

THE HEATHER SOCIETY

Bulletin No.9

Spring, 1970

From (or about) the Secretary.

In Praise of our Secretary.

We are apt to take for granted, the work she has to do,  
Writing up the Bulletin and posting it to you.  
Answering all your letters to keep you up to date,  
She can't have any time to spare, while working at this rate.  
March of all the months is when she's busiest the most,  
Packing all the Year Books and getting them to post,  
Checking postage rates and licking stamps with receipts for what is paid,  
If any member lives near by, I'm sure she'd welcome aid.  
So thank you, dear Mrs.Mac, we appreciate what you do,  
And please accept our praise as well for the way you do it, too.

B.G.L.

(Thank you, Mr.London ! (Sec.)

We had such splendid response to requests for Year Book and Bulletin articles that this one is very full. But more articles, please, for the summer bulletin are needed.

Mr.London, besides being the Advertising Manager for the Year Book has agreed to receive items of news about forthcoming Lectures. For this period he sends the following:

March 5th, at Wroxham, Mr.Neil Brummage

March 19th at Attleborough: Mr.C.Lawrence

April 15th at Thorpe Horticultural Society: Mr.C.Lawrence

Send in your details to Mr.London, though they cannot be published until the next Bulletin. Next year, please send them early!

We remind you of the Winter Flowering Heath Display on Feb. 24/25. The R.H.S. will again include a heath competition for the same dates. Volunteers for the Display please offer their services.

May 3rd. at 2.30 p.m. is again the date of the Northern Group meeting at Harlow Car.

6 Tickets for Chelsea Flower Show are now to hand, May 20, 21, 22. Ask for one if you would like it.

Loan of Bound Year Books: why are the Northern Group so much more keen? Mr.Ardron has sent out to sixty members: I have sent out only to nine.

We trust that all members received their copy of 'A Guide to the naming of Plants' by David McClintock, sent out with Bulletin No.8.

Joint husband/wife membership: Bankers Orders: Please will those who mean to avail themselves send to me for a new form, authorising payment on March 31st annually.

MEMBERS' FORUM

From your letters:      Want to Emigrate?

Mr. H. W. Copeland of Chatham, Mass. writes:

"The largest Heather Business in the U.S. chiefly wholesale requires a grower for taking charge. All details for anyone interested from:      Mr. Neil J. van Sloun,

Sylvan Nursery, 1028 Horseneck Rd., S. Westport, Massachusetts 02790. "

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Mr. W. L. Lead of 22 Imperial Avenue, Gedling, Notts, writes:

Interested in new heathers ?

For many years we have been trying to obtain and grow in our own garden as many as possible of the available varieties of heathers and ericas for we feel that this is the only way to find out which grow best under our own conditions and appeal to us most. In addition, we have a number which have occurred as seedlings or have been collected in the wild by friends, who are also heather enthusiasts. Each year hundreds of heather seedlings occur in our garden and as there are no wild heathers within many miles of here we believe them to be the result of cross or self-fertilisation of good garden varieties. It takes many years to discover whether a seedling is in fact good enough to be named and introduced as a new variety, but life is short and ground is limited and we cannot grow on more than a small fraction of our seedlings.

If any members would like to help in the search for good new varieties we will be pleased to send them some seedlings for them to grow on; all we ask is that if anything really good turns up they will let us have some cuttings.

We also have rooted cuttings of about three hundred different commercially available varieties which are available for exchange with other enthusiasts who have something new and good for exchange. We will also be offering for exchange rooted cuttings of varieties not commercially available at present as soon as we receive permission from the raisers or collectors concerned.

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Mr. D. A. Richards of Eskdale, Cumberland writes:

Daboecia Hybrids

Daboecially speaking this has been a very complicated year. I asked for some of Mr. McClintock's Daboecia hybrid seed and as there was some doubt of its fertility I got some seed of D. azorica and D. cantabrica from Messrs. Thompson & Morgan of Ipswich. Thus there were three batches, "A", azorica, "B", hybrids and "C" cantabrica. All were treated alike so if A and C grew and B failed, we knew the answer. They had my best seed compost, riddled from an old heap of weeds and sterilised. Thus the only addition was steamed wood-lice. Each had a pinch of soil from my Daboecia patch on top in case they were short of fungus. Some of each grew and were pricked out.

In due course all the hybrids were planted into open ground. They show interesting variations.

Having no wish for a lot of delicate plants (too lazy) I potted 6 A's and threw the rest away. Any year I can find perhaps 50 chance cantabrica seedlings, so batch C were carried out to the rubbish heap. Some looked odd and eventually I planted out a couple of dozen.

Although a sloppy writer my labelling is most meticulous (perhaps as well for a pharmacist). The A's could have had cantabrica added from my soil, but the C's should only be cantabrica.

A tactful letter to T & M. elicited the generous admission that possibly some C's were fertilised by azorica. It was a full week (incredible how stupid some people can be!) before I realised that if they had A's near the C's then the C's must be near the A's. A careful examination of the 6 A's showed that some were of doubtful ancestry.

Would any member who has sown Daboecia seed keep a sharp lookout for hybrids and write in, naming the "mother" if he has anything interesting.

From Mr. H. Hale, Cape Heath : Erica gracilis

October 26th. A fortnight ago I visited Mr. & Mrs. Bonney's heather garden at Chipstead. I was most intrigued with a heather plant in full bloom that I could not identify. Can you recognise the enclosed sprig? Mr. Bonney bought it in Leadenhall Market.

A second letter from Mr. Hale enclosed one from Mr. Bonney who had made enquiries at the market. He was told what I had already told Mr. Hale: that it was a Cape Heath reputed to be hardy in Germany where it is grown extensively in parks.

This bore out what Mr. Cheason of Cambridge had told me in 1966: that the Colleges and the Cambridge University Botanic Garden had been sent a gift of 200 plants from Eastern Germany with the assurance that they were hardy. The Director, Mr. John Gilmour in reply to my letter said that this was so, and that if they did prove hardy, this was a great "break-through", most Cape Heaths being tender.

Has any member any knowledge of the E. gracilis having proved to be hardy? (Note: this is not to be confused with the well-known Erica carnea 'Gracilis'.)

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From Mr. M. A. Hill, Timperley, Cheshire

Enclosed is a copy of the "Timperley Leader" as you may find the article on heathers written by a member of interest for the Bulletin. I have shown this to Mr. Chapple who suggested passing in on to you.

Collecting Heathers: The Rev. James Wright and his Hobby

(with acknowledgments to The Timperley Leader.)

"Have a weed free garden". This heading, read whilst I was struggling with weeds everywhere, brought a vision of paradise. Apparently the way to this enviable state was to buy a collection of heather plants. I promptly sent for one and started on what became an absorbing hobby.

I have never had a "weed free garden" but I have had endless pleasure. All the year round there are flowers of many colours: pink, mauve, red, purple, salmon and white. Added to these are the many shades of green foliage. All these provide restful beauty and are a great delight.

For the front of the bed there are dwarf heathers, less than an inch in height. For the back is the tree heather, growing up to six feet or more. So you can have variations of height, colour and foliage.

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If it is your privilege to see heathers in their native places you will want to bring them home with you. If you cannot see them in their homeland, a collection of heathers will bring the moors, the mountains and the shores into your garden.

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A Basque Heather Hunt: Mr. D. A. Richards writes:

In the Basque Provinces of France and Spain, Daboecia, Calluna and Erica ciliaris, cinerea, Tetralix and vagans are common. If you would like to hunt heathers over virtually virgin territory, please write to me immediately, saying whether you have a car and if so, whether you have spare seats. The cost per head, including the car (assuming two people per car) would be about £100, with best cabin accommodation and a comfortable French hotel near the frontier. I must book for the boat at once, but cancellations are accepted. The boat leaves Southampton on Sunday, Sept. 13th for Bilbao (6.30 p.m.), returning to Southampton on October 3rd at 7 a.m.

(Mr. Richards has been twice himself, once with Mr. Ardron, once alone. This is a unique opportunity to accompany him.)

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Wild Flower meeting : Guernsey, May 29-June 7.

Mr. McClintock tells us that though there will be no heathers, at any rate in flower, other wild flowers abound. This is a combined visit by the Botanical Society of the British Isles, The Wild Flower Society and the local Société Guernesaise. Our members would be welcome. Send 5/-s to book to Mrs. Burridge, La Pomare, St. Peter in the Wood, Guernsey, asking for details of accommodation, price etc. Cars will be hired.

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GOOD HUNTING IN BUCKS.

Whilst up in London for the A.G.M. on April 30 I took the opportunity of seeing an old friend who for many years was the head gardener of the best garden in the Isle of Man and who is now living at High Wycombe. This enabled me to meet Mr. and Mrs. London at their home in Adelaide Road. It was surprising to find how well Mr. London had grown his heathers on chalk. When these lines appear in print Mr. London will have retired from business and will be living in Norfolk, a county admirably suited for heath culture judging by the number of members we have there.

Mr. London has rendered invaluable service to the Society, and we wish him (and Mrs. London) good health and many happy years in retirement.

From High Wycombe Mr. London took me to see Mr. Stow's delightful garden at Flackwell Heath. Here again, the problem of combating chalk conditions had been well tackled in a gradual process of trial and error and now quite a pleasing heather garden has been established.

Then we went on to Chalfont St. Giles - to Mr. Mitchell's 'Heathlands'. The frontage is a fairly wide one, and all along the boundary to the left and right and along the back was a hedge of well over 100 Erica arborea 'Alpina' (interspersed with brooms) spaced about ten feet apart and four to five feet high. As they were in flower the overall effect was beautiful and original.

Full marks to Mr. Mitchell for producing a splendid heather garden in the course of a few years. He has successfully propagated by trench layering, as described in my book. This was the first time I had seen the result of this method. I wonder if other members have tried it?

F.J.C.

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MYCORRHIZA DEFENDS ITS HOST.

Following the article on Mycorrhiza in the 1969 Year Book, Mr. C.E. Bickerstaff sent to me The Forestry Commission Bulletin No. 36 (1963). This publication investigates the phenomena of the toxic effect of Calluna upon the growth of some trees planted on moorland sites and examines the problems of afforestation where Calluna is dominant. It appears that the Calluna defends itself by producing a substance which inhibits the growth of many trees, especially Spruce (Picea) and other conifers.

In spite of widespread investigations in many parts of Europe, the factors involved are not fully determined but experiments show that the check to growth of 'heather sensitive species' is part of the mycorrhizal mystery. It is likely that all the genera which have solved the problem of growth on very acid soil or in conditions of low fertility, have done so by association with mycorrhizal fungi. Evidence is produced that Spruce fails to acquire its necessary mycorrhizal partner where Calluna abounds.

There are many types of mycorrhiza awaiting investigation and it may be that an epic account of War between the mycorrhiza of Calluna and Picea will be written one day. Meanwhile, if your garden is on moorland soil, do not plant your Christmas Tree anywhere near your Callunas, but in most garden soils adverse effects are less likely.



The Forestry Bulletin is primarily concerned with the growth of forest trees, but observations are made concerning Calluna which merit our closest attention. For instance, the growth of mycorrhiza in association with the roots of Calluna is retarded by mineral Nitrogen (p57) or animal manure (p66).

The overall impression gained from the study of this lengthy Bulletin is, that the well-being of Calluna is secured by establishing conditions favourable to the growth of mycorrhiza rather than by fertilizing the soil chemically. Whether this is true in regard to all types of soil or only to soils of low fertility, remains to be discovered. And to what extent all this applies to Erica in general, also remains to be investigated. Indeed, the varying degree of pH \*\* tolerance within the various species of Erica we grow indicates the possibility of there being mycorrhizal differences; especially as we know that mycorrhizal partnership, arising from various recognized fungi, is widespread in many genera, from Conifers and Hardwoods to Orchids and in soils ranging from the most fertile to the most hungry.

Clearly our knowledge of this subject is very limited indeed but, until the Mycologists have secured more evidence for our guidance, we might well confine our growth aids to organic composts and peat and to check whether any trees (particularly Spruce) and any subjects we have planted amongst our Heathers, are thriving or not.

If any member has experience which tends to answer any of the questions posed or to disprove any of the theories advanced upon this subject, we shall be pleased to have detailed advices for publication.

Can we have stumbled upon a possible explanation for Sir John Charrington's "plague spots" mentioned in the 1969 Year Book?

J.P. Ardon, Sheffield.

\*\* The pH scale is the measure of acidity or alkalinity, in this case of the soil.

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### A YEAR IN CONNECTICUT

In April 1968 we started building our house in Connecticut on a 3-acre lot sprinkled with red cedars (Juniperus virginiana) chosen as an ideal setting for a heather garden. The house is finished but before gardening can begin my husband's job takes us to Baltimore, Maryland.

Although little actual gardening has been done, I've learned a lot, realising particularly what a gentle climate England has with extremes neither of heat nor cold and rainfall spread fairly evenly over the year.

How different in rocky Connecticut, where gardening ceases entirely from November through March and the ground freezes to considerable depth. But the sky stays clear and blue and the sun so strong that our heating bills have been lower than in England. By Spring, everything is tinder dry and fire risk great ... and from these conditions comes "winterkill", Connecticut gardeners accepting more or less philosophically the loss of some plants. Briefly, in April and May, weather conditions resemble those of a perfect English summer, then temperatures can soar into the 80's. From June to October 1968 rain fell on only three days. On November 1st. I worked outside in a thin cotton dress. On November 15th. came a vicious frost which killed overnight my one tree heath, E. arborea 'Gold Tips'.

Thus, though heathers will certainly grow here, they could not I think be grown in the large-scale, carpeting manner so common in England but rather as individual plants in rock gardens (hence the popularity of dwarf cultivars) or in small heather beds where winter protection is possible.

My plants spent the winter in three ways. Those planted outside in a nursery bed were covered with juniper boughs in Mid-November. Young plants rooted in trays in early summer were moved

into the unheated greenhouse (where they remained frozen solid from November till March.) Newly rooted cuttings wintered in propagating cases in the dining room where they made considerable growth. Losses were high among the plants in the garage but quite few outside.

Based on my limited experience over one year (a favourable one incidentally, in that deep snow provided protection during the whole of February and most of March) I would suggest that tree heaths and cultivars of E. mediterranea and E. ciliaris be attempted only by the dedicated: E. cinerea and E. vagans need protection and even then some winterkill is probable. Daboecias I have not tried but think doubtful. I had no losses amongst Callunas, E. carnea, E. x darleyensis or E. Tetralix. E. Williamsii seems particularly tough and of the Callunas the following show little or no damage: - 'J.H. Hamilton', 'Co Wicklow', 'Cuprea', 'Mousehole', 'Californian Midge', 'White Mite', 'Hammondii Aureifolia', 'Nana Compacta' and 'Drumra'.

Two other observations. Grey foliated cultivars seem to do particularly well in Connecticut's hot, dry summers. Instructions in English books and catalogues to plant in full sun are not applicable to New England conditions of high light intensity and hot sun: part shade is better.

P. Harper, Maryland.

### MY HEATHERS.

The "soil" in my garden is fine, sterile, grey sand. Two feet down it is hard, yellow sand, stratified with ironstone. When we dig a new flower bed, using a pick-axe on the yellow sand, we usually excavate enough ironstone to make a new rock garden!

The ironstone is in two forms. One finds pieces of grotesque and fantastic shape, "boxes", "bowls", "goblets", "drain pipes", all perfect to use for mini-gardens. The others are flat, rectangular pieces known locally as "cherts". They were used extensively for house building in the olden days. In the surrounding heather country we come across old chert-pits where the ironstone for building was dug out. Many of the old cottages round here are built of cherts. And I know of one pit which houses a flourishing family of badgers.

I started my heather garden many years ago with Erica carnea 'King George', 'Ruby Glow' and 'Winter Beauty'.

Our old gardener, who stayed with the family eventually for thirty years, took lots of cuttings and my heather garden grew without ever getting any more varieties. They were a glorious sight each year from February onwards.

They grew and flourished until two years ago when I acquired two collie puppies. Their great joy was to gallop down the lawn, leap on to the heathers and roll. I put wire netting where I could but even puppies are good jumpers when they are collies. Large areas of flattened brown stalks appeared and the beauty of the garden was cancelled out for that year.

In the autumn I cut back the least damaged and dragged out the rest. As I was also re-making the end of an old rock garden I decided to replant it with coloured-leaf Callunas. I put flat pieces of chert between them. These help to keep the soil cool in summer, suppress most of the weeds and make it easy to walk on the bed when an odd weed appears. The varied shades of brown of the ironstone complement the lovely colours of the Callunas.

Which plants go well with heathers? When I pulled out the puppy-rolled-on ones I replaced them with shrubby Geraniums. They make big clumps eventually and the pink, mauve and purple flowers go well with heathers.

Brooms of course seed themselves madly everywhere, the slender fairy like one with white blooms, the common yellow and the bi-colours. In the coloured leaf Calluna bed I have put some plants of Sedum maximum 'Artropurpureum' and Sedum 'Ruby Glow'. Their glaucous, coppery purple leaves and flat heads of pink flowers tone well with the heathers.

I do not label my plants. For one thing, I do not like beds full of labels and here one cannot complete with the magpies and the dogs who seem to love taking them out and dropping them by other plants! I make plans of the garden and the plant names in a notebook.

When we once had to let our house and were away for four years part of the wild garden was colonised by ferns. I had always loved ferns and was delighted. They grow into large, majestic clumps and look magnificent amongst the heathers.

We find all over the garden plants that have planted themselves, self-sown seedlings in odd corners, like the many baby forest trees. So often self-sown plants appear in just the right place and help in one's ambition to make a beautiful garden.

E.D. Strover, Farnham.

### DOWN TO EARTH WITH CUTTINGS

Any interested heather grower sooner or later wishes to grow his own plants from cuttings, but there must be many, like us, who have very little success with early attempts. We read all the books: we tried all the infallible, varying methods described by the authors, and achieved unremitting, 95% failure every time. Eventually we took refuge in the sour grapes policy that layered plants were bigger and better anyway.

But all the time we were wanting to belong to that esoteric sect of amateurs who raised their plants from cuttings. "There is only one thing for it", said my husband, emptying a box of defunct Calluna cuttings, - "mist propagation". No doubt this is a foolproof method, but for the amateur who grows only for his own small garden the cost of installation is prohibitive.

However, the principles of mist propagation were obviously sound and it seemed a good idea to attempt something similar. Cuttings were inserted into a seed box in the usual way, the box was then watered from below and allowed to drain. The whole box was then placed inside a large plastic bag, the open end of which was secured by a rubber band, thus making a sort of Wardian case. This box of cuttings was kept in the kitchen and from time to time was placed on the simmering hot-plate lid of the Aga cooker. This provided "bottom heat", although it was applied only very spasmodically according to convenience and never for periods of longer than half an hour at a time, otherwise it might have become too hot. After several days the cuttings showed no sign of flagging or browning, and if the plastic bag began to press too closely, we opened the end and blew it up like a balloon. Results, after our previous disappointments, appeared fantastically good. Some Callunas had formed roots in a fortnight; others and some vagans took a month. Inspired by this success we planted a further box of various winter-flowering cultivars. These were so successful that in the following Spring we were forced to dig up the asparagus bed (never very successful) in order to make a nursery for the young plants.

*While waiting* From one inch long cuttings taken the previous September these (the E. hibernicas in particular) soon made large bushy plants which so far have withstood all gales. Some experts affirm that it is a waste of time to take cuttings from carneae which layer so readily. But our experience is that cuttings do make better plants, with a better root system, and better able to withstand our particularly adverse weather conditions.

Of the summer flowering cultivars which root readily we have found E. terminalis and Bruckenthalia very good; E. vagans good; Calluna, E. ciliaris and E. Tetralix fairly good and E. cinerea rather poor.

Since the "Aga" treatment we have invested in a heating cable which cost under £2. My husband made a suitably sized bench for it in a cold greenhouse and covered the bench with four easily handled lightweight polythene lights. Now we can "dose" our cuttings with their essential bottom heat more systematically; the polythene lights keep the atmosphere suitably humid and success (apart from cinereae) is a regular 80-85%. We can raise more cuttings more conveniently on the bench. And it does keep the peat out of the pancakes.

Betty M. Kershaw, Fleetwood, Lancs.

Culled From Books

Extract from The Kilvert Diaries, edited by William Plomer.

July 22. 1870. (The drive to Mullion, Cornwall.)

Soon after this we got into the Serpentine district. The roads were made of marble, black marble, the dust of which looked like coal dust. The country became very wild and timber almost disappeared. Along the roadsides grew large bushes of 3 and 4 feet high of beautiful heather, white, pink and rose colour, growing as freely as gorse with us. We stopped the carriage and gathered some fine sprays. The splendour and luxuriance of the heather, I never saw anything like this before.

(contrib. C.I. MacLeod)

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Extract from "Old Time Gardens" by Alice Morse Earle, published in 1901.

Persistent efforts have been made to acclimate both Heather and Gorse in America. We have seen how Broom came uninvited and spread unasked on the Massachusetts coast; but Gorse and Heather have proved shy creatures. On the beautiful island of Naushon the carefully planted Gorse may be found in widely scattered spots and also on the near-by mainland, but it cannot be said to have thrived markedly. The Scotch Heather, too, has been frequently planted, and watched and pushed, but it is slow to become acclimated. It is not because the winters are too cold, for it is found in considerable amount in bitter Newfoundland; perhaps it prefers to live under a crown.

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Extract from "Myths and Legends of Flowers, Etc." by Charles M. Skinner, published in 1911  
Heath:

The heath, or heather, that decorates the Scottish hills, commemorates in its name the efforts of the Christians to convert the Picts. When the latter were visited by armed missionaries who ordered them to cease the worship of false gods, the Picts unreasonably gave battle, and the plants that were bedewed with the blood of the heathen became the heathen, or heath, for short. When all except two of the tribe had been killed, these survivors - father and son - were taken before Kenneth, the conqueror, who promised them life if they would tell him how to make heath beer. The remained silent. Thinking to force the old man to compliance, the king put the son to death before the father's eyes. In anger and disgust the old man refused to grant any favor to so brutal a victor and the secret of the drink was never known, although for shame's sake, Kenneth suffered his prisoner to live. In the Jura the secret still survives, for the peasants of that region continue to make a beer in which two parts heath tops are combined with one of malt. But the heath of the Jura is not stained with a people's blood.

(contrib. P.Harper)

New Members, not in the 1970 Year Book.

R.P.Burton, 30, Upper End Rd., Peak Dale, Buxton, Derbs. -

J.Roger Bell, 37, Newtyle Rd., Paisley, Renfrewshire

C.Barham, 29, Beaufort St., Southend-on-Sea, Essex.

P.Connelly, 1, Melrose Ave., Balgowie, Paisley, Renfrewshire.

R.J.Davis, Tamarisk, Hillview Gdns. Felton, Nr.Bristol.

W.D.Frearson, 268. Holbrook Lane, Coventry, Works.

Rose Brae Nursery, (V.M.Smith) 116/118, Pensby Rd., Heswall, Wirral, Cheshire. -

A.H.Smith, Litchfield, Upper St.Helen's Rd., Hedge End, Southampton.

J.D.Wilson, (formerly Col. Kelly, Oliver & Hunter) Moniaive, Thornhill, Dumfriess.