

Chairman's Opening Statement for the 44th Annual General Meeting - 2015 at the Leenane Hotel. Connemara. Co Galway

I welcome you to the 44th Annual General Meeting of The Heather Society here at the Leenane Hotel. Connemara. Co Galway

It is with great pleasure that we welcome John Hall as a co-opted member to Council. A heather grower of long standing, I have no doubt that his knowledge and vast experience will be an asset to the Society.

The Society continues to manage its declining finance reserves, economising where possible, and in 2014 this involved changes to membership fees and membership payment schedules. Regrettably when essential changes are necessary members who are not responsive are, despite numerous reminders, lost to the Society.

The finances and investments are in the hands of our treasurer Richard Canovan, streamlining of our banking facilities continues for the ease and benefit of the Treasurer, council members and the Society.

The revised Heather Society website is being constantly expanded under the direction of Council member Dave Brown. It now has the facility of an exclusive members only area with an online payment facility via Paypal facilitating an easier method of making membership and other payments to the Society.

The Society repeated a presence in 2015 at The Hampton Court RHS Garden Show. Forest Edge Nurseries undertook to construct an exhibit within the Floral Marque under the banner of The Heather Society which gained a Silver Gilt Medal. Again my thanks go to those members of the Society for assisting in the manning of the stand, handing out Heather Society publicity and providing valued advice to members of the public. A further application has been made to exhibit again in the Floral Marque for 2016.

John Hall, with the assistance of Society members attended the RHS "All About Plants" event at Wisley in June of this year with an informative display to promote the Society and will be promoting heathers and the Society at other RHS Wisley events.

Regional groups have continued to struggle with attendances and the efforts of the organisers are appreciated. I am especially grateful to Barry Sellers for taking on board the contact and organisation of the Home Counties Group in association with RHS Wisley and the representation of the Heather Society at their meetings.

The cuttings swop scheme has been suspended at present due to the retirement of Brian Burling. The Society will endeavour to continue this scheme as a Society benefit to membership and welcomes offers of assistance to continue this facility.

It is with regret that the Society has received notice of the Administrators resignation as from the 2016 AGM and the Council will be seeking a replacement. However Council looks forward to Charles Nelson to become a full Council member. Council welcomes applications from members to sit on Council to enable its function to continue.

Decreasing membership and attendances at Conference will require the quorum numbers to be monitored and amended within the rules of the constitution.

The National Heather Collection remains at Wisley and we continue to hope for the input of additional time and investment at this site. We encourage the onward development of additional comprehensive planting at Perth and further welcome the National Collection status of Holehird Gardens in the Lake District for its comprehensive collection of *Daboecia*

In addition I thank all the members of Council for their attendance at meetings and their valued input contributing to the running of the Society. Especially our administrator Dr E C Nelson, secretary Phil Joyner, Conference manager Susie Kay, Treasurer Richard Canovan, our council members Andrew Collins, Barry Sellers, Dave Brown, John Hall, our bulletin editor Daphne Everett and our Slide Librarian, Jean Preston.

David Edge

Chairman