

Gaultonia

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



**“Thread-leaved pine, Agaves and Yucca in a Guernsey Garden”
Engraving from an old gardening encyclopedia lent by John
Foley from the days when parks and gardens were given greater
priority and had an array of gardeners for their upkeep.**

Autumn 2009

This Issue:

**Victorian descriptions of Succulents
Picture Gallery
Cactus Hunting in South Wales
Wythenshawe (again)
The Gymnocalycium Family**

Agathosma—continued.

- A. hispida** (rough-haired). *f.* violet, on terminal sub-umbellate heads; pedicels and sepals pubescent; petals quite smooth. May. *l.* crowded, linear, trigonal, blunt, spreading, hispid, keeled, and two-furrowed beneath. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1786.
- A. imbricata** (imbricated). *f.* pale purple, in terminal sub-capitate heads; petals with a roundish limb; sepals smoothish; pedicels pubescent. April. *l.* imbricate, crowded, ovate, acuminate, dotted, fringed. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1774.
- A. orbicularis** (round-leaved). *f.* white, on terminal sub-umbellate heads; stamens twice as long as the corolla; pedicels pubescent. April. *l.* scattered, spreading, orbicular, ovate, or reniform, smooth, reflexed, small, thickish, without any dots beneath; branches villous. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1790.
- A. prolifera** (proliferous). *f.* white, on terminal sub-umbellate heads; sepals smooth; pedicels somewhat fastigate, pubescent. April. *l.* spreading, lanceolate, cuspidate; keel and edges fringed, dotted; branches whorled, proliferous. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1790.
- A. pubescens** (downy). *f.* white; umbels terminal; peduncles and sepals villous. April. *l.* lanceolate, trigonal, pointless, with margins and rib ciliated. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1798.
- A. rugosa** (coarsely-wrinkled). *f.* white, on terminal sub-umbellate heads; sepals pubescent; pedicels capillary, clothed with glandular hairs. April. *l.* spreading, oblong or ovate, blunt, keeled, wrinkled, villous beneath, reflexed. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1790.
- A. vestita** (clothed). *f.* lilac, on terminal sub-capitate heads; pedicels quite smooth. May. *l.* closely imbricated, ovate, acuminate, keeled, fringed. *A.* 1ft. to 2ft. 1824.

AGATHYSUS. See **Mulgedium.**

AGATI (its Sanscrit name). ORD. *Leguminosae.* Ornamental stove trees from India, with lanceolate stipules, abruptly-pinnate leaves, having many pairs of leaflets. Flowers large, few, racemose. Legumes 1½ft. long. A mixture of loam, peat, and sand is most suitable. Young cuttings will root in a pot of sand, with a hand glass over them, placed in heat.

A. coccinea (scarlet). *f.* red, rather smaller than the next species. Legumes rather terete. *l.* leaflets powdery. July. *A.* 20ft. to 30ft. 1768.

A. grandiflora (large-flowered). *f.* rosy red. July. Legumes evidently compressed. *l.* leaflets glabrous. *A.* 14ft. to 25ft. 1768.

A. g. flore-albo (white flowered). *f.* white, double. N. Australia, 1869.

AGAVE (from *agavos*, admirable; referring to the stately form in which some of them flower). ORD. *Amaryllidaceae.* Flower-scape tall, proceeding from the centre of the rosette of leaves; perianth funnel-shaped, six-parted. Leaves large, fleshy, tufted. Mr. B. S. Williams describes them as follows: "They are noble, massive-growing plants, and form magnificent ornaments in the greenhouse or conservatory; whilst, from their slow growth, they do not rapidly get too large, even for a small greenhouse. Indeed, some of the real gems of this genus are neat, compact-growing plants, seldom exceeding 2ft. in height. Besides being fine ornamental plants for indoor decoration, the larger growing kinds are unquestionably the finest objects for the embellishment of terrace-walks, or surmounting flights of steps in the open air during the summer season, and also for plunging in rockwork, or about any rustic nooks in the pleasure-grounds, as, in such situations, they are quite in keeping, and thrive admirably. As is well known, they attain maturity very slowly; but when this condition is reached, the plant sends up a flower spike, and, after perfecting this, dies." *A. Sartorii*, and a few others are, however, exceptional, and go on flowering year after year. It is certainly fallacious to suppose it takes them a hundred years to flower. Agaves succeed well potted in good loam and river sand, to which may be added a little peat and leaf mould for some of the smaller-growing kinds. The drainage should be good, as they enjoy a liberal supply of water during the summer season, but during winter considerably less will be required. They can be increased by suckers when these are to be obtained, and also by seeds, to secure the production of which, in the species that do not yield suckers, the flowers should be carefully impregnated. In the following descriptive list of species, only those of horticultural value are mentioned, some of which are still rare; and in describing them we have availed ourselves of Mr. J. G. Baker's

Agave—continued.

excellent monograph, which appeared in the columns of the *Gardeners' Chronicle*. Many are omitted, not from any deficiency in horticultural beauty, but because, in several instances, only one plant of a species is known to exist in cultivation, and such cannot, therefore, hope to become in general cultivation for many years hence.

A. albicans (whitened). Probably a variety of *A. micrantha*.

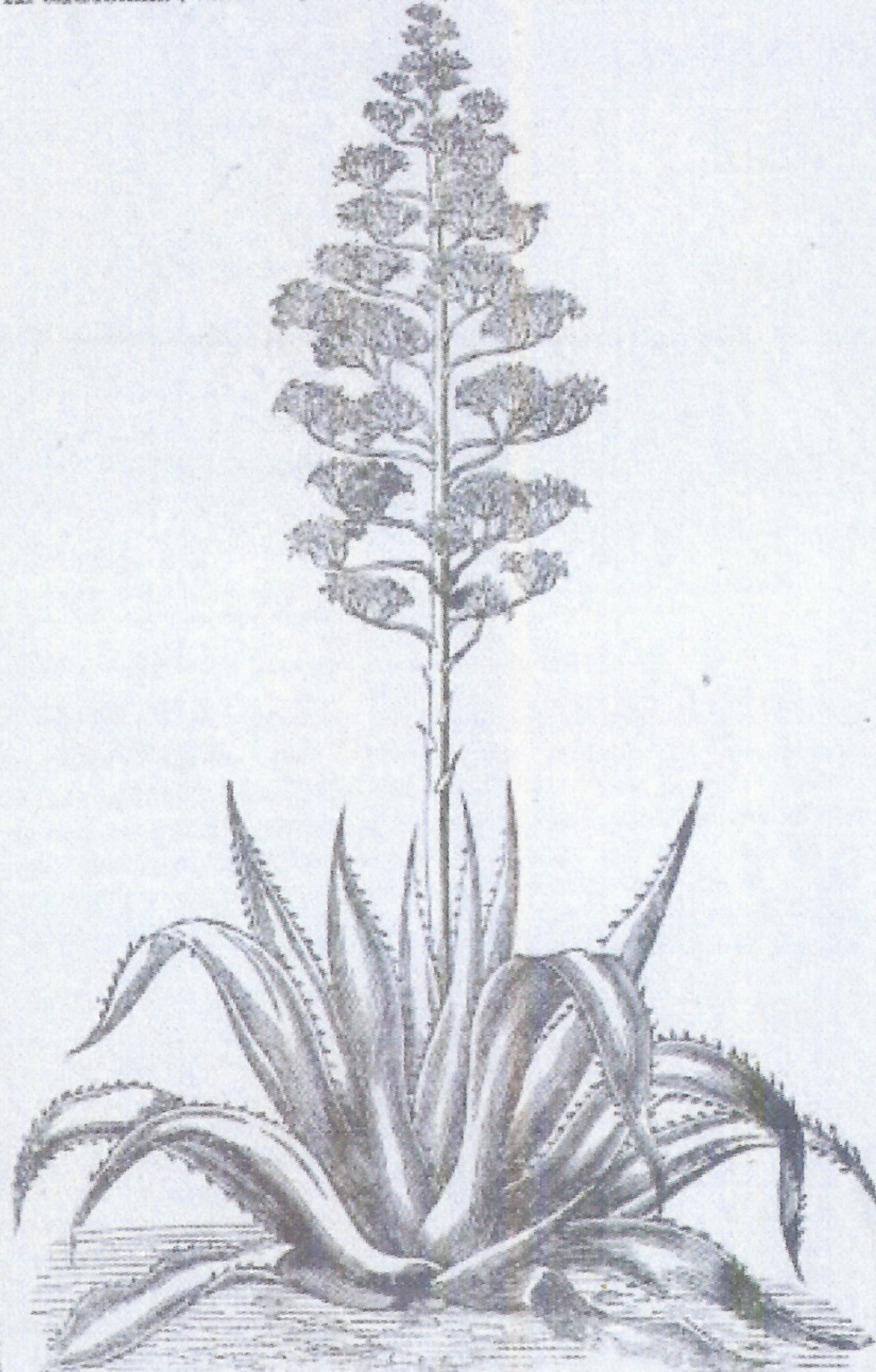


FIG. 45. AGAVE AMERICANA.

A. americana (American). *f.* yellowish-green, 2in. to 3½in. long, in very dense globose clusters, on pedicels ½in. to ¾in. long; scape, including the thyrsoid panicle, 2½ft. to 3½ft. high. August. *l.* usually thirty to forty, sometimes more, in a rosette, oblanceolate-spathulate, 3ft. to 6ft. long, 6in. to 9in. broad above the middle, glaucous green, more or less concave all down the face, the outer leaves recurved, the dark brown pungent point 1in. to 2in. long; prickles brown-tipped, ½in. to ¾in. long. South America, 1640. See Fig. 45.

A. a. mexicana (Mexican). A variety much shorter in the leaves than the species, of which it may be regarded as one of the many small forms.

A. a. picta (painted). *l.* 2ft. to 3ft. long, about 4in. wide, lower ones recurved, upper ones erect, moderately thick, rich golden yellow on both sides, bordered with dark green. A very splendid variety. SYN. *A. ornata*.

A. a. variegata (variegated). *l.* 6ft. or more in length, 6in. or 8in. wide, dark green in the centre, broadly margined with rich yellow. A very desirable variety.

A. amcena (pleasing). Referred to *A. Scalyana*.

A. amurensis (Amur River). Synonymous with *A. xylacantha*.

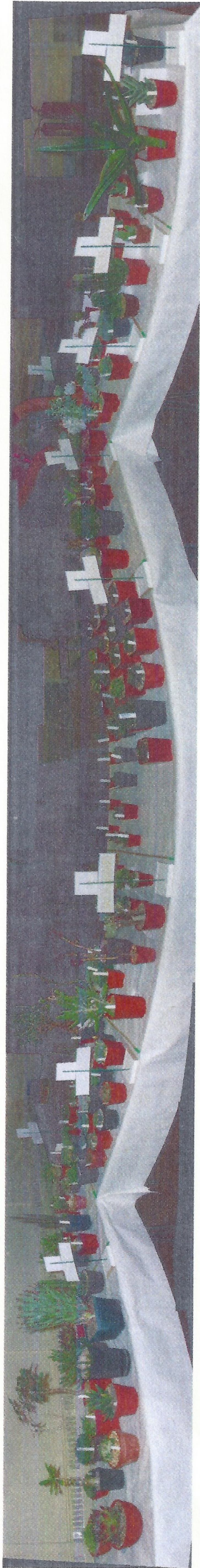
A. applanata (plano-convex-leaved). *f.* unknown. *l.* twenty to forty in a dense sessile rosette, reaching a couple of feet in diameter, oblong-spathulate, 8in. to 12in. long, 2in. to 3½in. broad, the lower half of the face flat, the upper half concave, suddenly terminating in a pungent brown spine above 1in. long, blue-green bordered with brown; prickles ½in. to ¾in. long, bright brown. Mexico, 1869.

An excerpt from the encyclopedias (approx late 1800s).

The classification of many plants has changed since then, as the knowledge of cacti and succulents has increases through study, and many plants were newly discovered at this stage.



Chris Leather took these great photos (including the remarkable central one), of the Succulents mini show in August, which was well supported.



Surprisingly Peter, the organiser, said there were about the same number of entries as for the cactus mini show - there just looked to be a lot more because they took up more space - yes, that's the problem we find with them.

Cactus Hunting in South Wales

(Surely somebody's been somewhere more exciting -
tell us about it for December's issue)

First stop on the itinerary was the National Botanic Gardens near Carmarthen, with its giant glass dome landscaped into different habitat zones of the world. (A view inside the dome is shown on the left).



View inside the dome

Camera at the ready, we thought we'd be spoilt for choice in terms of photos for the magazine and website, and were encouraged to see *Agaves*, *Aloes*, *Aeoniums*, *Caudiciforms* and *Senecios* dotted about in the Canaries region. We then made our way through exotic palms and grasses, and past a spectacular waterfall, heading for the arid regions of South America and Arizona, where we hoped to find cacti taking advantage of the height and space to grow more like their 'wild' state than in the confines of the average park conservatory – but there were none – not even a little *Mammillaria*. So, from the cactus point of view, our visit was disappointing, but there was still plenty to see with most other plants represented – all well set out and cared for,

including a separate humid conservatory filled with fabulous rain forest plants. In the outdoor vegetable section we found a novelty – a greenhouse under construction from empty pop bottles .



Aeonium Atropurpureum



Senecio candidas

We moved on to Swansea, recently rebranded a 'floral city'; which accounted for the low flying hanging baskets we had to dodge between getting to the centre, and here we had more luck. A new development of glasshouses, called 'Plantasia', held a combination of exotic plant and animal life, and included an arid section with 'prickly cacti'.

The blurb about the attraction seemed to be aimed at children, enticing them with thrilling animals like tarantulas and piranhas, so there was a definite place for something extreme in plant life. The arid section here was far more interesting with a good range of cacti and succulents, including large mature plants, and we spent over an hour taking photos and noting names from the labels (see general view below). We were interrupted a couple of times as school parties stampeded through, and noticed a good trick to get youngsters into the practice of handling cacti – put up large notices saying “Don’t touch the plants”.



You wouldn’t expect to find this in a shopping centre (note the Toys R’ Us behind the *Cleistocactus* in the picture above), but its central location means they can raise income by accommodating wedding photo shoots.



Graptopetalum paraguayense overgrowing some *Ferocacti*

There was some room for improvement – the dreaded *Oxalis* and *Kalanchoe* was springing up here and there; there was a bad infestation of mealy bug on an *Opuntia*; the usual problem of labels being dislodged and put back in the wrong place and some tidying up and watering wouldn’t have gone amiss – but it was still worth a visit and trays of new plants ready to plant out, indicated an intention that this was an ongoing project.



Lithops with *Kalanchoe* plantlets (as at Manchester University)



Opuntia microdasys with mealy bug



The ubiquitous *Echinocereus grussonii* with *Borzicactus aureispinus* in the foreground

Last stop was the Singleton Park Botanic garden – a new Millennium project which included a run of greenhouses, containing different habitat zones, including an arid cactus house. Now this really did look arid – many plants looked to be suffering from drought and in a raised bed next to the (ordinary) glass, there were a number of ex-cacti and succulents among others struggling along but badly scorched. Other scorched and dehydrated cacti were hanging in baskets from the ceiling. Others were enclosed in glass cases on the far wall, looking like museum exhibits. No wonder some of them had lost the will to live. Apart from a central bed containing some larger specimens in better shape, it left us feeling very depressed that this good range of plants were looking so neglected, so we moved on to the next greenhouse - with humid rain forest conditions – where the plants were looking happy and healthy, including a stunning range of orchids and bromeliads in flower.



Nice group of four *Ferocactus haematacanthus*

Leaving the greenhouse complex, we found ourselves looking at a series of outdoor beds, each dedicated to different types of plants and there, in the middle, was a bed of cacti and succulents looking happy and healthy. I asked one of the gardeners working there whether they were experimenting with growing them outdoors, but she said they would be moved back into the greenhouse in October.

In the visitors' centre, they had some feedback forms for comments on the exhibits and we filled one in. When we arrived back home, we received a pleasant e-mail from the parks manager thanking me for my comments and suggestions, but confirming what I suspected – that with budget cutbacks, they had limited resources and no longer had anyone with the specialist knowledge of how to care for them



The central section in good condition

I sent a copy of the BCSS basic care guide hoping it might help, but it seems as though this is a common problem. A couple of days later we had an e-mail from Peter asking whether we could do another day at Wythenshawe as the gardener who was overseeing the cactus and succulent sections was on long-term sick leave and the *Oxalis* was growing rampant again.

Sylvia Jones



The very arid window section

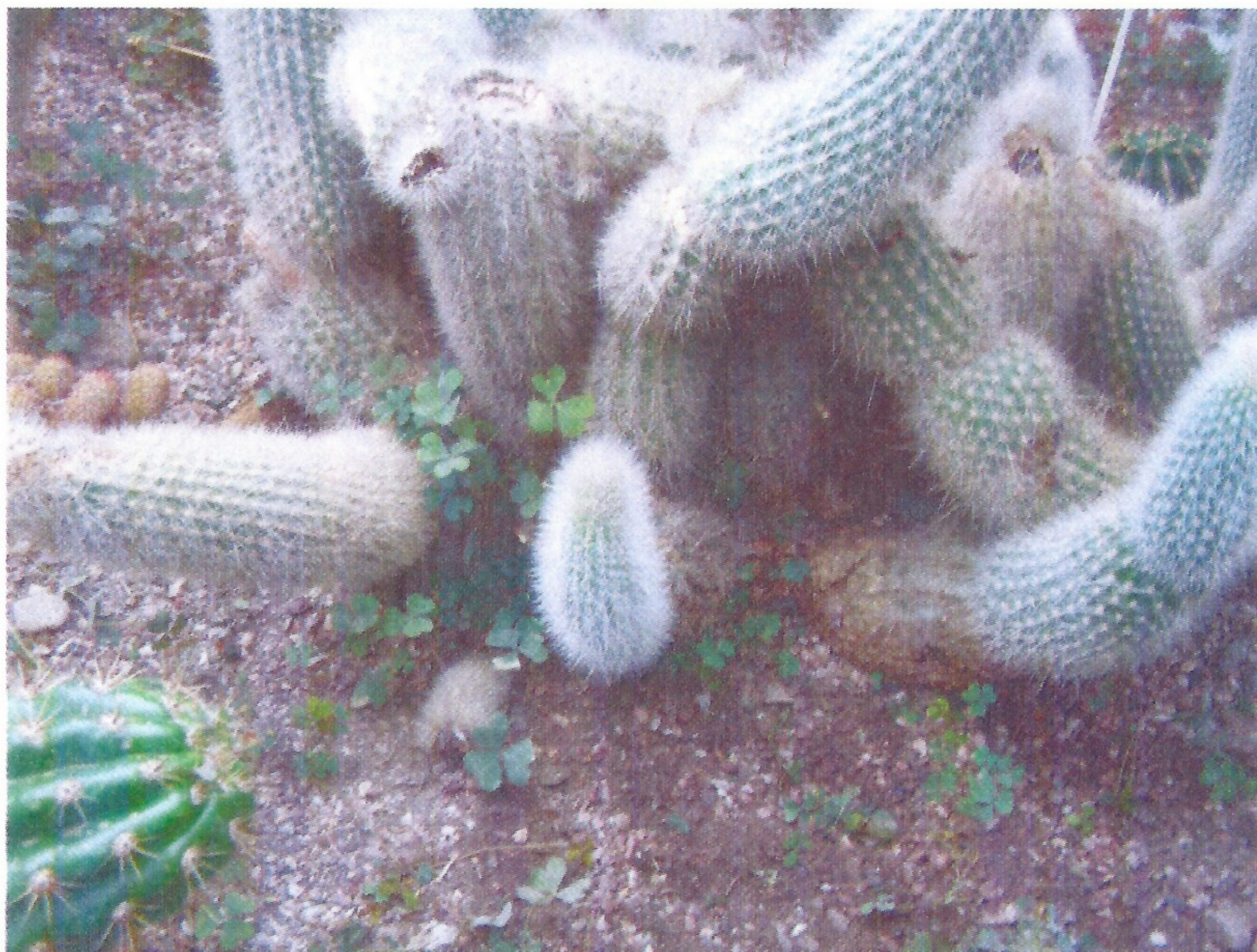


A survivor (just) of the window section - clearly labelled as *Orostachys Spinossus*



The outdoor cactus/succulent garden
With the arid greenhouse behind

Return to Wythenshawe - Part II.



Survival Technique

The *Oxalis* grow close in amongst the cacti and succulents where they're not easy to pick off and often flower and set seed before they can be removed. A few hours graft by five of us has cleared it - but only for now.

On the plus side, many of the plants we've put in there are doing well and many are flowering well. Some are shown below.



Errata - when I was typing up the *Rebutia* list for the last magazine, I thought 'I wonder how long this will stay as it is'. Sure enough - on the morning of the June meeting, we received the latest BCSS magazine which announced that the *Aylosteras* had been removed from the *Rebutia* family.

This quarter it's the turn of *Gymnos*, which appear to be more stable (those marked as *Echinocacti* were labelled thus over 100 years ago).