

Bulletin of The Heather Society



NB

Advertisement pages at end
of this part have not been scanned

DIARY OF EVENTS

2011

15 January	Closing Date for Spring Bulletin	
March	Home Counties (date to be decided)	Wisley
19 March	Yorkshire	Harlow Carr
15 May	Closing Date for Summer Bulletin	
28 May	Yorkshire	Harlow Carr
9 - 12 September	Annual Gathering	Lake District
17 September	Yorkshire	Harlow Carr

A Gift of Membership for 2011

The Society is keen to encourage new members to join. Every existing member could assist by giving a year's membership as a gift for a special occasion. Remember, it is a gift that will last until the close of 2011! Fill out an application form (we have enclosed one) for a family member or a friend, someone keen on gardening and the outdoors, and leave the rest to us.

For each gift membership we will send *you* a beautiful bell-heather card with a printed message inside — *A full year's membership of The Heather Society for 2011 is sent with very best wishes by ...* — for you to personalize and give to, or send on to, the intended recipient. Shortly before the New Year starts (or at any time you specify), we will send the recipient a letter of welcome, a membership badge, a complimentary colour chart and the Society's 2010 CD, to be followed in early spring 2011 by the *Spring Bulletin* ... and so on.

For only £15 (for UK addresses – other rates apply for Europe and the rest of the world) you can solve your gift “problem” and give a whole year's pleasure. But to ensure you receive the card in time for a Christmas gift please send in your requests before the end of November. Later applications may not be on time. We will be happy, of course, to arrange gift membership for birthdays and other occasions – just contact The Administrator with the recipient's details and, again, leave the rest to us.



Charity Registered in England and Wales No. 261407

Editor: Daphne Everett, The Bannut, Bringsty, Herefordshire, WR6 5TA.
Telephone: 01885 482206 e-mail: everett@bannut.co.uk

Cover illustration *Calluna Vulgaris* by Brita Johansson

Earlier this year, the Society's President, David Small, to whom the Society owes a great debt of gratitude for everything he has done for the Society over many years, indicated his wish to stand down for health reasons. His very worthy successor is Professor John Griffiths, whose heather breeding experiments have culminated in such superb plants as Erica x griffithsii 'Valerie Griffiths' and others.

When Derek Millis resigned as Home Counties Group organiser, I thought the Society was going to lose yet another local group. So it was a great pleasure to learn that Barry Sellers had taken it on.

I am sure we all wish both our new President and the Home Counties Group, much future success.

Chairman's Piece

David Edge

Another Heather Society Conference under the belt thanks to the dedicated organisation of Susie and Alan Kay. Whilst we struggle to maintain our members and finances it is uplifting to experience the undiminished enthusiasm of those attending from far and wide with an interest in our particular plants.

Our Treasurer, Phil Joyner and Secretary, Jean Preston are retiring from their posts at the next AGM after many years of dedicated service. The Society has need for replacements in situ for the next AGM. If you feel that you can undertake either of these positions to maintain the work of the Society please get in contact with a member of Council or myself.

In order to reduce Heather Society expenditure and the time of Council members there will be a review of the regularity of meetings. Modern technology allows for instant contact and response, which gives us the potential to streamline the decision-making processes.

Autumn is now upon us and with winter approaching we look forward to the onset of our seasonal heathers showing their flower and foliage through the harshest of weathers. I feel that there is a degree of increased interest and demand from the public for heathers. With many of the new varieties displaying more vibrant flower and foliage colour they attract greater interest in the garden centres. Colour sells I am told! Certainly the colder recent winter

conditions have led to a reassessment of the hardiness of plants, and garden centres will be hesitant about stocking marginally hardy plants through this winter.... perhaps this will leave additional space for the *Erica x darleyensis*, *Erica erigena* and *Erica carnea* to interest the browsing gardeners.

A new and welcome innovation for members is the facility of offering Heather Society membership as a gift to friends and/or family - a worthwhile present which will last longer than the chocolates or bottle of wine. Please contact our Administrator for further details.

40th Annual Conference

9th - 12th September 2011

Hardly have we put the wraps on Conference No. 39 at Kings Lynn when it is time to tell you about next year's venue and hopes of what will take place.

I would personally like to thank all of the members who contributed to the Kings Lynn Conference in so many ways. It is this welcome volunteering that helps to make our conferences so successful. A big thank you goes to each of you for the part you played.

For an account of this year's gathering, do read the article by Eric Cox further in this Bulletin; it will revive memories for those who attended and perhaps make somebody out there realise that you can enjoy a weekend with other "Heather Hordes".

Our venue for 2011 is The Lake District. A very beautiful area of England with its attractions for people from all walks of life and one of our speakers will be Geoff Yates, a long time member of the Heather Society.

The hotel is the Damson Dene at Crossthwaite, which is a little way south of Bowness & Windermere.

There will be visits to Holehird Gardens and Holker Hall. I have been informed of other interesting gardens that could be visited. But wherever we visit and whoever speaks to us, we promise a stimulating weekend and plenty of fun.

The record over the last few years of sun-filled conferences cannot be guaranteed in the Lake District, but I shall do my best.

The cost of the Conference will be announced in the February bulletin, but should be in the region of £250 - £280.

Please think about joining us in 2011.

Report on the AGM held on 12th September 2010

The Chairman, David Edge, reported that membership had fallen since last year, from 289 to 269 - partly to be blamed on the loss of the Direct Debit system of paying for membership. The display that the Society (David Edge and his helpers) put on at the Gardeners' World Live Exhibition in Birmingham was very well received by members of the public and gained a Commendation Award. (See pictures on centre pages). He thanked Dr Charles Nelson for his hard work as Administrator and Phil Joyner and Richard Canovan for managing the finances so well. He also thanked David Small (in his absence) for his continued work with the Heather Society Website.

The Heather Collection at Cherrybank is still uncertain and Richard Canovan was thanked for his efforts on our behalf to retain the collection. At Wisley, plans are in hand to reduce the tree cover and renew some of the plants.

The Society's association with the Plant Franchise has had to be been discontinued, as the Society must remain an independent body, but plants can still be sourced from various specialist heather nurseries.

The Secretary and the Treasurer have both informed Council of their wish to retire at the 2011 AGM. Also, Allen Hall wishes to withhold his name from re-election as a Vice-President next year. David Small indicated his wish to stand down as the Society's President, due to health reasons. This honour now goes to Professor John Griffiths.

The first recipient of the Society's Premier Award was *Erica darleyensis* 'Lucie'. The purpose of the award is to attract publicity in magazines and garden centres.

The *Everyone can Grow Heathers* booklet has been made available free on the website, on a trial basis and the Slide Library is now available in digital form.

The Treasurer, Phil Joyner, issued copies of the Trustees' Annual Report. He reported that income has decreased due to the declining membership and it has been necessary to draw on the Society's capital reserves in recent years. These need to be invested wisely to ensure the future of the Society.

2010 Conference

Eric Cox

This Conference was going to be fun. There was a good friendly gathering, with attendance numbers well maintained, and the Ramada (once found) proving a convenient base with its adjacent meeting rooms.

The Conference began with a minute's silence for a former Chairman, Arnold Stow who had died last year and who had given many years of sterling service to the Heather Society. A welcoming speech then followed from our current Chairman, David Edge, who duly introduced our evening speaker, Tim Marshall.

His subject "Plant Hunting in Bolivia", supported with an extensive photo rack and a confession that Bolivia had a very limited heather base, did not at first awaken our interest. However Tim, a self confessed cactophile, proceeded to show us some fascinating photographs of a wide range of cacti and we began to share his enthusiasm. Bolivia is a barren but beautiful country where vibrantly coloured alpine make their way bravely through the rocky terrain. No wonder Tim had returned over 14 times.

The next morning we went to the Kingfisher Nurseries at Spalding where Peter Bingham, his wife Maggie and co-director Mandy outlined their various roles at Kingfisher. Peter had originally grown soft fruit but had turned to heather production more than 30 years ago. He is a great innovator and had designed and adapted machinery to cope with many of the time-consuming jobs involved in heather propagation. A Japanese tea-plant trimmer was given a new role, trimming heather, and a machine normally found spraying grape vines was in service spraying heather plants of all sizes, within the confines of the greenhouse as well as in the extensive outside beds. We were shown the detail of preparing cuttings of equal length, then inserting them in a soil base with precise moisture

and temperature control which all ensured the plants were maintained at a top level quality. With Maggie selecting the appropriate plants for propagation and Mandy's marketing skills, Kingfisher Nurseries handle around 900,000 plants annually and more than 100 varieties. They supply Morrisons, the supermarket and many other retail outlets. We were all highly impressed, especially with the level of quality control and voted this a fascinating morning.

A delicious lunch followed, fortunately not accompanied by Peter's compost tea which had a higher value in the nursery! We then filled our baskets with a variety of heathers including *Erica x darleyensis* 'Bert' and 'Bing' named after Peter and Maggie's two sons.

The afternoon trip around Peckover House in Wisbech gave us time to realize that the world does not revolve around *Calluna vulgaris* and that beauty has many faces! Peckover House, formerly owned by a Quaker family had extensive gardens, which some members of the Society toured in the company of an amusing guide. We learnt that when the last owner died she had left the house and land to the National Trust, and only the furniture to an expectant nephew. He duly erected a marquee on the lawn, filled it with the house contents, and sold the lot - well, all except the kitchen range and a mirror!

On Saturday evening we listened to an excellent presentation by James Parry on an area in central Norfolk known as 'The Brecks'. At first sight of no great interest, no dramatic hills and rivers, but with the guidance of James Parry we learnt how the area had evolved over the years with the growth and and later felling of certain trees. We were treated to some fine photographs of the plant life, of butterflies and birds. We looked forward to our brief visit to the Brecks the next day.

The AGM began promptly on Sunday morning and was conducted in a business-like way, so that we departed on time for Bressingham. We did manage the brief stop at 'The Brecks' and saw fairly extensive growths of *Calluna*, as had been promised by James Parry. Farm traffic on the narrow road through the Brecks limited our stay but we appreciated the attraction of the area.

The Sunday afternoon was another sparkling display of garden design and planning from Adrian Bloom, who, with his father Alan Bloom, had created Bressingham Gardens. He described how he had returned to Bressingham after four years away, some of them spent in South Africa, full of enthusiasm for grasses - giving him a new interest he was able to indulge. In recent years many of his earlier plantings, the conifers in particular, had reached unexpected heights and some judicious pruning was required! In fact Adrian became a serious advocate of regular and ruthless pruning. The heathers in the garden sat well amongst a background of grasses, conifers, and perennials and showed their full beauty. We followed along broad avenues of splendid lawn, which added a framework to the beds they were surrounding.

The final section of the descending tour was to a small house set in a grove with its imaginative title of 'Foggy Bottom'. With a small lake and further rare shrubs it seemed that Adrian had created a garden paradise; but no, for Adrian, as with all keen gardeners, there was another challenge, but not for our ears that day! As we drove away from Bressingham the rain came - the first and only shower.

We had an evening closing session, which was quite brilliant. Alan Kay mastered a superb ending with an adroit presentation of members' PowerPoint displays, and then cunningly emptied our pockets as he auctioned old and new books as well as a few plants, and all in great humour. It will long be remembered.

It was a most interesting and stimulating weekend and for two newcomers to the Heather Society we could not have been made to feel more welcome. In particular we must congratulate the organizers for establishing such a super Gathering. We look forward to meeting up again in Cumbria next September.

Dr E. G. H. Oliver

We are very pleased to announce that Dr. E.G.H.(Ted) Oliver has been elected President of The Botanical Society of South Africa at their AGM in late September. Ted is well recognised as being the world's expert on Cape Heaths and his knowledge of all botanical matters is encyclopaedic in its extent.

Many members will recall Ted at the Conference held in Dublin in 1995 where he presented 130 specimens of Cape Heaths and gave an excellent presentation on these *Ericas*. He also conducted the first Heather Society tour of South Africa in 1999.

We congratulate him on the appointment and wish him well in his presidency.

Susie Kay

Tippitiwitchet Corner: Administrator's log no. 10

Email: theheathersociety@phonecoop.coop

New members since June 2010

We welcome these new members:

G.H.P Turpin: Irthington, Cumbria.

Jennifer & Neil Buchan: Alford, Aberdeenshire.

Ena Burn: Burnopfield, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Marilyn & Stan Williams: Knowle, Solihull.

Mr & Mrs James Masters: East Grinstead, Sussex.

James Parry: Oxborough, Norfolk.

Paul Cook: Ness Botanic Gardens, Wirral

2011 yearbook, *Heathers* 8

There is still time for articles to be prepared for the 2011 yearbook. Please send your contributions by the end of October. Thank you. If you are unable to meet the deadline, please let me know and I will try to allow some extra time.

Websites of members

In the last *Bulletin*, I noted that you could download the catalogue of a Polish member from <http://www.wolski.com.pl/>. Recently another member's

website came to my attention; I can recommend it for ideas and for excellent photographs of conifers. Stephen Grubb and Lynne Rutter's garden in Poole, Dorset, is called (appropriately) Foxhollow. "Foxhollow" is a 3/4 acre garden particularly notable for its extensive dwarf and ornamental conifer collection. Also to be found in the garden are good collections of ornamental grasses, especially varieties of *Miscanthus*, *Panicum* and *Pennisetum*, plus many other choice and rare trees, shrubs and perennials." Heathers are also planted in Foxhollow. The website includes a link to a list of plants (dwarf conifers) that are for sale. Go to www.foxhollowgarden.co.uk.

Fires and drought and heathers

Susie and Alan Kay and I visited the Irish colony of Dorset heath (*Erica ciliaris*) in Connemara on 16 August – a wet day! – and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the heather was regenerating vigorously! There were some nice long shoots concealed in the tufts of purple moor-grass. So the fire did not destroy the plant at all, only the aerial shoots, while the rootstock remained alive. In fact, it was a rather predictable result. All the burnt areas where *Erica mackayana* and *Erica* \diamond *stuartii* grow also had "carpets" of new shoots. Next year, all being well, these heathers could bloom spectacularly.

In the last summer at Tippitiwichee Cottage, drought, severe drought, was the problem. Newly planted heathers were not watered enough and one day I found that *Erica* \diamond *arendsiana* 'Charnwood Pink' that I had recently put in, was severely distressed. It lost all its foliage and I thought it was dead. Consequently I pruned back the shoots and left it where it was to decay with dignity! To my considerable surprise, shortly after we eventually had some rain – and the weeds sprouted – I was weeding at the spot and was delighted to see the heather sprouting new shoots. It has recovered well.

2010 CD

Thank you to all those who contributed photographs for the CD, which is enclosed. This can be played on a computer and should also work on a television that is linked to a CD player. We hope you enjoy this glimpse of the world of heathers and fellow members' gardens.

... and finally: 2011 subscriptions, airmail, etcetera

The time has come to remind everyone that the 2011 subscriptions are due on 1 January next. The **2011 subscription** remains unchanged: UK resident £15; EU resident £18; and rest of world £21. (Airmail rates and separate rates for nurseries have been discontinued. All copies of the *Bulletin* and *Heathers* will be posted by "printed paper surface mail" from 2011.)

UK members who have not set up a standing order will find in this package a renewal reminder plus a standing order mandate; please either send a cheque to The Administrator, or (better! saves postage too) complete the mandate and hand it to your bank. Alternatively if you bank on-line it is very easy to set up an annual standing order to ensure payment reaches the Society without the need for reminders. Details of the Society's bank account, essential for such an electronic transfer, are on the enclosed form. Or, you can

avail of the 3-year subscription offer, paying £45 (by cheque or transfer; debit or credit card can be used but will incur a transaction fee as below).

Three years ago many **overseas** members took advantage of the **three-year subscription** offer, which allowed them to pay a consolidated amount, and also, if they wished, to pay with a credit card at minimal cost. Until 31 December the fee for using a card remains at £3 per transaction, but this must rise on 1 January 2011 to £5 per transactions due to the amount that the Society is charged by the bank to maintain the facility for using credit and debit cards. Therefore we urge anyone wishing to renew and pay by credit or debit card to avail of this lower fee and renew well **before 31 December 2010**.

Payment in Euro is accepted, as long as this is sent direct to the Allied Irish Bank in Ireland: details of the IBAN and other necessary information is provided on the EU subscription renewal reminder. The 2011 subscription rate in Euro is €22; the 2011-2013 three-year rate is €65. Membership rates for non-UK residents are £18 for residents of Europe and £21 for the rest of the world. Three-year rates are, respectively, £54 and £63.

We regret we **cannot** accept cheques written for **US dollars** or any other foreign currency due to the amount the bank charges to cash and convert these. We can accept international money orders written in **UK£ (sterling)** (not in another currency), or bank drafts in sterling drawn on a British bank. The **cash** equivalent of the three-year subscription in US\$ is \$100.

Your Memories Wanted

In 2013 the Society will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary and we would very much value your memories. Happy, funny, sad or just nostalgic - everyone's contributions will be very welcome, but, anyone who has memories of the Society's early days will be especially so.

Does anyone remember the early Conferences, where (we are led to believe) the accommodation was rather basic to say the least, and husbands and wives were separated into different dormitories for the night?

There have been many memorable conferences, meetings and visits over the last forty-seven years and the Society has certainly had many memorable members. So - please- we need your help in recording them for posterity.

Rose Cottage Ramblings - 5

David Plumridge

In my last "Ramblings" I moaned about the harsh winter. Little did I know what was in store for us this year! Snow was never absent at Rose Cottage from December 17th until the second week in March. A permanent blanket cover would have given cosy protection, but minor thaws came and went exposing our favourite plants to the elements. As usual the main sufferers were the *cinereas* and it was notable that given protection they would have survived. One is flowering as well as ever, where it mingled with a neighbouring *carnea*, but in the open it died the death.

Once spring decided to arrive the *carneas* and *darleyensis* showed they

had been unfazed by the unfriendly winter. They gave their usual long lasting and breath taking display. This year they were not set off by a verdant lawn. Exposed mole tunnels ran along the surface. The little gentlemen had a great time just under the snow. Elsewhere there were large patches of grey fungus. I find it surprising how it grows at such low temperatures. The following dry May and June did not help the rejuvenation of the sward. Unusually we had to employ the sprinkler to make sure the heathers were given the best chance to recover from the winter. Fortunately no water meter here – Northumberland's Kielder Water gives unlimited supplies. In the drought of a few years back when Yorkshire was running dry we were told not to water our gardens all at the same time as it reduced the pressure!

Our heathers recovered not too badly from the cruel winter! Only a few small dead patches remain, mainly *cinereas*. Rita likes to leave them as long as possible. Many apparently dead stems do come alive after several weeks. We were especially pleased to have *Erica erigena* 'Thing Nee' do well after Rita moved her to a more sheltered position. She has lost the conical form sculpted by David Edge, but nevertheless gave us a lovely floral display. This has been followed by the most attractive golden foliage. Many thanks, Barry for this useful addition to our garden. We now wonder why we did not plant her earlier. Another is *Erica x griffithsii* 'Jacqueline', at present looking very pretty beside 'Thing Nee'.

'Valerie Griffiths' often gets a mention in my "Ramblings". Do you know she can be seen from space – the heather that is, not John's delightful wife? My son 'pointed' me to Google Earth. Rita's heather garden is quite recognisable with colour mainly supplied by 'Valerie Griffiths'. The curious can search via our postcode – DH8 9AP.

"Ramblings" readers may have noticed my obsession with the subject of heather gardening in the media. This time I have probably enjoyed more elation than despair. Deep despair, however, was caused by a now ex-favourite gardening guru. On Radio 4's 'Gardeners' Question Time' Ann Swithinbank declared her *hatred* for heather (and conifers). She was backed by Chris Beardshaw. At least Matthew Biggs kept quiet. He accompanied Rita when the garden was included in the Channel 4 TV visit to Durham. It would have been nice had he said that they could look OK! At least this bigotry was balanced by positive comments on two other episodes regarding the rejuvenation of old heather beds. Also, Radio Newcastle's gardening programme presenters encouraged the planting of *Ericas* and *Callunas*. So not quite so bad on the radio after all. We rarely watch TV gardening shows these days, so can't comment in that area. I wonder if we are alone in losing interest since the heady days of Geoff Hamilton?

On the printed page things seem to be getting better. Heather often gets a mention in the RHS *Garden* magazine and in various articles on attracting bees into the garden *Erica* and *Calluna* get a mention more often than not. I was especially pleased when Rita pointed out a competent article by Adrienne Wild in *Woman's Weekly* where she described a colourful photo with "Weather-proof heathers and conifers are a class act". I hope she is a member! Also, this spring, our local *Newcastle Journal* gardener nominated *Erica* as "The best of the Bunch" and "a joy at this time of year". But we may be *doomed!* An article in the Scottish

'Sunday Post' warned that heather is susceptible to *Phytophthora ramorum* – 'Sudden Oak Death' and is affecting plants in the west of England and Wales.....

Our gardening highlight of the year was a March tour of Crete lead by our own Charles Nelson. Not a lot of heather, but a cornucopia of wild flowers, great scenery and quiet archaeological sites coupled with nigh on perfect weather. Aided by his Greek friend, Andreas, we enjoyed great countryside catering and lubrication! The other highlight was a recent visit to Floors Castle in the Borders with our local gardening club. The extensive herbaceous borders, even for a heather lover, were magnificent.

Our own garden is, in its own much smaller way, reaching its "peak of perfection". At this time of year – early September - we have virtually all the summer flowering heathers in bloom together; *cinereas*, *Callunas*, *Daboecias*, *tetralix*, *x williamsii* and of course the *vagans*. It's a little frustrating that a garden visit arranged by our long time Heather Society friend, Dorothy Wilde came rather too early to see the garden at its summer best.

We unfortunately missed the Society's annual get together this year because of a long desired visit to the Croatian islands of Korcula and Brac. We have attended many Heather Society Conferences over the years and have enjoyed them without exception. I would urge any members who are maybe a little apprehensive about attending to give the next a try. Apart from interesting visits and talks, you will find us a friendly lot who are very welcoming to newcomers. We are determined not to miss number 40!

Sadly, Saga did not allow much heather hunting on the islands. It was frustrating to pass much *Erica arborea* and other lower growing heathers when travelling on the mountain roads of Korcula. We didn't think the rep would be happy to stop the coach while we explored the countryside flora! The tour did include a mountain top stop on Brac, but annoyingly there was not a heather to be seen. It's maybe even too alkaline on that island which is well known for its quality limestone quarries. Perhaps Charles Nelson could advise? Later, however, we did find heather on the island – and at sea level. There were to our astonishment several examples of *Calluna* and *Erica cinerea*. We discovered these in planters on the promenade at Bol. It would have been interesting to locate the provenance of this surprising selection of bedding plants!

We may have missed the annual conference, but we just managed to catch the September meeting of the Yorkshire Group of the Heather Society. This is one of the seven specialist groups registered at the RHS Harlow Carr garden. Instead of the old portakabin, we now meet in the recently opened ultra modern "carbon neutral" £3.3 million Bramall Learning Centre style classroom. Perversely, we found the echoing acoustics and the inability to darken the room for the video presentation less desirable than the facilities in our old venue! I will not go into detail regarding problems encountered after use of the "water efficient" toilet. Maybe it can be argued that these niggles can be balanced by the "annual saving of 75 tonnes of carbon dioxide"?

We find the 70-mile drive to the Yorkshire meetings well worthwhile. Apart from the pleasure of meeting with other heather lovers it gives us the opportunity to see the garden throughout the seasons. I am very pleased to report that the

continued on page 12



Heather Society stand and 'Bertha' at Gardeners' World Live 2010
Photographs - Daphne Everett



Photograph - F. B. Rice



Heather Society Conferences - Foggy Bottom 1977 & 2010
Photograph - Charles Nelson



Kingfisher Nurseries - with Valerie Griffiths
& the Society's President, Professor John
Griffiths by the sales benches
Photograph - Charles Nelson



Erica Vagans 'Lyonesse', Mrs D F Maxwell and
the pale pink 'stranger' in Colin Rogers' garden
Photograph - Colin Rogers



Basket of Heathers produced by John Hall
at Wisley
Photograph - Charles Nelson



Dennis Jeskins admiring the Heather beds
at Wisley
Photograph - Charles Nelson

from page 9

old heather plantings continue to look good, even if "livened up" with *Verbena bonariensis*! We were also pleased to see many new plantings containing heathers. No "old fashioned" heather beds, but a lot better than nothing!

Jean is organising the next meeting in March and we welcome other members who live within striking distance of Harlow Carr. Now we are in the swish new building we may also be able to entice members of the public and gain the odd member or two! We live in hope.....

Do deer eat heathers?

Charles Nelson

At our annual gathering in King's Lynn, two members spoke about their gardens in the "Open Forum" and stressed that they had not seen any signs of deer eating the heathers cultivated on their patches. Eric Cox, who lives in Finchampstead, Berkshire, surprised me by making the point while showing a photograph of a deer in his snow-covered garden. I remarked, as Eric was speaking, that this contradicted the usual perception of the behaviour of deer. Earlier in the same series of presentations, Walter Wornick had spoken about his garden in New Hampshire, USA, and showed photographs of plants such as conifers, which had been eaten and damaged by whitetail deer, which are native in his neighbourhood. But, Walter was not pleased by my later intervention and protested that I was casting aspersions on his veracity. In fact, I was not commenting on his talk at all.

This was not the first occasion on which Walter has reported his observations about whitetail deer. He wrote about them in a letter to the *Bulletin* in Autumn 2003 prompted by a response to a "Q&A" reply, and more recently in Autumn 2009. I do not for one moment doubt Eric or Walter but, to repeat, their observations contradict well-founded, British perceptions – that deer will and do eat heathers in gardens. In their book *Gardening with hardy heathers*, David Small and Ella May Wulff reiterate that "In general, North American deer leave *Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica cinerea*, and *E. tetralix* alone." However those American deer do like *E. vagans* and *E. manipuliflora* and the artificial hybrid *E x griffithsii*. The winter and spring-flowering heaths and tree heathers are "more susceptible to deer browsing than the summer bloomers". There is much more about deer and heathers on pages 60 to 62, but Small and Wulff's over-arching advice is that "in areas where deer are significant garden pests... heathers can be planted with little fear of predation."

Let's look at some deer/heather facts outside the garden. Not unexpectedly, heather (particularly *Calluna vulgaris*, ling) is a major component of the diet of the native red deer, which nowadays inhabit the forest, and moorlands of Scotland. A study conducted on the small herd kept in the Connemara National Park, Ireland, showed that *Calluna* was also a major component of these particular animals' diet in winter when grasses were not available. It is interesting, in this context, to quote from the first paragraph of the research paper which reported the Connemara study: "Red deer... evolved as a forager of low ground plant species of heaths, woodland and forest margins. Whilst

many present-day populations survive on grazed (i.e. pasture) habitats, comparison of the digestive tract with those of other ungulates indicates that red deer are adapted to a mixture of graze and browse." However, red deer are not likely to be found in any British, Irish or North American garden so they are unlikely to make a meal of planted heathers.

The other native British deer, the fallow deer and roe deer, also eat heather as part of their natural diet. Studies of roe deer in Scotland, however, suggested that deer, which fed mostly on spruce and heather, were more prone to liver cancer than those that had a more varied diet, and that varied diet includes grass, shoots of evergreen and deciduous shrubs and trees, as well as fruits and berries.

There can therefore be no doubt that European deer species will eat heather, and that they may do so if they encounter heathers planted in gardens.

As far as the species of deer endemic in North America are concerned, their natural diet cannot ever have included the heathers *Calluna*, *Daboecia* and *Erica* because these genera have never naturally occurred on the continent. North American deer did not evolve enjoying a diet of heathers, but that would not necessarily mean that when they found some in a garden they will not eat them – they are inquisitive and will nibble many plants. However, deer being ruminants are dependent on the microbial "flora" of their gut to digest vegetable matter and that gut-flora is very closely linked to the type of plant material that each individual animal habitually eats. In other words a deer's digestive system is "highly food-dependent – the microbial community in the stomach is tailored to digest specific types of plant material, which means that deer cannot rapidly switch foods.... A [deer] that has spent all summer feeding on grass will not have the microbial flora... needed to digest woody material." Yet a deer cannot know what microbes are in its gut, so it may eat "unsuitable feeds" at times when its usual fare is scarce.

This could account for Walter Wornick's observations, that the white-tail deer do not eat heathers in his garden but will browse off the native and exotic trees (relatives of those that occur naturally in the New Hampshire forests) because they can digest them, although, as noted, a deer cannot have any inkling of the composition and capacity of its gut-flora. It is also known that British deer, at least, have clear preferences for certain plants and will avoid eating others. Planting – or encouraging – plants such as brambles and even dandelions will provide a very palatable alternative for deer and they might then leave heather alone.

That deer are a problem in gardens, and will devour heathers, is quite plainly not to be doubted despite the individual experience of Eric and Walter. This is evident in web sites where advice is given about the "deer problem". The British Deer Society provides a meagre list of "deer-resistant plants" – *Camellia*, *Cistus*, *Crocus*, *Fuchsia*, *Helleborus*, *Hosta*, *Hydrangea*, *Iris*, *Lavandula*, *Papaver*, *Primula*, *Rhododendron*, *Sedum* – alongside a list of "vulnerable" plants, which includes *Calluna* but not *Erica*. The RHS website also has a list of deer-resistant plants; its "five usually deer resistant plants" are hellebores (for shade), *Kniphofia* (for full sun), gooseberry (for fruit), *Choisya* (shrub) and honeysuckle (climber) but a garden with just those would be frightfully dull.

Pot pot-pourri: In Praise of Pots

Barry Sellers

I tend to grow most of my heathers in pots. There are several reasons for this; partly due to a shortage of space, growing South African *Ericas*, most of which have to be moved from outside to a conservatory for winter protection, and also a few plants that I keep for experiments that I need to keep in the conservatory to protect from bees. Whilst it is very rare for me to see any heather seedlings sprouting in the garden, the opposite is true of the pots, particularly over the past five years.

The seedlings that have emerged include *E. platycodon*, *E. arborea*, *E. erigena*, *E. carnea*, *E. maderensis*, *E. ciliaris*, *E. lusitanica* and even *E. caffra* and *E. bergiana*. *E. bergiana* probably arose from discarded compost that contained seed I had sown but had not germinated. *E. caffra* was growing in a pot of *E. caffra*, which stands outside all year, so the young seedling had to withstand the vagaries of the English winter weather. The *E. lusitanica* are yellow foliage seedlings arising from 'George Hunt'. The *erigenas* contain both yellow foliage and green foliage seedlings. The yellow foliage ones are not surprising as most of the *erigenas* in the garden are yellow foliage plants (mostly unnamed seedlings from 'Golden Lady' from experiments in the 1980's), though one or two are most likely from a new yellow foliage seedling from 'Irish Silver'. The *maderensis* seedlings also arose within the pot of *E. maderensis*, which was fortunate, as the original plant died this year, that in itself being a seedling from Allen Hall some years ago.

There are also what appear to be two *Daboecia* seedlings coming up in a pot of *D. x scotica* 'Silverwells' that had since died. As *x scotica* is an infertile hybrid the seedlings must have arisen from another *Daboecia* since lost. Also growing in the same pot were yellow and green foliaged *erigenas*, a *ciliaris*, a real pot-pourri of heathers.

None of the seedlings have flowered to date, but buds are appearing on a few of the *carneas*, and one which I believe to be *x darleyensis* because of its rapid growth and habit.

Whilst a garden full of heathers in pots may not be everyone's idea of how to grow heathers it can provide a few surprises.

A Heather Bouquet

Colin Rogers

The former jungle that used to be our back garden is now occupied by my obsession - heathers, in a multitude of colour, shapes of beds, times of flowering, and a scattering of unplanned, random seedlings. The trouble began when the back garden was full, and I started dropping hints at how lovely the front garden would look with a distribution of heathers on the same principle.

I made little headway because, I was told, the front garden should be formal. In the end, we compromised and, against my better judgment, two short lines of heathers were given the go-ahead to be planted between the formally set out lines of

dwarf conifers. A pattern (pattern! I ask you!) was approved, and the selection of cultivars was left to me. Romantic fool that I am, two sprang to mind immediately, two that I had never grown before, to become the only *Erica vagans* in the front garden.

In the summer of 1923, a marriage took place between Douglas Fyfe Maxwell and Esther Caroline de Courcy Eastlake at Langport Somerset. He was born in 1892 in Middlesex (she was two years younger, born in Plymouth) and, since 1919; he had been a partner in the firm of Maxwell and Beale in Dorset and would already have been familiar with the heathers on the Lizard, where the couple spent their honeymoon. In *The Low Road* (1927) Maxwell records the finding of *E. vagans*. 'Lyonesse' and 'Mrs D. F. Maxwell', both first introduced in 1925, but strangely did not mention that the discoveries were made during the honeymoon. The earliest reference I can find to the timing of the finds is in Underhill (1971). (As an aside, anyone familiar with conjuring tricks would, on reading this story, immediately suspect a set-up by the groom knowing their whereabouts in advance, and one can only imagine the delight of the new bride on being able to name a heather after herself, using her new name scarcely days old!)

What better, then, to have these two cultivars together in our front garden! I was happy; my wife was happier; and the plants themselves were so delighted that they have produced an offspring! Furthermore, whereas 'Lyonesse' is as strong a white as Maxwell found, and 'Mrs D. F. Maxwell' is deep rose pink (H6-7), growing among them is a precocious pale pink (H8) - precocious because whereas the white has always been much larger than 'Mrs D. F. Maxwell', this new heather is larger still, and very vigorous, with racemes some 13 cms long! So, when our granddaughter married last year, we presented the couple with a bouquet of white, deep rose pink, and pink heathers, and a card explaining the background. And, guess what - this year they had a little girl, Amelia June. How lucky that the baby was a girl!

A Garden Blog With a Difference

A new type of garden blog has been launched by gardening author Karen Platt. The blog encourages gardeners from all over the world to post messages, information, advice and photographs about gardening in their part of the world. It is intended that the blog will build into an immense resource of gardening information for gardeners no matter where they live. To date we have bloggers from England, North America and Germany and an exciting exchange of information is taking place. We welcome gardeners around the world to share their gardening experiences with others. So why not login and see what we have to say and have your say at the same time.

The idea was the brainchild of Karen Platt, well known for her gardening books on colour. Her desire is to bring together gardeners across the world and to compare and contrast gardens, particular plants and more. Gardeners are encouraged to blog about their own gardens, public gardens in their area, garden visits and plants. Anyone with access to a computer can read the blog and you can register to take part online. The blog can be accessed on her website www.karenplatt.co.uk/blog

Questions & Answers

Question. I have a 'Holehird' (*Erica australis*) in my garden. I planted it two years ago and haven't pruned it yet. The flowering stalks are getting taller and I would like to prune it soon as the flowers are starting to fade. I keep reading that it needs to be well pruned, but nothing specific. How do you recommend pruning it? Go all the way down beneath the flowering stalk? Thanks.

Florentia Scott (Santa Rosa, California, USA)

Answer. *Erica australis* is tall-growing heather reaching a metre or more in height: it might be classed as "tree heather". 'Holehird' will reach 1.5m. As it is a young plant, to encourage it to become bushy, it is desirable to remove a third to half of the previous year's growth. This will encourage branching. Pruning is done soon after flowering. However, *Erica australis* is not one of the heathers that requires regular pruning; it should be allowed to grow without pruning making a bushy shrub. Of course, pruning may be necessary to control wayward shoots; these may be cut back as desired but older shoots may not sprout again readily so roughly shaping the shrub in its early years is a good idea. Once you have a shapely bush you should be able to leave 'Holehird' alone.

Question. Please could you advise us? We have inherited a large heather bed on moving house 6 years ago. It is starting to look a bit threadbare now with a lot of 'dead wood' undergrowth and some bald patches. How should we go about restoring it to its former glory? I was wondering about radically cutting back/even burning the dead wood/old brown stems and planting new heathers in the gaps? What do you advise?

The garden is in Gloucestershire in the Cotswolds on a limestone bed. The soil is presumably pretty alkaline therefore. The heathers seemed to be thriving though until recently. We have never really pruned them at all in the 6 years. Some of the bald patches are probably dog related: they tend to sunbathe when we are not watching them! The bed is south facing and pretty dry/well drained.



Charlie and Sarah Inman

Answer. This is not an uncommon problem, which I suspect has been aggravated by a very dry spring. My advice on this type of problem is to dig out all dead plants completely, fork over the ground and incorporate wet peat (no more than a couple of handfuls per hole and replant with *Erica carnea*, *E. x darleyensis* and possibly *E. vagans* if any summer colour is wanted.

As far as plants with dead wood below good growth I would dig them up with as big a rootball as possible after a good soaking and then deepen the hole and replant with the bare wood below ground level and the good growth flat

on the surface. They will then tend to root along the ground and recover.

Burning is totally out, as replanting becomes a problem. There are obviously some healthy plants still *in situ* and I think my suggestion would work. It has done so for others and me on my advice many times before. I also suggest applying Epsom salts at a handful per metre to help with magnesium in the Cotswold soils. {Geoff Yates}

Question. Following building works we are left with a large, very bare bank, no topsoil to speak of, it is east facing. We would love to grow heathers and conifers on it. Before the excavations rhododendrons grew there. It is sheltered by a large oak and has blackthorn on its west side (not ours) so it only gets the sun in the morning. What is the best way to prepare the soil and what heathers and conifers would you recommend? We are in East Sussex, twenty miles from the coast and not the centre of the universe. I have tested the soil and although the packaging/colour chart seems faded the result indicates an alkaline soil (a camellia I once planted there hated it) although the rhododendrons seemed ok, they were ancient and the same common type as in near-by Buxted Park.

Charmaine and John

Answers. It really depends on where the oak tree is and its canopy. Much better if it lies to the north. Also it depends on how steep the slope is. Even then it could be modified by peat blocks to create terraces or a few large rocks. I would suggest winter-flowering heathers. The more upright *Erica carnea* such as 'Rosalie', *E. x darleyensis* and *E. erigena* at the bottom of the slope, which may be near the eastern boundary of the site. Depending on space they may wish to plant *E. australis* or *E. arborea* on the eastern boundary too but would depend on proximity to the slope. With rhododendrons having grown there the soil will be acidic so a good mulch around the plants will help retain moisture after planting. {Barry Sellers}

With reference to the query from Charmaine, I fully agree with the comments already made. I might add that the subsoil should be investigated and if there is substantial clay then sharp sand should be also be incorporated into the top layer. I have similar sites in my garden and have found that *Erica x darleyensis* and *Daboecia* perform reasonably well. The heathers should be planted with plenty of space around them to allow leaves to settle in between the plants in autumn. The plants will need abundant water in summer and autumn unless there is heavy rain. {Bryon Roberts}

Assuming your soil is on the alkaline side, although as you say *Rhododendron ponticum* was happy on it, you should avoid planting the heathers that require acid soil. That still leaves a lot.

Spring-blooming

Erica carnea (winter heath) is a very useful ground-covering one, which flowers in late winter, and early spring 'Springwood White' is a good old variety.

Erica x darleyensis is a hybrid of it; slightly more bushy and upright often with coloured spring growth.

Erica erigena (Irish heath) is a taller species; plants such as 'W. T. Rackliff' form compact conifer-like shrubs. {Charles Nelson}.

Condolences

I am sure you will wish to join me in sending our sincerest condolences to Pamela Lee on the recent sad loss of her husband Geoffrey.

Group News

Yorkshire Heather Group

The usual six members of the Yorkshire Heather Group met in the Jubilee Room of the new Bramall Learning Centre at RHS Harlow Carr on Saturday, 18th September. As there are now so few of us we no longer have a formal lecture but look at digital photographs on the projector and have a grand discussion on heathers in general both wild and cultivated. Our chairman, John Griffiths had brought along a memory stick of photos of heathers in his garden and David Plumridge a CD of heathers provided by Ella May Wulff of the North American Heather Society. Many of these were of photos of heathers in English gardens including the Plumridge's so we were able to discuss the various aspects of each heather, conifer and other plants seen on the photographs.

The new learning centre is a magnificent building but still in its infancy as far as occupancy at weekends is concerned. We were sorry that we were not able to go into the library, which while advertised as being open is as yet only open on weekdays and whilst we had a large room for our discussion, being upstairs, it is not at present open to public access so we are not able to invite new people to join us. We very much appreciate though that the RHS provide this room and its facilities free of charge to us.

We must congratulate the management at RHS Harlow Carr also as they have planted thousands of new heathers both around this learning centre and along the path to it. At present these *Calluna* are looking good and with the new drainage installed by the RHS they should continue to do so as the pH of the soil is on the acid side. The *Ericas* planted along the winter walk are also looking very healthy whilst the large memorial bed of heathers by the entrance is interestingly interspersed with sculpture and *Verbena bonariensis*.

We shall have three meetings as usual in 2011 the dates are yet to be arranged but it is expected that they will be on Saturdays 19th March, 28th May and 17th September.

Jean Preston

North East

We were blessed with a beautiful warm, sunny summer's day for the Annual Ponteland Flower Show on Saturday September 11th. In spite of the poor, or should I say non-existent summer, the show benches held a high standard of produce. I can't honestly say the same for the heather classes because up here it has not been a heather 'year'. A lot were finished, a lot were still to come and those that were ready were passable. The four contestants, - yes- only four - and three of those were Heather Society members, battled it out. The final result was that Roy Nichols and ourselves tied with the most points in the heather classes. It was a 'first' in the history of the Flower show. Thanks Roy for a good contest!

There are no other events to report but, hopefully, when we emerge from winter hibernation, there will be news in the Spring Bulletin of our annual outing. We'll give it another try and hope for better numbers.

Dorothy Warner

Home Counties

Visit to Royal Horticultural Society Garden, Wisley, Surrey: Saturday 25 September 2010

Talk by John Hall of John Hall Plants Ltd.

As the new organiser for the Home Counties Group I should like to offer my thanks on behalf of members to Derek Millis for his sterling work in organising events, including the Turpin Trophy. I decided to step into the breach following Derek's decision to step down through his other commitments, for the thought of not having the annual visit to Wisley was too much to bear! After all, a visit to the National Heather Collection is an institution. So arrangements were made through Andy Collins, who has responsibility for the heathers in the National Collection at Wisley to set up a meeting at the garden with a talk in the afternoon. I approached John Hall of John Hall Plants Limited, to give a talk, as he was a local commercial grower of heathers. He kindly agreed. Charles Nelson kindly emailed and sent out letters to local members to announce the event. On Saturday 25th September we were blessed with a sunny day, a pleasant surprise after the rains a day earlier.

Around a dozen or so members met up outside the entrance coming from far and wide, Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Sussex, Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire and London. A warm welcome was given to Vic Jamieson, his first meeting with the Home Counties Group.

Andy pointed out the new leaflet on heathers published by the Royal Horticultural Society with special reference to the Heather Society and Plant Heritage and their respective roles in fostering interest in, and an understanding of, growing heathers.

We all trotted off to reconvene at the heather garden and noted how well the heathers were growing in a newly planted bed that had formerly been occupied by pumpkins. With Andy as our guide we carefully wended our way through the beds. At the far end we gathered to gaze at a beautiful clump labelled *Erica manipuliflora*, which was in full flower. Several of us pondered over what it was. With a scent we thought it might be *Erica x griffithsii* 'Heaven Scent' - but was the scent really strong enough to match that cultivar? Charles Nelson quickly reminded us that, at a previous gathering at the garden, this cultivar had also caught our attention. Well, Andy said he may have the answer in his records, so we were left to ponder the outcome.

A few of us quickly popped across the road to view the natural heathland of Wisley Common where *Calluna* and *Erica tetralix* were happily seen in flower.

After a good lunch at the restaurant, we all convened at the laboratory theatre, where we were greeted by John Hall, who had been busy setting up a display of heathers in preparation for his talk. We all marvelled at the display, particularly the arrangement of heathers in hanging baskets and terracotta pots. John's talk was about growing heathers, so appropriate with over thirty years experience of growing these beautiful plants, from his early beginnings at Windlesham Nurseries.

John took us through the stages of propagating heathers commercially, from selecting and taking cuttings, through to choosing the compost, planting in trays, re-potting, feeding the young cuttings, pruning, to eventual sales and promotion. Here he referred to the joint Heather Society - British Heather Growers Association stand at 'Gardener's World' at the Birmingham Exhibition Centre, to help promote the growing of heathers. He pointed out to us the challenge to make heathers fashionable once more.

John kindly answered numerous members' questions about growing heathers, particularly in pots and baskets, as we sat marvelling at the beautiful displays of heathers. There were questions about using peat and peat alternatives, and whether there should be once again a National Heather Week in September to help promote heathers. Members were also treated to being able to purchase some of the plants John had brought along.

We all thanked John for a really inspiring and most enjoyable talk. Afterwards tea and cake kindly provided by Lin Joyner and Audrey Sprague finished off a most enjoyable day.

It is hoped to arrange a winter gathering at Wisley to see the range of heathers that will be in flower in March. If members have any thoughts and ideas on topics and speakers for future events please do let me know.

Barry Sellers
sellersbarry@aol.com

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Society's Website: www.heathersociety.org.uk

- | | |
|--|--|
| Chairman & Steering Committee | <i>Policy matters, major events etc.</i>
Mr. D. Edge, Forest Edge Nursery, Verwood Road, Woodlands, Wimborne, BH21 8LJ. |
| Treasurer | Mr. P.L. Joyner, 84 Kinross Road, Rushington, Totton, Southampton, Hampshire, SO40 9BN. <i>e-mail:</i> philjoyner@btinternet.com <i>Tel:</i> (02380) 864336 |
| Secretary & Slide Librarian | <i>Council Matters/Hire of slides</i>
Mrs. J. Preston, "Matchams", Main Street, Askham Richard, York, YO23 3PT. <i>e-mail:</i> jeanjulian@btinternet.com <i>Tel:</i> (01904) 707316 |
| Yearbook Editor & Registrar | <i>Articles for the Yearbook / Naming of Heathers</i>
Dr. E.C. Nelson
For details - see back cover |
| Bulletin Editor | <i>Notes, articles for the Bulletin</i>
Mrs. D. Everett, The Bannut, Bringsty, Herefordshire, WR6 5TA. <i>e-mail:</i> everett@bannut.co.uk <i>Tel:</i> (01885) 482206 |
| Administrator | <i>Subscriptions, Orders for publications etc.</i>
Dr. E.C. Nelson
For details - see back cover |
| Conference Manager | Mrs. S. Kay, Lettergesh East, Renvyle, Co. Galway, Republic of Ireland
<i>e-mail:</i> susiek@gofree.indigo.ie <i>Tel:</i> 00353 95 43575 |
| Group Organisers (<i>Remember, you will be very welcome at any local meeting or visit!</i>) | |
| East Midlands | Mr. A. Hall, 10, Upper Green, Nanpantan, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 3SG. <i>e-mail:</i> halla32@tiscali.co.uk <i>Tel:</i> 01509 238923 |
| North East | Mrs. D. M. Warner, Littlecroft, Click-em-in, Ponteland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE20 9BQ. <i>Tel:</i> (01661) 823299 |
| Home Counties | Mr. B. Sellers, 8 Croft Road, Norbury, London SW16 3NF. <i>e-mail:</i> sellersbarry@aol.com |
| South West | Mr. P.L. Joyner, 84 Kinross Road, Rushington, Totton, Southampton, Hampshire, SO40 9BN. <i>e-mail:</i> philjoyner@btinternet.com <i>Tel:</i> (02380) 864336 |
| Yorkshire | Dr. J. Griffiths, 9, Ashlea Close, Leeds, West Yorkshire. LS25 1JX. <i>Tel:</i> (01132) 863349 |