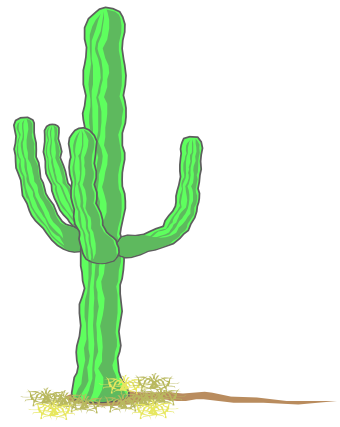


# Oxotica

The bi-annual newsletter of the Oxford Branch of the  
British Cactus and Succulent Society

December 2019

Volume 24, Number 2



## CHAIRMAN'S AGM REPORT

Well folks, it's the end of another year of enjoying our plants - in whatever way we grow them. Our branch has had a very active year, the culmination being the wonderful show at Grove in July; thanks to Gillian we can all re live the day with her pictures on the Branch web site.



Successful plants sales at various events throughout the year have pleased the Treasurer, and we met a lot of interested members of the public. The main event was the three-day display and sales at The Blenheim Palace Flower Show in June. Members have also been spreading the word at a number of Local Horticultural Groups. I myself have been busy attending various events home and abroad, flying the Oxford flag.

My particular thanks to all the other members of our committee for their continued support and YOU of course for making all our efforts worth while by your continued support in all that we do. We are always looking for new folk to join the committee to bring us some new ideas.

Our Branch meetings continue to bring a variety of speakers so I hope that you have all enjoyed their presentations, from a trip to Mexico, gymnocalyciums in the flesh (it's always good to see real plants!!), ferocacti and Crassulaceae. I hope that the programme we have arranged for next year will bring something of interest to you: DON'T forget to let us know if you have a particular subject you want and we will try and accommodate it in the programme. It has been good to see some NEW faces at meetings and visitors from other branches to swell our numbers.

We are looking forward to 2020, the pinnacle event being the National Show in July at Milton Keynes, a must for the diary, so look out for details in the Cactus World journal - date is 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Hope you all have a great Festive Season and here's to Next Year.

Good growing,

*Bill Darbon*

## BRIAN CONWAY

18<sup>th</sup> August 1934 to 27<sup>th</sup> September 2019



Brian was a man of many facets and many surprises. He was Oxonian through and through, yet he spoke with a Bristol accent. He joined the NCSS well before the rest of us in the Branch, but his membership number was 24690, by no means the lowest number. His father was a master baker, and the young Brian was sent on his own by rail during the war to guard and deliver cakes that his father had made to order for persons to whom the rationing rules did not seem to apply. He was something of a school refuser, chiefly because he did not see the point of learning Latin, so he trained his powers of observation instead by watching the otters in Cutteslowe Brook. Maybe that is why he was sent to Bristol to live with an aunt. Naturally, he fell in love with our plants soon after leaving school, only to find that they were named in his despised Latin.

National Service in the RAF took Brian to Stornaway, whence he would, when he

could, make the laborious journey to Glasgow to attend Branch meetings. The RAF taught him his trade of electrician, which is how he earned his living for most of his life working for Oxford's car industry in its various aliases. He must have been 22 years old when he married Margaret. They would have had periods of separation, because he worked for some years as a merchant seaman. The hiatus in his NCSS membership dates from this period. In later years he proved to have personal knowledge of most countries of the world where succulents grow, providing that they had a sea-coast. For example, he told me that the biggest *Edithcolea grandis* that he had ever seen grew on the municipal rubbish dump in Mombasa. How did Brian know this exotic but hardly romantic location? It was on the path between the docks and the sailors' favourite bar, bypassing the official route through Immigration. He learned some Spanish in Cuba, where a grounding in Latin might have been useful. He was feted in Galveston, Texas, because British seamen had worked selflessly to extinguish the Great Fire when the local *pompiers* had made themselves scarce.

Once established in Oxford, Brian helped to set up and run the British Leyland Garden Club, and he regularly took crates of succulent plants to work to exhibit and sell. He was the most loyal and hard-working of all the NCSS (after 1982 the BCSS) Branch members. He would make it his business to greet and welcome newcomers and visitors. As a Committee member, he would organise coach trips, and he would invariably help at all the public events that the Branch was involved in. During his three-year stint as Branch Chairman, he made a point of visiting every member who was officially on our books, even though most of them rarely or never attended meetings. His work was recognised by the BCSS Award of Merit.

Brian was a regular on the continental coach trips of his day. For years he went on the Scottish trips, as well as on Warren Withers' Coventry trips, including some of the most

notorious ones that are still the stuff of legend to this day. Naturally he went on the Waltham Forest Cactus Crawls, which is how your correspondent got involved. He invariably attended the Northern Weekends, which required a drive to Preston and then some. Furthermore, he would help Brian Goodey to man his stall at Chelsea Flower Show. This leads into a good story, which must be retold here. On alternate years Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens would set up a stall at Chelsea. They were not allowed to bring in rooted plants, so they brought in unrooted succulent material to ornament their display. One year, Brian gathered up this unrooted material after the Show and brought it back to Oxford in a black bin bag. But he did not disembark from the Oxford Bus at Headington, a short walk from his home. He changed buses, called at my house, and emptied the contents of his bin bag on my kitchen floor. My wife jumped up and down incandescent with rage.

“Why couldn't you have emptied your rubbish on your own kitchen floor?”

Plaintively: “Margaret wouldn't like it.”

The good part of the story is that between us we potted up and rooted this material and sold it for the benefit of the Aloe Suzannae Project, a Kirstenbosch plan to replant this endangered species in its native Madagascar.

Brian and I collaborated in rescuing collections and preparing them for resale, for Branch funds. On one occasion the owner was emigrating. How long have we got? “My plane leaves tomorrow.” That was several trips for two cars. Another time, a member of another Branch, who had fallen out with his Branch management, asked us to take his plants on condition that we did not mention their source. Once I had become a recognised travelling speaker for the BCSS, Brian and I would often travel together and share the driving. His chief interest lay in meeting other growers and discussing plants. He was honest enough, and a close enough friend, to feel free to tell me when I was boring or otherwise unsatisfactory.

It should be evident, even to those who knew him less well, that Brian was one of the kindest and most generous of men, as well as one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the hobby. Even so, he occasionally made a humorous *faux pas*. My favourite was the time when he was trying to save the coach driver the trouble of clearing our coach of refuse. In the process, he threw Alan Rollason's lunch in the hotel skip. Since Alan's lunch consisted of cakes made of trans fats with lurid colouring, I could not help observing that Brian had done him a favour, medically speaking. Alan's rage was so picturesque that I laughed for years at the memory of it.

The Branch celebrated Brian and Margaret's sixtieth wedding anniversary with a card signed by members and a bottle of champagne. We were honoured to find our card on the Conway mantelpiece accompanied by a card of similar size bearing a signed portrait of H.M. The Queen. It is a trite saying in obituaries that the deceased “will be sorely missed”. Brian did manage to survive to the age of eighty-five having had a triple bypass for thirty years. He was a keen supporter of the Oxford Air Ambulance and of the Friends of the John Radcliffe Hospital. The good that he did lives on, and I am grateful for his memory and his example.

*John Watmough*

**BRANCH MEETINGS  
JANUARY-NOVEMBER 2020**

***4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in month, 7:30 pm for 8:00 pm  
Please bring plants for the Table Show if you  
can - each of these meetings except January  
and November***

***We are always open to suggestions for the  
programme so if there is someone or something  
that you would like us to arrange please speak to  
one of the committee.***

DIGITAL PROGRAMME 23<sup>rd</sup> January - David Hartnell's flowers

We are lucky that the BCSS Digital Programmes Librarian, David Greenaway, is one of our Branch members; along with other folk in the Society he has been involved in the digitisation of some of the BCSS collection of slides. He has picked one of the newer sets to give this presentation, a programme created from images taken by David Hartnell that he calls "Flowers in my Greenhouse"

LES PEARCY 27<sup>th</sup> February - Succulents on Stamps

Les has not visited our branch before. He is a fellow committee member of The Haworthia Society where he looks after the seed list. He is an avid propagator and hybridizes some of his own plants. He comes from Matlock, is a member of Nottingham Branch, and has a background in the teaching profession. He has a wide interest in succulent plants and tonight will be showing us plants, not in the flesh but those issued on various philatelic publications. I am sure that you will be surprised by what's in store.

MARK PRESTON 26<sup>th</sup> March – Epiphytes, Christmas & Easter Cacti

Mark is not seen around the Branches often. One might say that he is a specialist in his field as not many people grow these types of plants. He gave a fascinating talk on a similar subject at the Showing & Judging weekend, on just how difficult they are to transport. It will not be just the ones that we see at Christmas; there are many more varieties so I think that we will be in for a very interesting and informative evening.

VICKY DAVIES 23<sup>rd</sup> April - Growing cacti from seed

Vicky is a qualified horticulturist and together with Chris they have attended our shows to sell the products of their propagations, as C & V Cacti. There is always something unusual to be found amongst their sales trays so perhaps tonight she may reveal some of their secrets as to how to tempt those seeds into mature plants. You may even be able to have a go yourselves.

JOHN HUGHES 28<sup>th</sup> May - Echeverias

John is a retired forensic pharmacologist and is well known in the RHS where he is engaged in Judging shows and displays. He gave a very informative talk on this subject at the Showing & Judging weekend last August. Tonight's talk will focus on one of his favourite groups of plants, so I am sure that we will pick up some cultivation tips on how to get the best plants for showing.

MEMBERS' EVENING 25<sup>th</sup> June

Tonight is your chance to bring along any problems or even some of your favourite plants to talk about. This will be an open forum with perhaps a "Brains Trust" panel to discuss any subject that you wish to. Don't be SHY or be put off: do come along and make it a FUN and informative evening.

GEOFF BOWMAN 23<sup>rd</sup> July - Plants I have seen with my camera

Geoff is a member of our neighbours at Gloucester Branch. You may know the name from publications and photographs of his vast collection of Agaves, some of which have taken off the roof of his large greenhouse. Tonight we will be following him behind his camera on a journey of plants that he has seen and some which he has cultivated to very large specimens.

KATHY FLANAGAN 27<sup>th</sup> August - Sulcorebutias

Kathy and her husband Keith are our friends from the Reading Branch and have visited us before, when they spoke on Agaves. They have a wonderful mixed collection of plants. They are members of The Mammillaria Society where they have recently taken over distribution of seeds, and where Kathy is the membership secretary. Tonight's talk will be on one of their other favourite group of plants - watch out for some wonderful flowers.

STUART RILEY 24<sup>th</sup> September - New and Collectables in the Haworthia world

Stuart is well known as the purveyor of plants from his nursery Plant Life. He will be at our show in August to tempt us with his display of plants. Tonight he will talk about some of the newer plants and species that have become available and that he has seen in propagation, particularly in America and the Far East.

ALICE VANDEN BON 22<sup>nd</sup> October - Mesembs in habitat

Alice is secretary of our neighbours at Reading and does a lot of publication layout work for the BCSS Journal Cactus World. She has travelled to South Africa on a number of occasions to look for and photograph some of her favourite plants. I am sure that we will enjoy her presentation, and it may bring back some memories from a trip I made in 2016.

A.G.M. & SOCIAL 26<sup>th</sup> November

Your chance to have your say and enjoy a Social evening.

*Bill Darbon*

### Oxotica

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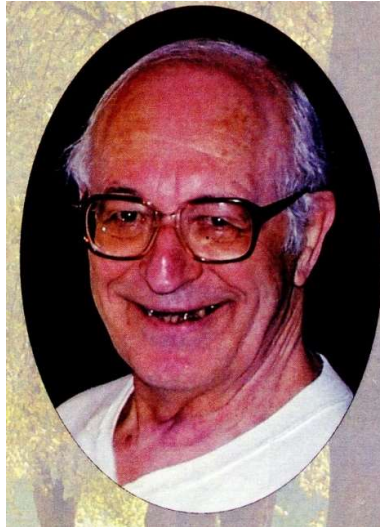
**The Branch meets 7.30pm for 8pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.**

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**GORDON ROWLEY**  
**31<sup>st</sup> January 1921 to 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019**  
**Some personal reminiscences**



Gordon's influence on our hobby has been so great that a considerable number of people will have been able to write a more copious and more exhaustive tribute than this one. However, Gordon outlived a lot of them. This is just one person's necessarily minor contribution, though it should chime with other people's reminiscences

When I joined the NCSS, Gordon was already sixty years old. The bible for beginners was his *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Succulents* (1978), about which he was self-deprecating in his later years. Wrongly so, though. The book is not divided into "Cacti" and "Succulents" as used to be the convention; it treated all plant families as being of equal value. This was very exciting for a new bug with a seed list. Botanical terms were explained with illustrations: "A raceme of racemes is a panicle; a raceme of cymes is a thyrse". When the eagerly awaited Journal landed on the doormat, I first turned to "Rowley Reporting", for in it Gordon would introduce important figures and the discoveries and controversies with which they were associated with such skill that even beginners could feel that they were included in the mysteries of succulent botany.

I first encountered Gordon in the flesh, as it were, at the 1990 Reading Convention, where he took the delegates on a tour of the facilities at the University and introduced us to *Brighamia insignis*, a Hawaiian endemic member of the Campanulaceae that has the distinction that its only pollinator is students. (Its original pollinator, a moth, was made extinct by a volcanic event). Many books followed. Each one is a work of art, and each one filled a gap that only Gordon had the knowledge to fill. His *Succulent Compositae* is still the only book on the subject. His *A History of Succulent Plants* is a great piece of literature in its own right, and one

that nobody else could have even imagined. I bought my copy at a BCSS Convention and missed my lunch because I got enthralled by it. I complained to Gordon, who was present, that he had made me miss my lunch, but he was not impressed.

Gordon's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party, in 2001, organised by Reading and Basingstoke Branch, was a splendid tribute to the great man. A central feature was a gigantic cake with green icing that was large enough for the assembled multitude each to have a piece. Gordon did not slow down with age. He served the Society as President for many years, and it was worth going to the AGMs just to hear his Presidential Address. As first Editor of *Bradleya* he set the standards that subsequent editors have been obliged to maintain, as well as the editors of similar yearbooks in other countries. I am not sure how it happened, but I managed to wangle an invitation to Cactusville in 2006, and was, like all other visitors, astonished. He showed me with justifiable pride round his unsurpassed library. His greenhouses were laid out rather eccentrically. Plants that related to his earlier books were confined to the back of the shelves; more recent books in the centre; and the book that he was working on had its relevant plants at the front. There was evidence of experimentation, too. There was a single cactus grafted with all the species of the *Didiereaceae*, just to prove that it was possible. There was a sort of green woman made out of a thick piece of *Senecio kleinia* stock grafted with strands of Gordon's own hybrid 'Hippogriff' representing hair. I came away with pieces of type locality or clonotype plants pressed on me.

In the living room there was an almost life-size model of the London Eye, electrically powered, with teddy bears in the gondolas. To tell the truth, Gordon remained a super-intelligent and inquisitive little boy all his life. In his house he had a shrine to the Marx Brothers with videos of all their films plus every book that had ever been written by them or about them. There was a similar shrine to David Attenborough, another genius of the art of presentation. The Goons were a special favourite. Subsequently I used to compile sheets of misprints and other infelicities culled from the Oxford Mail in particular (such as the John Radcliffe Hospital's green roof covered in sebum) and send them to him. In reply he sent me copies of his little books of poems and recipes, which are to be found in the custody of the Branch Librarian in the Branch scrapbook. He characteristically overdid the generosity by giving me a complimentary copy of the superlative *Succulents in Cultivation – Breeding New Cultivars* (published at the age of 96!) in token of the miniscule contribution that I had made towards it.

There will never be another like him, so fortunately his legacy will last through his writings, his wonderful library, and the encouragement that he gave to so many of us. He was very kind and reassuring when I found myself in the embarrassing position of giving a lecture with him in the audience at Reading Branch. I particularly treasure this piece of advice: “If you are going to spend your life doing something, it has got to be *fun*”.

*John Watmough*

## PERESKIAS

By David Greenaway

I brought some *Pereskia* plants to one of our branch meetings this year and some people did not know what they were, not even that they were cacti. Perhaps this is partly because we do not see them at plant sales or on the show bench, but mainly because they do not look like succulent plants at all. So I thought I might write something about them. I did some research and, of course, found a lot that I did not know either.

The genus name honours Nicholas Claude Fabre de Peiresc (1580-1637), French naturalist and archaeologist. The plants occur as trees, shrubs and woody climbers. They are cacti with spine and leaf-producing areoles. The branches are not conspicuously succulent, and the leaves are broad, flat, and not or only slightly succulent. They are the least cactus-like of all the modern cactus genera, and one of the most, if not the most, ancient. They are drought-resistant, with primarily C3 photosynthesis in the leaves (in common with most green plants) and weak CAM cycling in the stems (CAM is primarily found in succulent plants).

There are two basal clades (branches in the phylogenetic tree) of *Pereskia* - a northern clade of eight species around the Caribbean, now placed in a separate subgenus *Leuenbergeria* (named after the author of the monograph of 1986), and a clade of nine species south of the Amazon basin.

The northern clade consists of members lacking the basic cactus characteristic of stem stomata and delayed bark formation; it may be considered a sister to the rest of the cacti. The southern species are more closely related to the core cacti (the Opuntioideae, *Maihuenia* and Cactioideae lineages).

My three species are:

*P. violacea*

formerly a subspecies of *P. grandifolia* (see Nigel Taylor in *Bradleya* 18)

Distribution: Espirito Santo and Minas Gerais, southern Brazil.

Uses: it is cultivated in many places elsewhere for its attractive rose-like flowers, the most common usage being as hedges.

I find it to be very free-flowering.





*Pereskia violacea* cuttings

The cuttings were rooted in water first.

*P. sacharosa*

Distribution: Valleys of the Andes and in the Gran Chaco region of Brazil including the Mato Grosso region, Bolivia, Paraguay and north-west Argentina.

I have a relatively small plant of this. It strictly observes a dormant period, with complete leaf-fall, from December to late March.

*P. aculeata* 'Godseffiana'

Distribution of the natural species *P. aculeata*: northern, eastern, and south-eastern South America, and Caribbean. Introduced into the United States, Mexico, South Africa and Australia. It is a declared weed in South Africa.

Uses: it is widely cultivated for its edible fruit, which somewhat resembles the gooseberry in appearance and is of excellent flavour (they say).

The leaves of *P. aculeata* are accompanied by a pair of small, persistent, claw-like spines; normal spines occur at areoles on older growth only.

The garden cultivar *Godseffiana* is thought to have originated in Queensland, Australia. In Europe it was first mentioned in 1908. For my description and photograph see our newsletter 'Oxotica' of June 2019. It has never flowered for me.

I gave a plant to a friend of mine, and within a week she had made a painting of it:

~



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*DSG*