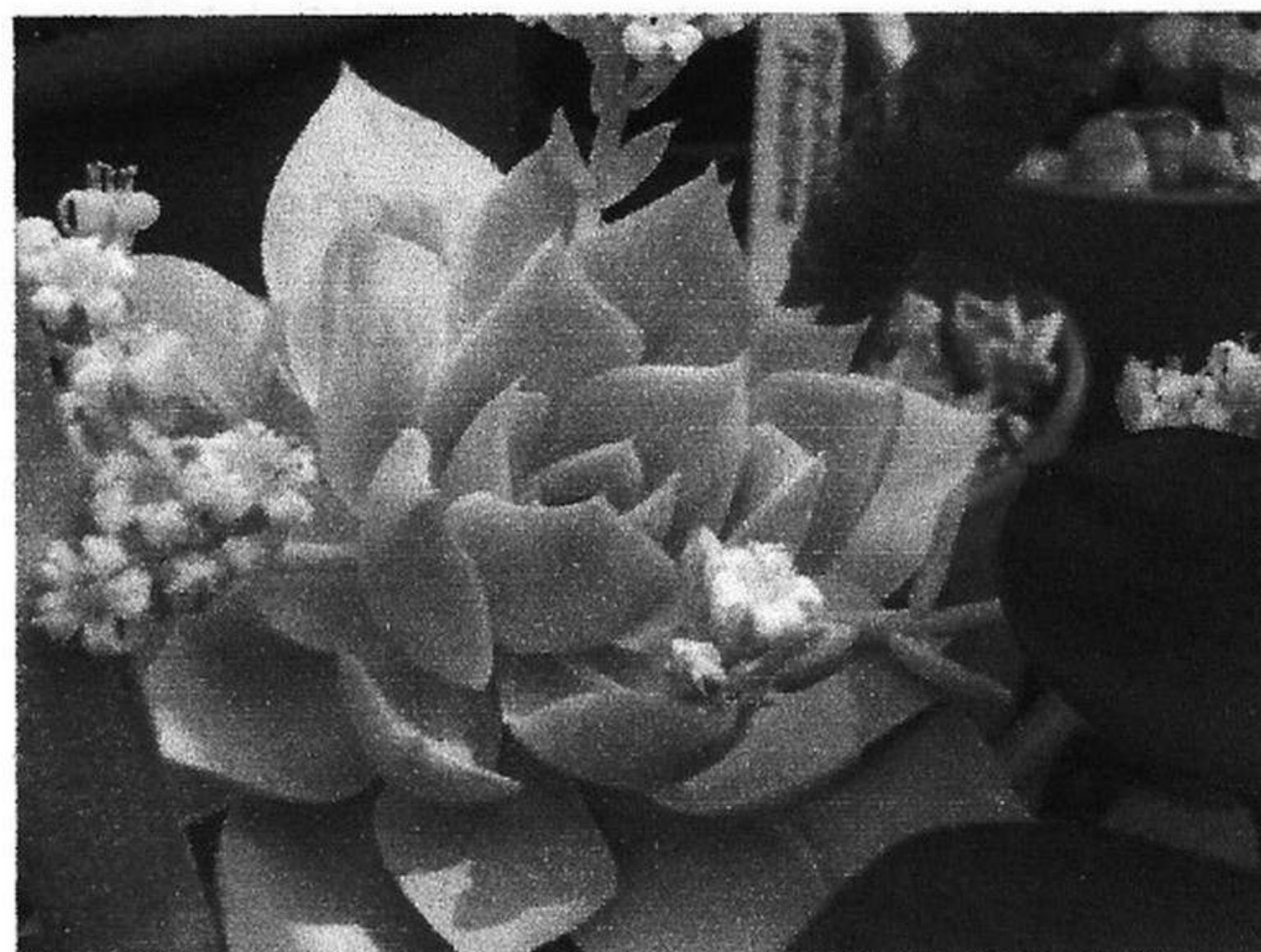
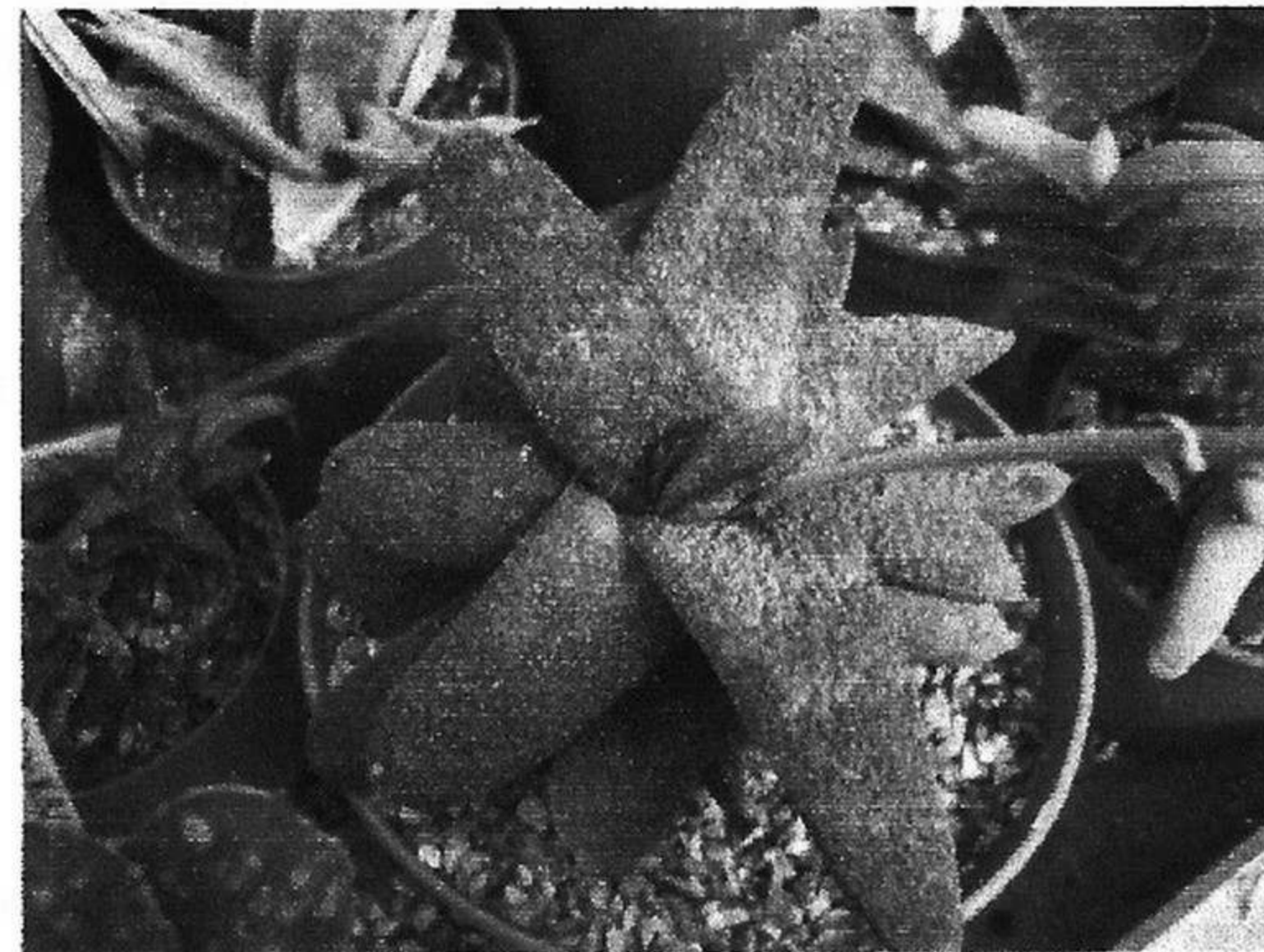
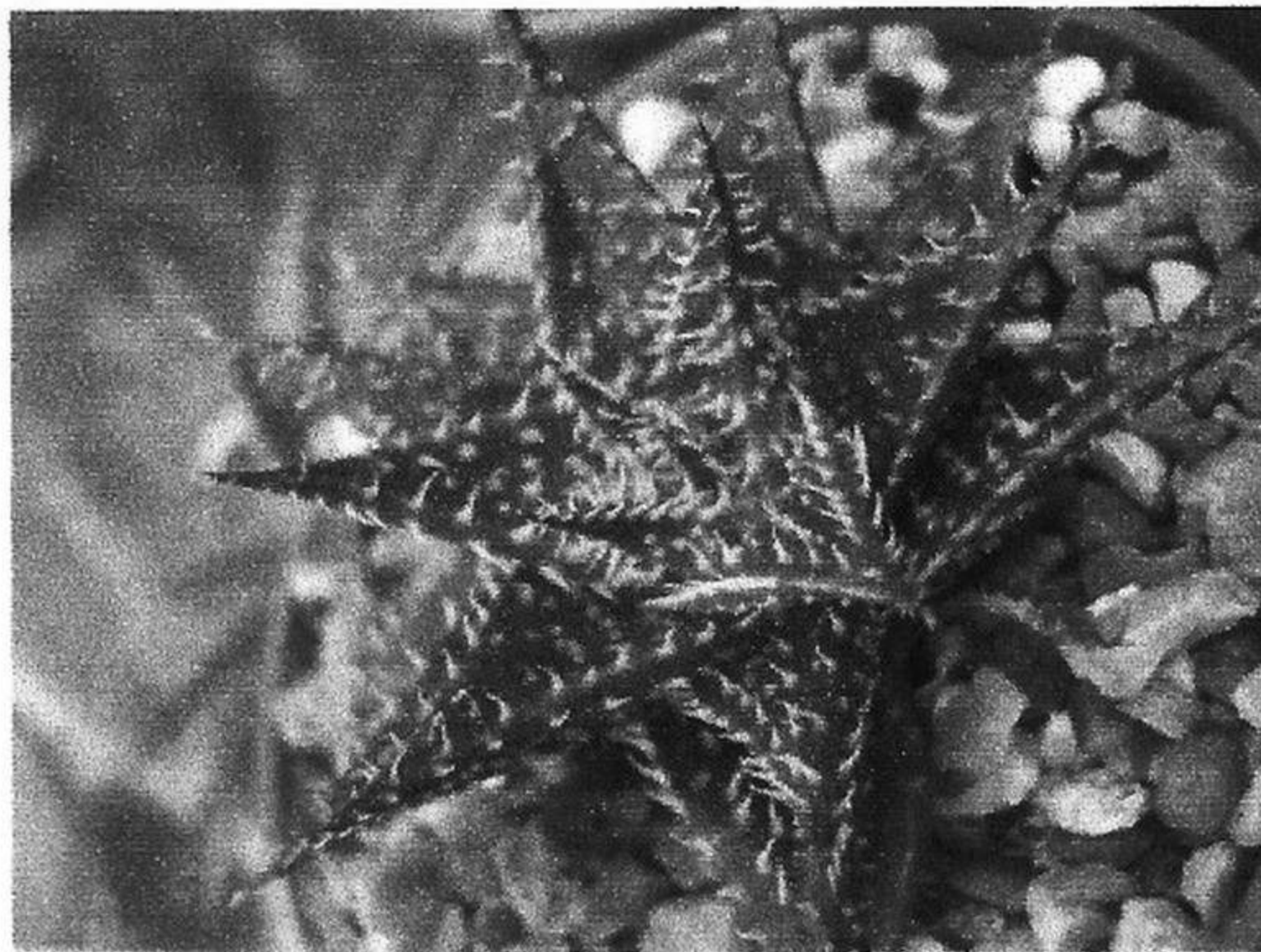
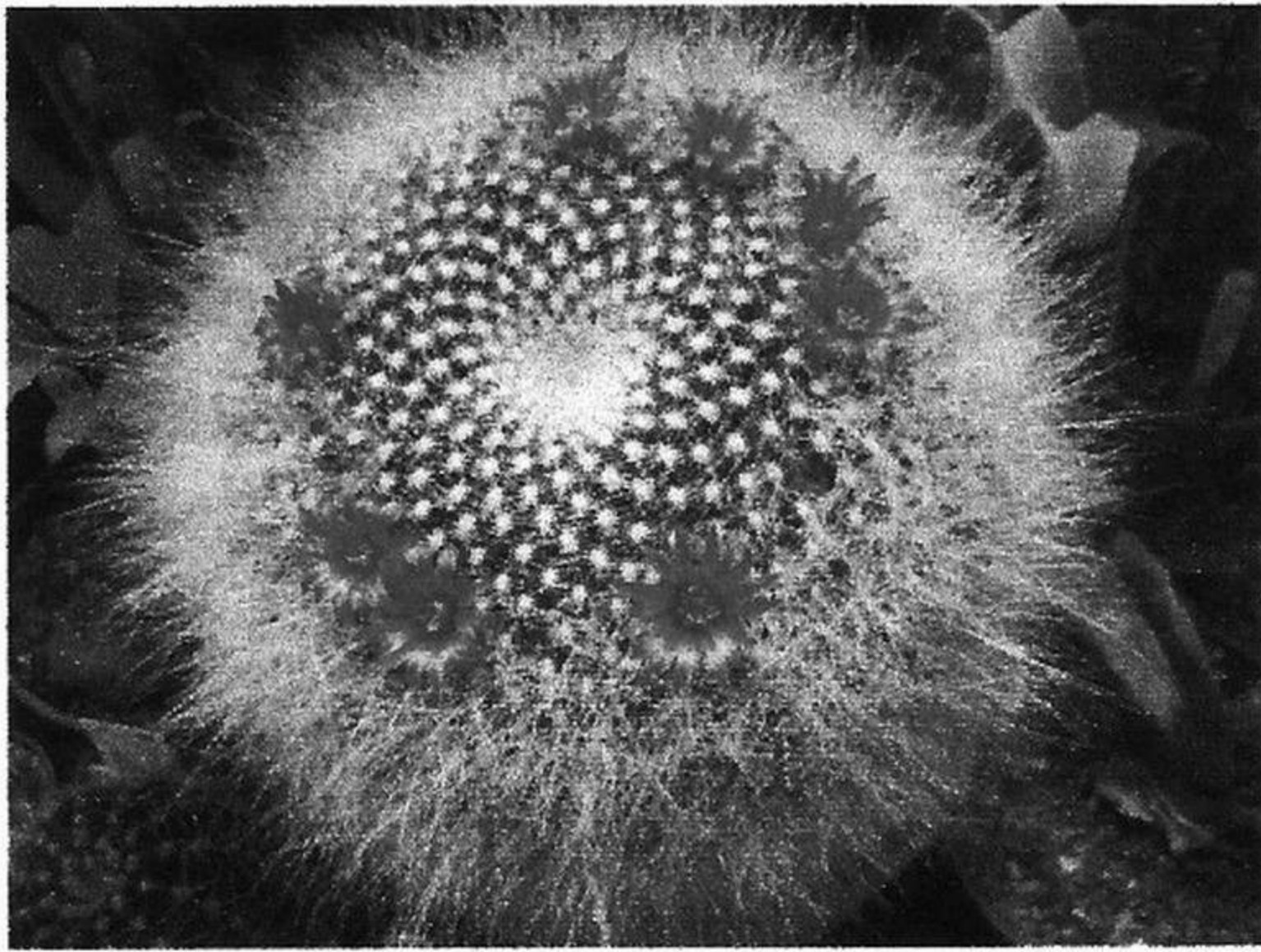
The greenhouses in December

By Peter Bint

It is a cool, but bright, afternoon this afternoon and a visit to the overcrowded environs of the greenhouses. A brisk watering with warm water of the many winter growing plants in 2" pots and a few slightly bigger ones has revealed that all seems well as far as I can see. The recent very cold spell has caused me to wrap the warm temperature greenhouse in its coating of bubble wrap, something that was not deemed necessary last winter. Many *Aloes* are in flower and others will start soon. *Aloe albiflora* is always attractive during winter and has started its flowering earlier than ever this time. Its open, bell shaped, pure white flowers contrast well with the dark brownish green thin spotted leaves. All my large *Aloes* enjoyed open air cultivation this year, only returning to captivity at the end of September, taking whatever the elements decided to send. They seem to have enjoyed the experience and gained girth. I have even had a May flowering *Mammillaria* in flower in November.

The hybrid *Crassula*, a cross between *susannae* and *mesembryanthemopsis*, usually flowers in February. It is already pushing forth its flowers now. It is a bonny plant retaining all the good features of its parents. To all intents it has the form of *C. susannae* with the subtle blue colouration of *mesembryanthemopsis*. Many other plants have extended their growing season as a result of the splendid autumn we have experienced and are only now showing real signs of rest.

Images from the Open Day visit to the Collection of
Mr Alan Hart
All photos: Peter Bint

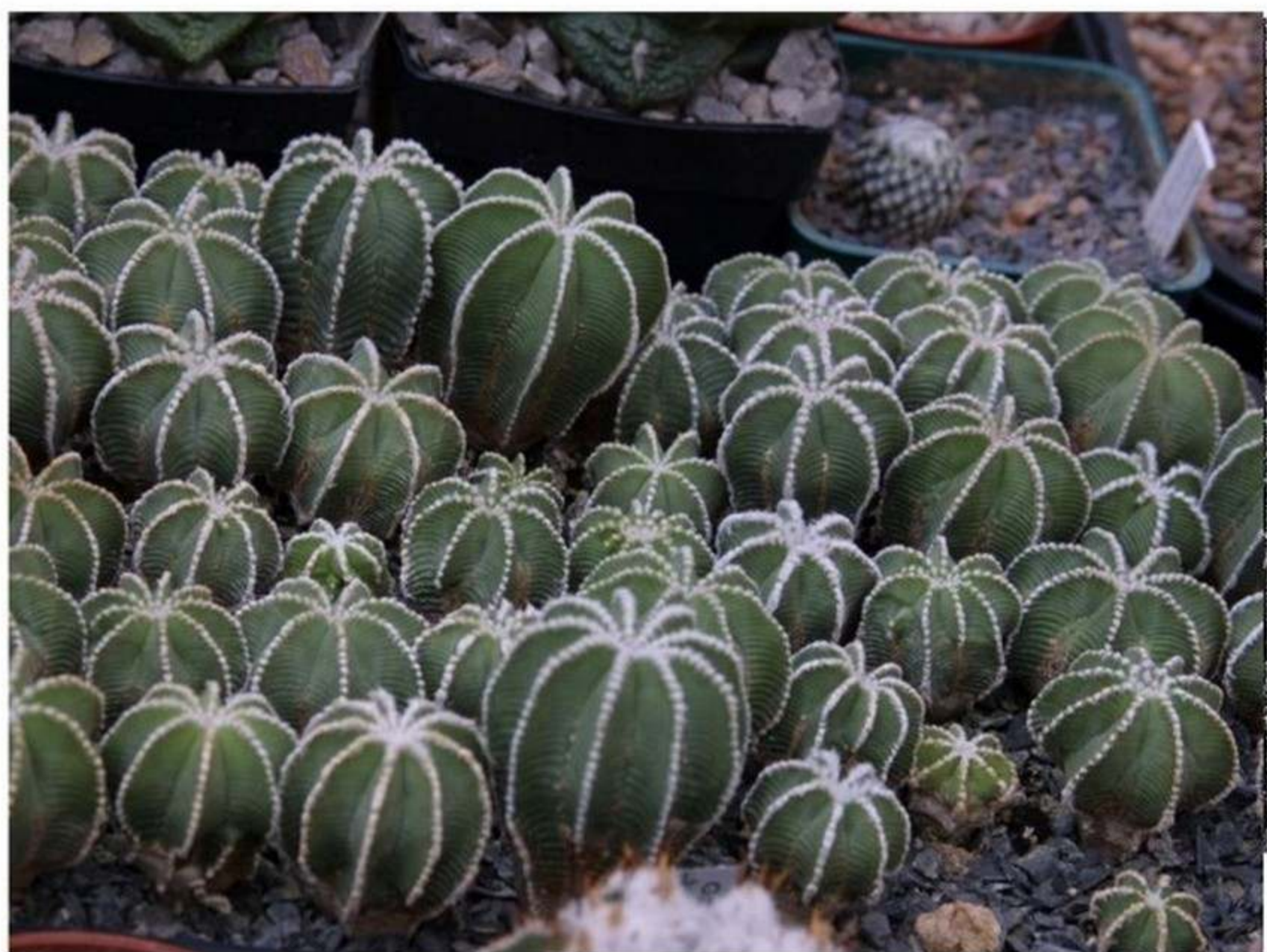
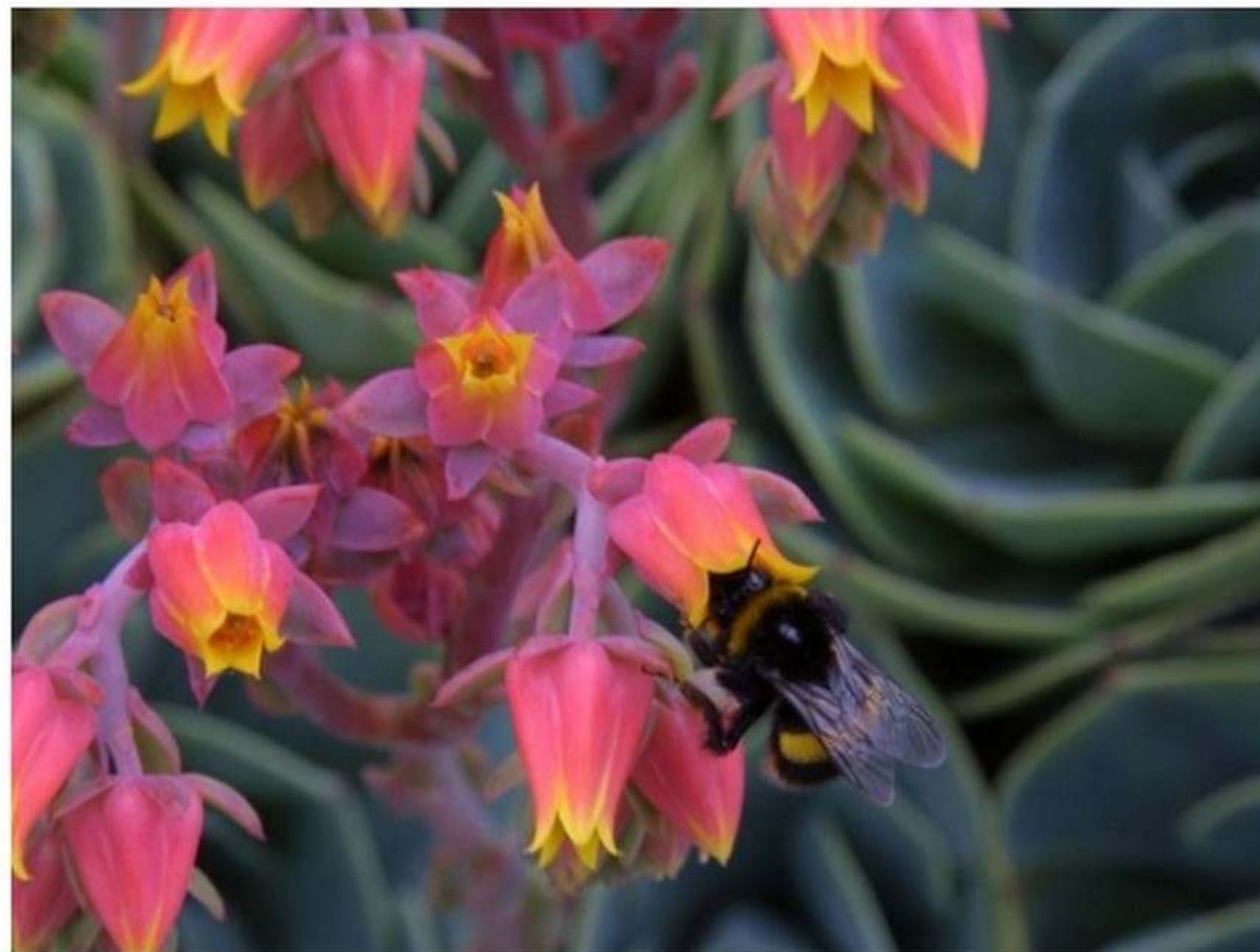


Up in the Lithoparium, which has been invaded by Haworthias, Gasterias and Trichocereis, all of which also had an alfresco summer and have been unable to return to their erstwhile homes, there are also flowers. As would be expected *Lithops optica* cv. *Rubra* is flowering well. It is a late flowerer and can be expected to perform between November and February. For the blooms to open fully bright sunlight is needed, not a regular commodity in December. Strangely one plant of *L. aucampiae* is also in flower, also struggling to open fully. Many plants have been deliberately pollinated and some others have accepted the ministrations of visiting insects. Burgeoning seed pods are in evidence and much fun will be had next spring with seed sowing. *Faucaria* and *Argyroderma* have also added brightness to the surroundings with their large, showy, yellow blooms.

Moving on to the cool, general house where everything is at rest, plant wise that is, life has been invasive. Rodent life is what I am referring to. In the farthest reaches of this greenhouse where close inspection is nigh on impossible at this time of the year mass murder has been committed. Many *Rebutias* inhabit this region. Some new immigrants succumbed to my treatment after what had been a harsh regime in a north-eastern collection. However many more have succumbed to the gnawing teeth of an invading rodent/s. Whole plant bodies had been neatly despoiled and eaten completely. Four specimens are at present housed in the conservatory to recover from this vile attack, the rest consigned to the compost heap as redemption is hopeless. I know the damage has not been caused by slugs for two main reasons; first there are no tell tale silver trails to give the game away, and, second the amount of devoured succulent plant body is far too extensive for their appetite. Having cleared away the resultant debris I rushed to the computer and sent an email to as many people, with knowledge of succulents, as I could. "Do mice eat *Rebutias*?" was the banner headline that accompanied the missive. Within 30 minutes replies were zooming in. Everybody who replied seemed to think the answer was 'yes'. One later reply by snail mail blamed squirrels for the attack but that is not correct as they cannot gain entrance to the greenhouse unless the doors are open whereas mice could have set up residence during the summer and then have been trapped once I closed down the greenhouse. A squirrel would have been highly visible as it tried to escape whereas a mouse finding it had plentiful food would not worry about a way out. Those of a squeamish nature do not read on!!!! I now had to prove the theory. My next door neighbour had been bothered by mice in her house and had called in

Images from the Bradford Branch Open Day

All photos: Philip Barker



expert help. Baited food had been laid with the resultant discovery of two villains. She supplied me with two pots of food which were placed in position in the greenhouse the same evening. The following morning the pot on the floor had been well eaten as had the second pot in the empty Rebutia tray two or three mornings later. I have seen no further evidence of plant decimation. Why not root them out and send them on their way I hear being asked. Practicability is my reply. Unless I had half emptied the greenhouse to allow me the opportunity of a proper search there is no way I could have located the nest. The staging is only 6 inches above ground level and I am willing to bet the nest will be in a distant corner when I do search next spring. Weather conditions did not allow me the luxury of placing a hundred or more large plants out in the garden with so much rain about.

Diary Dates 2006/7.

British C&SS International Convention

August 17 - 20, 2006 at Loughborough University in England. Speakers from Argentina, Australia, South Africa and the USA confirmed. For further details contact David Kirkbright, England, or e-mail at

Oakdene Nursery (Gordon Foster) Open Day

Sunday 27th August

Royston near Barnsley-details on notice board

Zone 3 Rally

Saturday 28th October 2006.

Carlton Village Hall-between Leeds and Wakefield

Speakers: Graham Hole/Malcolm Pym/Andrew Young

£14.50

Warrington Cactus Mart

Saturday 31st March 2007

The week-end before Easter week-end

See Philip for full detail