



**MANCHESTER**  
**BRANCH**  
**NEWSLETTER**  
**AUTUMN 2014**



## The John Gregory Story

In a sense I came on the hobby by chance. The first greenhouse we had was for the purposes of providing food for the family. An Alton Cedar wood 12' x 10' greenhouse was bought to grow tomatoes and other edibles for the family table and to supply to friends as well. For 18 months this was a very successful enterprise but it was quickly recognised that only half the greenhouse was required. Thought was put into the problem of what to do with the other half of the space. I had no particular plans but fate resolved the matter one Saturday morning when I was in Bolton Market. As with all markets they have stalls selling plants. I passed one such stall and it had cacti and succulents for sale.

These plants were different, something new to me, and they required a second look to satisfy curiosity. Yes they were indeed different, so different that I felt compelled to buy one or two. Curiosity now bubbling I felt a strong need to visit the Library to see if they had any books about these strange and compelling plants. Although in existence, I knew nothing about Bolton Cactus Society. Its existence remained a secret for a further nine months but fate guided my feet yet again. I was passing the Bolton Co-op Hall when the sign outside attracted my attention. BOLTON CACTUS SHOW, ANNUAL SHOW NOW OPEN. That was it. In I went and what a sight greeted my eyes. It was mesmerising; plants of all shapes and sizes like nothing you could imagine. I was hooked and thus began 40 years of collecting, growing and learning about our hobby. In fact I am still learning to this very day.

I say I was hooked but strangely it wasn't the spiny columns that grabbed my attention, nor the prickly globular shapes either which is what usually does attract newcomers. For me it was the lure of the leafy and trunky items that proved most fascinating. This was a period of rapidly increasing availability of Euphorbias, Aloes, Haworthias Echeverias, Dudleyas, Cotyledons, Gasterias but most importantly for those who wanted to grow the truly unusual, TCP's. Yes, the large group of plants that had swollen root structures capable of holding water during droughts, or those that produced swollen stems or pachycaul bases, most of which shed their copious leaves during the drought periods, all these caught my attention. They were irreverently called turnips, carrots and parsnips. I was totally captivated by these sorts of plants. I joined the Bolton Cactus Society and the BCSS about twelve months after visiting that first show and from there the hobby took off. Of course in those days the Society was the National Cactus and Succulent Society. Monthly visits to Manchester, Warrington and Southport Branch meetings, as well as various branch coach trips [what happened to them?] added to my knowledge. Naturally plants flowed into the greenhouse very enthusiastically, so much so that over the next two years a further two 10' x 8' aluminium greenhouses were added to the garden.

My first collections consisted mainly of Euphorbias with a lot of choicer items being purchased as cuttings from Edgar and Brian Lamb's Exotic Collection of which I was a member for many years. To these were added Echeverias, Gasterias and a few Haworthias and Aloes with the other half of the Alton house being filled with any other oddballs. By this I mean any Caudiciforms and Pachycauls I could find. This general theme would continue until 15

years ago or thereabouts. Redundancy hit hard, to be followed by a new job which did not allow me time to look after this large collection. Long hours were spent travelling as a contracts manager and later as a purchasing manager for a large international company. Naturally I did not want to see the plants suffer so there was no alternative other than allowing the plants to move on to other people who could look after them better than I could. I retained a few choicer items that could be grown on windowsills making them easy to watch over and generally safe from the effects of cold winter nights.

Over all these years I have stuck faithfully to two main soil mixes. The first was, as often advised by many books in those early days, namely, John Innes 2 or 3 to which was added various degrees of grit according to the particular plants needs. This certainly works but is heavy to handle in our changeable weather as well as requiring great care with watering. I also find this mix contributes to root damage when repotting and that can lead to rot and death. My current mix is roughly 40% John Innes 3 with about 30% Coir [Miracle Grow Expand and Go]. To this is added about 30% Vermiculite which has the effect of opening up the soil for good drainage, a lighter mix and one that dries out quite quickly.

When I retired 10 years ago I decided it was time to restart the collection. It is a vastly different collection these days, much reduced in size from the one I had previously. I like to collect the plants that grow in our winter, genera such as Othonna and Tylecodon, which allows me to devote the winter months to them and the summer months to my other passion, growing from seed. In this way I can enjoy the hobby for twelve months a year and know there is always something happening. I source the seed from various suppliers around the world e.g. Silverhill in South Africa, Joel Lode in Spain, Steven Brack in the USA and Koe-hres from Germany. I also buy from the BCSS and Haworthia Society lists. It is significantly easier to obtain choice species of plants if you grow from seed, plants that would be almost unobtainable if you wanted to buy them as actual plants from a nursery.

For me personally, the hours I spend with plants is a relaxing recreation and just an extension of my fascination with the flora and fauna that our planet has to offer. Thus, that is my story up to the present but even after 40 years I still haven't resolved one major problem — why do I never have enough room????????????????????



*Here we see John at the doorway into one of his two greenhouses which are situated at the bottom of his garden. In the right hand picture John is seen surrounded by the succulents he likes so much holding one of the Pachycauls he has grown from seed*



*The left hand picture shows John's greenhouses at the bottom of his garden. He has a totally unobstructed view across the fields which allows for good sunlight when it is shining. In the right hand picture we have a view inside the greenhouse he uses for seed propagation. Notice the bubble wrap which has a two fold purpose. It provides winter insulation from the cold and summer screening against too much strong sunlight which would be harmful to the seedlings.*



*Here is another view inside the propagation greenhouse where the use of heated propagators can be seen to raise the young plants from seed. Also on view are older plants that have been potted on, probably to be included among the trays of superb plants he brings for sale. He sows many of his seeds during the autumn so that by the following spring they will be ready for the next stage of growing, pricking out into trays or single pots. Seeds are sown at all stages of the year whenever he can buy them.*



*The final two views are from the greenhouse which houses his own collection as well as sales plants. If you look carefully you will be able to spot small plants of the many genera he has said he enjoys propagating and growing. It is a superb collection that is different from most collections.*

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE 2015 SPEAKERS

January 10th. We welcome Peter Berresford back to the Branch for his talk about Cacti of Oklahoma. The reference to 'music' is of course related to the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical classic by the same name. I believe Peter's sound track to this talk may well contain snips from the title—*though singing is not compulsory*. Peter is well known for his talks about 'Hedgehogs' which is the nickname for the genus *Echinocereus*. Just how many of that genus he found in the state remains to be seen but there are quite a number of cacti to be seen.

February 14th. Les Percy is not to be found as a regular speaker with his name in the speakers list. However he is a knowledgeable orator and, from his years in teaching, knows how to get his message over to the audience. Les was a Manchester Branch member before work took him to the hills of Derbyshire to live. It will be good to see him again and you can enjoy an evening travelling round Namibia to see the wealth of plants endemic to the country.

March 14th. Very few people know the name Mike Bridges. I only know him because his name has been in the Manchester members list for many years. A busy life working at University has meant he was unable to visit meetings but retirement has freed up a little time. I met him at the Symposium in 2013 and have met him occasionally before that but I am hoping he will be able to attend a few meetings from now on. The title of his talk speaks volumes and needs no further words from me.

April 11th. David Rushforth really needs no introduction but suffice to say he enjoys his life growing cacti and succulents. We all experience problems with growing plants and those that give us headaches vary from individual to individual. What one finds difficult another will say grows like a weed. But David has specialized for years in growing those genera that are universally acknowledged as proving problematical. Thus he grows a lot of plants on grafts simply because we have not found the answer to growing them as nature intended them to grow. More will be revealed.

May 2nd. May is a busy month as usual. We start with the Cactus and Succulent Mart and I am pleased to be able to announce that all last years sellers, both nurseries and private sellers, have indicated their wish to come and sell in 2015. As usual the doors will open to the buying public from 10.30am and remain open till 2.30pm. In the words of the well known saying 'the early bird catches the worm' it is advisable to be here from the opening because the unusual and more desirable offerings are snapped up in the first thirty minutes of trading. Jim and Anne and their helpers provide a welcome flow of victuals throughout the day and their stalwart work is freely acknowledged on this page.

May 9th. We see the welcome return of Ray Stephenson from the north east of the country. He is widely travelled, often visiting countries most people would not venture to. This time we learn about the Succulents of Southern Morocco and as he is off there again prior to this talk we will see brand new pictures of what choice plants there are over there. He is an expert about many of the vast number of plants belonging to the massive family, the Crassulaceae, and we can be sure they will figure in his talk.

June 13th. Once again it is good to welcome Trevor Wray back to the branch. He has consistently shown himself to both knowledgeable and witty as well. Again we will experience

plants from his favourite country for visiting, the south western states of America but this time we visit areas of some altitude as the title implies when it says 'the High Desert'. It is an area this experiences extreme cold in winter but because it is so dry the plants remain healthy and insulated beneath the snow, ready to soak the water from melting snow in nearly spring.

July 11th. Derek Tribble is again visiting the branch. He has been to South Africa so many times he is both an expert on its flora and a seasoned traveller with much to impart. We will be enjoying the Succulent Karoo in this talk, an area renowned for the huge array of plants both succulent and otherwise. The talk will be both full of information and amplified by superb photography.

August 8th. Back to South Africa again but with a different focus this time. We know from his previous visits that Andy Young's love affair with Conophytums is infectious and compelling. But other plants will be on display as well and it has become almost the norm for him, along with Chris Rodgerson, to discover something new or possibly plants lost for a long time. Yet again we have an excellent photographer so his presentation will be captivating.

September 12th. Here is another exile from the north west. Colin Walker once resided close by. His talk might have you scratching your heads or, even worse, thinking the plants covered by this title to be boring. Far from it. There are many genera you may never have heard of but among those you will know are: Caralluma, Brachystelma, Ceropegia, Fockea and Hoyas to mention just a few. It will be an eye opening evening.

October 10th. It's Mesemb time again. I do urge you to visit the show. Many Branch members have never been and don't realise what an array of plants they are missing. As Judge and Speaker we welcome John Watmough and we know how entertaining he can be. He is hoping to bring an array of plants to illustrate his talk and plenty of seedlings as well to sell. There will be plenty of plants for sale besides those brought by John.

November 14th. He's here again, that home spun talent we know as Ivor Crook. Since retiring from the Doctor's surgery he has been dissecting both the cactus and the succulent world. His studies have been deep and the deeper he goes the more questions he finds rather than answering them in full. We have already his attempts to unravel the world of Rebutias where some measure of success has been achieved. Now he will look at those plants which were wrongly lumped under the Rebutia umbrella, namely Sulcorebutia and Weingartia.

December 12th. Another year gone. Another AGM arrives. Another opportunity to have a little celebratory fayre. It is a pity so many people regard this meeting as not worth the effort. Constitutionally it is essential, an opportunity for members to either endorse the efforts of Society, Branch and officials or to denounce their efforts in a constructive manner. Without it there would be no Society, no Branch. We also take a look back at those earlier pioneers and the talks they produced for us to enjoy.

January 9th 2016. Another new year, another period of growing to look forward to. With this in mind we open the year with the Society Chairman visiting the branch to expound on the beauty cacti and succulents in flower with the title so aptly stated in 'The Whole Blooming Year'. The beauty of this is that the talk can change annually which is why nobody need worry if they may have seen this talk previously because it won't be the same.

**NORTH WEST  
CACTUS MART  
SATURDAY**

**MAY 2ND**

**OPEN FROM  
10.30AM TO  
2.30PM**

**loads of plants**

**plenty of food**

**All the usual attractions**

### Programme for 2015

January 10th	Peter Berresford	Oklahoma
February 14th	Les Percy	Namibia
March 14th	Mike Bridges	Cacti and me; a novice of 35 years
April 11th	David Rushforth	Growing the impossible
May 2nd	North west cactus Mart from 10.30am to 2.30pm	
May 9th	Ray Stephenson	Succulents of Southern Morocco
June 13th	Trevor Wray	Favourites of the High Desert
June 20th	Proposed date for the zone 19 Symposium Graham Charles—a cactus topic Wiebe Bosma from Holland—a succulent topic Third speaker to be arranged	
July 11th	Derek Tribble	Karooensis
August 8th	Andy Young	South Africa 2014
September 12th	Colin Walker	Apocynads through the Ages
October 10th	North West Mesemb Show open from 10.30am to 4.00pm John Watmough—judge and speaker Talk ‘Mesembs in October’ a talk with plants to see	
November 14th	Ivor Crook	Sulcorebutia including Weingartia
December 12th	AGM	Festive Fayre and DVD from <b>BCSS</b>