



MANCHESTER
BRANCH
NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2015



Manchester Branch Outing Saturday June 6th 2015

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Photos by Chris

This was the first Manchester Branch outing since the heyday of outings back in the 1970's and just into the 1980's. In those days we would hire a 53 seater coach often driven by a driver who thought we might be slightly mad. However by the end of the day he had been slightly converted because it was not unusual for him or his co-driver to have bought a plant at one of the nurseries we visited. People belonging to the Bolton Cactus and Succulent Society, now sadly defunct, would join us on these outings. It was usual to visit at least two of the many cactus and succulent nurseries that dotted the countryside. Alas those days are now somewhat diminished as a number of them have ceased to exist and more will close in the next few years as the owners reach or have passed retirement age.

However let's move on to this trip. After months of anticipation the day of the branch trip was with us. We were to meet at the church hall at 8am. Very soon everyone had gathered. There were three drivers waiting at the start point, Peter, John and Christine. There was a fourth car driven by David who was providing transport for Jo, Danuta and Mike but it had been agreed prior to the day that they would go direct to the first point of visitation. Harry and Bonnie joined Peter, Jack and Ivor went with John and Christine was accompanied by Chris and Carl. Jim and Anne who were already spending a little time in Lincolnshire agreed to meet us at the first venue.

Setting off in convoy we were soon on the M62 with most of the route familiar to me as I used to follow the same route when going on holiday to Skegness with my grandparents. The motorway was very quiet and progress was rapid. It was not long before we reached the Welsh sounding Pontefract and it was time to join the M18. Just as quickly we swapped on to the M180 and country roads soon followed. Travelling down the A1084 we were rewarded with the spectacular view of North Lincolnshire countryside the approx location being 53° 32' 36.32" N and 0° 23' 17.57" W.

Our first stop was to be at Rob Stevenson's collection at his home in Caistor. Some of us have had the privilege of seeing his collection in pictures when he spoke to us a couple of years ago. Upon arrival we saw that David's group had already arrived a few minutes before us and Jim and Anne pulled up about ten

minutes after us. First a period of time was spent admiring Rob and Alison's front garden where there were several raised beds containing Agave, Opuntia, Yucca species as well as many smaller cacti and succulents. Following a warm welcome from our hosts we made our way in orderly file to the back garden. Fair warning was given about their two dogs—the brown one would have us playing ball all day given the slightest encouragement and the white one was not so happy with visitors and was better ignored. Neither one was to be given the slightest chance to get out through the gate so we had to keep close to one another.

Safely ensconced in the back garden we discovered that the garden actually looked much larger than it had appeared on our screen at the meeting. It was normal width for a semi detached house but was at least 100 feet in length. There were 5 greenhouses though one was obviously a number of greenhouses joined together. This larger glass house was filled with the Auricula collection, Alison's passion, and they were awash with flowers. Another greenhouse was full of Alpine plants, another of Alison's joys, and again we were treated to an array of flowers. The other houses were full of cacti and some succulents. The first of these greenhouses had a splendid collection of Astrophytums which displayed the many variations that can be found now that so many hybrids are available, These were sharing the space with Lithops, Opuntoid species and many other smallish succulents.



Rob's largest greenhouse contains the general collection and there are many elderly plants to be seen at the far end

Moving into Rob's largest greenhouse, 24' x 10', we were confronted by hundreds of plants from small to massive. Some were so big that it would have been doubtful if they would have fitted through the greenhouse door. Many genera were represented in this space; *Gymnocalycium*, Chris's favourites, *Rebutia*, *Mammillaria*, *Notocactus*, *Thelocactus*, *Ferocactus*, *Weingartia* and many, many more genera. There were all in excellent condition which gave proof of Rob's skill at growing them.



A few larger plants that were on view.

The final greenhouse, and the reason for the visit in the first place, held the National Collection of *Turbinicarpus* plus a cluster of other Mexican genera such as *Ariocarpus*, *Obregonia* and *Lophophora*. Holding National Collection status is demanding. Rob must have several specimens of each variety and species and all must have provenance to show the source of the plants. As they are Mexican cacti they will be either from seed from plants in the wild or from cuttings from the same. As Mexico has long banned both collection of wild plants and collection of seed Rob will have had to rely on people being ultra careful with the pollination of their plants in the greenhouse. Looking at just a single extremely variable species of *Turbinicarpus*, namely *T. klinkerianus*, it is very easy to see how so many names have been attributed to plants of the same species in the

past. Spine length, density and colour, the amount of wool, the body size and colour all show immense variation, yet this is a single species.

The rest of the garden, not that there was a great deal left after the spread of glass houses, was equally well laid out and interesting. Succulents again came into the picture some which would endure the harsh Lincolnshire winters and others that would need to be given shelter once the cold began to bite. Rob had a few plants for sale which were on display well away from his collection so that no mistakes would happen and people would not be disappointed by being told 'that's not for sale.'



Refreshments were laid on which could be taken in their very pleasant conservatory which can be seen above and Alison had excelled herself in the production of 'cactus biscuits' to go with the tea and coffee that was available during the entire visit. So we come to the end of part 1 of the trip. Many thanks were offered along with oft repeated generous remarks about the variety and condition of all the plants on view, succulent and otherwise. A convoy of five cars now wended its way to the second venue that was but ten minutes away.

Pottertons Alpine Nursery

I did not know what to expect as I had no idea what an alpine plant was. However what we were greeted with was totally unexpected. The nursery was set back from the main road behind a wall of trees and other grounds. There was a huge area of ground belonging to the nursery wherein was a large lake well stocked with water lilies and mounded rockeries full of a multitude of plants, a most spectacular sight indeed. Inside the actual nursery was a huge array of alpine plants set out in low stone wall troughs which proved a magnet for most of the party as they spread out searching for additions to their own gardens.

Christine and I busied ourselves taking a few pictures of all this frantic activity whether people were aware or not. The sales plants were very nice and there was a huge profusion of them available to buy, but not knowing anything about them I refrained from making any purchases, acting instead as personal basket carrier to Christine. The nursery staff were amazed and very pleased to have so many customers at one time as this did not happen too often.



More plants than one could have expected to find in a single nursery.

It was massively more representative of alpine plants than any ordinary garden centre.

Lunch was taken in the spacious grounds as most people decided to sit on the grass near the cars. I was able to explore the pond and garden area opposite the car park. Seeing all the Koi Carp in that well stocked pond made me wish I'd brought my fishing rod with me. So we come to the end of the visit to the second venue which seemed very productive for many of the party who bought varying amounts of plants and stored them in the cars. We now set off towards the final destination for the day, Craig Barber's 'William's Cactus', in South Emsall.

If you were to look for this nursery on Google Earth you might wonder how on earth there could be a cactus nursery in this street. The address given is at the end of a narrow street of terraced houses none of which appear to have gardens. However the mystery was soon solved, once we had managed to park (all cars had to have a notice in the window announcing the fact we were visiting the nursery or we could have been booked for parking infringements as it is a permit only parking area). Craig actually had a triangular garden at the side of his house, the only house with such fortune. In this garden he had fitted a 30' x 12' greenhouse which was stocked with a huge array of plants. Craig has only been following this

occupation for a couple of years following the medical need to 'retire' from the line of work he had been doing. He is helped by his father who only lives a few minutes away in the same small town. Following a number of visits to the continent they have built up a wide variety of cacti, succulents and mesembs. It is very pleasing to see a much younger person entering into the nursery business because there have been and will continue to be many closures of existing nurseries as their owners find the occupation too taxing on their funds and ability to continue to look after such ventures.

There was plenty of choice for all who visited this greenhouse and plenty of money exchanged hands that afternoon. This was an exciting visit and I am sure that the nursery will thrive and grow as the years go by. As they say 'Rome was not built in a day' and Craig will learn from experience what people will buy. He certainly has a good contact on the continent and his name will spread round the country. He is already receiving invitations to visit events in the further corners of Britain and all who went to his greenhouse offer him their congratulations on his ventures.

So it was time to return across the Pennines with cars full of purchases and many weary travelers. As we passed in to west Yorkshire it became apparent that we had been lucky to enjoy so much sunshine. The lowering clouds and increased wind made it obvious that Manchester had not had such a sunny day as we had been blessed with. So we reach the end of this Manchester trip and though we could not have filled a 53 seater coach all who went feel it was very enjoyable and should be repeated next year with another visit somewhere.



Some of the intrepid travelers in Rob's front garden



A view of the gardens at the Alpine Nursery

Hot off the press: one of Rob's Agaves in his front garden has produced a flower.

NORTHWEST MESEMB SHOW

**ENTRANCE FEE £3 WHICH INCLUDES THE TALK AT
2PM ENTITLED "MESEMBS IN OCTOBER"
THIS TALK IS GIVEN BY THE JUDGE
JOHN WATMOUGH**

**Saturday October 10th
Hot and Cold food till 1.30pm**



Doors open at 10.30am. Viewing is allowed during the judging which begins at 11am. You are just asked to keep clear of the class being judged.

Plant sales by Gordon Foster, William's Cactus, Anthony Clark, Tony Irons, Branch members, Harry Mays; pots for sale by Philip Barker.