

To Harmonize with Heather / 5

Cold Wind Damage

THE HEATHER SOCIETY

Bulletin No. 6

Spring, 1969

From the Secretary.

The Year Book will always follow close on the heels of the Spring Bulletin, but as I promised to give further details about the Spring Display of Winter Flowering Heaths I must send this out earlier than expected.

To put on such a display for the first time is something of a gamble. The R.H.S. has arranged for the Heath competitive classes on February 25-26 so we have decided to ask for space on the same days. The main reason for wishing to do so was to encourage members who would be coming to the Display anyway to enter plants or cut blooms in the competitions. In 1967 our members did well in the spring competitions, but in 1968 interest flagged. The R.H.S. can not be expected to provide heath and heather classes in the Spring and Autumn if they are so poorly supported. True it is that the R.H.S. chose an unfortunate date, August 6th, in a late season due to bad weather in 1968, but at our request they have put it on to Sept. 9/10 this year when we hope to stage our usual display as well.

Some of those who manned the stand last September have already volunteered to do so in February but we do need others to share the burden. It is a pleasant task when you meet people already keen or anxious to know more. No deep knowledge is required: just your own experience and enthusiasm. Please send me your names and when you could help and whether you require a helper's Pass to get in without paying!

These then are our dates to bear in mind:

R.H.S. Heath Competitions and Heather Society Display: Feb. 25-26.

Annual General Meeting (Heather Society: Agenda to follow with 1968 Year Book) April 30th.
Harlow Car Northern Members' Meeting, Sunday, May 4th.

R.H.S. Heather Competitions and Heather Society Display, September 9/10

One more date: the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies of Great Britain has asked us to put on a "Bell Heather" display on the platform at the R.H.S. on July 8-9. The Alpine Society will occupy the other corner so we shall have pleasant company!

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Now that we have run the Bulletins for two years and the Year Books for six, it would be well to take stock. It will not have escaped the notice of the perceptive that far too often the same people write the articles and that as Mr. Chapple pointed out to me recently, it is the members of the Northern Group who have done most. Stop to think for a while what the Year Book or come to that, the Bulletin, would do without the work of these few. Ask yourselves if you haven't some experience, some delight, some despair to share with others. The Members' Forum was brought into being for you. Do make use of it.

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We have so many new members that it would be as well, during this review, to tell them what privileges membership of the Heather Society brings them.

First, Affiliation to the Royal Horticultural Society: we receive two tickets giving free entrance to all Fortnightly Shows and to Wisley Gardens. In addition, six tickets to Chelsea Flower Show and the Great Autumn Show are available, but should be booked well in advance with me and stamped addressed envelopes sent.

Chelsea Flower Show is May 21, 22, 23 in 1969 and the Great Autumn September 23, 24, 25.

The monthly Journal of the R.H.S. comes to me and is available on loan to any who care to send postage, 6d.

Similarly, affiliation to the Northern Horticultural Society brings two entrance tickets to Harlow Car Gardens, Harrogate, and six Journals (Northern Gardener) in alternate months: all the above available to any member.

Recent appeals to members and ex-members to let us have their old Year Books resulted in my being able to let a very few on the waiting list have copies. But this does not cover anything like the demand. We have been fortunate enough to obtain from our previous printer a few unbound Year Books for the years 1963-1966. These we are having bound together and they will be available on loan. This we feel will make the maximum use of them.

We have as yet made no plans for garden visits in the south for the coming year. One of the suggestions is that another "Bring and Exchange of cuttings" afternoon such as we enjoyed at Mr. H.C. Ellis' garden at Uckfield in 1965 would be welcomed. The member who suggested this was sure that our nurseryman members would not be harmed by it. This could better be arranged perhaps for some smaller garden where there is not enough scope for just looking and admiring. We could take picnic teas as well, to relieve our host. We would welcome your reaction to the proposal.

Another suggestion, as was carried out in the Bucks area a little while ago is to select an area where there are several members with nice gardens where we might arrange an itinerary, ending up at a pleasant tea house. The Farnham area lends itself to the idea. How many would be willing?

C.I. MacLeod, Yew Trees, Horley Row,
Horley, Surrey.

From The President:

Isle of Man.

January 1. 1969

YULETIDE BLOSSOM Gale force winds swept over the garden throughout December last year. There was plenty of sunshine and many fine sunsets over the Irish Sea. On Christmas Day carnea Winter Beauty, Pirbright pink or December Red, Cecilia M. Beale, and Darleyensis were in bloom. Stricta, in bloom since July, still had well over a hundred blossoms. The pink Cecilia M. Beale just 'pipped' the white. Other plants in flower on that day were pink geranium (never taken out of the ground), wall-flower, veronica, primrose, polyanthus, arbutus unedo, and a dozen yellow roses.

TO MEMBERS OVERSEAS Whilst we are grateful to those members who live abroad for telling us about their heathers we would welcome more descriptions of heather gardening in different parts of the world. For instance, how does one grow heaths in Milano (Italy), Porto (Portugal)?

SHOWS A reminder that the Society would like to have the names of Shows where heathers received an award or special praise by the judges in 1969. It would be helpful to have a record of such events printed either in the Bulletin or Year Book.

F.J. Chapple.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Two Corrections

1. In the November R.H.S. Journal, in Notes from the Shows, it was stated that the cultivar Cal.v. 'John Letts' was a seedling of Cal.v. 'Mrs. Ronald Green'. This should read Cal.v. 'John F. Letts' a seedling of Cal.v. 'Mrs. Ronald Gray'

2. In the November Northern Gardener, the book "Companion to Flowers" was attributed to David Mackintosh instead of David McClintock.

Mr. H.C.Prew, the Slide Librarian, says that he is short of individual specimen pictures. If anyone has good slides of correctly known specimen plants he would welcome them as a gift to the library or even on loan. The Society may be asked to put in a representative collection of pictures for a section on Heathers in a new Gardening Encyclopaedia (Readers' Digest.)

A talk on the flora of South Africa, mainly in the Cape was given by Mr.E.G.H. Oliver, co-author of the book "Ericas in Southern Africa" at a recent meeting of the Horticultural Club at the R.H.S., London and I was fortunate enough to be invited. Inevitably, to me the most interesting part of the talk and the wonderful slides he showed related to the heaths. I had noticed without knowing why it was, that the tubular florets of my Cape Heaths are all sticky. Mr. Oliver explained that the pollination of these tubular heaths is only possible through insects with a very long proboscis. Hence the stickiness, to prevent bees from biting their way in at the base of the corolla to get at the nectar. I particularly like the extract from Maeterlinck who describes the small brown bumble bees, "half barbarous" which "ravish the calyces, destroying them if they resist and push through the satin veils of the corollas like a cave-bear that might have forced its way into the silken tent of a Byzantine princess".

How clever of the South African heaths to have evolved a way to defeat them!

In a Reigate garden on October 24th. Mrs.L.Simpson had picked for my delight a charming nosegay of winter-flowering heath which I took for 'George Rendall'. She told me how to keep the leaves from dropping. Plunge the sprays every night into cold water, or run the cold tap over them. Gently shake off the surplus water but allow some to remain to dry off, obviously not over the furniture. The sprays last for weeks.

Daboecias: Mr. McClintock has given me some seed of *D.cantabrica* X *azorica*, to offer to members willing to report on their results.

Mrs. D.Metheny sent a charming Christmas card of *Daboecia azorica* sketched by herself and with a note that there was a flowering stalk "right now on my *Dab.azorica*", perhaps because of the peculiar weather in Seattle in 1968 with an excess of both temperature and rain-fall.

Mrs. Elizabeth Newton of Stone Chimneys, Vermont also sent "heather" in the form of exquisitely dried and mounted sprays, the natural colour wonderfully preserved, to both Mr. Patrick and me, three cards, pink, lavender and white. Such artistry shows yet another way to use heather, if one has the skill.

We are pleased to hear that Mrs.P.Harper, our former Editor who joined her husband in the U.S.A. last spring is now settled in the new house that they both did so much to throughout the summer. Now that the building operations are over and the horrible effects of "poison ivy" a thing of the past, we hope to hear more of her heather gardening.

Nearer home:

We were sorry to see the McCrindles of Dunblane beaten in the General Knowledge quiz "Ask the Family" on B.B.C.1 in spite of the sprig of heather he wore in his lapel. However, the flying visits to London enabled him to explore the Heather Gardens at Kew and Wisley which he had always wanted to see.

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Mr. & Mrs. Proudley have sold their Nursery at Aldenham and have moved to a new one near Blakeney, in the Forest of Dean, Glos. We wish them success in their new nursery and are thankful that they will still put on our shows for us.

Holland.

We have great hopes of the formation of another Group based on the Dutch-speaking areas of the Netherlands. Such a group might have sufficient force to save the beautiful Gemeentelijke Beplantingen Bossen en Begraafplaatsen of Driebergen-Rijsenburg which is threatened with destruction.

PLANT RIGHTS

The Plant Variety Rights Office of the Ministry of Agriculture has sent us details of the proposed plant breeders' rights scheme ("Plant Patents.")

Permanent trials for heathers will start in the immediate future at Wisley. For Callunas, Daboecias and the main Ericas, it is proposed that the period of rights should extend to 20 years, and for Andromeda 25 years. The rights cover also the propagation of the variety for cut blooms and foliage, except for Daboecia whose short-lived deciduous corollas render this unnecessary.

Those who wish to enter a new variety should write to the Plant Variety Rights Office, Murray House, Vandon St., S.W.1. for their free guide "Plant Breeders' Rights" and further details. The duration of trials for heather will be a minimum of two years. The cost is not inconsiderable and we must point out that for many it will be prohibitive. It starts, at present rates, with an application fee of £10, trial fees are £15 per annum, and £20 is due when the rights are granted. Thereafter there is a £25 renewal fee for each year the rights are maintained in force, giving a minimum total cost, for a 20-year licence of £560.

Only a breeder with an outstandingly successful plant would be likely to contemplate such an outlay, but if he did, he would be the sole producer for 20 years.

MEMBERS' FORUM

A Lecture at Stoke Mandeville, Bucks. October 3rd, 1968

A series of short courses was run during 1968 sponsored by Buckingham Education Department and held at the Headquarters of the Bucks. Dept. of Agriculture, Hampden Hall, Stoke Mandeville. Other courses on growing alpines, fruit tree pruning, etc. were held, but this particular lecture given by Mr. G. Mitchell was on the Ericaceous Garden. Unfortunately, very little publicity beyond a leaflet obtained from the Domestic Horticultural Officer and small press advertisements was given so apart from a dozen or so students and an assistant park-keeper from a London Borough, few people knew of it. It was however well received. The talk was entitled "Ericas in my Experience", as chosen by the tutor, Miss M.F. Mountain, the Domestic Horticultural Officer, but Mr. Mitchell spoke more on designing and building his garden, covering such aspects as advance planning and time scale, rate of bed preparation and plant production in relation to the size of the bed, time estimates and so on. The site at Hampden Hall is a poor one: waterlogged alkaline clay. They have an "ericaceous unit" which consists of leafmould and peat piled high above the ground within a log base. Nor had they risked any plants but carneas and a few vagans. We hope that the talk will prove encouraging. It was illustrated with his own slides and so interesting was it that very little time for discussion remained.

The request for the talk came to the Secretary and it seemed that Mr. Mitchell living in Buckingham would be best fitted to give it. We are extremely grateful to him for doing so and for thus extending the interest in heathers.

TO HARMONISE WITH HEATHERS

It is always a problem to know which other plants would associate with heathers, that is, plants which would not take up too much space but at the same time give height and scale to the beds. Perhaps the following list of plants will be of interest to members planning or replanning their own garden.

Ruta 'Jackman's Blue', placed next to Calluna 'J.H. Hamilton' is a pretty sight in August.

The blue of Gentiana sino ornata contrasts well with the silvery pink long sprays of C.v. 'H.E. Beale'.

The following Hebes (shrubby Veronicas) are particularly good (and not expensive) - H. 'Autumn Glory', H. 'Armstrongii' and H. salicornoides 'Aurea', my favourite being the last named.

I asked a nurseryman to recommend three dwarf rhododendrons which would be exceptionally hardy and stand up to the rigours of a very exposed heather rockery. I have had no cause to regret the three supplied - R. radicans (a prostrate alpine, forming carpets of tiny bright green leaves with flattish purple flowers in May), R. keleticum (hummocks of small leaves from which the purplish crimson flowers arise in June), and R. myrtilloides (a charming shrublet, 6 inches high, with plum-coloured flowers.)

Finally a choice little shrub is Berberis thunbergii 'Nana', sometimes listed as B. 'Little Favourite'.

Pamela Harper.

Secretary's comment:

In 1966 Mr. W. L. Lead of Nottingham sent Mrs. Harper on loan an exquisite colour slide of Cal. v. 'Golden Feather' growing next to Gentiana 'Inverleith'. As my second love, after heathers, is gentians, I did the same, but substituted the sino ornata gentian, not having Inverleith. Blue and gold, a lovely combination.

A Follow-up to Brig. C.H.R. Smith's Propagation Method

by Donald Crabbie, Edinburgh.

In 1967 I tried Brig. Smith's method of propagation (Year Book 1966 "bottom-out-of-a-box") with extraordinary success although the boxes were left untended all week and even for two weeks in summer and more in winter.

Incidentally, my efforts to improve on Brig. Smith's propagation methods proved astonishingly unsuccessful. Having spent much time doubled up inserting and removing cuttings in the boxes nine inches below ground level, in September 1967 I separated my cuttings into two lots. The first lot were placed direct into the soil in the boxes as usual. The second lot were inserted into pots which were then sunk into the soil in the same box. The former rooted well, but not one single cutting 'took' in the pots although the remains of the last cuttings were not removed until May 1968. Thus is slothfulness rewarded!

1968 has taught me that heaths are not as easily propagated as I thought. Minor troubles from slugs, beetles and worms in the boxes as well as mould on the cuttings and green mossy growth on the soil surface had not been encountered in 1967.

(Here follows an astounding difference in the 1968 summer in the North and the South, where we had endless rain and almost no sun).

Mr. Crabbie continues :

The main difficulty this year (1968) has been the exceptionally fine weather. From May onwards long spells of sun dried up numerous cuttings despite shading and jars of water left in the boxes in an attempt to keep the air moist. The 1967 cuttings also had their troubles in the nursery bed. Moles uprooted many but my attentions were at least as harmful. A gale in January neatly removed the plastic cloches leaving the carefully tied down wire frames intact. The plastic vanished and small bits have been appearing in odd corners ever since. My paternal instinct then made me lay a blanket of peat round my precious babies to keep them warm. It quickly turned into a wet blanket and several cultivars suffered casualties from rot, in particular Calluna vulgaris 'Hirsuta Typica'. It is not surprising that this plant with its grey velvety foliage, originating on the Moray coast, seems to need drier conditions than normal.

The January gale which could be accurately described as a hurricane and which snapped off large trees like match sticks and did tremendous damage to central Scotland, left my heathers quite unperturbed.

WINTER DAMAGE 1967/1968

This was the worst winter known along 300 miles of the north east coast of the U.S.A. On the main land many growers of heather reported severe or complete loss, due not alone to low temperatures but to the accompanying high velocity of wind.

Here in Chatham, Cape Cod, where the ocean on three sides of town exerts a tempering influence, we experienced a disagreeable yet interesting story. Throughout January we had low temperatures, the lowest being -1° F. on January 9 and steady N.W. winds with velocity sometimes reaching 60 knots with gusts much higher. In prior winters we here had temperatures as low, but no damage to heathers. This winter the high wind velocity accompanying the cold made all the difference.

It has been our successful practice through the years to provide Winter cover of cranberry vines (Vaccinium macrocarpon) only for the baby plants set out the prior May and for mature plants of Tree heaths and the taller mediterranea. All else are given no protection whatever.

None of the baby covered plants were harmed at all. The covered Tree heaths and taller E. mediterranea showed some splitting and die back but no deaths.

Of the mature plants, all unprotected, all the E. cameas came through untouched except buds failed to mature on E. camea 'Springwood Pink' and 'Winter Beauty', and the hybrid 'Geo. Rendall.'

All the other unprotected Ericas, ciliaris, cinerea, hybrids, Tetralix, and vagans, the Daboecias and the Callunas (227 cultivars) showed every condition from being totally unharmed to stem splitting, dieback and death. Nor was there any uniformity of result in single varieties. Of a single cultivar, some plants died, some were badly hurt and some totally unharmed.

And as all growers have learned, a severe pruning of damaged plants and even those which appeared dead brought many to a final flourishing condition.

Harold W. Copeland.

Membership Lists.

As the full list of members up to December 31st will appear in the 1968 Year Book, it is unnecessary to give the names of any except those who have joined in the New Year, up till the time this Bulletin goes to press.

New Members

Mr. A.P.J. Addis, Three Kings, Culverden Down, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.
Mr. W.J. Bettam, 71, Manor Road, Tankerton, Whitstable, Kent.
Miss H.K. Green, Finlandia, 89, Lions Lane, Ashley Heath, Nr. Ringwood,
Hants. BA24 2HJ
Mr. B.L. Ruddock, Dunromin, Bankside, Wadhurst, Sussex.
Wng. Cdr. J.S. Johnson, 4, Ladythorn Ave., Marple, Ches. SK6 7DR
Mr. J.A. Sellars, 16, Park Road, Dosthill, Tamworth, Staffs.