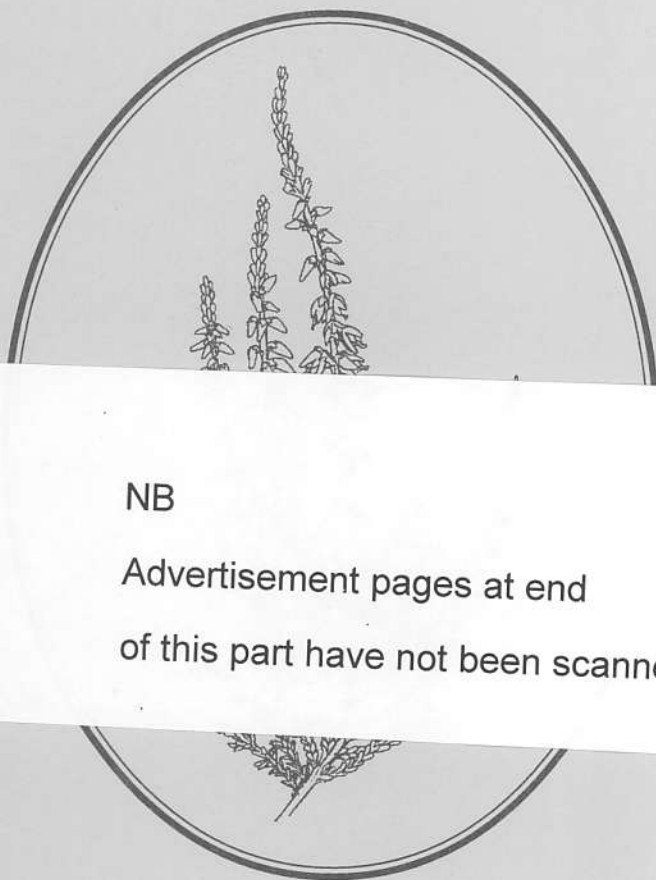


*Bulletin of The
Heather Society*



Vol. 5 No. 15

Autumn 1998

DIARY OF EVENTS 1998/99

1998

24 October	North East Group	Car Outing to Cragside
30 October	North East Group	AGM

1999

15 January	CLOSING DATE FOR THE BULLETIN	
16/17 Feb.	RHS Show	Heather Competition
6 March	South West Group	Visit to 'Otters' Court'
20 March	South West Group	Table Show & Talk
27 March	Southern Group	Visit to 'Steps', Dorking
15 May	East Midlands Group	Talk by Arnold Stow
14 August	East Midlands Group	Visit to 'The Bannut'
10-13 Sept.	29TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE	



A Registered Charity No. 261407

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Cover illustration *Calluna vulgaris* by Brita Johannson

This edition of the Bulletin is necessarily dominated by the untimely death of our Registrar, Bert Jones. Bert was a true friend of the Society and over the years he put in uncountable hours of work on its behalf, on Council, on Committees and as Yearbook Editor and Registrar. I think the little poem, which was read out by his Best man during the Service of Thanksgiving, sums up how we all feel now that he is gone:

*So here I sit now, a little sad certainly, but not sad for something that has been lost, since friendship like ours is never lost, it is and it endures
(From ETTY: A Diary, 1941-43)*

29th Annual Conference, September 10th - 13th, 1999

The Society's 29th Annual Conference will be held in Falmouth in Cornwall. Accommodation, dining and lecture facilities have been arranged at the St. Michael's Hotel, Gyllngvase Beach, Falmouth. The accommodation is limited to 21 single, 8 twin and 9 double rooms which equates to 55 residential delegates - and all rooms are *en suite*. A programme of lectures, garden visits and field trips is being prepared and will be announced in the *Spring Bulletin*; the theme of the Conference will be *The Heathers of the Lizard*. A field trip will take in the Goonhilly Downs and the Lizard Peninsula to view *Erica vagans* and the hybrid, *Erica x williamsii*. Cornwall has many attractions, so why not make the conference part of a holiday to that attractive corner of England. The approximate cost will be £190 (use of the swimming pool is included). Bookings may now 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. Would couples please indicate whether a twin or a double room is preferred. If all the available rooms are taken, further bookings will be considered as day visitors and those persons will be asked to arrange their own bed & breakfast accommodation.

Further to the Conference it is hoped to arrange a day-trip to the Abbey Gardens on the Island of Tresco, on either the Thursday prior to the

Conference, or the Tuesday after. A cost has been requested for this excursion and will be announced in the *Spring Bulletin*. No accommodation will be arranged around the Conference and delegates will be expected to make their own arrangements. I would be grateful if you could indicate if you would be interested in the trip to Tresco when you book for the Conference.

Details of accommodation can be obtained by phoning the Cornwall Tourist Board on 01872 274057 or by writing to: Cornwall Tourist Board, Daniell Road Centre, Lander Building, Daniell Road, Truro, TR1 2DA.

The Heather Society Tour of South Africa - Dates

David Small, *Chairman*, (address inside back cover)

An eagerly awaited tour of the southern tip of South Africa is being planned by Ted Oliver, the well-known guru of South African heaths. The tour will include visits to Cape Town, Table Mountain, the botanical gardens at Kistenbosch, a number of the mountain sites to see many species of Cape heaths and other spring flowers. It is hoped that there will be time for other activities too such as visiting a wine estate, penguin and whale watching. It is expected the tour will last 18 days. The most likely dates are **27 September 1999 to 14 October 1999** but these may have to move one or two days either way to accommodate air flights.

The tour is still being planned so I cannot give a precise cost at this stage but it is expected the cost will be in excess of £2000 per person. Full details will appear in the *Spring Bulletin*.

Anyone interested on going on this tour should get in touch with me as soon as possible, as numbers on this tour are strictly limited because of the small tour vehicles needed to get to some of the mountain sites. I will also be able to inform you of developments as they occur.

Report of 1998 AGM - Norwich Saturday, 5th September

In a very moving tribute, the Chairman dedicated his Opening Statement to the memory of the Society's Registrar, Bert Jones, who had died a few days previously. A minute's silence was then held in his honour.

The Hon. Secretary, Ron Cleveley, told members that there had been significant developments towards the completion of the International Register, and that the publication of the Register for Bruckenthalia was imminent. Following the death of Bert Jones the tasks of the Registrar will be taken over by the Technical Committee. A booklet series concerning different aspects of heather growing is under way, in an attempt to encourage interest in heathers. Ron himself has ideas for competitions to encourage young members. Ron finished with thanks to the Chairman for his tremendous involvement with every aspect of running with the Society.

The Hon. Treasurer, Allen Hall, gave his usual very clearly expressed account of the Society's finances, which appeared particularly healthy due to a generous bequest from Joan Lister.

The 1999 Conference to be held at Falmouth was discussed. A request

from the floor that a trip to Tresco before or after the Conference should be considered was accepted.

In AOB, Dorothy Warner asked to be informed of new members so that they can be contacted by the local group. Maurice Everett asked about the arrangements for the proposed trip to South Africa, and was told that they have not yet been finalised but the cost is expected to be £2000 +, for an 18 day tour.

Ron Cleevley said that the Society needs to reconsider its Constitution to satisfy the Charity Commissioners and comply with the recent Charities Act.

Direct Debits

Note from the Treasurer

A direct debit facility was established with the Bank of Scotland in 1995, ready for collection of membership fees in January 1996. This service is open to members with UK bank accounts only. The collection of fees takes place on the nearest business day to 26th January and statistics since 1996 are:

	Direct debits	Fees collected
1996	60	£692
1997	140	£1,785
1998	166	£1,927

Currently in 1998 we have 164 direct debit mandates – a small drop since the 1998 collection in January – covering 250 members. These mandates will not be used until January 1999.

The Society benefits in two ways from this facility. The first benefit lies in a simplification of administration. I consulted our hard working Administrator, Anne Small, about this subject. Anne says "I certainly believe that the direct debit system is a good one for U.K. members. As long as I have the data correctly entered on the computer, all I have to do is push a button and it prints out a list of the payers, together with the amount of the payment and automatically updates the computer for the current year." Writing about the alternatives, Anne says "The entering of the individual cheques as they trickle in is time consuming. The Bankers' Order payments are a little better as I get them all at the same time but they still have to be entered individually. Both the Direct Debits and the Bankers' Orders, however, ensure that the subscription is paid and on time!"

Anne is a very busy person, helping run Denbeigh Heathers as well as administering the Heather Society. I think we owe it to her to simplify her task as much as possible and paying our fees by direct debit is one easy way in which many of us can help.

The other benefit is that it facilitates changes in membership fees which regrettably are needed from time to time even though Council has succeeded in absorbing much inflationary pressure. The last change took place in 1996 and the two before that respectively 9 and 16 years previously. The fees have been raised only infrequently in the past, and really much later than they should have been, partly because of the administrative nightmare involved

and partly because changes in fees cause large drops in membership. One consequence of this policy is that fees have to go up steeply when change does come. The direct debit system should ease these problems considerably.

One thing more – the Society fully accepts the direct debit guarantee which is as follows: -

- The Guarantee is offered by all Banks and Building Societies that take part in the direct debit scheme. The efficiency and security of the scheme is monitored and protected by your own bank or building society.
- If the amounts to be paid or the payment date changes, you will be told of this in advance by at least two months.
- If your bank/building society or we make an error you are guaranteed a full and immediate refund from your branch of the amount paid.
- You can cancel a direct debit at any time by writing to your bank or building society. Please also send a copy to us.

For all these reasons, I urge members to use direct debits to pay their annual fees if they reasonably can. Anne will as usual provide direct debit mandate forms. To be in time for the January 1999 collection of fees, these need to be completed and returned to her before the end of this year. **Please Help Us To Serve You.**

Albert William Jones 1934 -1998

On 1st September 1998, many friends and relatives gathered at the village church in West Camel, only a few hundred yards from Bert Jones' home at Otters' Court, for a Service of Thanksgiving to celebrate his life. Most *Heather Society* members will have known Bert Jones, firstly as Editor of the *Yearbook* for many years and, more recently (and despite much pain and suffering) as the Society's Registrar.

At this most moving Service, Diane and Bert's two sons, Ewan and Innis, each read a poem and the Best Man at their wedding gave an illuminating account of life with the Jones's, back in the 1950s and beyond; Bert playing his clarinet with a marching band, Bert playing rugby, Bert and Diane partying the night away, and later, Bert and Diane building a Lotus 7, from a kit and using it in Speed Hill Climbing competitions. Diane was Bert's helpmate throughout their years together. We send her our love and sympathy.

D.E.

Letter from John A Plowman, Yeovil Somerset:

It is with profound sadness that I mourn the death of Bert Jones. Not only was he a fellow Chartered Engineer and photographic enthusiast, but a meticulous worker for the Society, an excellent brain, a near neighbour and a very dear friend.

It is at this moment that my thoughts go out to dear Diane, who has been a pillar of strength during the last traumatic months, always managing to put on an optimistic front in the most adverse of situations. Let us hope that she can pick up the pieces with as much determination and spirit as she has exhibited during the recent dark days. Our Bert will be sadly missed

Profile of the Society's Hon. Sec. - Ron Cleevely

It would seem that right from the start, I have had a tendency to not quite conform to the normal pattern. In June 1934, I apparently decided to arrive whilst my mother was travelling home on a bus after visiting her sister in South London and was born in Paradise Road, Stockwell. Perhaps that early journey, together with other moves in childhood including wartime evacuation to South Wales, Staffordshire and various places in the Home Counties, developed a liking for travel and a subconscious affinity with the countryside. Despite time off school collecting rose-hips, or weeks spent potato-picking (my first earnings!), I was the only pupil amongst the village's contingent of London evacuees, who managed to pass the 11-plus.

The awkward trend continued during 1945-50 when attending the grammar school in Acton, Middlesex for I did not fit easily into either the history/art, or the physics/chemistry streams. Few London schools had an awareness of biology/botany let alone courses. Consequently, school was left with an awareness of the careers I did not wish to follow, but with a School Certificate (missing Matric by two marks!).

I drifted into a City accountant's office as an articulated clerk. During the next four years I saw a wide range of businesses from fashion houses at the top - to Petticoat Lane dress factories at the bottom of the scale; to large & small boot & shoe factors; bakery chains, Yorkshire pubs and Haywards 'Military Pickle'. However, in 1953, a holiday spent working in a German forestry camp helped me realise that an interesting outdoor career might be possible. In the early 1950s, the Forestry Commission was still acquiring land for afforestation and was recruiting students to be trained as foresters.

After working to gain practical experience in Staffordshire and Berkshire and spending two years at the Forest of Dean training school, I eventually finished up at the largest nursery in West Sussex, near Rogate, supplying young trees for Commission sites in the entire South West. However, in 1958, prompted by parents' health, together with dissatisfaction over constant accommodation in pubs & digs, the poor prospects & earnings with the Forestry Commission, coupled with that desire for research involvement, I resigned and returned to London. From 1958 to 1960, I took temporary jobs in various government departments, spent a term as a supply teacher in a Secondary Modern school at Greenford, Middx., whilst seeking A-levels to enable me to study for a forestry degree.

During this period, there was a drastic change in the forestry profession as those serving in the colonies had to return to Britain. Finally, in 1961, I managed to obtain employment at the British Museum (Natural History) despite attending an interview immediately after St. Patrick's Day with two black eyes! Instead of entering the Dept. of Botany and perhaps renewing my acquaintance with trees, Murphy's Law engineered that I filled a vacancy in Palaeontology on Fossil Mollusca. Fortunately, a lifelong love of books and seeking information from them helped in tackling the tasks of identifying, classifying and curating these fossils. For several years I also served as the Department's deputy librarian and as an assistant editor for one of the museum's journals. The 60's were a time of expansion and we were encouraged to pursue our studies as well as benefiting from working in one of the world's centres of natural history research. I switched

from the goal of a forestry degree to that of geology and became a student at Birkbeck College. However, following administrative changes at the museum and then moving to Reading after getting married in 1965, I was persuaded to give this up. Luckily, the advised internal promotion route through service and publication eventually enabled me to become a Senior Scientific Officer and follow this opportunity for research, over the years becoming responsible for the world-wide collection of Cretaceous specimens. This period includes many of the geological formations that are exposed in S.E. England. Particular interests are the Gastropoda, Oysters, and the Chalk Inoceramid bivalves (see the Mollusca sections in the guidebook *Fossils of the Chalk*, 1987); fossil faunas of the Lower Greensand - especially those of the Isle of Wight; Wealden molluscs and those of the unique Blackdown Greensand of Devon.

An involvement with the Museum's historical collections led to work with various archives and an interest in illustration & the naturalists/botanists of the past, especially those of the 19th Century. This resulted in several biographical and bibliographical papers dealing with Dr. James Parkinson [of disease fame], Dr. Gideon Mantell [the discoverer of *Iguanodon*] to the members of the artistic Sowerby family, the ornithologist/conchologist Colonel George Montagu and, of course, Charles Darwin. On occasions even acting the part of Sowerby in a play I had devised from surviving correspondence. One result of delving through libraries was the publication in 1983 of a reference guide *World Palaeontological Collections* to assist in locating the important historical collections that are used to authenticate species names.

A consequence of working in the BMNH (it was closely associated with the British Museum until 1976) was that staff were encouraged to join the relevant professional societies. The Conchological Society of Great Britain was one of those of which I became a member - Ros, one of a trio of young zoologists, who could identify the snails found on a field trip to Burnham Beeches came to the aid of a palaeontologist, who had no idea of land mollusca. Whilst she progressed through her degree at Leicester University, I became familiar with the late-night trains back to London, or else the road to West Wycombe. Any spare time was used searching zoological journals for data needed by the various recorders of the *Zoological Record* and gaining extra income. Soon after Ros obtained her degree, we were married at Fleet, Hants. - and within weeks the church was knocked down and the site sold to Woolworths!!

After various jobs in London and Reading, Ros went to work for the Home Office Forensic Unit at Aldermaston & we moved to Silchester in 1968. On having an opportunity to establish our first garden, we became interested in heathers, joined the Heather Society, visited John Lett's nursery and established two raised peat beds on the clayey gravels. Commuting to London and involvement in numerous other local & museum associated activities limited our attendance at *Heather Society* functions.

In the process of organising the fossil mollusca collections, I visited sites throughout the British Isles and have collected specimens in Holland, Belgium, France (Provence & Dordogne) and Italy (Dolomites). As a specialist on Cretaceous rocks & fossils, I was fortunate to get a visa to attend meetings in Georgia (twice) & Armenia in the 1980's (both still in the USSR at that time). Wandering around the hills and up streams in a bear & lynx reserve on the

Turkish/Armenia border, with Mount Ararat suddenly appearing above the clouds high up in the sky, was just one of the memorable incidents. Unfortunately, the proposed research collaboration came to an abrupt end with the changes as both countries became autonomous Republics. I too was made redundant and offered early retirement when the Conservative government decided to cut Public Service expenditure by cutting down on scientists.

In 1978, we had moved to Midhurst in West Sussex, close to my earlier forest nursery site, and Ros joined me commuting up to London for the next dozen years. The Lower Greensand soils allowed us to have another heather garden, but until our own activities and the weather pattern changed the soils, we indulged a liking for the Himalayan species of primulas and had a considerable variety growing in the soggy areas. These were gradually replaced by a dozen or so small rhododendrons over the years. Of course, there had to be a few trees - Canadian, Himalayan & Common birches, three species of snake-bark maples, ornamental cherries, Amelanchier, various ornamental and dwarf conifers that belied their description, with several *Daboecia* cultivars to guard an 'intensive care' area. We had also been members of the Alpine Garden Society since the late 60's and had two garden frames containing alpinas as well as a scree garden based on fossil & rock debris from my hammerings. Over the years, we have been to the Dolomites, Pyrenees, the French Alps and Yugoslavia (Julian Alps) on AGS botanical holidays and more recently have rented gîtes to continue exploring on our own, staying in the relatively unspoilt region of the Queyras on the last five visits (see A.G.S. *Bulletin*, 63, 1995:13-15). On occasion we have (or rather Ros has!) managed to succeed with alpine species of *Primula*, *Saxifraga* & *Hepatica* brought back under licence, but we particularly like to see the wild orchids and fritillaries in the alpine meadows. The only trouble is that it seems to be much harder and take far longer getting to the top! and over the past few years, as soon as we did get there - it always snowed.

Now having decided to move again, this time to North Devon - the "wrong rocks" for me - but influenced by friends and relatives, as well as ample book shelves for my library, we need to adapt to different gardening conditions. The soil is apparently suitable for ericaceous plants, but in addition to introducing a few heathers we expect to use other Ericaceae genera. At least, we do not have to create another garden from scratch, but merely adapt one. We have certainly learnt that the region is far wetter and windier than anywhere else in the south and spent rather more time than we should watching the antics of new-born lambs. So far the intention to ease links with London's institutions doesn't seem to have worked, but time and gardening chores should rectify this - it takes several hours just to cut the grass! I still haven't learnt to say 'No!' for apart from taking on the position of Hon. Secretary to the Society, I have somehow also become the recorder of Butterflies seen in this part of N. Devon.

I have been a member of the *Heather Society* since 1971, attended the first meeting of the now defunct (?) Cape Heather Group in April 1973, (which seems to match my own success in not maintaining these heathers for more than a few months!) and have produced the Index for each volume of the *Yearbook* (as well as another for the *Bulletin* that was not published).

Handy Guide to Heathers

David and Anne Small

In a book as detailed as the *Handy Guide to Heathers*, it is not surprising that some errors are made. However, there is one which we would like to correct as soon as possible

The entry for Glynwern Nurseries on page 164 is incorrect. This nursery is wholesale only - not retail as stated. We would like to apologise to Jean and David Croft for the error.

Growing Lime Hating Heathers in Alkaline Soil

Peter Vickers - Sheffield

We wanted to start a heather nursery near enough to Sheffield to make it possible to commute to my engineering job. The idea was that one day I would retire early and supplement my pension with income from the nursery.

We looked at many sites but settled on Dinnington, a village sixteen miles south of Sheffield, where everything else was satisfactory except that the soil was alkaline. As plants for sale and stock plants were to be containerised in a peat based compost, I felt that alkaline soil was something we could learn to live with.

The whole half acre was uncared for, so at the same time as getting the nursery going a lot of clearing was necessary. The front garden involved wall building, rockery building and heather beds. These heather beds are the whole purpose of this article: How to grow lime hating heathers in alkaline soil.

The Heather Society Yearbooks had articles on the subject in their first year. In 1963 AG Pannel advocated sequestrene, whilst in 1964 Jack London told how Lord Horder grew rhododendrons in deep deposits of leaf mould on top of chalk. Terry Underhill in his heather text book *Heaths & Heathers* said that sequestrene was not as satisfactory as we had been led to believe for a large bed of heathers on alkaline soil. He suggested that the fight against nature should not be attempted but if you must, then raised beds supported by peat blocks was the best approach. He warned that irrigation should be on hand to prevent the bed drying out, but also warned that in alkaline areas the water supply may also be alkaline to the detriment of the plants. This was no worry to me as Dinnington water is pumped all the way from Sheffield. As the front garden design evolved, a low stone wall was built next to the road and soil thrown up to it to make a bank. Towards the end of this bank a peat bed was created using peat blocks as retainers and filled with peat to a depth of 6 inches into which plants of *Erica cinerea* were planted. Below the peat bed at ground level a large shading Juniper has protected these beds against too much sun.

In front of the house are two curving beds either side of the front door with a pH of 7.5, which I wanted to plant with *Calluna* and *Erica cinerea*. I tried to buy acid soil but soon found that haulage contractors who deal in top soil were not helpful, so I ordered a load of sedge peat instead. When this arrived it was obvious that the mechanical digger which had loaded for me had included not only sub soil but broken land drains as well, together with a soggy gunge referred to as "sedge peat" on the delivery note. I refused to pay but I still had a load of unwanted material blocking the drive so we bagged the best of it and sold it very cheap.

All this was lack of experience but I have found that other *Heather Society* members have had similar experiences. Now after 20 years in the trade I know how to buy what is needed.

Funds were getting low so I tried what Jack London suggested years before. I planted my garden in peat holes, that is, to save on the cost of peat, I dug holes in the alkaline soil as big as a bucket and planted in each hole using sphagnum peat, plus grit sand, and a handful of fertilizer for each plant, I followed by a mulch of peat to a depth of two inches over the whole area. I mulched annually with peat and my summer flowering heathers flourished.

There was a drought in the mid 1980's when hose pipes were banned and many plants died. When clearing up I found that the plants had rooted into the mulch, making a 4" thick mat of roots, thus bringing roots right to the surface and they soon suffered in the drought. Terry Underhill's comments had been true. I realized that for an acid raised bed over alkaline soil to be a success a few inches depth is not sufficient or the moist conditions of the moorland have to be provided.

When replacing the beds after the drought I resolved to bring all my experience to bear on the problem. I cleared out all the old plants and dug into the alkaline soil several loads of well rotted stable manure followed by several loads of peaty acid loam collected from the fen lands to the east of my village, finally a small load of acid grit sand, the whole mixture was dug again and again, together with a bag of fertilizer. The *Calluna* and *Erica cinerea* growing in this mixture like it very much.

I had known that alkaline soil could be acidified by using sulphur, but I had done very little about it because sulphur was not readily available at the time. At the 1991 Heather Society Conference a speaker suggested that 4 oz. per square yard per degree fall in pH, dug well into a depth of 8 inches to 10 inches was required for satisfactory results.

About the same time, through my engineering contacts, I learnt that a coking plant was closing down and that sulphur was available cheap. It wasn't refined flowers of sulphur which is now available through horticultural outlets, rather it was a pile of solidified molten sulphur as it had drained from the coke often onto the concrete roadway. It had to be broken up with a mattock to load into sacks. It had to be further broken before it could be used on alkaline soil.

I treated a bed to test the theory using the sulphur liberally at 10 oz. per square yard, but dug to a depth of 10 inches - the *Calluna* and *Erica cinerea* growing in this are particularly colourful. It remains to be seen how effective my latest efforts will be, I expect the plants to flourish for many years.

It is 20 years since I started; I have achieved what I set out to do. Was all the effort worth while? I feel great satisfaction in the knowledge that I have won in the end and the results look good, but the view at the back of the house is equally satisfactory without the work and worry. These beds are filled with *Erica carnea*, *Erica darleyensis*, *Erica ertgena*, *Erica vagans*, Tree Heathers and dwarf conifers of many different colours shapes and sizes.

We don't get much snow, so these beds are in flower in February, March and April and the conifer shapes are very pleasing.

Was the front garden worth all the efforts? As a showcase for the nursery - Yes. But what about as a garden for the ordinary gardener - you must make up your own mind - I've told you how, you must find the materials and do the work - and pay the bill! Then decide.

Scrap Bowl - titbits of news from Members

Heather Moorland Albert Julian - Askham Richard, York

An interesting account of a survey of radioactivity on the North York Moors appeared in the local York Evening Press recently. The following is an extract from the report.

"Experts have discovered that radiation from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster is still present in heather growing on the North York Moors and in related products such as honey. Those behind the survey say the levels are not hazardous, but environmentalists in Ryedale have vowed to find out as much as possible about the new research which found traces of radiation in food products derived from heather. Ryedale District Council is behind the study, which found heather containing levels of the radioactive substance Caesium 137. Traces were found in honey made by bees which collect nectar from the heather on the moor and in the grouse which feed on the heather. The levels found are way below recognised safety limits and are diminishing as each year goes by. The Ryedale Council Radiation Monitoring Report says the land was likely to have been contaminated by rain, with the heather drawing it up through soil and minerals."

Late last year the Ministry of Agriculture warned farmers that it would be enforcing a reduction of the national flock of sheep. Sheep numbers have expanded considerably as a result of the European Union Support scheme of 1980, the *Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance*. Recently the then Minister, Dr. Jack Cunningham, followed up by spelling out his policies to Parliament. His proposals included expanding the "Countryside Stewardship" scheme to include projects to protect heather moorland. He said "there are significant areas which have been overgrazed with a damaging effect on bird and plant life".

The recent RSPB Heathlands appeal raised £200,000 and this together with the EU "Life" fund, will help to restore RSPB heathlands to good condition, also finance many of the important management tasks on RSPB heathland reserves such as Arne in Dorset and Minsmere in Suffolk. Heather is certain to benefit considerably with the improvement in management which will result from this financial help.

A Dazzling Display Of Tree Heaths Maurice Everett - Herefordshire

At the Malvern Autumn Show (26 & 27 September 1998) Daphne and I saw many outstanding displays of plants (and vegetables) but, in our judgement, the most striking and imaginative consisted entirely of Tree Heaths - with not a flower in sight! The many hundreds, probably thousands, of plants were arranged in the form of a pyramid 12 - 15 feet across and about the same in height. The nine cultivars had been set out to show up the contrasting foliage colours of green and several shades of gold to maximum advantage. On the top of the pyramid - like a flame - was a maroon glazed ceramic pot filled with *Erica arborea* 'Albert's Gold'. The other plants in the display were:

E. arborea 'Alpina' and 'Estrella Gold'

E. australis 'Castella Blush' and 'Riverslea'

E. lusitanica and *E. l.* 'George Hunt'

E. x veitchii 'Exeter' and 'Gold Tips'

The Tree Heath Pyramid stood out among the other more-conventional displays and created a great deal of interest; it was awarded a well-deserved Silver Medal. Congratulations to John Richards Nurseries of West Malvern (wholesale suppliers of plants to Garden Centres etc.) who created the display to promote their range of "Garden Charm" plants.

Those Rooted Cuttings Allen Hall - Leicestershire

Pamela Lee and Derek and Pamela Millis have already written about "those rooted cuttings" which a substantial number of members were given by our Chairman, David Small, as a reward for their efforts at the Propagation Workshop at Denbeigh in 1996. I published my thanks to David that year in my capacity of Southern Group Organiser.

Pamela reported in the Summer Bulletin, that she had good success in getting most of her cuttings to root but that subsequently, she had "tremendous losses" in the plants she potted on and over-wintered outside.

Like Pamela, most of the cuttings taken by Joan and myself rooted, no doubt due to the excellent mist propagation unit at Denbeigh. I did not pot on the rooted cuttings that year, partly because I hardly ever do pot on before the Spring and partly because we were moving house in the late autumn and it is more convenient to transport trays of cuttings than scores of potted plants. My plants therefore over-wintered in a heated glass house. Following David's advice, I took care to ensure that the infant plants did not dry out. I stood the trays on capillary matting once they were old enough to be taken out of their protective plastic bags. As a result, I lost hardly any of those plants, either in the winter or subsequently when I potted them on.

In 1996 also, I had one of my best years for rooting cuttings taken from heathers in my own garden, which was providential in view of our subsequent house move. However, I rooted these in seed trays and not in the multiple plug trays such as those David provided. Again, I had few losses during the winter but many losses when I potted on, even though I used similar compost to that used for the plants taken out of David's plugs. There were of course reasons for these losses. For one thing, I think I made a mistake about the amount of fertiliser added to one batch of compost. The point is, however, that the plants whose roots were disturbed during potting-on suffered badly for my mistakes while the plants with firm roots in plugs suffered barely at all.

I am sure that nurserymen members will shrug at this - a problem solved in the trade long ago. However, it came as a revelation to this poor amateur and I hope to do better in future, by using plugs. But I did well enough as it was. I now have 365 heathers growing away in my new, small suburban garden and I could have made it 366 had it been a leap year. I must also have given away 250 to fellow members, family and friends. Thanks David.

Wildlife Travel 1999 - Connemara & the Burren

Your opportunity to visit Connemara & the Burren and to see its wild flowers, under the expert guidance of Christine Donnelly and our own *Yearbook* editor, Dr. Charles Nelson. The tour lasts from 1st - 8th July 1999, with the opportunity of extending to the 11th, in order to see Burren ancient sites. Dr. Charles Nelson, an acknowledged expert on the flora of the Burren, will stay with the group until the 8th and Christine Donnelly, whose interests

include early human history and archaeology, will stay on for the three extra days. Price £670 per person + £170 for additional three days (air fares included). Single room supplement £75 - deposit £90. For full details telephone Sunville Travel, on 0181 568 4499.

Book Review

Heathers of the Lizard

The Cornish Garden Society has recently brought out a very interesting and well produced booklet, entitled *Heathers of the Lizard*, with text by our President, David McClintock and botanical paintings by the celebrated plant illustrator, Marjory Blaney.

David tells of the early heather hunters (such as Gertrude Waterer and P D Williams) and of the many heathers we grow in our gardens, which had their origins in and around the Lizard peninsular. Mention is also made of the later discoveries, including the *Erica x watsonii* found in 1980 by Cherry Turpin (wife of our previous Chairman, Major General Pat Turpin) and later named in her honour.

At the cost of £1.50p plus 25p postage, this is a bargain not to be missed and can be ordered through the *Heather Society* (see order form).

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David McClintock has also sent me details of a book entitled *Shrubs and Climbers* (Dorling Kindersley 1996, £14.99), which he says contains photographs, with a brief text, of no fewer than 65 heathers, all hardy, with the exception of *Erica canaliculata*. David comments that, except for *E. mackaiana* 'Shining Light', few are of the newer cultivars, however, he knows of no other publication which illustrates *Daboecia cantabrica* 'Snowdrift'. (Ed)

Group News

Yorkshire

The threat of rain did not deter the 14 members, among whom were Dorothy and Geoffrey Warner from the North East and Beryl and David Mayne from North Yorkshire, from attending the meeting at Peter Harrison's heather nursery, Worksop on Saturday afternoon of June 13. The nursery is medium sized, and produces 60,000 heather plants of around more than 100 cultivars per annum using the latest techniques appropriate to its capacity. Plants, assembled in their final stage of development, the largest in two litre pots, presented a most attractive appearance, helped by the bright colours of the coloured foliage varieties. It was sad to note that fine garden-worthy plants of the less known species and hybrids were not to be seen. The aim of most nurserymen in the highly competitive business of producing heather plants is to satisfy the established demand.

Peter Vickers, who once ran his own small heather nursery and a close friend of Peter Harrison, described and demonstrated the successive stages of propagating and producing a plant. He stressed that great care has to be taken to keep the developing cuttings with the correct humidity and soil moisture in the early stages and that comprehensive precautions are observed in preventing soil fungus infections such as Phytophthora to which some heathers are prone. Cuttings taken at a given time are ready for sale in 9 cm. pots approximately 6 months later. Mrs. Harrison was a wonderful hostess providing cakes, scones and tea to all present at the finish of proceedings.

Harlow Carr - The 'Phase One' planting of the new *Calluna* collection was completed

in May. It was followed by four weeks of heavy rain which prevented control of the inevitable crop of weeds (mainly buttercup and grass). This necessitated an urgent appeal to members to bring along their hoes and forks. By the third week in June most of the beds were cleared and a holding operation has continued to date. There will be a need for constant attack on the weeds until the plants are large enough for the beds to be mulched so volunteers will continue to be welcomed in the coming weeks.

Jean Julian

North East

Our first meeting of the year was our annual outing on May 9th, when we went by coach to Castle Howard, in North Yorkshire. Although our numbers totalled 53 this was due to inviting the Ponteland Bowling club and the Ponteland Local History Society to join us, so making it a viable proposition. We had a really beautiful day and everyone enjoyed the gardens with their spectacular show of rhododendrons and azaleas in a huge woodland area. Free transport is provided to get from one part of the garden to another and we all found this invaluable. Unfortunately Castle Howard does not go in for heather gardening, but they do have some fine peacocks.

On July 15th, twelve members met at Bill Crow's Nursery for a very pleasant evening wandering around the nursery. Bill had some new cultivars to show us in which great interest was shown and we all came away with lots of 'goodies'. Our thanks again to Margaret for the welcome tea and biscuits.

It was our annual show on September 12th, which is incorporated with the Ponteland Flower Show, and 82 exhibits were entered in the 16 classes. This was a slight increase on last year and thanks to all those who took part. Overall the heathers have been very good this year, probably due to heavy rains in the spring (and all the rest in between!) but the spikes were long, with good colour, and the show bench did us proud. People did show an interest and quite a number of *Heather Society* leaflets were taken. Let's hope for some positive results.

Our next meeting will be on Saturday October 24th, when our Car Outing will be to Cragside at Rothbury for the autumn colours. We will meet at 11.00 am in the car park and, depending on the weather, have a picnic lunch. However, there are eating facilities in the Courtyard for those that prefer this. As Cragside is a National Trust property, don't forget your membership cards.

Our final meeting will be the AGM on Friday October 30th in St. Matthew's Church Hall, Ponteland, at 7.30 pm. Slides from members will be welcome for a short show after the business is over and a small contribution to our Faith supper will be much appreciated on the night. Do please come and support us.

Dorothy M Warner

East Midlands

On June 13th, 14 members and guests assembled at the Sutton Bonnington Campus of the University of Nottingham for the summer meeting of the East Midland Group.

Dr. John Griffiths, who was accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Valerie Griffiths, presented a fine lecture, well illustrated with slides, on the hybridisation of heathers. Dr. Griffiths reviewed heathers that hybridised naturally, and supplemented this with information about heather species which had been crossed deliberately. His review included his own work and that of others including Herr Kurt Kramer. He spoke of methods of hybridising these small flowers and of the difficulties and disappointments which attended this work. His successes are well

known and no doubt reward the years of patient endeavour which he has put into it. Members were given rooted cuttings of his golden clone *Exgriffithsii* 'Ashley Gold'. Members had a chance to talk informally with John and Valerie over a cup of tea.

In an open forum after tea Daphne & Maurice Everett showed some slides of heathers in their garden at *The Bannut*. They said that some 9,000 heathers had already been planted in a new heather garden on part of the 2.5 acre plot. Daphne and Maurice invited the Group to visit the garden in 1999 and to take tea with them afterwards. This invitation was accepted on the spot. As always, members of other Groups will be welcome to join us, and a special invitation is given to members of the West Midlands Group. I would be grateful if members would let me know at least three weeks before the visit if they intend to participate

Provisionally, the visit has been arranged for Saturday 14th August 1999. Further details will be given in the Spring *Bulletin*.

Before this appealing visit, an indoor event has been planned to take place at the University of Nottingham Sutton Bonnington Campus on May 15th 1999. Mr. Arnold Stow has agreed to give a talk entitled *Heathers, Plants & People*. Arnold has been a member of Council since its inception and has known most of the leading personalities and characters of the Society. He is also an engaging lecturer.

Allen Hall - East Midlands Group Organiser

South West

Many of the local members will have been informed of the death of a fellow local member and Society Registrar, Bert Jones, at the end of August. For those that weren't informed, I apologise.

Bert and Diane formed the South West Local Group in 1974, with the first meetings being held at Queen Camel, Somerset, in the Spring of 1975. Since those early days Bert and Diane have attended many meetings, firstly as the organisers of the group and then as ordinary members. On several occasions they entertained group members at Otters' Court and always showed us warm hospitality. Even in later years when Bert's health deteriorated they still continued to support the group and to work tirelessly for the *Heather Society* as Editors and Council Members. Bert will be missed and our thoughts are now with Diane and her family.

Due to my commitments during August and September, the programme for the South West Group finished early with the July visit to Hilliers, described below. However it is hoped to arrange four meetings for 1999, the first of which is described at the end of the report. Meanwhile, please find below two reports on meetings held earlier this year and a report on the Southampton Balloon and Flower Festival.

On the afternoon of Saturday May 30th, members met at the garden of Chiffchaffs in Bourton, just in the north-west corner of Dorset and a stone's throw from the Somerset and Wiltshire borders. The garden is advertised in the *Yellow Book* and belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Potts. Nineteen members and two children attended the meeting on an afternoon with hazy sunshine and a stiff, but warm, breeze. Although rain had been forecast, it stayed away and the members enjoyed a walk around the cottage garden surrounding the house and then a walk up the hill to the back and side of the house over to the woodland garden. Some winter heathers were present around the house but were in a minority to a fine display of herbaceous plants. Up on the hill there were glorious views south across the Blackmoor Vale and the woodland garden contained a collection of flowering trees and shrubs, including a collection of rhododendrons. In the clearings amongst the trees were damp areas with primulas and wild orchids. Below the

woodland garden nestled a small nursery with a choice collection of plants, many of which were the offspring of those in the garden. Needless to say members enjoyed the opportunity to purchase. Mr. Potts was on hand to answer the many questions and Mrs. Potts rounded off the afternoon by providing welcome refreshment. My thanks go to Mr. and Mrs. Potts 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 prior to the Festival had been very wet but fortunately the weather set fair just in time and the show-ground 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 on the Heather Society and instructions on growing and propagating heathers. My thanks go to Henry and Anne Pringle for looking after the stand during the weekend.

The Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum in Hampshire was the venue on a July afternoon of sunny spells and members were shown around the gardens by the Curator, Mike Buffin. 22 members and 2 children attended and we accompanied Mike on a tour of the gardens, stopping in areas which were of particular interest at that time of year. An area of the garden which is of interest all year but is of particular interest in the darker months of the year was the newly planted Winter Garden and here we saw a fine display of heathers planted in the last three years in several large beds and now beginning to mature into a fine patchwork of flower and foliage colour. Most of the hardy species were represented by an extensive selection of cultivars. At this point Mike left us to wander around the heathers at our leisure, then members gradually drifted over to the tea rooms close by, to complete a pleasurable afternoon. My thanks go to Mike Buffin for the excellent way in which he conducted the tour.

Meetings for 1999

So far, only one meeting has been arranged for 1999 but further meetings are planned and members will be informed by circular or the *Spring Bulletin*.

Saturday March 20th - This will be the indoor meeting at the Lytchett Matravers Hall in Dorset. Members should meet in the hall by 2.00 pm, where I will give the illustrated talk which I normally present to local horticultural societies, on growing heathers. This talk should be of particular interest to those members wishing to do their own propagation. 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 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. A charge will be made to cover expenses and there will be refreshment supplied after the talk.

Further information on the meetings for 1999 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 ten 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.

Stop Press - Diane Jones has kindly invited the group to visit Otters' Court on Saturday 6th March 1999, at 2 pm. Further details will be in the *Spring Bulletin*.

Phil Joyner

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