



**MANCHESTER
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An update on Chris' Greenhouse story

Three years on

Back in 2011 I wrote an article about tidying up my greenhouse. Due to various circumstances many of the plants had become somewhat spoiled and I had far too many plants that were just sat there doing nothing. In a sense I was collecting cacti, not growing cacti.

Many of you know of my nephew and part of my reason for wanting to improve my collection was to show him the strange shapes and patterns that many cacti have. There was also an element of never being able to show anything in branch shows too – nothing was in a fit state to bring. I was also photographing the shows, and the few flowers that I would get each year. I mentioned the move shift work with the result that I could see (and photograph) more flowers during the late morning/early afternoon.



The above picture shows part of the collection as it was some time in 2008. I can count at least 25 identical Echinopsis plants in the bottom right hand corner – not something you want if you've only a 6x4 greenhouse. The picture below shows part of the collection after all the re-potting and alterations mentioned in the last article. Yes there are still too many identical Echinopsis plants. The other pots you can see are, then recent, purchases from the Cactus Mart. There are new square black trays that are flat at the bottom that exactly fill the staging.

The following two pictures show part of the greenhouse as it is now in 2014. Anything that needed a pot bigger than a 2½ inch round pot was put in a square 2¾ inch (or bigger) BEF pot. I've labelled everything with a Brother 1230-PC label printer, and everything is listed in a spread sheet on the PC. A lot of my plants have welcomed larger pots – a case in point is the Oreocereus and the Neoporteria you can see in the middle of the top picture. Having everything in the same compost mix has also helped greatly. There are also a lot of new plants. The Gymnocalyciums in the bottom picture are a CactusWorld forum purchase from last year. There are also lots of new flower photos on my website. In 2009 I took 16 pictures that I labelled up as the best picture to represent the flower on my plant. In 2010 there was 61, and in 2011 there was 87, both years including many variations of the same plant. 2012 there was 106 and last year, 2013, there were 206 pictures! I won't include any here as the black backgrounds would use up too much printer ink, but I will include some flower pictures within the article on the branch website.



The CactusWorld forum has been of great use to me. I've bought lots of plants from members who also visit it. The *Gymnocalycium*s were one purchase and I also got a lot of *Rebutias* from Ralph Martin. I was under the impression that all *Rebutia* flowers were the same – not so, as a look on the *Rebutia* page of my website will show.

I also decided to enter the 2013/2014 Calendar Photo competition – and was amazed to find that one of the pictures had been picked for November.

The other thing that I've been doing is growing more plants from seed. I always seemed to lose so many that there was hardly anything left at the end. I came up with a plan where by I sowed much more seed than normal into square BEF pots in propagators on the windowsills. Predictably a lot more seedlings survived into plants and I've got way too many trays of plants!

So from back in 2007, when I could quite easily have given up and stopped growing anything at all, I can now look at the Greenhouse and the plants within it with a certain amount of satisfaction that the plan from 2010/11 has worked out for the best.



I like to think that I am now “growing” cacti, as opposed to “collecting” them. Hopefully Daniel will continue to show interest in the cacti (he is always asking “when are we going to the Cactus Mart?”).

He has “helped” sowing seeds and repotting plants and he also likes to take pictures of the flowers. One amusing incident that happened last year was when I was trying to take a photo of a flower and Daniel had picked out an *Astrophytum* in a square pot. There was me in the kitchen with my plant on the floor in the sunshine trying to take its picture, when there was an explosion of gravel everywhere. I looked up and Daniel had an empty square BEF pot in one hand and the *Astrophytum*, roots and all, in the other. When asked what he'd done he replied “I

wanted to see the other side.....” Needless to say he'd tried turning the plant round whilst keeping the pot the same way.....

Continuing the series ‘Getting to Know our Members

This time we look at Harry Mak whose interest in cacti and succulents began in Hong Kong.

My first strong memory related to the hobby is a ‘miracle’ which surprised me. In my university life, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a 3-year hall life in Ricci Hall, the University of Hong Kong. I was brought up in the New Territories, the more rural part of Hong Kong. The travelling time to the university was 6 hours return – walking, country bus, bus, ferry and bus again! Accommodation in hall was a ‘must’. We all had a separate room with a balcony. Whilst there, I discovered a spiny ‘dead’ plant lying in the balcony of my neighboring room for a long time. I forgot how long it was. One other day, after raining, I was shocked to see that it revived! It was *Mammillaria prolifera* as I found out later. Its life strength was so strong. This incident ignited my interest in succulents and I still remember it. It was 1980, some 34 years ago!

However, my first encounter with succulents was very much earlier, dating back to my childhood. When I was about 3 or 4, my family moved from the urban area, Kowloon, to the New Territories due to my father's poor health. He needed more fresh air there. At that time, our living depended on simple farming – growing vegetables and later raising poultry and pigs. I had plenty of exposure to plants. Two cacti and one succulent come to

my mind – *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*, *Hylocereus undatus* and *Kalanchoe pinnata*. We used *Kalanchoe pinnata* for medicinal herbs and flower of *Hylocereus* for making soup! *Epiphyllum oxypetalum* is known as ‘night blooming queen cactus’. She has a nocturnal scented flower. These are my earliest memories.

During university life, my interest in ornamental plants began. I attended an extramural course on houseplants and later founded ‘The Hong Kong Houseplant Society’ with a group of other interested people. I joined the Hong Kong Orchid Society later. I had a mixed interest in ornamental plants – orchids, cacti and other succulents, carnivorous plants, bromeliads, ferns and others. My passion for cacti and succulents was still not strong at that time.

After graduation, I started my teaching career (Chemistry) at a secondary school in Fanling, not far away from my new home which was an apartment. My stronger interest in cacti & other succulents began there. This was a boys’ school. However the head-teacher was a lady. She persuaded me, because of my interest in plants, to start a horticultural club which is a much ‘quieter’ type of interest for the boys. She supported me completely. I had a primitive venue for the club – a shelter for growing plants on the flat roof of the staff room! We grew a variety of plants – cacti and other succulents, orchids, ferns and other ornamental plants. The students (even some colleagues) enjoyed the hobby. To my surprise, the horticulture club became a favourite interest group. At about the same period, I joined the Hong Kong Cactus Society and met its chairman. Incidentally he had a growing place which was just five minutes walk from my school! I was so lucky that I had the chance to visit his collection very often. He was very generous to offer me unlimited cuttings each time I visited him. He is probably the most influential figure in cultivating my hobby. Thanks to Mr. Kit-hung Leung. Sadly he quietly passed away about 3 years after I moved to UK.

During those days, I grew most plants in school and kept a few at my apartment house. There was not much space to grow plants there. I acquired most cacti and succulents from Japan and later UK (Abbey Brook & Whitestone), USA (Abbey Garden) and Germany (Exotica). Thanks Mr. Leung again for lending me some BCSS journals which meant I was acquainted with the Society before I joined BCSS when I was still living in Hong Kong. I later joined CSSA, Succulent Society of Zimbabwe, RHS, IOS and many others, including some non-succulent societies such as AOS. I was quite active when I was in Hong Kong, exhibiting plants in flower shows and participating in local plant societies. After winning many prizes in local flower shows, I was later invited to become a committee member and I was asked to judge in the shows. To promote the hobby further, I accepted some invitations as a speaker to give special talks, courses and as guest on TV. This hobby was indeed a great emotional support during my hard times particularly the relationship with my ex-wife when I was in Hong Kong. I sold plants (mainly succulents and *Tillandsia*) in local shows to support my hobby. I also put some succulents for sale in a plant shop, paying 20% commission to the shop owner, Mr Wan, who later became my friend. I was indebted to him and he persuaded me to publish a book on cacti and succulents. He also introduced to me the publisher of Shu Shin Books. Without him, my publications (3 books on cacti & succulents and 1 book on other ornamental plants) would not have happened. Then I started my correspondence with Mr. Gordon Rowley to have my books reviewed. At that time, I had a collection of about 700-800 cacti/succulents and other ornamental plants. My collection was quite mixed without specializing in any genera but mainly consisted of *Euphorbia*, *Pachypodium*, *Haworthia*, *Echeveria*, asclepiads and cacti. Around 1990, I began to grow more other succulents than cacti. Later, I specialized in *Haworthia* and randomly crossed *haworthias*. In 1993, I sold my apartment and rented a house which had more space for growing plants. I moved some of my favourite plants back home. The majority were still housed at school. In 1995, I migrated to UK at my ex-wife’s request. I had to sell most of my collection and only keeping some of my favourites – mainly *Haworthia* hybrids from Japan. I did not bring them with me. I asked my friend to send them to me after I settled down and built a greenhouse to accommodate them. Sadly, all were seized by customs and lost forever. This means I had to start afresh from scratch!

On arriving in Middleton, Manchester, UK, I searched for BCSS contacts. Peter Bint was the first person I met. I was again fortunate enough to be living just a few minute’s walk from our branch meeting venue! Peter was so kind as to help me in every aspect to start the hobby again in UK! I learned a lot from him including greenhouse maintenance, growing compost, garden centre location, ways of keeping cacti and other succulents in the British climate, etc. He even helps me to look after my plants when I am out of the country! Thanks Peter! I began to attend the branch meeting monthly and later was persuaded to join the committee. I made lots of friends in Britain through the hobby. We shared both experiences and spare plants. Derek Tribble is another great figure in shaping my hobby life. I met him when I attended the Chelsea Flower Show possibly in 1996. I remember we had a long chat at the BCSS stand. Later I visited him and he shared lots of *Haworthia* cuttings with me. Some even survive up to now. He introduced the *Haworthia* Society to me and I served the society from 1999 to 2000. Dorothy and I become friends by then and we have yearly mutual visits several years later up to now. I also visited Gordon Rowley in 1996 and 2000. He is another great figure in the development of my

hobby. I still have some of those gift cuttings from him.



Left School 85 – Harry with Mr. K.H. Leung at KS Secondary School (old place) in 1985 Right School 95 – Harry at KS Secondary School (new growing place) in 1995.

My first primitive galvanized iron greenhouse in Britain was built in 1995(replaced in 2012 by standard aluminium type). Two others were built in 1996 and 1997. All greenhouses are of same type and size (6' x 12'). Originally my collection was very mixed – cacti, haworthias, crassulas, echeverias, kalanchoes, adromischus, mesembs, euphorbias, sempervivums, sedums, aeoniums, gasterias, aloes, peperomias etc.. I acquired them by mail order, from plants sales in cactus marts and national shows. A brief check on the plant source in my plant records shows the following names – Whitestone, Abbey Brook, Westfield, Ching Fa(Japan), Oak Dene, Kent Cacti, Pete & Ken, Southfields, Glenhirst, T.Edney, J.Henshaw, Exotica, N.Forest, Holly Gate, Woodside, Brookside, G.Rigg, Plantlife, Eau Brink, STC etc. Most importantly I obtained some rarer ones from fellow enthusiasts in UK, Hong Kong, Japan and USA. Some plants were acquired through exchanges.

As with most people, the number of plants in my greenhouses grew exponentially and all space was filled up quickly. I realized there was a need to scale down some of my collection and concentrated on specific genera. About five years ago, I gave up most euphorbias, sempervivums, crassulas, kalanchoes, aeoniums, cacti and peperomias. I concentrated on haworthias, gasterias and astrolobas. I also keep variegates, cristates, monstrose plants, echeverias and a representative collection of other genera. I mainly grow small plants rather than large plants to conserve space! Now *Haworthia* is my main interest. More than 18 years ago in Hong Kong, I started creating *Haworthia* hybrids from my own stock plants. Some hybrids are morphologically uniform while others are very variable. Each individual is a unique clone. I created most hybrids from 1999-2006. Now I have thousands of unique clones. I have shared some of them with other fellow enthusiasts. Some were even tissue-cultured and distributed widely before I noticed. To promote the genus *Haworthia*, I joined the NCPPG (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens – www.nccpg.com) and was awarded National Collection Status in 2004. The mission of NCPPG is to save and preserve our plant heritage and to conserve biodiversity. A visit to my collection is very welcome for me on behalf of the National Council.

As for the growing side, my compost consists of mixture of 1 part of 4mm alpine grit and 2 parts of John Innes No.2 and with 4mm grit as top dressing. Inspired by some *Haworthia* growers about 5 years ago, I tried to use a mixture of Akadama (Japanese natural clay medium) and Kyodama (UK artificial clay medium which is harder) to grow haworthias. At the beginning, it worked very well without any problem and the growth was even better. After about 6 months, I began to repot most haworthias using this mix. About 1 year later, I was faced with a devastating problem. It is just a disaster which I had never expected! There were lots of sciarid flies in my greenhouses. The larvae of these flies are the damaging kind which feed on soft plant tissue and leave bacteria/fungus behind which causes rotting and the death of plants if left untreated. Many plants rotted and died in this way. I have tried many ways over the years to eradicate them but in vain. I can only reduce their number to certain level, just to reduce the casualties. At the time of writing, there has been a loss of about a hundred plants this winter. Though the percentage is low (about 1-2% out of total), it's quite a lot particularly when some of them are my favourites! I need to spend more effort to reduce the loss. Now I understand that it is not a good practice to change the compost if we are satisfied with the compost we use. Also it is unwise to change the compost too hurriedly before we are absolutely certain that there are no adverse effects. Otherwise this terrible outcome may persist for longer than we can foresee.

Left Home 94 – Some of my collection at home just before I moved to UK Right 3 Greenhouses – The three greenhouses in Harry's back garden.



The plants in my three greenhouses are arranged systematically. The furthest one houses mostly *Haworthia* and *Astroloba* species, cacti in hanging trays, seedling/small plants for sale on lower selves. The middle one (left front in the photo) houses *Haworthia* hybrids (most are my own). There is a heated propagator for warmth-loving plants such as euphorbias and asclepiads. I also keep some leaf cuttings in this greenhouse for propagation purpose. An area is reserved as a 'hospital'. The one closest to my house has 3-tier shelving. Most other genera are kept there – echeverias, adromischus, agaves, large cacti, crassulas, dudleyas, gasterias, mesembs, variegated & cristate succulents. Seedlings and smaller *Haworthia* hybrids for sale are also kept there. After working in UK as travel consultant for 14 years, I chose to retire from normal work and work as self-employed since 2009. My self-employment work deals with selling second hand microscopes and their accessories in eBay. In 2011, I began selling haworthias and other succulents too. Now I can manage my own time much better than before. 2012 was a special year for me – my marriage to Bonnie. Thanks to Bonnie – she has no objection to my hobby! She actually supports me and we attend our branch meetings together! During the winter period, I bring my favourite plants and sansevierias indoors to protect them from severe weather conditions. They are placed on the windowsills and a 4' x 3' table near the patio door! Thanks to my wife for permission to do this!

Though I grow mainly other succulents, I like cacti too. To my eyes, all plants are beautiful with their own unique features to admire and appreciate. For me, growing cacti and succulents is more than a hobby. In the early days, it gave me comfort when I was suffering hard times. By admiring and staying with plants I felt very relieved when I was in bad mood or very tired or very sad. Worries would eventually be wiped away. It shapes my life. It directs me towards a spiritual path. At the beginning, I learned to identify and name plants. Then I learned to grow them to their best within the limits of my environment. I understand that very often we cannot guarantee the result. What we can do is to try our best. In this process, I saw many plants die as well as being born. Occasionally, I could not keep or save my most beloved plants. I was very sad. I learned how to accept this and let go. I have created many new plants through hybridization. I have also killed lots of plants. What is the meaning of life and death? Is there anything which can be permanently possessed? This urges me to seek the answer. In parallel, it corresponds to the meaning of our living and dying. Are wealth, power and reputation important? The truth can be found in the teachings of the Buddha Sakyamuni. So I am now a Buddhist and walking in the right path to enlightenment and help others to go in the correct direction. Buddhism is not just a religion but the way to understand the entire world including living and non-living things across space and time scales - past, present and the future.



Middle GH – Harry in the middle greenhouse holding 2 cultivars (*Haworthia* 'Harry Mak' & *Aeonium* 'Harry Mak') named after him by Mr. Gordon Rowley in his book 'Teratopia'.



Haworthia species – some of my Haworthia species showing variations in viscosa



Closest GH – the greenhouse closest to the house, showing 3-tiers staging

Haw Hybrids – some of Harry's own hybrids



[My unfinished website can be found at – <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/haworthia>]



Top: *Neochilenia dimorpha*

Bottom: *Notocactus roseoluteus*





Top: *Gymnocalycium horstii* FR437 Bottom: *Gymnocalycium ferrarii*





Top: *Thelocactus conothele* v *argenteus* SB331 Bottom: *Escobaria minima*





Top: *Frailea castanea*

Bottom: *Acanthocalycium glaucum*

