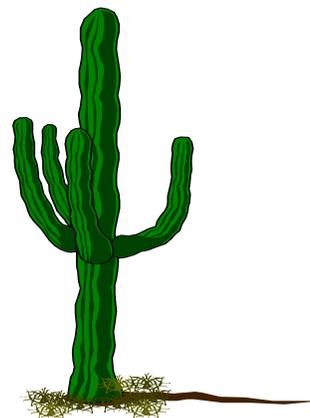


Oxotica

The Newsletter of the Oxford Branch of the
British Cactus and Succulent Society

December 1997

Volume 2, Number 2



FROM THE CHAIRMAN.....

.....Please read this even if you normally discard this newsletter unread!.....

At least once every three years the Oxford Branch of the BCSS has a new Chairman: I am proud and honoured to have been elected to that post at the AGM in November.

Over the next year or so, it is my intention that the Branch Committee will conduct a detailed review of all Branch activities. This process will commence at the next Committee meeting in February. If there are any matters you would like us to discuss, or if you have any comments pertinent to any aspect of the Branch and its activities, we would value these greatly. Comments from members who rarely or never attend our meetings will be as welcome as those from regular participants in our activities.

Of a membership (on paper) of about 60, we have seen about 22 at our monthly meetings during the past year, and perhaps half a dozen others at the Branch show. *Are we providing you with what you want?* Even if you have no interest in the activities of the Oxford Branch we would be pleased to hear from you, even if only to know that you are not dissatisfied with us! If there are any problems which prevent you from enjoying our programme as you might wish - difficulties with travel, or time and place of meetings etc., please let us know; this information will help us plan for the future, and we **may** be able to do something constructive.

I will be pleased to receive any comments at:

40, Northfield Road,
Headington,
Oxford,
OX3 9EW,

or on 01865 766891, or they can be conveyed to any other
Committee member, if you prefer.

Ray Pearce.



Branch plant sales by Cok and Gillian

The Branch Annual Show - 1

Oxford Branch Show, Langdale Hall, Witney 24 August 1997 - 16 exhibitors attended from Birmingham, Bristol, Harrow and Woking in addition to 10 Branch members. There were 357 entries and 538 plants on the staging (not counting the thematic displays).

The main honours on the day went to our Chairman John Watmough with 95 points winning him the Ginns Medal. His main competitor was Len Evans (Birmingham) 80 points. Other high scoring exhibitors were John Warwick, Bill and Cathy Darbon, Brian Conway and our Zone Representative Stan Griffin. The Best Cactus award went to Stan for his *Mammillaria petterssonii* and The Best Succulent award was won by Gill Evison for *Pseudolithos migiurtinus*.

A special vote of thanks goes to the catering staff in the kitchen. May I also thank those exhibitors and visitors who attended the show to make it such an enjoyable day.

Bill Darbon - Show Secretary.

The Branch Annual Show - 2

Well, it was the bank holiday weekend and if you decided not to go with the other

lemmings to Brighton or Southend or somewhere similar, because of - yes! - the British weather, you would have been rewarded with a visit to the Oxford Branch Show at Langdale Hall, Witney on the 24th.

As you entered the hall you received a cheery greeting and a waft of bacon from the kitchen. It was difficult to decide what to do first - a refreshing cuppa, or visit the plants sales for the choice goodie, or admire some of the superb plants on the show bench. But what language was the judge talking!

Well hunger and thirst prevailed - a warming cuppa and a bacon butty would give me the energy to continue. The show plants would be there all day anyway; it's better to look round after judging and perhaps consider the decision, if you know what you're looking at. So a venture to the sales table - but which one? Branch sales plants, various succulents and a variety of cacti; checking my financial reserves I decided on four plants from Hayden Hill Nursery.

Now for the show itself - had they finished the judging? Well anyway did it really matter? My goodness! was it lunch time? Well back to the kitchen for a quick sandwich or salad and perhaps a small beer from the bar.

Now really must see the show plants to compare them with mine at home. Every class seemed to be well entered and the plants were in excellent condition, but perhaps next year I might bring some along to have a go. There's always the novice section. My time had expired, it was time to gather my purchases and venture home, but not before trying my luck on the raffle; a thoroughly enjoyable day.

A Visitor

The Open Classes attract interest



The new thematic class



The trade sales area - wozzat there?



ABINGDON & DISTRICT BRANCH

Alan Ilott, who has just done us the honour of accepting the Presidency of our Branch, joined the Society as a member of the Abingdon Branch late in 1957 (Membership No. 9505) and kept his newsletters.

From these we learn (Issue 13, Jan. 1958) ("now that we are definitely on our own") that the Branch had recently been formed. Issue 58, Nov. 1961 states that the newsletter started 5 years previously under F Cullen. The Chairman when Alan joined was Alf Bruton "our founder", but he emigrated to Tiree in March 1958 and handed over to Mike Blakeston. A Walker was Secretary and F Cullen Treasurer.

The monthly newsletter was vital, because there was no regular meeting place. In January 1958 24 members crammed into Abingdon Magistrates' Room. Sometimes meetings were in Fitzharry's Common Room ("too far from the town centre"), sometimes in St Nicholas Church annexe (now demolished).

In 1957 there had been a joint show with Oxford Aquaria Society; in 1959 they held their own in the Congregational hall opposite the cinema. The branch used to subsidise junior subscriptions. In 1959 Mike Blakeston left the area and Dr Clarence Hardy became Chairman from then on. Members were encouraged to bring their friends, and Oxford members visited also, so that 39 people attended the October 1961 talk on Euphorbias. Note that Abingdon only had a population of 20,000 in those days. We are getting sometimes only 12 or 15 attending out of a catchment area of 500,000. Alan Ilott appears as Auditor in Nov. 1961, with Mr K F Bainton as Secretary.

But by 1963 Mr Bainton stood down as Secretary, and the AGM in December

discussed the continuing future of the Branch. There had been no AGM the previous year. Mr A A Stevens took over as Secretary, and Dr Hardy, the Chairman, took over the newsletter from Mr Cullen, the Treasurer. It was a national rule that a Branch had to have at least 16 members; Abingdon then had 18 but only 12 attended meetings. It was agreed that meetings should be bi-monthly, with the newsletter corresponding.

In 1964 the newsletter featured a remarkable crossword with truncated answers and mealybugs in some squares. In June a visiting non-member won the Table Show judging competition. By October the membership had dropped to 16, and Dr Hardy announced that he would be resigning during the following year to take up a temporary assignment in Tennessee. He warned (could a present day chairman?) "Any member not attending (the AGM) and not sending an apology will be deemed to have no further interest in the Branch."

There follows a gap in the Abingdon newsletters. Coincidentally Alan starts to receive the Oxford newsletters at that point.

In September 1966 Mr F Cullen, now Chairman, announces that Dr Hardy is returning in October. Hardly had his plane landed than the AGM is held in his house, and he is once again Chairman and Newsletter Editor. Mr Cullen moves to Secretary, and Alan is Treasurer. Was Alan already Treasurer? What happened to Mr Stevens? We learn that seventeen members attended the Branch Christmas dinner.

1967 was the Society's best year when 1109 new members joined and the NCSS recorded over 5000 members. Gordon Rowley came to Abingdon in March, and

Dr Mortimer from Cardiff - then the National Chairman - visited the Branch in September. That was the year when John Mullard of Oxford Branch became National Secretary.

Even so, by early 1968 poor attendance was again noted. Dr Hardy instituted three-page monthly newsletters. The first table show since 1964 was held, but attendance was very poor. Dr Hardy and Mr Cullen wanted to resign at the AGM in November, but only seventeen members turned up, including Alan and Joyce Ilott. In 1967 Mr Tonak, who had supported the Branch for years both in person and financially from his nursery in Chiselhampton, died, and in 1970 his widow closed the business.

Gordon Rowley in 1969 and Keith Mortimer in 1970 got good receptions, but there was a "terrible attendance" for Clive Innes in July 1970. Ominously, the future of the Branch came up for discussion at the 1970 AGM, with Dr Hardy complaining about the fact that "a hard core of six" did all the work and a "paper membership" of sixteen didn't even bother to turn up for famous speakers.

The last newsletter, dated December 1970, indicates that the same officers were re-elected. However, Dr Hardy resigned to take up a post with the Australian Atomic Energy Commission. Curiously, the Oxford Branch newsletter provides few clues as to what happened. In June 1973 we read: "The Society have kindly donated the Abingdon Branch trophies to us. Several of the members agreed that it would be nice if we called one the 'Abingdon Cup'".

Can any reader provide any more information about the beginnings of the Abingdon Branch or its demise?

John Watmough

Antidote to Euphorbia latex

When I was setting up my display at the show, I got some latex from Euphorbia tirucalli on my arm. I wiped it off with some paper and forgot about it ...until the evening when my arm began to feel very sore.

I remembered reading in the Euphorbia Journal that the juice of *Aeonium lindleyi* was said to be an antidote to Euphorbia sap. I had acquired a plant for just such an occasion and immediately rubbed some on - just as one does with a dock leaf on nettle stings. At once it took away the pain and I had no further ill effects - more than can be said for dock leaves!

From this experience I would recommend all Euphorbia growers to keep a plant of *Aeonium lindleyi* to hand.

Mary Stone

Cold - induced germination

Don't know about you folks, but I've never had any success trying to germinate *Maihuenia* seeds in the 'conventional' way (spring/summer warmth and moisture). However, here's a way to do it, using the cold of winter.

Soak the pot of soil that the seeds are in, pop it into a plastic bag, and put it in the garden shed for the winter (or anywhere else safe, where the frosts can get at it). Check the bag occasionally, from March onwards (I move it to be under the greenhouse staging about then) and by April they should have germinated like mustard and cress.

Might work for seed of other high-altitude or high latitude plants.

Prickly Pear

Southern California



Giant Yucca, Mojave Desert

A two-week touring vacation by car, prior to the '97 CSSA Convention, gave us the opportunity to see some fat plants in the wild. We flew into San Diego - staying just one night - and set off to Palm Springs via the **Anza-Borrego** national park. The latter is a famed place for cacti and agaves, but by inadvertently going on the less-interesting road through, and because we had to make good time on a long day's drive, we hardly got to grips with it. There was one interesting gorge on the way in, lined with red-spined *Ferocactus acanthodes*, but otherwise we crossed a dead flat plain of low, jointed-stemmed *Opuntia* bushes (cholla), creosote bushes and other desert flora.

I greatly enjoyed, however, a one-day trip out from Palm Springs to the **Joshua Tree National Monument**. At somewhat higher altitude than the city and therefore escaping its 105F dry heat, this was a varied park just as interesting for the strange boulder formations as for the xerophytes. Approaching the entrance at Twenty Nine Palms, I spotted a nursery with the roadside notice "DIG YOUR OWN CACTUS"!

The Joshua is actually *Yucca brevifolia*, a very slow-growing and distinctive tree. A trail on foot during the afternoon led to my excited discovery of clumps of *Echinocereus* and *Mammillaria*, and a coyote taking the shade at the roadside. Driving down to lower levels, just below a point which they had felt important enough to signpost 'Point of Transition between High Desert and Low Desert', we came upon a remarkable sight, a few acres of densely-packed Teddy-bear cholla (*Opuntia bigelovii*). This had a walking trail through it, and we stopped to take photos among thousands of the plants with their golden spines luminous in the sunlight. *Opuntia ramosissima* was also abundant there.

We saw no new succulents after that day, despite going halfway up the State and back, but we were not seriously hunting. If we were, we might have found up to about 20 other *Opuntia* species, possibly even including the highly desirable *O. pulchella* over near the Nevada border.

Benson tells us that California is otherwise rather low in numbers of cactus species. There are only two ceroids - the Saguaro, *Carnegiea gigantea*, only just strays across the border from Arizona at one spot, and the sprawling *Bergerocactus emoryi* just makes it north of the Mexican border to the San Diego City shoreline and a couple of off-shore islands.

Similarly, there are only two *Echinocerei* - *engelmannii* and *triglochidiatus*, three *Mammillarias* - *dioica*, *microcarpa* and *tetrancistra*, and two *Ferocacti* - *acanthodes* (=cylindraceus) and *viridescens*. The remaining genera have only one species each represented in the State - *Echinocactus polycephalus*, *Sclerocactus polyanctistrus*, *Neolloydia johnsonii* and *Coryphantha vivipara*.

There are 'other succulents' of course, and this trip was my initiation into the world of the beautiful *Dudlias* - but more of that another time.

David Greenaway

SPEAKERS, January - June 1998

22 January

*Dr Ray Pearce***Evolution of a hobby**

Our new Chairman Ray Pearce will entertain us with his new 3D presentation 'Evolution of a Hobby'. Those of you who have seen Ray's original lecture in 3D will know what an enjoyable evening this will be. Ray came to us from Birmingham Branch many moons ago now, and in addition was a member of the Council of the GB Society before amalgamation. In 1997 he qualified as a judge for cacti.

26 February

*Sonia Barker-Fricker***Growing and showing Pediocactus and Sclerocactus**

We welcome Sonia Barker-Fricker to our February meeting, and she will impart her vast knowledge on the Growing and Showing of Pediocactus and Sclerocactus. She has been a qualified judge for many years, and is no stranger to Oxford Branch. It will be very interesting to find out what we should be doing with these two genera to get them into the condition that I have seen on the show bench exhibited by Sonia.

26 March

*Ian Thwaites***Madagascar Part 2**

Ian Thwaites returns to give us the second part of his Madagascar lecture. Those of you who saw the first part in 1996, will, I am sure, welcome him back - animal impersonations as well.

23 April

*Ken Scales***Mammillarias**

I suspect that this will be a new name for many of you, although when you meet him I'm equally sure you will *know the face*, as he has attended our Southern Area Shows at Kidlington. Ken is Zone 10

representative, and spends much of his retirement travelling America and Europe with David Rushforth. His main interest in the hobby is Mammillaria and Allied genera, so we will be in for a very well informed lecture.

28 May

*Tom Jenkins***Forty years through the hobby**

We welcome our new Society Chairman to the May meeting, and I'm sure that he needs no introduction to most of you. Tom will be taking us on a sentimental trip through his forty years as a grower and nurseryman.

25 June

*David Minnion***Cacti and Succulents on Stamps**

David Minnion has been to our branch on numerous occasions in the past, but not in recent years. On this occasion he will be speaking about another hobby which becomes entwined in ours - cacti and succulents on Stamps. Something different for, hopefully, a warm summer evening.

Cathy Darbon

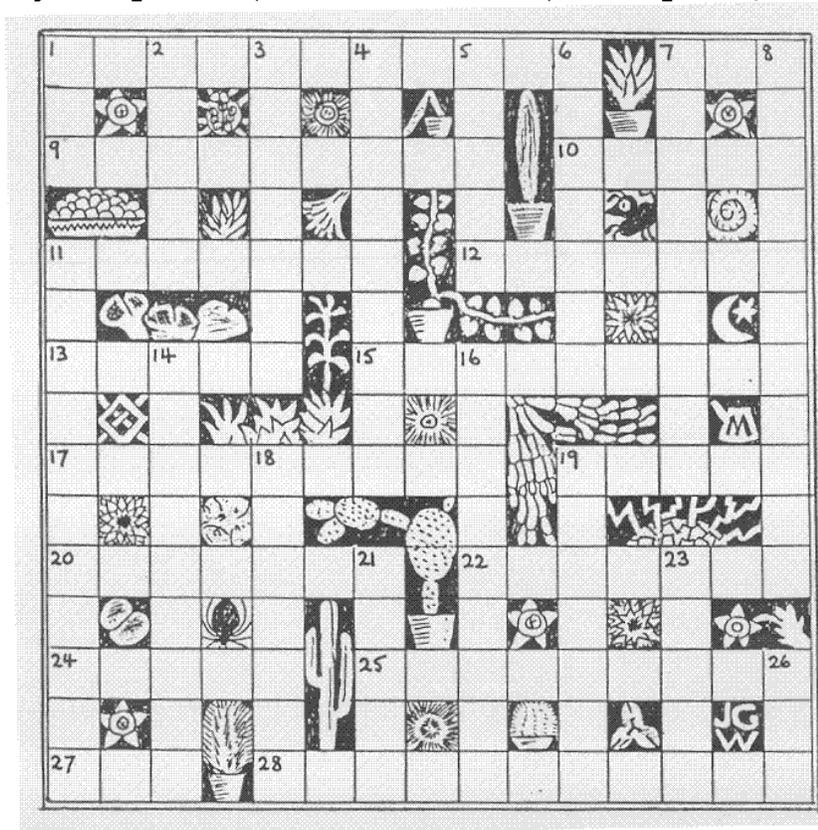
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The Branch meets at 7.30 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the John Bunyon Baptist Chapel, Cromwell Road, Cowley, Oxford.

Chairman:	Ray Pearce	01865 766891
Vice-Chairman:	Mary Stone	01865 774268
Secretary:	Kathy Darbon	01993 881926
Treasurer:	Steve Williams	01367 718944
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	David Greenaway	01235 762761
	John Warwick	01235 848399
	John Watmough	01865 772709

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And finally - try this puzzle (answers next time). Compiler: John Watmough



ACROSS

- 1 Showy mesemb. genus (11)
 7 Vessel or container (3)
 9 Navelwort (9)
 10 Sign of the zodiac (5)
 11 Long cylindrical cushion (7)
 12 A state of Mexico (7)
 13 Currants (5)
 15 Mesemb. plants with unequal leaf pairs (9)
 17 Dark spot on surface of Conophytum (9)
 19 Easiest way to get to La Oroya (5)
 20 Unbeliever (7)
 22 Country and mesemb. genus (7)
 24 Offer inducements (5)
 25 Adherence to the straight and narrow (9)
 27 Found on both East and West of 4 down (3)
 28 Parent of many epicacti (11)

DOWN

- 1 Missionary and plant hunter (3)
 2 Steve Hammer's name for Steven Brack (5)
 3 Tells a story, or demonstrates a connection (7)
 4 Country where most cacti are epiphytes (9)
 5 Tubes for watering (5)
 6 Flat dry terrain (7)
 7 Asclepiad genus recently reduced (9)
 8 Huge cactus that nobody grows (11)
 11 Genus of S. American cacti (11)
 14 Hawaiian caudiciform (9)
 16 Concerning the study of plants (9)
 18 Colleague of Rose (7)
 19 City in South of Tamaulipas (7)
 21 Small pest (5)
 23 Typical vegetation of 6 down (5)
 26 Juan Peron's first wife (3)