

*Bulletin of The
Heather Society*



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Vol. 5 No. 12

Autumn 1997

DIARY OF EVENTS 1997/98

1997

31 October	North East Group	A.G.M.
25/26 November	RHS Show	Heather Competition

1998

15 January	CLOSING DATE FOR THE BULLETIN	
17/18 February	R H S Show	Heather Competition
28 March	South West Group	Heather Competition and Talk Lytchett Matravers
8/9/10 July	Yorkshire Group	Great Yorkshire Show

28th Annual Conference, September 4th - 7th 1998 to be held in at Norwich

Accommodation, dining and lecture facilities have been arranged at Southwell Lodge, the halls of residence of the City College, Norwich. There will be a choice of accommodation between single study rooms with shared facilities and twin en-suite rooms. The en-suite accommodation is limited to a maximum of 14 rooms.

The City College is close to the centre of Norwich. A programme of lectures, nursery and field visits is being prepared and will be announced in the *Spring Bulletin*. Norwich and East Anglia have many attractions so why not make the Conference part of a holiday to that delightful area of England.

The **approximate** cost of the Conference will be £155 for the single rooms with shared facilities and £170 for the en-suite accommodation. Bookings may be made by sending £2 (per mailing) to: Phil Joyner, 84 Kinross Road, Rushington Manor, Totton, Southampton SO40 9BN.

Cheques should be made payable to *The Heather Society*, the booking fee is non-returnable and is not a deposit on the cost of the conference. Please indicate the type of accommodation preferred.



A Registered Charity No. 261407

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Cover illustration *Calluna Vulgaris* by Brita Johansson

Another Conference has come and gone, but the Saturday of this one will be remembered for having been the sad occasion of Princess Diana's funeral. We had been expecting to visit Hayes Garden Centre in the morning but, as it was closed as a mark of respect, the Lakelands Horticultural Society invited us to arrive at Holehird Gardens earlier than the programmed time. They also, very kindly, set out several televisions in their Members' Room, so that those Heather Society members who wanted to watch the Service could do so. Our thanks are due to the Staff at Holehird for their hospitality and to Phil Joyner and his team, who kept the Conference running smoothly, despite the upsets in the arrangements.

Report on the 1997 Annual General Meeting, held on Saturday 6th September at Newton Rigg College, Penrith

The Chairman, David Small, welcomed everyone to the Conference, with a special welcome to several Members from overseas and those from the UK who were attending for the first time.

The Secretary, Pamela Lee, then gave a report on the activities of the Society during the previous year. These included preparations for a set of Heather Guides, a 'cuttings service' for members, two new Regional Groups, and the Society's own Web-site on the Internet. She also mentioned that Diane and Bert Jones' heather garden had been featured in the Daily Mail Colour Supplement and had resulted in the recruitment of eight new members for the Society.

The Chairman announced that Pamela, having loyally served the Society as Secretary for over 20 years, had decided to retire from the post and also to stand down from Council. He thanked her for all the work she done for the Society over the years. A presentation was made to her of six cut-glass wine glasses, each with a heather motif.

The Treasurer, Allen Hall, gave his usual very clear presentation of the Society's accounts. He told the meeting that the Society did not now take enough in subscriptions to pay its way and is relying on dividends and sales to make up the shortfall.

The President, and existing Vice-Presidents were re-elected. In appreciation of their work for the Society, two new Vice-Presidents were then elected - namely the past Treasurer, Des Oliver and the retiring Secretary, Pamela Lee. The Assistant Yearbook Editor, Ron Cleevely, was elected as the new Secretary and Derek Millis as a new member of Council. The Auditor, Ron Wing, who was in the audience (much to the mock consternation of the Treasurer), agreed to continue and was thanked for giving his time so generously.

An important announcement was made by the Chairman. This was that the cross between *Erica manipuliflora* and *E. vagans* 'Valerie Proudley' created by Dr. John Griffiths, has now been accepted as a new hybrid - to be called *Erica x griffithsii* in his honour. He and his wife Valerie (after whom the first cultivar was named) were congratulated.

There were suggestions from the floor for raising the profile of heathers, with talks and radio interviews etc. Also, some criticisms of the National Heather Collection at Wisley where trees are blocking some paths and the 'powers that be' have planted an oak tree in a heather bed. Phyllis Kennedy reported a miniature *E. vagans* found in a member's garden. Questions were asked about a visit to South Africa with Ted Oliver as guide, proposed for 1999. The Chairman said that he was still negotiating with Ted Oliver, who only wanted to lead a very small party, and he was waiting for a reply to his latest e-mail. After a question about the availability of the *Handy Heather Guide*, the Chairman said that a new one was almost completed and it is hoped to have it available in time for Christmas.

Results of the Heather Competition at Vincent Square 19th - 20th August 1997

Class 1. Three distinct Heather species or variants in bloom

1. *Erica cinerea* 'Margaret Bowerman', 'Alfred Bowerman', 'Champs Hill'
2. *Erica cinerea* 'Snow Queen', 'C D Eason', 'Eden Valley'
3. *Erica cinerea* 'Pink Foam', 'Apple Blossom', 'P S Patrick'
Mary Bowerman 1st, 2nd & 3rd

Class 2. *Erica vagans*, any variant, one vase

1. 'Hookstone Rose' Mary Bowerman
2. 'Viridiflora' Mary Bowerman
3. 'Birch Glow' David McClintock

Class 3. *Calluna vulgaris*, single flowered variant

1. Gold seedling David McClintock
2. 'Carnea' Mary Bowerman
3. 'Oxshott Common' Mary Bowerman

Class 4. *Calluna vulgaris*, double flowered variant

1. 'White Coral' Mary Bowerman
2. 'County Wicklow' Mary Bowerman
3. 'Oxshott Common' Mary Bowerman

Class 5. *Calluna vulgaris*, single/double white variant

1. 'Elegantissima Pearl' Mary Bowerman
2. 'Anneke' Mary Bowerman
3. 'My Dream' Mary Bowerman

Class 6. *Calluna vulgaris*, bud bloomer, any variant

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. 'Alexandra' | David McClintock |
| 2. 'Alexandra' | Mary Bowerman |
| 3. 'Amethyst' | Mary Bowerman |
| Class 7. <i>Erica cinerea</i> , any variant | |
| 1. 'Champs Hill' | Mary Bowerman |
| 2. 'Carnea' | Mary Bowerman |
| 3. 'Margaret Bowerman' | Mary Bowerman |
| Class 8. <i>Daboecia</i> , any species, hybrid or variant | |
| 1. 'Praegerae' | Mary Bowerman |
| 2. 'Cinderella' | Mary Bowerman |
| 3. 'Rainbow' | Mary Bowerman |
| Class 9. Any species or hybrid not specified above | |
| 1. <i>Erica manipuliiflora</i> | Mary Bowerman |
| 2. <i>Erica ciliaris</i> 'Camla' | Mary Bowerman |
| Class 10. Heathers shown for foliage effect | |
| 1. <i>E. arborea</i> 'Albert's Gold' | Mary Bowerman |
| 2. <i>E. arborea</i> 'Albert's Gold' | David McClintock |
| 3. <i>C.v.</i> 'Arran Gold' | Mary Bowerman |
| Class 11. Arrangement of heathers in a basket | |
| 1. | Mary Bowerman |
| 2. | Mary Bowerman |
| 3. | Jill Wright |

Although Mary Bowerman almost swept the board once again, she did have some competition this time and the Society would like to thank **all** those who rallied to the call and placed an entry, whether they were winners or not.

The Little Brown Dog with the Green Coat

Walter Wornick - New Hampshire USA

Reprinted with acknowledgements to Heather Notes - the quarterly Newsletter of the Northeast American Heather Society.

Coming back from London's Heathrow airport to New York's JFK at the end of May, I was waiting for my baggage to appear on the carousel at the British Air Terminal. I had my one bag of hand luggage on a cart and it contained a plastic bag with about 15 plants that I had declared on my Customs Declaration. I had carefully washed the soil off the roots of each plant and placed it in a separate plastic bag.

Then along came a woman in uniform with a little brown dog on a leash. The dog wore a green coat with the words 'US Department of Agriculture' on it. As it sniffed along the carts it came over to my cart and stopped. Its keeper immediately asked me if "I had any bread". Tired, and watching for my other luggage, I responded that I did not. Then she asked me "if I had any fruit" and again I responded in the negative. However, by that time I got the *gestalt* and responded that I did have some plants which I had declared on my Customs Declaration. She asked to see it and wrote on it that I should go to Agricultural Inspection when I got the rest of my baggage and "he CLAIMS TO HAVE A PLANT IMPORT PERMIT".

When I collected the rest of my bags I was sent to the Agricultural Inspectors and there were 9 standing at the booth. I guess they had increased the staff, since the dog was on duty. However, I was the only one to be

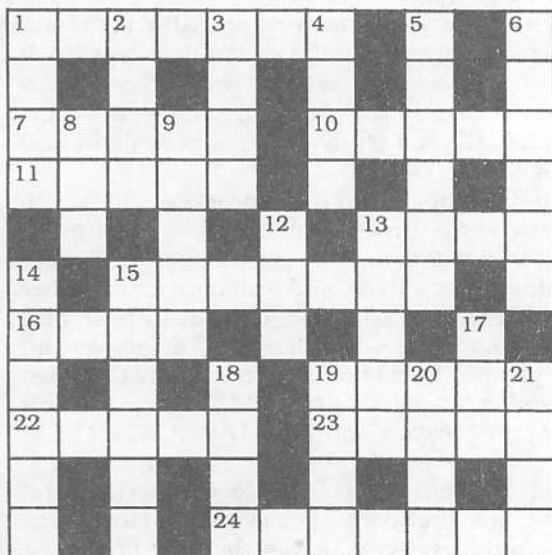
inspected. They all gathered round and I showed them my plants and then took out my permit. This impressed them no end, and it was in a new and revised format, as I had just had it renewed. I was immediately treated with more respect and they agreed that they could not deal with the matter and had to send for a supervisor so, that made 10 people looking at my plants.

The supervisor was also very impressed by the fact that I had declared the plants and had a permit. He asked me to show the group a few of the ferns I had with me, as some of them had just taken a course on ferns that week. My plants were declared clean and everything was in order, so I was passed on, with thanks and no problem.

There is no problem bringing plants into the USA from abroad, but you must declare them and have a permit and enter through a port where there is Agricultural Inspection. Otherwise the little brown dog with the green coat may get you and it becomes a very serious offence.

Heather Crossword

30 years ago the very first Bulletin was produced by the Society's Secretary Constance MacLeod. It was intended from the start that the Bulletin should be the voice of the Society, a way for members to communicate with one another. The aims and intentions are still the same today and the Editor would welcome your letters, articles, questions, problems, useful tips, and ideas on ways to make it more relevant to your needs. Looking back at the first issue, I see that Constance suggested someone should devise a Heather Crossword, and in Bulletin No. 3 (Spring 1968) one was duly produced. It has been reprinted in this edition and a small prize will be sent to anyone who can solve it. Answers in the Spring Edition. (Sadly those careful members who still have Bulletin No. 3 are barred). Maybe someone would like to try his or her hand at producing an up to date Heather Crossword for inclusion in the Bulletin in 1998?



Across

- This tall heath has pale green foliage
- Alias *scoparia*.
- Denotes red flowers.
- Connected with stars, curtailed.
- Seaweed, singular.
- Freezing water.
- 9 down, beheaded.
- A product of 1 across.
- Sacred book of the Mogammedans.
- E. mediterranea* (now *hibernica*) Superba is considered this as a specimen plant.
- If one believes in feeding *Ericas* this is useful.

Down

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Could denote the colour of 1 across. | <i>carnea</i> and <i>E. cinerea</i> . |
| 2. Definitely a choice heather. | 13. Omit the R and you have ideal growing conditions. |
| 3. Similar to 'Mullion' in appearance. | 14. Essential for cars and a good mulch for heather. |
| 4. Prefix in the names of many <i>Erica cinereas</i> . | 15. Type of grafting. |
| 5. Not the best tool for planting heathers. | 17. Omit the water from this tree heath. |
| 6. This hybrid sounds like a tropical fruit. | 18. Latin for one. |
| 8. Anagram on the last 3 letters of the name | 19. Very little difference between this bird and a fir tree. |
| of a well-known heather grower. | 20. 13th century spelling of a heather requirement. |
| 9. A Queen without a letter. | 21. Might have a variety of <i>tetralix</i> attached. |
| 12. Prefix to a variety of <i>Calluna, E.</i> | |

Leann Fraoch

An article by Steve McGrail, reprinted from The Scots Magazine November 1996 & sent in by Jean Davidson. It is rather long but is so interesting it seemed a shame to chop it about. Ed.

If you happen to find yourself somewhere like Glen Orchy say, or around Loch Fyne or Appin during the summer months, you may come across an unusual sight. Down on their hunkers, anti-midge nets billowing around their heads, are small groups of people cutting heather and bundling it into large sacks. They work swiftly, as well they might: nobody sensible hangs about when the Highland midge is on the air. In any case - as it turns out - these people are professionals and they know how to shift. (Earlier in the year you might have seen some of them at the rasps in Angus, others will be picking tatties over in the Mearns.) Sometimes, one of them will stray off to a patch of bog myrtle and will start picking that instead. Into a separate sack goes the myrtle however.

But why pick myrtle? Or heather for that matter? As a thatching material heather is hardly ever found these days, so thatch cannot be the reason for the arduous toil on the hillsides. Heather rope too is seen only in museums. Besides, for all their speed, the workers are not just collecting the heather in long tangled skeins, any old how. Only the top few inches of the plant are being chosen, and carefully at that. It is all very mysterious.

Perhaps some sort of long-forgotten ancient craft is being practiced? Well yes, in a way, it is. It is a craft, and it had been nearly forgotten for centuries, except by a few people in the Highlands and Islands. And it is certainly very ancient. The Picts would have guessed what these 20th century pickers are up to, for the little groups of men and women are gathering two of the ingredients crucial to the making of the country's oldest known fermented beverage. They are cutting heather and myrtle to create Heather Ale - leann fraoch in the original Gaelic.

Heather Ale has been made in Scotland for 2500 years. It may have been

drunk for much longer. On the Isle of Rum archaeologists have found a fragment of pottery dating back to 2000 BC which bears traces of a fermented drink made from flowers. It is likely that these were heather. Then, as now, the little purple shrub was plentiful. One day someone must have realised that the liquid made from its flowers would occasionally bubble up and change its character, turning into what we now call alcohol - and with the effects we know only too well.

The Picts, who certainly understood that the nectar in heather could be made to ferment, were a Celtic people; and the Celts were famously ingenious. In their rocky fastnesses north of the Firth and Clyde, the Picts must have set about developing the drink. Liquid drawn off cooked cereals was probably the basis for their brew. Heather would provide the flavour and the sweetness of its flowers and also additional alcohol.

Over time the Picts became skilled brewers. *The Scottish National Dictionary* says of them: "The Picts brewed some awful grand drink they ca't heather ale". There are even legends about their favourite potion. Robert Louis Stephenson turned one of these into a poem. In it, a king of Scotland has defeated the Picts, but is desperate for a recipe for their special ale. The Pictish chief and his son are the last to hold the secret of its making. Rather than have it revealed, the chief, first hurls the boy over a cliff, then flies at his arrogant conqueror. Both fall to their deaths from the ledge and with this, the secret is lost forever.

Of course, that was only a romantic legend. The secret was never really lost. People continued to make Heather Ale in cottages and crofts long after the Picts had died out as a race. But for many years it could only be made illegally. After the Act of Union in 1707, Scotland began to lose some of her old freedoms. The trickle of controls and prohibitions became a flood after Cullodion of course, with the kilt, the pipes and Gaelic all being banned.

An earlier casualty was Heather Ale itself, just four years after the Act of Union. By this time the venerable brew had become a national drink, but that did not save it. A law was passed stating that beer could be made out of malt and hops alone. Hops do not grow in Scotland's cold climate, so the country's brewers had to import them from England. Other old drinks were lost in the process as well, such as ales flavoured with liquorice or ginger. People adapted to the new hop beer, but it wasn't the same.

All that was to change 281 years later, thanks to the persistence of two brothers from Dunfermline and a chance meeting that might have come out of one of the old legends itself.

"Our launching of Heather Ale happened this way", explains Bruce Williams, co-director of the company that now produces Fraoch, the first commercial Heather Ale for two centuries. "Scott and I had a string of home-brew shops around Glasgow in the 1980s. We were keen home-brewers ourselves, and we liked to play around with different recipes. One day in 1986 a woman came into one of the shops with a very old set of instructions for making something called Heather Ale. She was from Benbecula, I think, and was visiting the Mod. The document was, naturally, all in Gaelic, as it had been handed down in her family. She wanted to learn how to make this leann fraoch. She had to translate the recipe for us first, but when I told her that

I calculated it would take her seven hours to make just 20 pints, she gave up the idea and bought an ordinary beer kit instead.

We kept her instructions and put them on file. It was quite a common thing for us, getting strange recipes that way. We had built up quite a collection. But something about this one intrigued me and I took another look at it later. What would it taste like I asked myself? I found out a bit more about the drink, its history and so on, and decided to make it for myself.

I started by getting some heather and brewed a first batch. The finished ale was quite a shock - nice I mean, but not at all like ordinary beer. It was dry with a sort of winery flavour from the nectar in the flowers. It was bit like mead without the honey, but of course it was fizzy. I took a gamble and tried it out on my friends. They really enjoyed it, particularly the ones who liked German or Belgian beers rather than English or Scottish ones. I thought 'I'm on to something here'."

Bruce carried on experimenting over the next six years. Getting enough bitterness proved to be a problem. Heather alone did not seem to be able to provide it. Adding some myrtle helped, but too much myrtle produced an antiseptic flavour. In the end he compromised by adding a small amount of hops as well. "The brew still contains hops", he explains "but we are reducing the percentage all the time as people get used to the taste of heather flowers. Eventually we'll get rid of them altogether".

Of course, it was one thing to have a circle of friends enjoying your homebrew, but quite another to try to sell it on the open market. Nevertheless, that was exactly what Bruce and his brother decided to do. It was a big risk: "We knew we couldn't produce commercial quantities by ourselves. We knew we'd have to find a commercial brewery to do it. But where would we find a sympathetic brewer? And even if we did, would anyone buy the ale at the end of the day? And where would we get the money from?" Yet they went ahead and looked for a suitable brewery. A particular stipulation, according to Bruce, was that the one that was chosen would have to be located north of the Antonine Wall.

Finally, they hit upon the small West Highland Brewery in Taynuilt, now closed. The owner was keen to be involved and a deal was struck. The brewery was small and could produce only 200 gallons at a time. However, that was enough to supply six pubs in Edinburgh and Glasgow at first. The landlords were amazed at their customers' positive responses, and all sorts of people suddenly began to take an interest in the drink. For example, researchers at Heriot Watt and Glasgow Universities voluntarily undertook research into its history and into brewing techniques. Folk were fascinated, recalls Bruce. "They liked the taste, and they liked the fact that the ale was old, and that it was Scottish."

Demand for Fraoch took off. Bruce and Scott soon found themselves having to be everywhere at once - collecting heather one day, delivering the next, doing the books in their spare time, telling anybody who would listen about the delights of their unusual brew. "It was hard" smiles Bruce ruefully. "There were never enough hours in a day. It's not much easier now. I was living in Helensburgh at the time and having to drive to Edinburgh regularly with

deliveries. I'd even have my family gathering heather sometimes. My friends thought I was mad. 'Bruce's Odyssey', they called it."

The West Highland Brewery could not continue to meet the increased demand, however. In 1993, a new contract was negotiated with another brewery, also suitably north of the Antonine Wall. This was Maclay's, Scotland's oldest family-owned brewery.

Alloa is now where Fraoch comes from. The only difference is that the amount of ale involved has gone up from the original 200. "You'd hardly notice us in the brewery and I suspect that Maclay's think that we're oddballs. Still, they've been very supportive, including selling Fraoch in their own pubs. They've been pretty patient, too, when things have gone wrong."

"Our first batch at Alloa was a disaster. The brew is made by first boiling up the malt - which comes from the Borders, by the way - along with heather tops. Then, a valve is opened to let out the liquid. That should work fine in theory, except that the heather promptly formed itself into a solid mat that blocked the outlet pipe completely. We had the devil's own job to clear it. We are now much more sophisticated. We shove a sort of glorified wooden tea-strainer over the pipe, and that stops the blockages. Actually, our company is getting very 'state-of-the-art' all round, these days. We've even bought a computer, and you can't get more modern than that!"

The little episode of the blocked pipe was a timely reminder that with any craft product, things can go wrong. Every part of the process of making Heather Ale has to be carefully controlled. Heather itself is particularly tricky stuff, it seems. Just for a start, there is heather - and heather. "We prefer ling," explains Bruce, "Because the flowers cluster better, but we use ordinary bell-heather as well. But whatever you do, you don't want too much stalk in proportion to flowers. Then astringents in the bark upset the fine balance of flavours and it becomes a bit too harsh. Harvesting heather can be a nightmare as well, if it's too hot, like it was in 1995. Then, the flowers were blooming and fading within two or three days and the pickers had an awful time of it, keeping pace. Fortunately, heather is generally pretty tough. You can pick it when it's wet and the aroma and the nectar will still be fine but you've only got a couple of days to get it into cold storage before it becomes silage. It's best gathered dry and put into hessian sacks, where it won't deteriorate."

The heather picking season is fairly short, from the end of June to September. Because of this, Heather Ale is not an all-year-round product, on draught at any rate. (The bottled variety keeps as well as any bottled ale, however.) "We try to retain stocks at least until Burns Night" says Bruce. "Maybe we could make more, but as I've said, we're only a tiny organisation. Basically, it's Scott and me still, with the part-time pickers and three people who deliver for us on a contract basis. There's the question of cash too - everything we have is tied up in this. Personally, I'd like to expand, to try other brews like Spruce Beer or Myrtle Ale - two real old-timers - but we couldn't afford to do that. Still, we're managing, and the weans aren't actually starving yet!"

Some three or four hundred pubs now stock Heather Ale, either draught

or bottled, whilst many tourist shops and off-licences sell the ale in bottles as well. Bruce frets that Fraoch cannot be found throughout the whole country yet: "We haven't got a very good coverage in the capital and it's really difficult to interest Highland hotels and pubs in Heather Ale. Most of them just seem to want only what's safe and predictable — in food as well as in drink by the way. They don't seem willing to promote Scottish products, to say to visitors 'Here you are, here's something that's part of our heritage, something unique in the world.' I know I'm not the first person to have made that complaint, but it's a crying shame, altogether. "

So where does the ancient drink of the Picts go from here? Forward, according to Bruce Williams. He sees Heather Ale as a crusade, not as a mere money-spinner for himself or anybody else. "To me, this drink is about Scotland itself" he says. "We're a small country but we have so much to offer. My philosophy is that we should use our natural resources to the full should take a pride in what we own. With Heather Ale we have the pure artesian water of the Ochils, the heather of Argyll and Perthshire and the barley of Berwickshire. I see in all of this the beauty of using wild lands to feed the native spirit."

And - spotted in the Scottish Herald Newspaper (30 August 1997) by Jean McCrindle

Police were in a ferment last night as they braced themselves for one of the worst escapes from any cell in the country. The escape could happen at any time over the next two days, said a spokesman for 16 detainees in deepest, darkest Ayrshire. The 16 were taken into custody on Wednesday after police were alerted by a gamekeeper who became suspicious of goings-on on the border between Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. However, the public need not be alarmed - the 16 detainees are bags of heather which are about to turn into alcoholic compost as the plant's wild yeast and nectar react with each other. The smell when it does escape will be extremely nasty.

The bags were seized after the gamekeeper complained about four people picking heather for the company which makes heather ale. Mr. Bruce Williams who runs the Alloa based brewery, said: 'Four of my pickers were arrested and 16 bags of heather were confiscated by the police. I was shocked at the time that the police would lock up a load of heather.' He said that the confiscation had meant that they had lost a day's production as they had nothing to brew the next day. 'There are 11 million acres of heather in Scotland and last year we picked 16 acres in total. We have picked heather on land owned by the Duke of Argyll, Hopetown House and Balmoral Estate. Most people are interested in what we are doing and we give them a few cases of beer'.

Last week they had permission to pick heather on land owned by the Scoretulloch Hotel by Darvel in Ayrshire. However, the pickers strayed on to someone else's land and landed up in trouble. 'It was misunderstanding on our part - we were picking on the wrong side of the road' Mr. Williams said. 'Apparently we are being charged with ground damage, however we haven't done any damage. We pick the flowers and they grow back better next year.

The police think it will be laughed out of court'.

And - finally - at the end of a report on the 'BBC Good Food Show' held in Birmingham - or the 'How to Flog an Awful Drink Show' as Richard Neilson called it (*Daily Telegraph* 28/12/96) "..... all right, it is not all doom and gloom. I did find one drink I liked in Birmingham. Tucked on to the end of a crowdless stand offering Scottish smoked snails (no joke), a glass or three of Fraoch Heather Ale (£1.65 at Oddbins) provided a fragrant, spicy antidote to the blandness all around."

Maurice and I also found it for sale at The Heather Heritage Centre at Speyside. (Ed.)

Slide Library

Few demands are being made of the slide library now; probably because most members who lecture have their own slides to support their talks. The collection has grown over the years and the quality has improved greatly so it has been decided to widen the uses to which the slides can be put. As winter approaches members may wish to organise home slide shows to depict the many aspects of heather culture - large and small gardens, heathers in the wild, close up of flowers, cultivars etc.

For a trial period members may borrow a collection of up to a maximum of 80 slides. When making a request, the subjects to be covered should be stated and the librarian's selection will be despatched within a few days. The total cost to the borrower will be for postage, both ways.

Jean Julian

Letters to the Editor

From: David Lambie, Speyside Heather Centre, Inverness-shire
Ref. *The Heather Society Bulletin* Vol. 5 No. 11 Summer 1997, *Heathermania* (Dee Daneri, California) - I feel I must reply regarding plants shipped to the States.

In Dee's letter she says, and I quote, "This method proved fatal when the plants arrived several months later, long dead from their travels". This to me gives the impression that the plants had been travelling for months. I must make the point that all plants shipped to the States from Speyside Heather Centre are sent Air Mail, are healthy, (having been inspected by, and given a clean bill of health from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Plant Health Inspectors) are very obviously marked "Perishable - Plant Material" - any delay in receiving our plants can be attributed to US Customs.

We have received many letters/photos etc. from very satisfied customers in the USA and we are very sorry indeed that Dee's experience has not been of a similar nature. Realistically, when dealing with perishable plant material/postal services/customs etc. we can't expect 100% success but the small percentage of failures are dealt with professionally.

From: Bob & Joan Rope, Ravenshead, Nottingham - August 1997

Everyone I know complained about the atrocious wet weather we experienced in June. I am over the moon because we have had, since mid-July, the most wonderful display of summer-flowering *Ericas*.

We have had the garden open for charity twice in the past five years with little to offer in flower colour in the heather garden. This year, whilst the soil was moist, I applied a mulch of cocoa-shell at a depth of 1-2 inches, this has helped to seal in the moisture and we still have a good display. One or two earlier flowering varieties such as *E. cinerea* 'Providence' are now past their best, but *E. ciliaris* is now flowering instead - also *Calluna vulgaris* 'Tib', not my favourite by any means but good for early flower.

Allen Hall should have no difficulty with *E. australis* 'Riverslea' (see Bulletin No. 11, page 9). I have one which was planted about eight years ago, quite healthy in North Notts. - somewhat ungainly in growth but a wonderful display of flower throughout April and early May.

Group News

North East

Unfortunately, through members being away or otherwise occupied at the time of our proposed visit to Howick Gardens on June 7th, this event had to be cancelled. However, on July 16th we had a very enjoyable evening at fellow-member, Bill Crow's nursery, when we had a pleasant time socialising with other members on a warm summer's evening and walking around the heathers. As usual we had a welcome cup of tea with biscuits, kindly provided by Margaret, so once again, our thanks.

Saturday, September 13th was our 15th Annual Show and 7 members submitted a total of 75 entries. They made a very colourful and attractive show bench and our Judge was well pleased. Membership leaflets were on display and many were taken so, hopefully, they may bear fruit - or rather - Members.

The AGM is on Friday, October 31st, 1997 and will be held in Saint Matthews Church Hall, Ponteland, at 7.30 pm. This will take the usual format and after the business we will show members' slides of heather and garden interest. Anyone wishing to bring slides please do so. Again we will be having our Faith Supper and small contributions will be very welcome on the night. See you all there.

Dorothy Warner

Yorkshire

Fifteen members of the Yorkshire Group braved the dismal weather and unpromising weather forecast for a midday visit to the *Gardening Which* trial garden in the Leeds Golden Acre Park. It was followed by an escorted tour of the Harry Ramsden Heather Garden which, also, is located in the park. We had a friendly greeting from Joe Maiden, the well known broadcaster who entertained us with an amusing and informative talk and then escorted us on a tour of the various *Which* sponsored trials of flowers and vegetables for which he is responsible. The resulting produce will be used for the successful show display stands that he sets up. The splendid "a little bit of everything" garden provided the display material for the "A little bit of everything" *Gardening Which* stand at the Harrogate Spring Show for which Joe received a premier award. There was an impressive series of trials of root vegetables

some of which are destined for the Great Yorkshire Show. Then followed a walk to the Harry Ramsden Heather Garden where a number of *Erica cinerea* plants were in flower also a few of *E. tetralix*.

Joe described how he had met a senior executive of the Harry Ramsden Organisation socially and arising out of their association Harry Ramsden financed the present heather garden to the tune of £50,000. It was Joe who arranged for the purchase of the adjoining field from a local farmer and was in the process of planning the layout when Leeds City Council transferred the management of the whole of Golden Acre Park to contractors and Joe lost control. The current layout design which will, ultimately incorporate around a quarter of a million plants, has very large beds each of which is planted with cultivars, mainly of one individual species. *Calluna*, *E. carnea*, *x darleyensis*, *cinerea* and *tetralix* are well represented. He had to leave for an afternoon broadcast appointment and we all returned to the garden restaurant where the meeting was concluded with a discussion over bowls of hot soup, having enjoyed the tour and a most informative and amusing talk and commentary.

The next group meeting will be in the Study Centre, Harlow Carr, on Saturday, 13th September 1997 at 2.30 pm. when Allen Hall will speak on 'Photographing Heathers'. Cape heaths and European heathers will be illustrated by slides.

Calluna vulgaris National Collection - The plot in the Harlow Carr Gardens which is to hold the new *Calluna* Reference Collection has had coarse sand distributed over the whole area and the final rotavation is pending. The paths will then be laid out in preparation for planting in the autumn.

Albert and I spent the Spring Bank Holiday at Denbeigh Heathers, with David and Anne, potting on the rooted cuttings of the plants which they had propagated for the collection. In all 1,500 or so potted plants were produced to complete the 2,000 plants required for the first round of planting in the autumn. The *Calluna* cultivars represented, numbered 499. This is slightly more than are planted at Wisley and at Cherrybank in their national collections. Ultimately we aim to have plants of all the 571 cultivars that are, or have been, commercially available. The Society is greatly indebted to David and Anne for their marvellous generosity in propagating, raising and delivering the 2,000 plants plus standbys completely free of charge.

Great Yorkshire Show - We are planning a small table exhibit of *Calluna* cultivars for the Great Yorkshire Show at Harrogate on 8th, 9th 10th July 1998. It is to be part of The Northern Horticultural Society's main exhibit featuring the Harlow Carr Gardens National plant collections of which the *Calluna* collection is one. A *Heather Society* credit will be placed on the stand.

Jean Julian

East Midlands (GEM)

Fourteen members took part in a meeting of the East Midlands Group on Saturday August 16th 1997 in the beautiful setting of the Sutton Bonington Campus of the University of Nottingham. The Chairman of the Heather Society, Mr. David Small, presented a well-illustrated talk which he called "In search of *Erica andevalensis*".

It appears that this rare plant is now hard to find in nature and nowhere to be seen in public collections. However, after the meeting, members were presented with pots of *Erica andevalensis* to try in their own gardens, allowing that it is not totally hardy in Britain. Members were also given a selection of

other less usual heathers including the fine (and hardy) *Erica xoldenbergensis* 'Ammerland', *Erica manipuliflora* 'Korcula', *Erica multiflora* white variety and some cape heaths.

The day was gloriously sunny and it was with some pleasure that we went to the restaurant for tea. After tea, David Small led an open forum which took in a range of topics. Among these was the future of the Group and a number of members offered firm support for future meetings. It was thought that there should be a small committee to select future events and several members volunteered to serve on it. Members are invited to contact me with suggestions for events or venues. We will write about our proposals in a future edition of the Bulletin.

Allen Hall, Organiser. - Telephone 01509 238 923

Southern

On Sunday 20th July, thirteen members of the Southern Group, including our President, David McClintock and first-timers Jemima and Katie, plus two guests, visited Bodiam Nursery in Kent at the invitation of fellow member Richard Biggs.

Richard set up his specialist heather nursery twenty years ago on a slope with a full frontal view of Bodiam Castle a quarter of a mile away. With hot sunny weather as well, we had a perfect setting for our guided tour of the nursery.

Richard began by taking us to see the polythene tunnels in which he roots his cuttings. He uses both standard trays (I counted 150) and plug trays (I counted 200), but he prefers the former because the moisture permeates the compost better and they hold more cuttings.

Moving on to his extensive open displays of one and two year old plants, Richard pointed out the idiosyncrasies of some of the cultivars. Here are a few examples: Out of favour is *Calluna vulgaris* 'Kinlochruel' because the foliage turns brown after the plant has flowered. My daughter, who accompanied me on the visit, now rues her purchase of five 'Kinlochruels' in the Spring. In favour is *C.v.* 'White Coral' which retains its green foliage. Thumbs down too for *Erica carnea* 'Myretoun Ruby'. We heard that an experiment by the *British Heather Growers Association* has shown that the cultivar has a tendency to die off without apparent reason; I must be lucky - all nine of mine have survived five years. The favoured alternative is *E. c.* 'Porter's Red'. However, there was praise for *C.v.* 'Soay'. It has sensibly adopted a neat and compact habit to withstand the rigours of its native island.

A focal point of discussion was the plant that, according to respected authority, does not exist - *C.v.* 'Polifolia'. Several of us bought specimens. We shall no doubt be adding our voice to the controversy in due course.

We were alerted to the danger of buying young plants with red foliage in early spring. The redness would be a sign of stress, probably from frost, and could mean that plants had been brought direct from their protective growing tunnels without being weaned.

We then came to Richard's collection of individual heathers rising and overflowing from their 10 litre pots in fountains of foliage and flower. Magnificent, impressive and sumptuous were some of the adjectives used to describe these plants. All this while Richard was patiently answering our individual queries about our individual heather problems. We then enjoyed the tea and biscuits which Mrs. Biggs had kindly laid on for us.

Our grateful thanks go to Mr. and Mrs. Biggs for inviting us, for sacrificing

so much of their valuable time for us and for giving us a delightful day.

On Saturday 16th August, members of the Southern and South Western Groups visited Thursley Common near Godalming, where the Surrey Heathland Project has sought to recover and protect the heathland for the past nine years. Our guide was Mr. Rob McGibbon, Project Officer.

As we set off on our tour Rob put the recovery of such areas into their historical context. He said that heathland had its origin in the destruction of woodland for agricultural purposes and the consequential leaching away of the nutrients in the soil. Heather and gorse were able to survive in such conditions and have been in widespread use for both fuel and grazing since early times. However, since the late 1700s 80% of Britain's heathland has been lost with birches, pines, bracken and grasses taking over.

In Surrey, where Military training has helped to preserve the heathland, the County Council, English Nature, The National Trust and other bodies have set up recovery and protection projects and Thursley Common is one of the sites. The Common comprises two slightly elevated areas which drain into an expanse of bog. On these *Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica cinerea* and *E. tetralix* are thriving. In this area also we saw Stonechats and heard, but did not see, the Dartford Warbler.

Rob explained that the project aims to have all four stages of a heather's life (pioneer, building, mature and degenerate) represented on the Common, each supplying the needs of a particular animal, bird or insect. The main problems are the grasses, bracken and young saplings and we also saw examples of dodder invading young heather.

In the bog area, which the project has made accessible with planked walkways, Rob pointed out a large variety of insects and plants. Others needed the eagle eyes of Pamela Lee to spot and identify. Dragonflies and damselflies, for which Thursley Common is renowned, were much in evidence. We also saw raft-spiders, funnel-spiders, and the strange insectivorous sundews and bladderworts. A variety of mosses, orchids and the bog asphodel also grow there.

I hope this shows that we all spent a very pleasant afternoon - the uninitiated (like me) and the knowledgeable (like Pam). It was a treat for all nature-lovers.

David Sprague

South West

On Saturday June 7th members met in the car park of the National Trust garden at Stourhead, not to visit Stourhead itself, but Stourton House, which is situated opposite. The garden belongs to Elizabeth Bullivant who specialises in dried flowers and who has written books on the subject.

At Stourton House we were greeted by Mrs. Bullivant who proceeded to give us a description and history of the garden, after which we were invited to wander around on our own. Showers threatened but did not materialise, although a fresh wind made its way up through the Blackmore Vale and across the garden. The garden is made up of several areas, including a kitchen garden, a herbaceous garden, a secret garden, a woodland garden and several other 'rooms', giving us plenty to explore and see. Members then made their way to the tea room where Mrs. Bullivant's daughter served cups of tea and delicious home-made cakes. The afternoon was finally closed with a visit to the plant sales area, where members were able to buy examples of some of the plants observed earlier in the garden. My thanks go to Elizabeth Bullivant and

her daughter for their hospitality.

On the first weekend in July the group put on a display of heathers at the Southampton Balloon and Flower Festival. The weather had been very wet, but fortunately it set fair just before the Festival and the showground was only a little damp by the time the stand was set up. Many visitors attended the Festival and those that showed interest in our stand were given information about *The Heather Society* and instruction on growing and propagating heathers. My thanks go to Henry and Anne Pringle for looking after the stand during the weekend.

At lunchtime on a glorious Saturday, 19th July, members met in the garden of Bill and Joan Vicary at Foxhills on the eastern edge of the New Forest. Bill and Joan have been members for many years and we have visited their garden before. Once again they showed us warm hospitality as we explored the spacious garden, containing many plants and shrubs.

There were plenty of heathers in the beds, giving the members the opportunity to get some ideas on the cultivars to grow and the way to grow them. We were also able to relax and eat our picnic lunches with cups of tea supplied by Joan. At 2.30 pm we all moved on about a mile or so to my garden at Totton, where members were able to see heathers growing in the smaller garden. I have heather planting at all stages, some new and some due for replacement, so it was possible to appreciate the full cycle of a heather garden. My wife Lin and daughter Sharon served refreshments as the afternoon wore on and members were able to relax and chat upon their favourite subject. My thanks go to Bill and Joan for opening their lovely garden and to Lin and Sharon for providing the refreshment in mine.

Meetings for 1998 - So far only one meeting has been arranged for 1998 but more are planned and members will be informed by circular or in the *Spring Bulletin*.

Saturday March 28th - This will be the annual indoor meeting at the Lychett Matravers Village Hall in Dorset. Members should meet in the hall by 2.00 pm. There will be a talk on *Heaths and Heathers* by one of our members, Arnold Stowe and we will also have our two class Table Show:

Class 1. A vase or bowl of heathers in bloom.

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

Prizes will be awarded and the Burfitt Bowl (currently held by Phyllis Kennedy and Anne Pringle) will be awarded to the exhibitor with the most points.

Lytchett Matravers is situated six miles from Poole and one mile west of the Poole-Blandford road. The Village Hall is on the west side of the High Street, just north of the Rose and Crown Inn. Ample parking is available close to the hall and a charge will be made to cover expenses. There will be refreshment supplied after the talk.

Further information on the meetings for 1998 can be obtained by sending me two SAEs as soon as possible and if you intend to come to a meeting I would be grateful if you could let me know about 10 days beforehand (Tel. 01703 864336). I would like to emphasise that the meetings are open, not only to local group members but to all *Heather Society* members and their friends. Once again I am grateful to those people who make the visits possible and I look forward to seeing you at future meetings.

Phil Joyner

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