

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

March 2014 - 60th Anniversary



Branch Secretary

David Neville
6 Parkville Road
Swaythling
Southampton
Hampshire
SO16 2JA
davnev@btopenworld.com
(023) 80551173 or
07974 191354

Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah
29 Heathlands Road
Eastleigh
Hampshire
SO53 1GU
vvshah@clara.co.uk
(023) 80261989

Editorial	1
Announcements	1
Last Month's Meeting.....	1
Capture The Moment	1
Table Show Results.....	6
Branch Committee Meeting	6
The First 60 Years.....	7
Next Month's Meeting	8
Forthcoming Events.....	8

Editorial

Signs of daffodils (and crocus and snow-drops last month) do suggest spring is here. However as this morning indicated, there is still a chance of frost and low temperatures for a few more weeks. I haven't done anything in the conservatory for a few weeks but any more of these sunny days and I may have to consider watering some of the plants soon.

Announcements

Today's meeting is the first of a series of events to celebrate the Branch's 60th Anniversary. In this newsletter you'll find an article by our President Peter Down which recounts how the branch was formed, and reminisces about some of the people who helped make the branch what it is today.

If you haven't already done so, **renew your BCSS membership** right away – otherwise the dispatch of your first journal for 2014 will be delayed. You can pay online via the BCSS website – visit <http://www.bcss.org.uk/fees.php> for further details.

Our next two meetings will require some participation from the members! April will be our **cultivation workshop**, bring along plants for identification or your problem plants. And if you have Haworthias in flower, bring some in, Bruce will be giving some tips on how to pollinate them. Finally, the branch handed out free plants to members during the last 2 years – do bring them in, so that we can see and compare how they are doing.

In May we will be running a **Minishow**, with 10 classes. There's a leaflet for you on the front table, detailing the classes, but basically we want people to

bring in plants and enter the show, and then everyone will have a go at judging the plants. In the second half of the meeting, a judge will tell us what he would have selected as the best plants.

Finally, there is a sheet on the front table where you should fill in your name if you are interested in going to the Havering Cactus Mart in May. At this stage we are judging the level of interest.

Last Month's Meeting

Capture The Moment

Tom Radford's talk on photographing plants was titled "Capture the Moment". He started by handing out a sheet with two photographs on it - they were of the same plant, but the one on the right had been edited in Photoshop. He asked the audience which one they thought was the best? Most people preferred the plant on the right because it "looked" cleaner. It was a tidied-up version of the picture on the left, with the debris near the base of the plant being edited out. Tom said the original came from the BCSS journal, and he wondered why it hadn't been cleaned up before publication. Paul Klaassen suggested it was down to the person who submitted the photograph; the BCSS journal editor probably wouldn't feel like altering submitted pictures.

Tom mentioned he did not have such a big collection of plants, but he had grown many different things and taken photographs of them over the years. He had thousands of slides and had been converting some of those to digital images. Digital photography has of course revolutionised the way we can take pictures. Now you can take dozens of pictures of a subject and keep the best ones, and even edit them to improve them.

So why do we take photographs? After having spent time growing something and seeing it flower, you may wish to record the event. Photographs help us remember the past. If you're not good at identifying plants, you can take pictures and show them to an expert. Some people give talks and photographs are useful as illustrations. And you can create a decorative object. He prints off pictures and laminates them, to create table mats. They last 6-12

months and you can just make a new set when they wear out.

With modern cameras what could wrong? Surely it's as easy as falling off a log? Well things can and do go wrong. He showed us pictures of an *Ariocarpus retusus*, one out of focus and one in focus. It is important to get this right - if the shot is out of focus, you might as well throw the picture away. Sometimes things can be out of focus in the front and the back and this gives the impression of distance. We saw a collection of plants at a nursery, with the plants in the middle in focus and those at the back blurring into the distance. Tom mentioned that often these days on plays on TV and in films, the person speaking is in focus and the other person is out of focus - this is used for emphasis. Sometimes you can deliberately put things out of focus for a decorative effect.

It isn't simple to get things in focus and Tom used two pictures to illustrate depth of field. These were of a measuring tape, stretching into the distance. The image on the left was taken at f3.3 (large aperture) 1/2000th second, the section between 3-5 inches was in focus and the rest of the marks were blurred. On the right was the same object photographed with f8 and 1/600th second. This time the section from 1 to 7 inches was in focus. This is important when taking close-up pictures of plants - using the settings on the left, you wouldn't be able to get all parts of a 4 inch plant in focus, but using the settings on the right, you would.

Next he showed the effect of exposure time, and we saw two pictures of a snake, both at f3.6, but one taken with the automatic setting of a shutter speed of 1/30th of a second, and the second with a shutter speed of 1/50th second. The first picture was blurred and the second picture was sharp. The longer exposure time of the first shot had fallen prey to camera shake.

Now some examples illustrating exposure. We saw a picture of *Astrophytum myriostigma*, which had a pale yellow flower on a dark green body and with a dark green background. Since the camera had tried to base the exposure time on the overall brightness of the scene, the flower had become overexposed. If you "stop down" the camera and force it to use a shorter exposure, the body and background become a bit darker but the flower is a lot better. The red flower of *Haemanthus coccineus* was used to illustrate another point - colours like red and violet sometimes do not capture correctly and with the camera taken down 1.5 stops, the colours were more intense. Even in country scenes, reducing the exposure can help. He showed two photographs of a

river scene in dark conditions. The first shot was on automatic settings and was overexposed, the 2nd was 1.5 stops down and had much better balance, and you could see the blue colour in the sky and in the reflection in the water, whereas it was washed out in the first. So cameras may be automatic but they sometimes do need assistance.

Tom mentioned that sometimes you see amusing pictures due to perspective, for example notices poking out of people's heads. This was due to the fact that we can see in 3D but the camera can't. He showed an example with a toy Eiffel Tower situated behind a Mammillaria - a shot from the front would have us believe that the tower was growing from the back of the cactus plant. This can have quite an impact when you take photographs. He then proceeded to give the audience an observation test. He would show us 5 pictures of 2 teams of people throwing balls around and said "Tell me how many times the players in the white are holding the ball". He received answers of 4, 2 and 1 - with 2 being correct. He then asked, there was quite a large letter in the background - did anybody spot it? No, but someone did notice that one of the players was in a gorilla suit. What significance is this test? It shows that we don't always see what's there.

Tom proceeded to show examples of this, with a *Ceropegia* where the untidy background was affecting the shot. You tend to see the object in the middle and ignore the surroundings. Another example featured *Conophytum steinkopf*, where the flower drew your eye away from fact that last year's dried skin was still around the bodies. He also finds plant labels can be distracting. When taking pictures, you want to be left with a good memory of the photographed object. Don't hurry or settle for second best when composing the shot - sometimes it might be your one and only chance. Imagine you are going to enter the plant in a show - so don't leave weeds in the pot, and perhaps also clean up the pot.

With cameras, there was no need for expensive equipment. He used a Panasonic Lumix FZ45 and a Nikon Coolpix P6000 and these were both under £200 each. When choosing a camera, rather than a fully automatic point and shoot, you want the camera to feature aperture priority mode, the ability to spot focus and to adjust exposure times. A point and shoot will take reasonable portraits and holiday snaps but you really need more control, especially for the close ups. He also uses a tripod whenever possible, especially when using small apertures or slow shutter speeds. He prefers natural sunlight for lighting and uses a reflector sometimes. Some staging materials come in handy from time to time. Finally a computer and photo editor software will

allow you to clean up your images where needed. The next slide showed some currently-available cameras he recommended. These were the Nikon Coolpix P310, Fuji Finepix F770 and Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ25. All are available for £150 or less.

When projecting onto a screen such as the one in our meeting hall, you don't need a big image - the projector is around 1000 x 800 pixels which is less than 1 megapixel. Mark Jakins said the most critical bit of a camera is the physical glass and most of these pocket digital cameras have small lenses and are just marketed on their megapixels to make them sound impressive. Tom said the advantage of the extra megapixels is that you may be able to crop a part of the picture and still have reasonable detail. One advantage of the small camera lenses is that the glass is very thin and you get less distortion and less colour aberrations. For the bigger lenses on SLRs you have to put more elements together to combat the distortion and you can end up with more colour distortion.

He uses Adobe Photoshop Elements (which costs around £60-£70) to perform his image editing. He uses several features. **Enhance** is used to alter the light balance, alter shadows, improve contrast, increase or decrease brightness. **Cropping** is used where you want to select just part of the original photograph. In this case, when taking the photo, use plenty of room around the main image which you intend to retain. You can square things up and cut out things you don't want. The **Spot healing brush** is used to brush out little spots or blemishes. The **Clone stamp tool** allows you to copy and paste sections to alter the picture as well.

Next, he showed a picture of *Mammillaria carmenae*. The plant was unbalanced, lopsided and also underpotted. By putting it into a different pot and turning the plant round, you can actually take a reasonable photograph. With *Tacitus bellus*, the flower is so bright it tends to take your eye away from what's underneath and the plant itself was a bit tatty. A picture of *Frithia pulchra* taken in the greenhouse had lots of clutter in the background and was overexposed. By taking it outside, removing the weeds and underexposing the shot, you get a much better picture. There were several things wrong with a picture of a *Huernia zebrina* - there was clutter in the background, cobwebs on the plant, scratches on the pot and the flower was underexposed. What he did was take plant out and used staging material to place the plant pot at an angle and get more light into the centre of the flower. He also took the label out, and also cleaned off the cobwebs. You could now see something in the centre of the flower.

Rather than trying to get closer to the plant, you can take a larger scene and then crop the area you want. This gives better results with more of the picture in focus. The pot was still a problem, and there were one or two blemishes on the flower, but these were handled in the photo editor, resulting in a final photo that was a big improvement on the original.

Next was a Christmas cactus, photographed on a bright window sill and hence appearing as a very dark plant with a bright background. Never take picture facing into the light - move it and use a dark background and you get a much nicer picture, which was then cropped to show detail around the flowers. Next was a *Rhipsalis neves-armondii* that he repotted and cut up. Using a nice dark background (a black board) he took various photos. Rather than producing flower buds, this *Rhipsalis* forms yellow patches at the stem tips which burst through the epidermis and turn into flowers. We saw them just about to emerge. The final picture showed the flower. After flowering, a scar is left, but it's hard to tell that this was due to a flower bud.

With a yellow-flowered *Conophytum*, Tom showed how with sun shining from one side, use of a reflective screen helped remove most of the shadows and even out the lighting across the flowers. The effect is quite subtle but it produces an improved picture. A *Stapelia* flowered last summer and there was heavy shading in various places and in the flower. By using a screen, you got a much better view of the colour of the plant and flower. You can see the shadows disappear and a significant improvement in the image.

The lack of 3D effect in a photograph means a flat leaved plant can appear very one dimensional. A *Dorstenia* was in a 4-5 inch pot and it was quite a big plant. Photographed out in the yard, the background was not good at all. Tilting the angle can make a big difference and you can sacrifice some of the flowers to get more of the leaves and caudex. You can of course still take closeups of the flowers. The plant was *Dorstenia ellenbeckiana* and Tom said it grows twice a year. It first grows the flowers, then you water it and it forms the leaves. Then it dies back and you can repeat the whole process 6 months later. *Pelargonium carnosum* is another tricky plant to photograph, with nice flowers but very scrawny. He used a dark background and light coming in from all sides to get a good shot of the flower. *Nerines* also have nice flowers but they have straggly stems which are 2 feet tall and it's difficult to get it all in the picture, so he just concentrated on the flowers.

He photographed *Glottiphyllum nelii* with light and dark backgrounds, to illustrate that plants that have light-coloured flowers tend to look much better against a dark background, and darker flowers can tolerate lighter backgrounds. Even with a dark background, the yellow flowers were overexposed and he had to stop down 1 stop. Now there was a shadow so he had to use a reflective screen and both flowers looked evenly illuminated and the shadow was gone. The flower of *Huernia aspera* was in a bit of a shadow and he lightened the shadows in the flower using Photoshop. This was from a slide he had taken some time ago. While he was editing, he also used the healing tool to remove an aphid (white speck) from the flower.

Over the last two years, His plant of *Leuchtenbergia principis* had flowered well. They really do like a lot of sunshine. His first picture was taken in the greenhouse. He also tried taking pictures outside, but grass is not a good background for plants - it seems to overpower and grow into the plant. He put the plant up against a wall, with a screen behind and tilted the pot using a wedge. *Leuchtenbergia* has an interesting body too. He needed to turn the plant to find its best side. Later on in the year, the plant produced two flowers.

One of the things he saw at an exhibition (a bulb show) was someone's camera kit. They were taking a picture of every plant in the show and setting up each plant on a stand, against a grey background, with light coming in from one side. Most of the bulbs were in relatively small pots, so it was feasible to move them around for photography, but at our shows, some of the larger specimens would pose a problem!

After the break, Tom discussed how to deal with photographing small objects. He had in the past grown quite a lot plants with small complex flowers. With older cameras, there were ways of getting high magnification using combinations of lenses and he had only just started doing that with digital - it is trickier. First, a lesson in optics. Usually the object is a long distance from the lens and the image is formed at the focal point of the lens. The light enters parallel to the lens and is focused down to an image at the back of the camera. When you are taking pictures of small objects, the object has to be very near the camera, perhaps just a few millimetres away, and you have a small object at the front and a large image at the back. Lenses aren't designed for that and the automatic systems can't focus. However, if you use two lenses mounted back to back then you can get around this. He uses an old lens coupled into the front of his Nikon.

We saw *Boucerosia (Caralluma) frerei* taken with a normal lens - the flower is about 1.5cm across - and then with the close up system, to get a magnified view of the centre of the flower. With a white spined *Mammillaria*, you can magnify up a standard image but you start to get blurred images since there aren't enough pixels for a clear image. If you use the back to back lens you get a better image but you do lose depth of focus. If you then crop this, you can get quite clear images of the spines and see the intricate hairs on the areoles, which you would never normally spot. With some flowers, you have to decide whether you want the petals or the centre of the flower in focus. We saw the flowers of *Cynanchum gerrardii* which is a twining plant with small flowers. As an aside, if you are taking pictures for use with a projector, the picture on the computer monitor may look quite clear but as you blow up the image on a large screen, you lose some of the intensity of the colours and it looks overexposed. If you darken the picture, it improves the image quite a bit - that flower is 3-4mm in diameter. *Massonia jasminiflora* is a South african bulb. The plant had been attacked by some sort of animal and there were some holes in the leaf. He used the healing tool to fix the damage to the leaf. The editing program copies the texture from the surrounding area. We again saw a close up of the flower using the close up lenses.

Next we saw seeds of *Notocactus* taken using a standard camera. If you crop that and look at the seeds, there is no really definition to the seed's surface. But with a close up lens, you get to see the real detail. You need to play around with the lighting since the lens is almost touching the objects being photographed. We could see the strange ripple patterns on the surface of the seeds.

The saying goes "never work with children and animals" and the same applies with photography. When you take plants out from the greenhouse, you seem to be swamped with insects. When showing a set of slides, one example of a greenfly may be a talking point, but when all your slides feature them, people will start to wonder. The wretched things fly in, they must smell the plants and come in from the garden. Bright yellow flowers may also have attracted it. The bigger insects like hover flies, you can see and chase away. We saw a ladybird on a stem of the *Cynanchum* - was it after greenfly or after nectar which the plant was secreting? We also saw a kitten next to a large flower of *Edithcolea grandis* - half the audience can look at the flower and the rest at the cat. Taken in Arizona, a cactus wren was sitting in the midst of a very spiny cholla (opuntia) - as a photo it was neither a bird photograph nor a cactus photograph. Ivor said he

was looking for a good picture of a cactus wren for his carving. We saw a hornero bird (in Spanish this means oven). They build nests which look like an oven and put them on top of a cactus or anything that happens to be handy. Some Lear's macaws were sitting on a cereoid cactus. The tops of three of the stems were quite badly damaged from their claws. Tom said this was near a colony of 250 endangered birds in Brazil, there is only one other colony of these birds.

It's not just your own greenhouse where you can have problems - but these multiply when you are out and about in habitat or visiting someone else's greenhouse, since you have little or no control. Another picture taken in Arizona was of a tall *Ferocactus*. It can get overexposed quite easily and this becomes worse when projected on a large screen as they become lighter. Photoshop can easily correct this. He doesn't like shooting plants in portrait if he's going to project them or show them on a TV screen - since most screens are wider than their height, a portrait picture leaves gaps on either side. For a picture in a magazine or something to hang on a wall, then portrait can work quite well.

With a distance shot, he asked if anybody could spot the cactus? A red circle on the next slide indicated the area of interest. His Lumix can do x25 zoom but sometimes the object is just too far away for any detail to be captured. So for this, he uses a telescope in front of the camera. He took photographs from 200 yards away using the telescope. The overall magnification was x100 and this was equivalent to a 1800mm lens on a 35mm camera. We saw some more distance pictures from Bolivia - again with the telescope it was possible to capture a good amount of detail.

The natural environment can be very untidy, and it is not always obvious until after you have taken the picture. A minute or two to clear away debris can make a lot of difference and he illustrated this with a bromeliad's before/after shot. Paul said this was often a source of arguments on trips - some people wanted to tidy up a plant before shooting and others wanted it left as is, for a natural effect. And in some plants are protected by the covering so you should put it back, if you move it away for the photograph. A fence post near some *Heliconia bihai* was ruining the picture, but by moving around, you can get a better picture. A bad leaf was still spoiling the image, but by changing the angle, you could also remove that from the shot. By just carefully choosing and picking the right side you can get a much better view.

Other things can also be intrusive. Someone's garden was full of hummingbird feeders. He got a nice picture of the bird - but the red colour from the feeder becomes oppressive and can even reflect off the bird. You have to wait for the bird to sit in a tree or elsewhere. By using a wide aperture and fading out the background and using some patience, you can get a good picture. A common Tody flycatcher is an angry-looking bird, but he got a nice shot of one on a branch. In Thailand due to the tropical weather, they grow orchids all over the place. He took a picture of a *Cattleya* in flower, but the colour did not come out correctly. After stopping down the lens, the flower colour matched more closely, and there was the added benefit of the background being less conspicuous.

A picture of a nice *Agave victoriae-reginae* had a couple of problems - there were marks on some of the leaves and it was also in a shadow. By altering the brightness/contrast and using the healing tool / stamp tool he was able to improve the image. *Melocactus peruvianus* was growing with grass all around, and he couldn't remove all of it by hand, so had to do the rest on the computer. In another shot, he removed debris from the front, but a nearby stray branch looked like it was quite close to the plant. However, from a different angle he could eliminate it from the picture. Similarly with *Ferocactus wislizenii*, a view from a different angle produced a better picture.

In Kenya, *Desmidorchis acutangula* has large clusters of dark flowers atop green stems. However, a fly over one of the florets was spoiling the picture. Using the stamp tool, you can copy one of the other florets and place it on top of the fly, to eliminate it. You can go further - if you have a nice plant with no flowers, you can stick a few on it, but that is cheating! He found another group of plants with a lot of flowers, and found the best one but one side was in a shadow. He used a sheet of white paper to reflect light and produce a better image, with the flower head lit from all sides.

In Venezuela, he came across a group of several *Notocactus* plants. He cleaned up the image using Photoshop by cropping off other vegetation and replacing it with gravel using the stamp tool. Perhaps he should have gone one better and lined them all up in a straight line! The next picture was of a *Yucca* but it also featured his shadow - he just hadn't noticed. It is tricky to photograph plants when the sun is low. The solution would have been to stand further away and use telephoto mode. Next was a really nice plant of *Adenium obesum*. However, the background was engulfing the plant. He did get a couple of nice pictures of the flowers.

In one instance, the branch was broken but this was tidied up on the computer. The next shot was of a *Mammillaria* grown in a hanging basket in somebody else's greenhouse. The supporting chains were getting in the way and the solution was to take a shot from further back and crop it. For some flowers, you can use an ordinary background and he showed us examples of *Hoya australis*, *Hoya carnososa* and *Hoya longifolia*.

Haemanthus humilis was a plant that gave him a problem because it had a pair of large floppy leaves. He tried supporting the leaves by various means - but then it looked like it is suspended in air. He finally put in a larger pot where the rim supported the leaves and then used top dressing to improve the appearance. At a show he attended, he wanted to take a picture of a *Massonia pustulata*, but all the plant labels on the stand were in the way, and there were also other distractions in the background. In addition there was a little rip in one of the leaves. He took the labels out when no-one was looking to take a picture and then put the labels back. He cropped the resultant picture, cleaned up the debris and repaired the leaf tear. There was still a bit of dust in the centre of the plant and that was also cleaned off. After 15 minutes of editing, the picture was close to perfect!

A *Notocactus magnificus* photographed in his greenhouse didn't look too good with bubble wrap in the background - a black background improved the shot considerably. A stapeliad was shown, suspended in air after some more Photoshop. It was difficult to get good picture of the flower, since it has a very tubular shape. Next was the plant he had showed us earlier, the *Ceropegia ampliata*. Even with a black background, it looked unsightly because of the green supporting frame. Well, because the frame is a uniform colour, it can be easily removed using Photoshop, and you end up with a much better picture. A close up of the flower ended Tom's talk.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 17 entries in the February table show.

	Cacti – Copiapoa	Succulents – Crassula
Open	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Copiapoa dealbata</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Crassula</i> cv. "Celia"
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Copiapoa cinerea</i>	(2) S. Wilson <i>Adromischus cristatus</i>
	(3)	(3) I Biddlecombe <i>Adromischus cooper</i>
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Copiapoa cinerea</i>	(1) A Jankovec <i>Adromischus</i> sp.
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Copiapoa columna-alba</i>	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Adromischus cristatus</i>
	(3) T Smith <i>Copiapoa barquitenis</i>	(3) S. Wilson <i>Crassula</i> sp.

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held at Dot's, on Tuesday 25th February.

The branch's bank balances were similar to those at the end of last year. Arrangements for the Anniversary meeting were discussed. Peter Down will speak at the start of the meeting. Dot will arrange the drinks, Sue will prepare the birthday cake, and Glenn will look after the catering.

The topics for the cultivation evening (April) and format for the Mini-Show (May) were discussed.

The first external event we will be attending is the Havering Cactus Mart (in May), and a list of names of people who are interested in going will be gathered at the next couple of branch meetings. Depending on interest / numbers, we will look into whether a minibus is feasible.

We also polled for ideas on a 60th Anniversary memento to hand out to branch members. This will be revisited later in the year.

Vinay Shah

The First 60 Years

(of the Southampton & District Branch of the NCSS and BCSS) – A personal view by Peter Down (Branch President)

In 1950 I did a school exchange visit with my French pen pal, Jean-Pierre Serrier. He lived just outside Paris and during the three weeks stay we visited Paris several times. Jean-Pierre's family had a small cactus collection which spent the winter in the cellar! In August the plants looked fine. On our trips to Paris we often passed the market stalls on the side of the river Seine. Some of them sold cacti and succulents and I bought a few. The French family gave me some cuttings and I returned to Southampton with about 20 plants. I was 'hooked'!

In the next couple of years I made myself known to anyone who I noticed had cactus plants in their greenhouse or, more often, on their window sill. Kenneth Harle ran a cactus nursery in Lower Basildon just north of Reading near the river Thames. He supplied Woolworth's and other outlets with nice clean healthy seedlings and many of the older generation of cactus growers started with his plants. In 1952 and 1953 he put on a display of plants at the Southampton "Fish Keepers" show at the Avenue Hall. There I met George Hiscocks who had a lot of cacti and lived fairly near me in St.Deny's. We decided it would be a good idea to have a Southampton Branch of the NCSS. I joined the National Cactus Society in 1953.

Having found out where Lower Basildon was, I cycled to my aunt's in Reading from Southampton and from there visited Kenneth Harle a little further on. My aunt lived at 1 Ramsbury Drive and later took in Gordon Rowley as a lodger when he got a job at Reading University. Gordon later bought the house from her and developed it into 'Cactusville'. Another time in the fifties a friend and I cycled to a nursery near Arundel to visit an elderly eccentric who lived in his greenhouse. (This is quite commonplace in Holland now but seemed a bit strange then; also thinking about it, the elderly gentleman was probably a lot younger than I am now!) Anyway he gave me a 2 foot (0.6 metre) topcut from a *Cereus peruvianus* which I strapped across my saddlebag and took great care getting on and off my bike on the way home.

After twice meeting George Hiscocks at the fish show, I persuaded my neighbour, Bert Thompson, to put an advert in the 'Echo' to see if anyone else was interested in forming a local branch. There were several names, thanks to my contacts and the newspaper advert and the first meeting happened at

the back room of the Royal Arms, Padwell Road, in March 1954. I was up to my neck in 'muck and bullets' at the time doing my National Service. My dad went to the first few meetings and reported progress. In 1955 I was freed from National Service and soon got involved in branch activities. I probably joined the committee in 1956 and have been involved ever since, many years as treasurer, as vice chairman and more recently chairman.

Bert Thompson was the first secretary and Elsie Margetson was one of the first chairmen. Elsie was a teacher from Winchester and had been growing cacti for years and was very encouraging to new growers and collectors. George Hiscocks started to import plants from Edelman in Holland and everyone was able to get a good variety of choice plants. I seem to remember that nearly all of K. Harle's plants were Mammillarias. After a few years we moved from the pub. I don't remember the reason. Perhaps we were not spending enough at the bar (you could get a nice plant for the price of a pint), or perhaps we were drinking too much! The next meeting place was the committee room of the St. John's Ambulance Hall in Kings Park Road. This was like having a meeting on a coach, the room was long and narrow and difficult to socialise in as there was only a narrow through way from the back. We were allowed to use the main hall for our 10th anniversary meeting when Mr. Hampshire and Winnie Dunn visited us. George Meager was chairman at that time.

Growing numbers and the meeting place restrictions caused us to move to the Spiritualists Church Hall off the Avenue. The hall was down a dark lane behind the main church, and more than one member found themselves in a spiritualist service before they realised they were at the wrong meeting!

Ian Acton moved from Newcastle in the mid-sixties and quickly got involved. He became branch secretary about 1965 and negotiated a rental for the newly built Allotment Association Hall in Bangor Road, Freemantle. This served us well for over thirty years but the hall deteriorated and parking became a problem. In 1968 the branch enrolled its 100th member, a young man called Oxborough. He was a botany student at Totton College and as I live near to it, he spent many summer lunch times in my greenhouse. Ken Halstead was chairman then, Ian Acton secretary and myself treasurer.

We continued to meet at Bangor Road until 2001 when we moved to the Church Hall at West End which is much more comfortable and has proved a good move. We have been getting new members

join and some away for years have started coming back to meetings.

Some of the names that come to mind during our 60 year history are Elsie Margetson, George Meager, Ken Halstead, Doris Meager and Roger Labbett as chairmen. Bert Thompson, Ken Thornton, Ian Acton, David Phillips and Richard White as secretaries.

We are proud at Southampton to have had David Neville as a member since he was a teenager. Ivor Biddlecombe has been show secretary for about thirty years, following George Cozins. There are so many people who have done so much for the branch over the decades that I cannot name them all, I cannot remember all their names for one thing! We are indebted to Margaret Corina for organising the 50th Anniversary celebration Convention and also the 'prickly potting' attraction at the show at Broadlands, well supported by her husband, David.

The above convention was a great success with Ernst Specks from Germany speaking and bringing lots of his interesting succulents with him. Gordon Rowley and Graham Charles were the other speakers, the day was enjoyed by over 100 people.

The branch continues to thrive and is considered by many speakers as one of the best branches in the Society. Sadly both David and Margaret Corina have died in the last few years, and are missed. We have been lucky to get some younger members onto the committee and some travel from Dorset to our branch. Dr. Richard White has retired from Cardiff and is back on the committee, he was newsletter editor and secretary before taking a job in Wales.

To sum up – the branch would not be what it is today without the support and contributions of many people and especially the committee and helpers of today. Everyone should be proud of Southampton & Districts first 60 years. I wish you continued success in the future!

Peter Down

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be on 1st April and this will be the Cultivation and Propagation workshop. The topics to be discussed include harvesting seeds from your plants, pollinating haworthias and growing on seedlings once they have germinated. You can also bring along problem plants or plants which require identification. Members are also asked to bring in their specimens of the Echeveria and Mammillaria plants that the branch handed out to members over the last couple of years.

The April Table Show will consist of the **Rebutia** group (cacti) and the **Echeveria** subgroup (succulents). Please note that members can submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The Rebutia group includes *Rebutia*, *Aylostera*, *Cintia*, *Cylindrorebutia*, *Digitorebutia*, *Medioblobivia*, *Neorebutia*, *Setirebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia*.

The Echeveria subgroup includes *Echeveria*, *Cremnophila*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Hasseanthus*, *Oliveranthus*, *Pachyphytum*, *Stylophyllum*, *Tacitus*, *Thompsonella* and *Urbinia*.

Forthcoming Events

Sat	8 th	Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' Talks
Tue	11 th	Mar	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat	15 th	Mar	Portsmouth	Plants in my Greenhouse (Stirling Baker)
Tue	1 st	Apr	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
Sat	12 th	Apr	Isle of Wight	Nature in Close-Up 3 (Colin Haygarth)
Tue	15 th	Apr	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat	19 th	Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Auction
Tue	6 th	May	Southampton	Branch Mini Show, & Judging Explained
Sat	10 th	May	Isle of Wight	Talk from Cliff Thompson
Sat	10 th	May	Southampton	Branch visit to Havering Cactus Mart, Romford, Essex
Sat	17 th	May	Portsmouth	Plants & Animals of Madagascar (Hazel Taylor)
Sat	17 th	May	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Sparsholt College (Countryside Day)

Branch website: <http://www.southampton.bcsc.org.uk>

Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/southamptonbcsc>