

# THE HEATHER SOCIETY BULLETIN

Vol. 4. No. 1

SUMMER 1987

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It is always a sadness to have to record the death of someone very dear to us, and the Society has recently suffered the loss of a very dear friend and Founder Member, Joyce Burfitt. An appreciation of her and her devotion to heathers is included in this issue of the Bulletin. Those of us in the South West Group, who were fortunate to know her and benefit from her knowledge and enthusiasm, are grateful indeed.

Group activities in various parts of the country are under way, and it is always a pleasure to visit different gardens and exchange ideas. We all have our favourite plants, our likes and dislikes, and have to some extent 'tailored' our garden to suit its situation, climate, and soil conditions etc. Hence every garden however large or small is entirely individual. To those members who haven't so far participated in a local group visit I would say please go and make some new friends! If there isn't a local group near you — then contact some other members in the area and start one yourselves!

A reminder to Group Convenors. It is helpful if members can have notice of the spring meetings in the Autumn Bulletin — dates arranged for late March and early April only have a limited notice if left to be inserted in the Spring Bulletin.

Diane Jones.

## 17th ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 4th-7th September 1987.

Details of this year's Conference at Hadlow College near Maidstone, Kent, were published in the Spring Bulletin. If you wish to attend, and haven't yet made a booking, please send £2 per mailing to: Mrs Tessa Forbes, Spoute Cottage, Longmill Lane, Plaxtol, Sevenoaks, Kent. TN15 0QR. Payment of the full Conference fee should be sent to Mrs Forbes by 18th July. Cheques should be made payable to "Heather Society Conference".

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1987

The Annual General Meeting of the Heather Society will be held during the Conference at Hadlow College, Hadlow, Near Maidstone, Kent, on Sunday 6th September at 9.15 a.m. The Agenda for the meeting is enclosed with this issue of the Bulletin.

## MISS JOYCE BURFITT — AN APPRECIATION

On Easter Sunday, April 19th, my dear friend Joyce Burfitt died after a short final illness.

Twenty seven years ago, whilst planning my then new garden, I was introduced to Joyce because I "fancied a few heathers". Over the years since then she became a cherished member of my family. Today my garden is a lovely reminder of her, and all she so patiently taught me.

Joyce had come to the Clarendon Road nursery of Maxwell & Beale early in the 1940's to help with the war work of growing food. Even in those dark days the nursery was allowed to maintain its collection of heather stock plants, and she began to help with that. She stayed on after the war, working in both the nursery and the office. She learned propagation from Esther Upfold, and, with H.E. Beale as her tutor, began to develop her great knowledge of cultivars. She assimilated some of his ideas on garden design, and indeed designed many customers' gardens for the firm. She was involved for them in the making of the heather garden at Compton Acres.

She retired from Maxwell & Beale in the early 1960's, but kept in contact with her former colleagues, many of whom had heathers named after them. In 1958 the firm introduced a dusky maroon coloured *E. cinerea* that she had found and named it after her. She also introduced two little known cultivars of *E. ciliaris* - 'Burfitt's Dwarf' and 'Egdon Heath'.

After her retirement she maintained her interest in heathers. She was a Founder Member of the Heather Society in 1963. In 1975 she was one of the group of members that formed the Southwest local section of the Society and seldom missed a meeting. She would gladly share her encyclopaedic knowledge, but was always keen to learn more. It was her self-imposed duty to ensure that heathers were correctly named, but she always pointed out errors with great charm and courtesy.

During the post Maxwell & Beale days she rooted many thousands of cuttings for Jack Drake of Inshriach Nursery, Aviemore. She also produced the most exquisite pressed flower work, which found a ready market in Corfe Castle and further afield in National Trust shops. Her work was also sold in Germany and America.

All her life she was extremely interested in bee keeping, and judged at many local shows.

One summer evening my husband and I will take her ashes and scatter them on the heath at Arne where she found the heather that was named after her. Joyce will be sadly missed by all her friends for her kindness and her interest and knowledge of all things in nature.

Valerie Davis.

### **The *Calluna vulgaris* heather reference collection in The Granada Arboretum, Jodrell Bank, Cheshire.**

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the need to conserve the garden varieties of species of herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees which might otherwise disappear from commerce and, ultimately, from our gardens. The outcome of a conference held by The Royal Horticultural Society in 1978 to deal with this problem and the preservation of gardens, was the formation of The National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (N.C.C.P.G.). Action has been taken by many interested organisations and a few examples of many reference collections that have been established are: 'Lilacs' (Brighton Parks Dept.), 'Ceanothus' (Somerset Farm Institute), 'Old Roses' (National Trust) and one close at hand is the 'Gooseberry' collection in The University Experimental Grounds at Jodrell Bank. In 1979 The Royal Horticultural Society, in collaboration with The Heather Society, decided to set up national reference collections of the hardy heather species in a large area of their Wisley Gardens. At about the same time, The Northern Horticultural Society agreed to collaborate with The Heather Society to establish reference collections of cultivars of *Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica carnea* and *Erica x darleyensis* in their gardens at Harlow Car. The following year plans were made to plant a collection of *Calluna vulgaris* cultivars in the Arboretum. As long ago as 1973 Dr. R.A. Benton first made contact with The Heather Society but it was not until 1980 that a close liaison was established, resulting in the above mentioned decision to plant our *Calluna vulgaris* collection. Propagation using material from authenticated plants, of approximately 170 cultivars of significant merit and historical importance, in The Heather Society's trials, was started and despite many set-backs, plants of most of the cultivars were available to be planted in position during the Spring of 1985. Jack Swan allocated space adjoining the *Berberis stenophylla* hedge near to the heather garden, and prepared four beds. The soil, which had been checked for its suitability to support acid loving Ericaceous plants, was deeply cultivated by hand digging. A generous quantity of bark fibre and peat was worked into the top spit. Alas, the winter was disastrous. A herd of cows broke into the Arboretum and strayed across the two large beds, rabbits uprooted a number of plants by burrowing, and many succumbed to the severe weather conditions, said to be the worst for 40 years. It is thought that the very cold spells interspersed with warmer periods and the absence of a protective snow cover was the major cause of the failure of many plants to survive unscathed. Most of the gaps will be filled from the reserve plants held in the nursery.

As expected, weed growth was considerable in the first year with *Polygonum persicaria* (Red Shank) the worst offender, but regular and frequent hoeing has considerably reduced the weed seed population in the surface layer of the soil. This year the most troublesome weeds are Dandelion and Buttercup. The Dandelion seedlings, which probably result from wind blown seeds, are particularly difficult to remove from the heather plant roots when their tap roots have developed.

Fortunately rabbits do not eat heather foliage but they burrow alongside the plants, often uprooting them. Probably they prefer soil which has been loosened during planting to the consolidated areas between the plants. To minimise this problem, short sticks have been inserted in the ground around and close to the plants in the hope that the rabbits will be inhibited from burrowing in the area contained by the sticks. There is evidence that this is proving to be successful.

Cultivars with broadly similar features are grouped together, enabling direct comparisons to be made one with another. The largest bed holds the white flowering and coloured foliage cultivars. The next largest bed has the coloured flowering cultivars with the "doubles" segregated from the "singles". A smaller bed holds the low growing cultivars (all colours) and there is a small triangular bed in which the silver foliated cultivars are planted.

The plants are spaced approximately 45 cm apart. They will be lightly trimmed each year to prevent long extension growth and encroachment on each other.

Old cultivars and recent introductions of merit constitute the collection and it is hoped that more space will be allocated to the project so that there will be room for the addition of future worthy introductions.

We, at the Arboretum together with our Northern Horticultural Society colleagues, take pride in having established the first national Heather reference Collections, more are to follow. There is to be one in The Saville Gardens at Windsor for which John Bond is making preparations, one at Plymouth which is to be set up by the Parks Dept., and, of course, the comprehensive collection being planned by the R.H.S. for their Wisley Gardens.

(This article on *Calluna vulgaris* has been contributed by Mr. A. Julian).

## GROUP NEWS.

### NORTHEAST (NEWCASTLE)

At a recent committee meeting it was agreed that this Group would take part in a Garden Weekend at Durham College of Horticulture at Houghall on Sunday 17th May from 2-5 p.m., to which all members are cordially invited. The various trade and society stands which support this event should prove of interest to members. Our Heather Society stand will be staffed by six members to offer assistance and information, and will no doubt enlist some new members.

Our Heather Show will once again take place by kind invitation of our members Mr and Mrs D. Goodchild at 66 Darras Road, Ponteland, on Sunday 27th September. Full details and schedules will be posted to all our members in due course.

By kind invitation we are to visit the very picturesque large garden at the home of our members Mr & Mrs D. Plumridge at Rose Cottage, Castleside, Consett, (situated ½ mile along the road to Stanhope, opposite to the church yard) on Saturday 18th July from 2.30 p.m. It is hoped this function will be well supported. Interested friends will also be made welcome.

The next indoor meeting will be held on Monday 19th October in the Methodist Church Hall, Ponteland at 7 p.m. This will take the form of a business session and slide illustrated talk by one of our members covering various features of heather growing.

Syd Courtney.

### MIDLANDS (BIRMINGHAM)

The Group's November '86 meeting took the form of a heather quiz, followed by a short report and a few slides of the 1986 Heather Society Conference. Having ploughed manfully (or rather 'womanfully' through the quiz, Mary Hamnet emerged as clear winner, with Leonard Hemming, 2nd, and Ray Yardley, 3rd. It was at this exciting point that I found I had forgotten to bring the prizes. However I must have been forgiven because there was a marvellous turnout for the next meeting on March 6th, for a short film and a heather competition. On this date the winter flowering heathers were almost at their peak for us in the Midlands and there were about 50 entries for the competition spread among the 5 classes. As it happened we were very fortunate because the day after the meeting 6 inches of snow blanketed the Midlands and there wasn't a heather to be seen! For many members this was a rare opportunity to take

## GROUP NEWS Cont.

part in a heather competition, interest was very keen and the standard remarkably high.

In the absence of vases, entries were arranged in circular blocks of 'Oasis' and this was a cheap compromise which worked well. The results in the 5 classes were:-

*Class 1 Any E. carnea* 1st David Radley; 2nd Mary Hamnet; 3rd John Dearn.

*Class 2 Any heather hybrid* 1st Betty Bishop; 2nd Phil Yates; 3rd David Radley.

*Class 3 Any heather to be judged for foliage effect.* 1st; 2nd; 3rd David Radley.

*Class 4. A Tree Heather in flower* Evelyn & Bernard Skett.

*Class 5. An arrangement of heathers in a basket.* 1st Rosemary Radley; 2nd Mary Hamnet;  
3rd Betty Bishop

The 1st prize winner in each class won a most 'valuable' Easter Egg.

We also showed a short cine film lent to us by Mr Hardwick of Newick in Sussex.

Part of this unique film, taken about 25 years ago, shows Mr Hardwick's lovely garden and nursery, with thousands of heathers planted out in rows in the open ground, as was usual at that time. The remainder of the film is of John Letts' nursery and garden at Windlesham in its heyday. Although not much more than 10 minutes in length this film is a real piece of history. After so many years it is becoming rather brittle and easily broken but Mr Hardwick has kindly allowed us to have a video made from the film which we can keep and it can then be shown to interested members without damaging the original. We are indebted to Mr John Hatton, who has a photographic business in Birmingham, for offering to have the video made for us.

The next meeting is our annual social evening to be held this year at 6 p.m. on Saturday June 6th at Winterbourne. We are always pleased to see members from other areas but everyone who comes is asked to bring something towards the cold supper.

For your diary: The Group will visit Ness gardens on Saturday August 22nd (meet at the visitors' centre at 11 a.m.). Please contact me by the end of July if you intend coming and if you need transport. Tel: 0885 82206.

Daphne Everett.

## SOUTHERN.

The Spring issue of the Bulletin arrived only 4 days before our planned spring gathering of which it gave notice. After discussion with the Chairman, it was felt too short a period of notice to expect a substantial response from membership. Thanks are extended to the few who did make contact. They were told on inquiry that the April meeting has necessarily been cancelled and asked to note that a meeting would be held on Sunday 2nd August at the same venue 12 Ringley Park Avenue, Reigate (Tel: 48211) commencing 2.30 p.m. followed by tea hopefully in the garden.

Those who find themselves unable to attend on this date may care to send me a stamped addressed envelope in which I will enclose details of when further group meetings will be held in the autumn, and in the spring of 1988.

Jock Vickery.

## SOUTHWEST.

A wet and windy day greeted us at Lytchett Matravers on April 4th for our first meeting of the year. Diane Jones gave us a talk with slides entitled "Creating a Heather Garden on Alkaline Soil". With the excellent slides Diane described how she and her husband Bert developed their garden at West Camel. The very informative talk was concluded by Diane answering a barrage of questions which continued informally through our refreshments. The two class Table Show was well supported by 10 exhibitors in the first class and 5 in the second class. The results are as follows :-

*Class 1 A vase or bowl of heather in bloom.*

1st Diane Jones; 2nd Val Davis; 3rd Henry Pringle; H.C. Daphne Maginess.

*Class 2 A vase of bowl of heathers shown for foliage effect.*

1st Val Davis; 2nd Daphne Maginess; 3rd Henry Pringle; H.C. John Turrell.

Most Points in the Show: Val Davis.

## GROUP NEWS Cont.

My thanks go to Val Davis and Mrs Joyner Snr for serving the refreshments and to those members who provided cakes. Joyce Burfitt although very ill at the time was able to provide preparatory help as she always had done for that meeting. Sadly, only 2 weeks after this meeting, on Easter Sunday 19th April, Joyce Burfitt died in Poole hospital. We have all lost a very dear friend and she will be greatly missed.

Reports of our May and June meetings will be in the Autumn Bulletin, as will that of the final meeting of this year arranged for Saturday August 22nd. This will be a two garden visit near Southampton. Members are invited to bring picnic lunches (and garden chairs) from 12.30 p.m. to Bill & Joan Vicary's garden at Foxhills, Ashurst, and then move on to my garden at 84 Kinross Road, Rushington.

Bill and Joan Vicary's home may be reached by driving from Lyndhurst to Southampton along the A 35 and turning left into Whartons Lane just before the dual carriageway; or by turning right onto the A 326 from the A 336 Cadnum to Totton Road and then turning right at the second roundabout into Knellers Lane. Foxhills connects Whartons Lane with Knellers Lane. To reach my garden from the A 35 Lyndhurst to Southampton road, turn left into Rushington Avenue from the dual carriageway immediately after the roundabout with the A 326 for Fawley. Kinross Road is on the right off Rushington Avenue. Detailed instructions may be requested by sending a S.A.E. to me.

*For your diary:* Our first meeting in 1988 will be on Saturday March 26th at Diane & Bert Jones' home at West Camel near Yeovil.

I shall look forward to meeting members at the August meeting.

Phil Joyner.

## SCRAP BOWL — Titbits of news from members.

*"Save the Bogs Campaign"* The Irish Peatland Conservation Council is a charitable organisation established in 1986 to promote public awareness of the plight of Ireland's rapidly disappearing peat bogs. It is their view that a unique opportunity exists to conserve some of the finest examples of peatlands left in western Europe. As part of their diverse programme of activities they have launched a "Save the Bogs Campaign" appeal fund. Direct action of this kind is now urgently needed and this will demonstrably reflect the very real concern of conservationists both here and abroad. A number of natural history and conservation organisations have given their sympathetic support, including the Irish Wildbird Conservancy Newsletter, An Taisce, The Irish Biogeographical Society, the Hare, the Botanical Society of the British Isles, Glasra etc. These organisations have also circulated the appeal leaflet free of charge.

*My Favourite Heather?* This is surely a question to which the answer is fleeting. My favourite heather is the one which is giving special pleasure at that moment. Is it in the spring when *Calluna vulgaris* 'Fred J. Chapple' with its coral tips or *Exdarleyensis* 'Arthur Johnson' with cream tips, or is it in summer when the new growth of foliage heathers is fully coloured? Or is it when autumn comes and the large bells of *Daboecia* glow behind a coating of dew? On a bleak winter's day, when a shaft of light hits a solitary plant of *Calluna vulgaris* 'Cuprea' sited so that it is in full view from your favourite armchair, is it this? May all my other heathers forgive me if I plum for *E. x darleyensis* 'Arthur Johnson'? For me it has the longest flowering season through the dullest months — a solid mass of colour 6 feet by 5 feet. And remember — as the flowers fade, the tip of every shoot will give a second "flowering". This time it will be cream!

Alan Duncan, Zone 9.

*'Carefully Managed' burning of Upland Heath.* "Burning management is carried out in winter when reptiles are hibernating, ground-nesting birds are not at risk, and there are few invertebrates in the heather canopy. If carefully controlled, the fire will not affect the deeper layers of litter and soil. Moss and litter are effective insulators. Although 840°C is measured in

## SCRAP BOWL Cont.

the canopy, it is only 65° 1cm below the surface and no change is recorded at 4cm. Some invertebrates will perish but reptiles should be unaffected.

The bare ground introduced by burning is a valuable habitat to many insects, especially fast-moving predatory spiders and beetles. The ensuing young heather shoots are nutritious to several herbivorous species. Birds, including golden plover in the uplands and woodlark in the lowlands, favour a short sward for breeding, and a valuable diversity is introduced into the heath.

Accidental summer fires which burn deeply cause very great damage to the animal life and the heather rootstocks and seeds. Purposeful burning helps minimise the risk of accidental fire by reducing the combustible material."

(This item was a reply by Katherine Hearn, Assistant Adviser on Conservation to The National Trust, following a letter expressing concern about the plight of reptile life on upland heaths which are regularly burned. Pub. in the Spring 1987 issue of the National Trust Magazine. Ed.)

*Book for Sale.* I have a book written by Fred J. Chapple and signed by him entitled "The Heather Garden". It is in perfect condition including the jacket. If a member would care to make me an offer for it, please contact me : Mrs. I.L. Purdom, c/o Mrs Chandler, Weald Hall, Weald Hall Lane, Thornwood, Epping, Essex.

*Correction* In the Spring Bulletin (Vol. 3 No. 20) p.5. there was an unfortunate printer's error in the first item of the Scrap Bowl. Paragraph 2 of "Heathers in Surrey" should read :-

"Some cultivars of *E. tetralix* flowered exceptionally early — even in April — while *Daboecia cantabrica* was on average a month late. One result of this was that 'Charles Nelson' in some cases omitted the first flush of single flowers, and when it started to flower at the end of June produced double flowers straight away."

*Heather on the Move.* When Joan and I first joined the Heather Society, we lived in a corner of Cheam, Surrey, which had once formed part of the Nonsuch Park. We had gained our love of heathers during a visit to Wisley but our interest developed in many a happy tour of the Valley Gardens of Windsor Great Park. Our first acquaintance with fellow members was at Bletchworth one cold Sunday afternoon when our Chairman showed some of his latest slides. Before the summer developed that year however, we were on the move to Formby, Merseyside.

Formby turned out to be a heather fancier's dream. For those whose geography of the North West is now a little hazy, I should add that Formby, once a fishing village, is now a commuter town serving Liverpool. The climate is mild, though strong winds blow off the sea in winter. Pilots flying into the local airfield speak of the "Formby Hole" a characteristic break in the clouds over Formby point. This probably helps explain the generous share of sunshine which the residents enjoy, in a region otherwise well known for its high rainfall. The soil is light and there is sand one spit down. A local carpenter came one day to do a job for me and I confided my concern for the foundations of our bungalow built on sand. "I helped build these houses", he said "and you have nothing to worry about. Consolidated sand provides the best foundation after solid rock". As something of a Bible fancier as well, I could only comment "you could have fooled me."

Sand and peat made for good heather growing. The first owner of our bungalow had imported some top soil which was broadly neutral and helped balance the strongly acid substratum of sand. We had no difficulty in getting a pH of around 5.9 - 6.0. Another plus point for Formby is provided by a specialist supplier of peat near Southport. The charming and obliging proprietors could supply any kind of peat one could wish for, including peat blocks, at discount prices. Just ask — by telephone please — and your order would be on your doorstep the next day. Sometimes on the same day,

We had not been living in Formby long when we were looked up by Bob Pickering and thus

started a happy friendship that still continues though at a distance. We used to meet, generally without much if any prior arrangement, about twice a month. Not infrequently he would drop in around noon on a Saturday, or we would call on him. We'd yarn for a while over a glass of red wine, and then poke around among the heathers for a bit. Occasionally we would have a meal together. Our approach to heather growing is identical. For us it is simply, but most enjoyably, a hobby. If things go wrong it doesn't matter and if they go right, as occasionally they do, we have much to crow about. Bob uses sedge peat exclusively while I use moss peat for preparing beds and black sedge peat for dressing them. His heathers have to grow in straight lines and like it, while, perhaps presuming on my rather haphazard nature, mine pretty well please themselves.

Bob was keen to encourage a local group of the Society and Joan and I were willing to help. His idea was to foster somewhat more generally the sort of easy informal friendship and co-operation that the three of us enjoyed. Joan and I were privileged to host the inaugural meeting of the Formby Group in our home. It would surely be invidious to mention individual members we met then and subsequently, but we remember them all with great pleasure. These pleasures were not to last, at any rate, not in the Formby mould, because my employers said that they wanted me back in London. So ended two happy years.

Looking for property in the London suburbs these days is no pleasure. I was already well aware that the Home Counties are well favoured with chalk but I hoped that we might at least find a pocket of land suitable for growing 'the chosen weed'. Pamela Lee suggested in a letter that I should consult a geological map, which after some false starts I did, at the Geological Museum, Kensington. However, other constraints decided the issue and we settled on a return home to Cheam.

But this time, we were able to check the soil conditions before we got there — on our geological map. We discovered that we would be gardening on a stratum known as Thanet Beds, clay with pebbles mixed in. Underlying this is the dreaded chalk, so much in evidence on nearby Epsom Downs.

We eventually returned to Cheam last June and found there the clay, the pebbles and a pH of 6.5! Wherever we tested the pH it is uniformly 6.5 even in the front garden where the spade turns up nodules of chalk amid buried builder's rubble. I was comforted by a scientist acquaintance of mine who tells me that in places where the pH is too low, it is quite difficult to bring it up just by applying chalk. In a naturally acid soil, the lumps of chalk get a skin. Obviously there is hope yet.

In the meantime we are waiting for our rooted cuttings to grow. While in Formby, I did have a go at propagation and my results were a good deal patchier than the splendid performance which Peter Vickers demonstrated at last year's Conference. Never-the-less, we were able to bring with us about 60 plants in pots and another 70-80 in trays. Enough to make a new start. We are still looking forward to seeing one of our own tree heathers grow to 12 inches but, who knows, perhaps in our new home we shall at last enjoy an established heather garden for the first time.

Joan & Allen Hall, Zone 11.

## DIARY OF EVENTS

- Jul. 3/5th Southampton Show - South West Group Heather Society Stand.  
Jul. 18th Northeast (Newcastle) - Garden visit to Consett - See Group News.  
Aug. 2nd Southern Group - Garden visit at Reigate - See Group News.  
Aug. 11th COUNCIL MEETING - R.H.S. Halls, Westminster.  
Aug. 11/12th R.H.S. Summer Flower Show & Heather Competitions, R.H.S. Halls , Westminster.  
Aug. 22nd Midlands (Birmingham) - Garden Visit to Ness. See Group News.  
Aug. 22nd Southwest - Two garden visits near Southampton - See Group News.  
Sept. 4/7th ANNUAL CONFERENCE at Hadlow College, Nr. Maidstone, Kent.  
Sept. 6th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING " " "  
Sept. 17th Northeast (Newcastle) Group Heather Show - See Group News.  
Sept. 20th CLOSING DATE for material for the Autumn Bulletin.  
Oct. 19th Northeast (Newcastle) Illustrated talk at Ponteland - See Group News.  
Nov. 27th Midlands (Birmingham) Talk by Mrs Ruth Hayden "Mary Delany 1700-1788" at Winterbourne.

1988 Mar. 26th Southwest Group - Visit to Otters' Court, West Camel, Nr. Yeovil, Somerset.  
Details in Autumn Bulletin.

1987 May 23rd to October 4th An Exhibition "Manchester & its Parks 1846 - 1986"  
at Wythenshawe Hall, Northenden, Manchester 23.  
Monday - Saturday (not Tuesday) 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sunday 2 - 6 p.m. Admission free.  
Further information from Clare Latimer, Manchester City Art Gallery, Mosley St., Manchester M2 3JL.