



MANCHESTER
BRANCH
NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2014



CACTUS MART

SATURDAY MAY 3RD 2014

In St Thomas More Church Hall

from 10.30am to 2.30pm

Refreshments available

Nurseries in attendance:

Gordon Foster (Oak Dene Nursery) The Edgintons
Tony Irons Seedlings Ralph Northcott (Cactusshop)
The Plant Lovers Ray Allcock Ian Robinson
Anthony Clarke John Henshaw (Croston Cactus)
Harry Mays Brian McDonough Philip Barker
Keith Larkin (a must if you want a good selection of books)
William's Cactus from Pontefract (first time attendance)
Brian McDonough Branch Sales (incl John Gregory)

Getting to know our members.

Continuing our series about collections our members have and their interest in the hobby we will take a look at our Chairman, Brian Darnell. Most of the pictures supplied (those of his greenhouses and plants therein) were taken by Brian.

In Brian's own words: The year was 1948 when I went with my grandfather to his friend's house. During this visit this friend showed me round his large greenhouse full of the strangest plants I had ever seen. These, as you've guessed of course, were cacti and succulents. Because I had shown amazement and an interest in them I came away with a few small plants in pots, some rooted cuttings and a few bits and pieces plucked from plants at random. I was hooked (unintentional pun). This friend was actually a founder member of Manchester Branch, Mr Leah. Despite the age gap we became firm friends and he took me to branch meetings. My grandfather donated one of his garden frames which allowed me the opportunity to spend many happy hours tending my newly acquired plants. I was intrigued by the shapes, the great variation of spines on the cacti and the colours exhibited by the succulents. Then, the crowning glory, they actually flowered! WOW!!



This is a picture of the larger of Brian's greenhouses situated on the upper level in his garden. It houses mainly cacti. Many taller growing cacti, some Mammillarias and other interesting genera are present here as well as a number of plants growing in hanging baskets.

I was a Branch Member at the tender age of 11 years. Luckily there were two other junior members which meant I didn't feel out of place among so many older people. I now had no difficulty in deciding how to spend my pocket money. Every Saturday I made my way to Manchester to visit either Clayburn's or Yates' emporiums where I would pore over the few trays of cacti and succulents on display. At one shilling (5p) per plant my pocket money was happily spent. Even today I still have three of those original purchases, a blue *Cereus*, an *Echinopsis* and a *Chamaecereus silvestrii*.

Moving to the present, my collection is split roughly into three quarters cacti and one quarter

Succulents. Where possible I try to keep plants from the same genera growing together in a group as this makes it easier to pick out plants for showing. I grow all my plants in the same soil mix. I use John Innes no. 2, alpine gravel, sharp horticultural sand and perlite. I use a scoop to measure out the four elements in the following ratio; 3 scoops of J.I. no 2 to 1 scoop each of the other three ingredient which means my final mix is 50% loam and 50% aerating materials.



Now we have another glimpse inside the larger greenhouse. Immediately we can see that he uses gas heating for protection against winter cold. Sensibly he tries to keep taller growing plants to one end of the staging to prevent too much shading on smaller growing plants. Evidence of his plant grouping is immediately visible .

A partial break from my collection of plants was enforced by having to do National Service for two years. This meant my mother was also recruited, into plant service not National Service, for this period of separation. Sadly I had not thought to educate her into the why's and wherefore's of plant management, especially how to deal with them in the winter months. Watering at the wrong time of the year and lack of protection from the cold wreaked its heavy toll with about half of my collection being wiped out. Not only National Service meant a break from the plants but also the attraction of the opposite sex played its part as well. Marriage followed and children so time flew by while the plants received little attention. However, all was not lost. It so happened that I needed to go to Oldham one day when I had finished work. Woolworths was my destination, to collect an item from the store was my mission. It was a Saturday and time was short as they closed early on that day all those long years ago. I arrived with just 15 minutes to closing time. On entering the store I was confronted by a long counter crammed full of cacti and succulents—such bliss. Enthusiasm was fired again and I spent my bus fare buying five plants. Money well spent I then had a two and a half mile walk home clutching these new treasures; once again I was hooked. I

Could not wait for my next day off and happily visited the Woolworth's store once again to add to the new collection.. It so happened that I had to visit Lewis's store in Manchester a few weeks later. In the basement of the store I was confronted by a small stall where cacti were being sold. My eye was caught by a white spined Parodia which just had to be bought. Even more importantly I spied a small booklet about cacti which was purchased. I read it avidly on the bus back home (I still had enough money this time) and, when I reached the back page, I discovered the application form to join the Society, in those days the National Cactus and Succulent Society. No time was wasted, the form was filled in and sent off to the membership secretary that same day. 1970 was the year, the adult membership fee was £1 and I was once again a member of Manchester Branch. The rest is history.



Looking into the smaller greenhouse it is immediately obvious that every possible inch is used to house as many plants as possible. Low benches, shelves along the side walls. Once again there is evidence of gas heating for the winter.

*The eye cannot fail to see the huge specimen of *Nolina recurvata* also known as *Beaucarnea recurvata* which Brian grows. Though this is undoubtedly a very fine specimen it is still a youngster. They can reach a height of 16 feet when mature. It is an evergreen plant but the bottom leaves die off with age revealing the lengthening trunk as they drop off.*

Once a plant reaches this age and size the compost needs to be free draining as it would be fatal to have waterlogged roots. It will with stand cold being hardy to -5° if the soil is dry.

My favourite plant is *Uebelmannia pectinifera*. It possesses a purple, rough textured body with straight black spines—it is a truly magnificent plant. However this is not the easiest of plants to flower and when it does manage to do so the reward is scant.—a small yellow flower less than an inch in height and width. The most stunning flower on a cactus, in my opinion, is that borne by *Arthroceus mirabilis* (also known as *Setiechinopsis mirabilis*). This elegant pure white flower is slender and 4 inches tall, often taller than the plant itself. It bears the most enchanting perfume which is readily noticeable especially on a summer's evening when the air is heavy with dew. There is only one drawback to this plant's flowering regime. It opens at dusk, flowers happily through the night attracting its pollinators and closes promptly the following dawn, its reason for existence completed.



These pictures show both the elegant flowers and the fruit of Arthroocereus mirabilis . Notice the vertical split in the seed pod to release the seeds which are usually very fertile if sown quite quickly after harvesting.



This is Brian's plant of Uebelmannia pectinifera (left) and in the other picture you can see the small flowers. 'Pectinifera' is the Latin for 'bearing combs' because the rows of spines resemble combs.

As for my favourite Other Succulent it must be Euphorbia horrida. It does truly resemble a cactus on first sight but the lack of areoles and its poisonous white sap soon prove that it is not one.

I buy cacti and succulents based on their appearance not what they are called. What is important for me is the colour and texture of plants, the shape of the body and the spination—or lack of it in some cases—and how long the spines are on some plants. The plants has to

‘jump out at me’. The name of the plant is of secondary importance and, as I tell people, I don’t grow labels. In spite of that the greater majority of my plants are labelled because identification of plants is important to help cultivate them properly.



Another view in Brian’s greenhouse showing the range and variation of the plants he grows.



Euphorbia horrida in the wild (left) and a seedling in cultivation

OPEN DAY

Manchester Branch members will be opening their greenhouses to any of our Branch members as well as members from other branches of the Society who wish to attend. This event is also open to your family members and friends if they would like to come.

DATE: SUNDAY JUNE 22nd

COLLECTIONS TO VISIT

Ivor Crook:

Ivor has an interesting collection which reflects his varied interests. He has a strong interest in the Rebutia genus, has visited many habitats of Haworthia in South Africa and also enjoys growing plants from the genus Rhipsalis. This does not, however, reveal his fascination with cacti and succulents overall. Only a visit to his collection will make this clear. He has recently replaced and 8x6 foot greenhouse with a much larger glass house which allows him to better display his plants.

Harry Mak:

Harry has a superb collection of Haworthias which is one of the National Collections that the public can visit. That is not the sum total of his collection though as he has an interest in other succulents in general, especially small Aloe hybrids, as well as certain cacti. His collection is housed in three greenhouses which half fill his small garden.

Peter Bint:

Peter's collection is the largest in Manchester Branch and reflects 60 years of growing cacti and succulents. It is housed in four greenhouses because the terrain does not permit one large house as the garden is terraced. His collection tastes are gregarious but there is a keen attachment to all mesembs with Lithops being the overriding favourite. The other highlight at his house is the sumptuous buffet served by his wife, Joan, which provides 'the icing on the cake' for the afternoon. TIMES WILL BE ANNOUNCED NEARER THE DAY.