

Bulletin of The Heather Society



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NB



Vol. 7 No. 13

Summer 2011

DIARY OF EVENTS

2011

5 July Yorkshire Breezy Knees garden.

9-12 September Annual Get together

15 September Closing date for the Autumn Bulletin

17 September. Yorkshire Harlow Carr

1 October Home Counties Wisley - Surrey Beekeepers

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. Remember, it is a gift that will last until the close of 2011! Fill out an application form (we enclosed one with the Autumn 2010 *Bulletin*) 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. Soon afterwards, or at any time you specify, we will send the recipient a letter of welcome, a complimentary colour chart and badge with *Heathers 8*, the *Spring Bulletin* ... and so on.

For only £15 (for UK addresses, or £18 for Europe or £21 anywhere else, you can solve your gift "problem" and give a whole year's pleasure.



Charity Registered in England and Wales No. 261407

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Cover illustration *Erica Ciliaris* by Brita Johansson

What a winter it was – with many plants lost. But have you noticed how well the plants – that didn't suffer have done? It is as though the hard winter encouraged even more flowers than usual. I expect some of you saw the Channel 4 programme 'The Hotel' which featured this year's Conference venue, The Damson Dene Hotel? Why do people put themselves through that? They might know that Channel 4 will do them no favours. However, I am sure we will enjoy our stay and will look at the hotel with new interest.

Chairman's Piece

David Edge

The new Heather Society website is now up and running and great credit lies with our administrator Dr Charles Nelson for his input and effort spent on this task. Whilst, in these technological times, there still remain areas to be developed it has received over 2700 hits to date, providing information to others around the world about the Society and the plants we dedicate ourselves to cultivating.

The British Heather Growers Association. www.bhga.co.uk is, again this year, involved in a small garden construction at Hampton Court Palace Flower Show (5th-10th July 2011) whereby it hopes to raise awareness of the uses of heather in the modern garden. Entitled 'Heathers in Harmony' it will feature Winter and Summer flowering heathers in a typical suburban garden, blending in the beneficial aspects of wildlife conservation. Again this year, members' assistance to promote the Society whilst manning the garden would be appreciated and I can be contacted at the address at the end of this Bulletin.

The government's consultation on the future of peat usage in the horticultural industry has raised its head again recently. Various national bodies have aired their views and the Heather Society is grateful to Council member Richard Canovan for submitting its views on the subject. Whilst the emphasis is concentrated on a product so necessary to the cultivation of our plants, it turns a blind eye to the ravages that scar the countryside caused by coal and other mining and mineral extraction processes. Peat at least is used in the cultivation of plants to beautify and benefit our environment, another commercial use of it I understand is the burning of it to flavour whisky...so which is more beneficial or important to mankind?

Annual Gathering 2011 – September 9th – 12th **The Damson Dene Hotel, Crosthwaite, Cumbria**

The response to the flyer in the spring Bulletin was very good and we are hoping to see new faces and some members who have not joined us for a few years. Below is a r sum  of the programme which appeared before, just in case there are one or two of you out there who are considering whether or not to attend.

Our venue is The Damson Dene Hotel at Crosthwaite, which is close to Windermere and Bowness, but far enough away to be a tranquil haven where you can meet old friends and make new ones - all interested in heathers.

The Damson Dene Hotel is set in beautifully landscaped gardens and has a swimming pool, spa and gym facilities, if you find you have a few moments to avail of these leisure pursuits.

On our agenda for 2011 will be a presentation on "The History of Holehird" by Peter Hoggett. The next day this will be followed by a visit to Holehird Gardens. Since we last visited, in 1998, the volunteers at Holehird have extended the gardens and made some changes, which enhance this superior venue.

After a pub lunch, we shall travel to Grange-over-Sands for a visit to Yewbarrow House. This small town enjoys a micro climate, which allows the owner of the garden, Jonathan Denby, to grow a large range of exotic plants with great success. For Saturday evening, Geoff Yates, a revered member, will be talking to us and dinner will be served after Geoff's talk.

The A.G.M. takes place on Sunday morning and after morning coffee the coach will transport us to Holker Hall, near Cartmel. This is the home of Lord & Lady Cavendish. It overlooks Morecambe Bay and towards the mountains of the Lake District. There are extensive gardens and we shall be having a guided tour of these.

Be prepared for anything on Sunday evening when we hope to entertain you in a heathery manner.

The annual plant and book sale will be running throughout the weekend, so this is a timely reminder to think about taking some cuttings of a favourite rare heather.

For the people who have already booked, it is time for your cheques to be sent to Dr. Charles Nelson.

The latest date for payment is 31st July. Please make cheques payable to "The Heather Society".

Double or twin room	£235 per person
Single room	£280 per person
Single room in annexe	£235 per person (these have all been allocated)

The cost indicated includes all entrance fees, speakers, lunches and tips, and of course dinner, bed & breakfast.

Not only is it time to pay, but it is time to be looking at your cuttings or taking them so that you will be able to bring a rare or special heather to share with the other members at the plant sale. Also if you have any books or memorabilia we would be very happy to accept these for inclusion in our auction on the Sunday night.

Our gathering gives everybody the opportunity to meet new and established members of our Society and the chance for discussion of our beautiful plants.

Susie Kay Phone: 00353 95 43575

E-mail: susiek@gofree.indigo.ie

Position of Hon. Treasurer

The Society is in urgent need of a Hon. Treasurer and will be pleased to hear from any member interested in taking on that role.

Under the Society's rules, the member taking on the role will become an Officer and a Trustee of the Society. The position is voluntary but reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out the duties of the position will be paid. The Hon. Treasurer is required to attend at least one Council meeting a year usually held in London either in a room at the RHS Hall in Vincent Square or at an alternative venue. The Hon. Treasurer is also required to present the accounts at the AGM, usually held on the same weekend as the Annual Conference. The current Hon. Treasurer maintains the financial records using a PC running Microsoft Excel so familiarity with that software package, although not necessary, will be an advantage.

Interested members should contact the Hon. Secretary, Mrs Jean Preston, contact details on the back inside cover of this publication.

Notice of the AGM

To all Heather Society members

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Heather Society will take place at 09.15am on Sunday, 11th September 2011 at the Damson Dene Hotel, Crosthwaite, Cumbria during the annual conference.

Nominations are also invited for new council members.

These should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs. Jean Preston, by 25th August 2011 Tel: 01904-707316 email:preston.julian.j@gmail.com

Nomination forms to be completed by the proposers and candidate can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary.

This is your opportunity to serve the society, influence the way it is run and learn about heathers at the same time.

Tippitiwitchet Corner: Administrator's log no. 12

Email: theheathersociety@phoncoop.coop

New look to the Society's website and the NAHS website

There is a new look to the Society's website which has been simplified to allow the Society to manage it more easily. For more information, see p. 6.

Our sister society in North American also has a new look: you can check out their new site at **www.northamericanheathersociety.org**.

New members since January 2011

We welcome these members:

Dawn & Gordon **Carmichael**: Pitlochry, Perthshire

Miss Camilla **Cooke**: Pill, Somerset

Bruce **Hall**: Colchester, Essex

Paul **Hansord**: Stowmarket, Suffolk

Helmuth **Hiedl**: Krugzell-Altusried, Germany

Mrs Val **Jeffreys**: Ulverston, Cumbria

Mrs Brenda **Leese**: Windermere, Cumbria

Dr Mike **Pirie**: Mainz, Germany

Eric **Renault**: Gorrion, France

John **Simmerson**: Sheffield, Yorkshire

Peter **Walmsley**: Norwich, Norfolk

Kevin **Wilkinson**: Sidcup, Greater London

Our members in Japan

We have a small number of very faithful members in Japan. When I heard the news of the earthquake and tsunami last March, I promptly sent an email to Satoshi Miwa. He replied promptly...

Thank you for your email worrying about the yesterday's earthquake. It was the biggest one ever recorded in Japan. A very large area of north-east Pacific coast was hit by tsunami repeatedly. The tsunami reached 10km inland and the wave was more than 7m at the highest. More than a thousand people are estimated to have been killed or are missing but the whole picture of damage is not known even now.

We felt only a quake, not so big, and I didn't feel any fear. Fortunately we have no relatives in the north-east area, so we are all safe....

Thank you so much.

Sincerely

Satoshi

The following day, 14 March, Satoshi sent more news confirming that our members who lived closest to the epicentre were alive:

I got in contact with both Shinichiro Nishikawa and Takayuki Kobayashi. They and their family are all well though they have a little trouble in daily life. I didn't get a reply from Katsuya Hayashi yet, but he will be well as the Takasaki area is not affected severely.

According to the TV news this evening more than 10,000 people are estimated to be killed by tsunami. It is very, very sad news.

Kind regards,

Satoshi

2011 CD

Please take lots of photographs in the coming months and send them to the Administrator for the Society's "Life in Pictures" CD which we would like to be able to distribute in the autumn, as usual. You can send the images by email (theheathersociety@phonecoop.coop) or on CD if they are digital images.

Slides or print are also welcome and will be returned as soon as they have been scanned. Last year's CD had a bumper crop of photos; please help keep the standards high with your pictures.

2012 yearbook, *Heathers 9*

The time has come again to think about contributing articles to the next yearbook, please. We welcome contributions from members. Indeed, it is your yearbook and members' articles are its mainstay. You can write about anything relating to heathers: your own garden; your favourite heathers (or your least favourite!); history...

I had hoped to have produced a piece about "painted heathers", but (fortunately?) all but one have perished in the drought!

... and finally...

This is a rather short log because I returned only last week after spending seven weeks working in Crete. The weather there during that period was astounding; it was persistently colder than the UK and it rained "chair legs" on quite a few occasions (Greeks use the analogy of chair legs, rather than stair rods, to characterize downpours). Yet the chair legs had one splendid effect! The wild flowers were superb from beginning to end. At the start, in mid-March, the tree heathers were in their prime, tall snow-white bushes to match the snow on the mountains. By the end of my seven-week stint the heather had faded but the tulips, crown anemones and crown daisies were in full bloom. Crete in springtime is a very beautiful island.

Lest you think the Society was neglected while I was away, we had a flurry of emails from our new website enquiry page - it is working very well! - on topics ranging from growing heathers for weddings to rejoining the Society, from growing heathers (perhaps) in shade to drying heather for weddings! Weddings were a popular topic - see Questions and answer on p. 20 for others!

No sign of white heather in *that* bouquet, however: just myrtle, sweet william, hyacinths, ivy and lily-of-the-valley.

Charles Nelson

New look for the Society's website

Over the past few months, Daniel Hutton has been working to produce a new website for the Society. The site is now available on www.heathersociety.org (or www.heathersociety.org.uk).

The opening (home) page of the new site has a fresh, new appearance with a series of "sliders" displaying images of heathers, one each for *Calluna*, *Daboecia*, *Andromeda*, and hardy and Cape *Erica*. Clicking on these will enlarge the images. The Society's diary is also visible on the right-hand side.

The site is still under construction so some pages are empty, and quite a few are not yet complete or need minor corrections.

To use the new website! Along the top of the screen in the dark band there are headings with downward arrow-heads to the right. Pointing your cursor

at the arrow-heads will produce drop-down menus and clicking on the headings items will lead further in to the site.

The Heather Society Home About Us News & Events Gardens Heathers Contact

Everyone can grow heathers!
 Everyone can grow heathers! They are evergreen, colourful all year around, and very hardy. Heathers are among the easiest plants to grow.
 This essential booklet is packed with advice about them. We'll be delighted to send you a copy free of charge (limited price to non-members is £2.50) when you become a member.
 Join us, now! We're a very friendly society.

Andromeda Calluna Daboecia Erica hardy heaths Erica Cape heaths



Welcome to the world of heathers!

The Heather Society extends a very warm welcome to everyone entering the world of heathers, especially to newcomers who have recently developed an interest in these attractive shrubs.

The Society covers every aspect of this world from the wild heathers of European heaths and moorlands to the rare and unusual specimens of South African or 'Cape' heaths, from everyday cultivation, including showing, growing and propagating hardy heathers, to scientific studies and nomenclature.

The Heather Society was founded in 1963 to promote and encourage interest in all aspects of heathers. It now has members throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland as well as elsewhere in Europe, and in Africa, the Americas, Australasia and the Far East.

Members receive an informative yearbook, as well as three newly published Bulletins which contain a diary of events to meet members in both with Society activities and new developments. It organises regional groups, visits to heather gardens, an annual week-end gathering and the occasional field day, and provides free advice to members on heather-garden design or any problems they may have. The Heather Society maintains a photograph library, sends national selections of heathers, and is the International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for *Andromeda*, *Calluna*, *Daboecia* and *Erica*.

Upcoming Events

[View All Events](#)

May 15, 2011

Closing date for contributions for the Summer 2011 Bulletin

September 3, 2011

Annual Gathering, The Lake District, Cumbria

The Lake District

Cumbria

September 15, 2011

Closing date for contributions for

Heather descriptions, sources and colours. The most significant of the headings is "Heathers", and its drop-down allows access to what is essentially the old *Handy guide to heathers*. As with the previous site, the heather cultivars are arranged first by genus, and then alphabetically by name. To find a *Calluna*, for example, with a name beginning with B, click on "Calluna" and then on the letter B on the next page. To find *Erica mackayana*, click on "Erica Hardy Heaths" and then scroll down to find the description of this heather; under it, in blue, are three separate "forms" so it is easy to find, for example, the white-flowered cultivars.

Some have lamented the "disappearance" of the *Handy guide* - in fact it has not disappeared but is entirely present and follows the listing in the *RHS plantfinder*, so every heather available commercially in the United Kingdom and Ireland is still listed and described in *Handy-guide* format. Some of the descriptions have been up-dated; if you see any errors or discrepancies, please let us know so they can be amended. You may use the new contact form which is available by clicking on "Contact" on the upper bar of the home page.

To find a source (nursery) for any heather cultivar you need, as before, to consult the *RHS plantfinder*: the Society has not provided source information for several years because of the time-consuming problems of keeping this up-to-date, a role very adequately fulfilled by the *RHS plantfinder*.

The colour chart is also available on this drop-down menu, as well as information about cultivation, pruning and propagation.

Can I help improve the website? Yes, please.

Heather gardens. One series of pages will be devoted to gardens with heather collections - and not just "national collections" - anywhere in the

world. If you know of a garden that can be visited (even just once a year), please let us have the name and address (and email, if available), and we will enquire if the garden will allow us to list it and provide a link to its website (if one exists). Again, you may use the new contact form which is available by clicking on "Contact" on the upper bar of the home page.

Heather of the Month! This provides every member a chance to contribute. For it, we need a very good (preferably, close-up) digital photograph of the heather that you think should be included here - we don't want "old" photographs but modern digital cameras mean we can use images taken the very month. We also need 50-100 words describing the merits of the heather, its full name and where and how it is cultivated.

"Heather of the Month" is on the "News & Events" drop-down. It can and will change every month as long as we are sent a suitable image.

Use the new contact form, which is available by clicking on "Contact" on the upper bar of the home page, to let us know about a suitable heather; do not send images via the contact form, please.

Will nurseries be listed or given reciprocal links? Yes. Members who own or run nurseries are invited to contact the Administrator about this as soon as possible. Please provide a "logo" or a suitable thumbnail image that can be used, the URL (if you have one), and not more than 30 words of description/information in the following form (**this is a fictitious example!**). Nurseries which do not have a website should give a postal address and phone number.

Tippitiwicht Nursery, Inwell, Norfolk, UK: Andromeda, Calluna, Daboecia, hardy Erica: 50 cultivars available, all home-propagated: specializing in garishly dyed heathers for colour-conscious gardeners; mail order service to Members only.

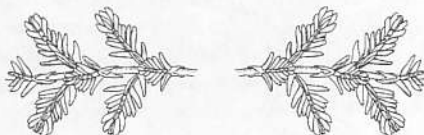
We will request a reciprocal link from the nursery website. Note that The Heather Society does not endorse suppliers nor recommend nurseries, so listing on the Society's website, or the provision of a link, does not imply any recommendation.

Again, you may use the new contact form which is available by clicking on "Contact" on the upper bar of the home page.

Contact us! The contact page (upper bar, right-hand side) provides a form for sending messages to the Society. This is already proving valuable and is very easy to use.

Heather garden design: this facility was extremely complicated with a vast number of links which required the input of hundreds of thousands of pieces of information. It could not be copied on to the new site and has had to be abandoned.

The site will eventually be managed by Alan Kay and Charles Nelson.



Connemara Chat

Susie Kay

Slash and burn, slash and chop, slash and shred! Well, that was how it was planned for this winter, but we were well and truly defeated by nature. I moaned about the winter of 2009-10, never guessing that nine months later it would return with greater severity. November 24th the temperature dipped below freezing - truly unheard of on the Atlantic seaboard of the West of Ireland. This continued with one or two short interludes of slightly milder weather until March.

It was impossible to do any of the major pruning of the trees and shrubs that we had hoped to achieve. Even putting fingerless mitts inside the gardening gloves did not stop the hands from freezing up in a short space of time, which soon made me retreat indoors. It wasn't much warmer there either. Once again the water was lost and the ice on the small dam was too thick to break to encourage some sort of flow down the mountain. It only reached -7°C , but just a few miles away at the head of the Killary, Ireland's only fjord, cars were recording -17°C . Soon it was very obvious that South African plants do not like this weather and they slowly succumbed and turned that inviting shade of brown, which indicates only one thing - they were dead!!

Cape Heaths, *Watsonias*, *Osteospermums*, *Restios*, nearly all gone. I think the reason the damage was bad as this was because it was the second time the plants had been subjected to such severe cold for a long period. I was particularly saddened by the passing of the *E. canaliculata*. There were three plants, each about two metres tall, which had provided a grand spectacle in early spring, but now no more. So this is the story for several areas of the garden, which means I have to move on in a big way, because where a plant has been pulled out, the plants abutting it have a brown side and it is a big question as to how many plants should be removed.

It is going to be interesting to see how *Erica* branches burn on the fire. They certainly seem to weigh quite a lot. The *Restios*, which had grown in to massive clumps have been attacked with the hedge trimmer as being the quickest way to cut them down, instead of cutting each with secateurs. *Restio* stems can't go through the shredder, so they have to be carted to a bank we are trying to build up by the stream.

I started my summer heather pruning in the middle of March and thought that the European heathers had managed to come through the cold, but now a month on, there actually does seem to be some damage. The *cinereas* and *Daboecias* do not look too good with very little sign of spring tips. My own *Calluna* 'Connemara Colleen' is looking extremely bedraggled in one bed, and yet a few newer plants in another position look much healthier. So is it a question of shelter as well? My neighbour has removed a lot of trees on her side of the stream and a week of strong gales is far more noticeable in our garden now. Now that we are starting the removal of our tall dead plants, I am slowly losing layers of shelter that have slowly built up over the years.

The horrid wind and the loss of shelter caused another casualty at the beginning of April. An *E. lusitanica*, which had already partially laid itself down, so measured almost 2 metres wide by 1.5 metres tall, was found to have several branches snapped off at the base. More firewood!!

Confined to barracks, as we were, we had amusing days watching the birds that were availing themselves of the food that was being supplied. My *Arbutus unedo* was covered in its strawberry fruits, but the arrival of a flock of fieldfares, stripped these off in a very short space of time. Having eaten their fill they all flew off except for one bird. By this time we were also putting out rotten apples and this fella (or girl) kept all our local birds at bay in an effort to claim each apple for himself. The bird had a very menacing expression as he strutted up and down the front patio and he was not at all fazed by our watching from the other side of the glass.

Despite all the doom and gloom, the winter heathers have provided a wonderful display and prove that I can manage to grow something in this benighted garden. I should chase up people who have rare *E. erigenas* as they do really well for me. If you do have any, please bring them to the Conference in September.

Having started to remove dead and ailing plants, I am now pursuing a policy of disposing of stuff that is no longer giving me pleasure. From my attendance at the Penrith Conference in 1997, I had obtained a cutting of *E. platycodon*, 'Madeira Gold'. I had great success with cuttings from my original plant and had used these to provide shelter and to fill up empty spaces. I am now ripping several of them out and replacing them with *E. arendsiana*, which was a cross between *E. terminalis* and *E. cinerea* made by Georg Arends and produced by Kurt Kramer. I find this plant intriguing as it flowers through the late winter to Spring, even though its parents usually bloom in the summer. I have also had great success in striking cuttings of this plant and will have to get busy in June to increase my stock. It seems not to mind being pruned severely although this does mean there are fewer flowers the following year, but, as I am hoping to obtain a very bushy plant, which I shall then allow to grow up into a bit of a shelter, I do not mind.

On my daily walk round the garden, I am now confronted with these bare spaces and I am pondering what to plant, which will tolerate my difficult conditions? I have mentioned before that I am surrounded by *Calluna*, *E. cinerea*, *Daboecia* and *E. tetralix*, and yet when in the garden, they do not seem to do very well at all. (This is not quite true as some of the plants that I am removing have been there for fifteen years). The idea is now to choose heathers which will last another fifteen years and that should see me out. The temptation is to plant more and more winter heathers, which grow tall and never seem to fail. *E. carnea* does not do very well here at all, so that would mean *Ex darleyensis* and *E. erigena*, but then the garden would not look very good in summertime.

On past experience, *E. vagans* have grown into big bushes, but they do take a while to become established. Then there are the *watsoniis* and *williamsiis*, but this winter even these have suffered a little. There is always the bother of the salt laden wind which seems to produce nasty brown patches

and the same with the *mackayanans*. The choice is bewildering really and should provide a lot to think about in the next few months.

I did take a lot of cuttings last year, but there was a disaster with two thirds of them when they were potted on. They did not like the compost and immediately turned up their toes. Therefore I do not now have a lot of stock and we all know that Garden Centres do not really stock all those specialist cultivars and that the number of growers has reduced substantially.

Having had a failed plan for the winter, perhaps I am being a bit optimistic in making a plan for the summer. First I must finish the clearing out and then I shall lightly fork over all the areas. There will be an amazing number of small stones. I have now come to the conclusion that they are reproducing under the soil, but as you know, I always have a use for these stones. They will be going in the paths between the raised beds in the vegetable garden. After this, I shall cover each space with the home-made shredded mulch and then resist the urge to fill the space with any plant I can find. I shall be good and allow the *Rumex acetosa*, Sheep Sorrel, to come through and then I shall pounce with my Roundup, probably getting a bit of collateral damage to a few strands of some precious adjacent heather on the way. Yes this happens too much, I must be more careful. I realise that I am beginning to sound like an auld farmer of these parts; it is either too cold or too hot, too dry or too wet, too windy, or too still. But the spring has arrived and those plants that were spared are putting on their new growth, trees have burst in to life, the Cuckoo has arrived (17th April) and a pair of swallows have taken up residence in the shed; so some optimism is returning and I have new vigour for getting out and making the plans happen.

I read with great interest the accounts of heather in bridal bouquets and the freezing of flower stems [Ella May Wulff and Josie Stow in the Spring 2011 *Bulletin*]. This gave me an idea for a competition for ICA, Irish Country-Women's Association, akin to the Women's Institute in Britain. We had to decorate an egg. So I cut long heather stems and stuck them to the hardboiled egg, (see photo on centre pages). Won first prize!

Writing a few days later after re-reading my *Bulletin*, I see that I am not the first to stick heather racemes to something, but I had not seen the article before and I now think double sided sticky tape would have been a better idea than Evostick.

I have one bed that has proved to be disastrous. It is known as Paddy's bed, named after the man who came with his digger to help make the bed. It was constructed after we had built the conservatory, as I imagined, sitting with glass of wine in hand, that I would be gazing at a bed full of summer heathers. We can only very rarely sit outside in the evenings, as the midges always defeat us. Every type of summer flowering heather has been tried and none has really made the grade. It is just a sticky mess under the mulch. A drain was put in, huge quantities of sand were incorporated, it has been dug so many times and still nothing really thrived, except for one dwarf conifer, which is now too big. So, I have given in and having found an assortment of white winter flowering heathers, origin long forgotten. I have planted them with a long pep talk as to how they are to perform.

I have now potted on roughly 450 cuttings, but on past history, I am not holding out great hopes; but wouldn't it be wonderful if they all grew into lovely plants and I could fill all those empty spaces. One of these days, I hope to write about some great achievement. If ever there is one, I shall be sure to chronicle it.

Sybil Perry 1920 - 2010

I must apologise to Society members and to former members of the South West Local Group, who remember Sybil Perry, for not informing you, via the Spring Bulletin, that Sybil, age 90, sadly passed away on 6th November 2010.

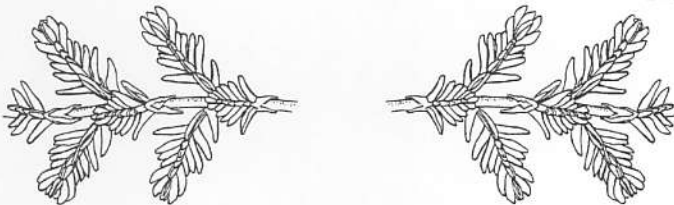


Sybil was a stalwart supporter of the Society and the South West Local Group and with her husband Des attended the majority of the Local Group meetings over the many years of its existence and also attended many of the Society Conferences. When Des and Sybil joined the Society they were living in Market Lavington in Wiltshire and on several occasions invited members of the SW Local Group to view their garden and to take refreshment. In later years Des and Sybil moved to Farnham to be with their son James and his family but they still remained avid supporters of the Society. In

2003 Des and Sybil moved back west, to Paulton in Somerset, again to be close to their son James, but by then their difficulty with mobility prevented either of them attending meetings and Conferences. In 2008 Des and Sybil celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary and the Society was pleased to congratulate them in the Autumn Bulletin of that year. Sybil was an avid letter writer remaining in contact with many of the Society members to within a few months of her passing away.

Sybil will always be remembered as a kind and generous person, a friend to many and always interested in the affairs of the Society and I extend the Society's condolences to Des, who himself still takes a keen interest in the Society's fortunes.

Phil Joyner



The Heather Society Home About Us News & Events Gardens Heathers Contact

Everyone can grow heathers!

Everyone can grow heathers! They are evergreen, colourful all year around, and very hardy. Heathers are among the easiest plants to grow. This colourful booklet is packed with advice about them. We'd be delighted to send you a copy free of charge (normal price to non-members is £5.00) when you become a member. Join us, now! We're a very friendly society.

Andromeda Calluna Daboecia Erica: hardy heaths Erica: Cape heaths



Welcome to the world of heathers!

The Heather Society extends a very warm welcome to everyone entering the world of heathers, especially to newcomers who have recently developed an interest in these attractive shrubs.

The Society covers every aspect of this world, from the wild heathers of European heaths and moorlands to the rare and unusual specimens of South African or 'Cape' heaths, from extensive cultivation, including showing, growing and propagating hardy heathers, to scientific studies and nomenclature.

The Heather Society was founded in 1963 to promote and encourage interest in all aspects of heathers. It now has members throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland as well as elsewhere in Europe, and in Africa, the Americas, Australasia and the Far East.

Members receive an informative yearbook, as well as three newsworthy Bulletins which contain a diary of events to keep members in touch with Society activities and new developments. It organizes regional groups, visits to heather gardens, an annual meet and gathering and the occasional lecture, and provides free advice to members on heather-garden design or any problems they may have. The Heather Society maintains a photograph library, assists national collectors of heathers, and is the International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for Andromeda, Calluna, Daboecia and Erica.

Upcoming Events

[View All Events](#)

May 16, 2011
Closing date for contributions for the Summer 2011 Bulletin

September 8, 2011
Annual Gathering, The Lake District, Cumbria

The Lake District
Cumbria

September 18, 2011
Closing date for contributions for

Home Page of the new website



Allen Hall's North Border - Before and after



Susie Kay's garden



Heather bed with early rhododendrons



Winter heathers and stream



Susie crying over dead Erica canaliculata



Heather decorated egg

Winter Woes

Allen Hall reports from Leicestershire

The 2010/2011 winter in England is said to have been the coldest since 1910, and December 2010 the coldest December since records began. It was certainly the coldest I have experienced since I began growing heathers and its effect on my garden was devastating.

When the biting cold of December had eased a bit after Christmas, I surveyed the garden and was astonished to see that among the heathers destroyed were all my *Erica erigenas*, and a number of *Erica vagans*. The remaining *vagans* were so damaged that they will have to be removed. These plants succumbed mainly to stripping of bark and splitting stems. Many other plants were destroyed or damaged but somehow I was most shocked by the loss of plants of these species that I have always considered hardy in the English Midlands.

For the record other species and plants that were either destroyed or badly damaged were: -

E australis

E ciliaris and some of its *x watsonii* hybrids. In particular the tender *E ciliaris* 'Fada des Serras', introduced from Portugal by John Tucker, was killed. John gave me my plant 20 and more years ago, but this year even the one I had in a heated greenhouse died (though not from frost damage) so I am left without any. However, 'Fada Des Serras' used to seed very freely and if seedlings appear I may yet enjoy its dusky bells again.

E cinerea

E lusitanica

E mackayana

E multiflora

E platycodon (a mature plant situated in a very sheltered place).

E azorica

E umbellata 'David Small' was destroyed but the white form, 'Anne Small' growing elsewhere in the garden was untouched.

E x afroeuropaea

E x gaudificans

E x veitchii 'Pink Joy' and 'Exeter' but *E x veitchii* 'Westbourne Grove' was relatively little harmed. The characteristics of this plant lean strongly towards its *arborea* parent.

Some plants suffered only light damage and these were:

Daboecia cantabrica

E scoparia

E platycodon ssp. madericola

E x arendsiana 'Charnwood Pink

E x darleyensis

E x williamsii

E x griffithsii

Of all these losses, I think I regret most that of *E lusitanica*. I first made

my acquaintance with this splendid species at a meeting of the Southern Group many years ago. Our then Chairman, General Turpin, invariably attended Group meetings wearing a buttonhole of heathers in season and on one occasion he was sporting some *E lusitanica* racemes. From him I learned of the valuable characteristics of the species – its long flowing season and its gorgeous white bells that open from red buds.

The plants I lost this winter were off-springs of those I obtained after my conversation with General Turpin. However, *E lusitanica* is most easily propagated from seed and, as it happens, I collected some in 2006. I sowed these in February this year and they germinated after 6 weeks.

I suspect that most of the pink *umbellatas* growing in British gardens are (or perhaps were) un-named clones. *E umbellata* is another species that propagates easily from seed. So in February, I sowed some that I had collected in 2004 and these too germinated in 6 weeks. The tiny seedlings now growing in my greenhouse give me promise for the future.

Is it really worth trying to learn lessons from the freak weather of the recent winter? I now understand more clearly why *E ciliaris* and *E vagans* are not native north of Dorset. The winter demonstrates again that gardens have their own microclimates. I noted that young cultivars planted last season survived better than established ones. For example some young *E cinerea* appear to be undamaged while established plants of the same kind were either destroyed or suffered badly. It appears to me that the matted foliage of the latter tended to hold frozen snow and ice well after the sturdy young plants were clear, giving them a better chance of survival.

I have however only told part of the story. Many plants survived untouched and some of them rather surprisingly. As would be expected related genera, *Arctostaphylos-uva-ursi*, *Cassiope* and *Phyllodoce* were fine.

All the *Calluna vulgaris* cultivars I have survived untouched

Also undamaged were:

E arborea 'Alberts Gold' and 'Estrella Gold'

E carnea

E spiculifolia

E tetralix

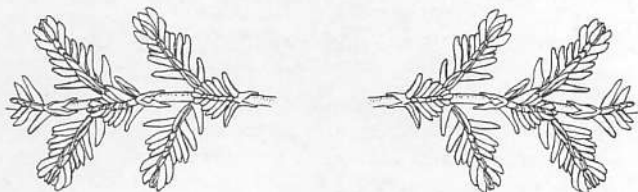
E x garforthensis

E x oldenburgensis

Daboecia azorica (how surprising!)

I do not have any *E manipuliiflora* growing outside – my cultivars succumbed in earlier winters.

Lastly I am happy to report that a cultivar introduced by Steve Yandle in 2009, –*Erica x watsonii* 'Allen Hall' has survived the winter.



Richard Canovan reports on winter damage in the West Country:

The exceptionally severe weather that set in over the West Country during the last week of November and lasted with only minor breaks for a month was feared to have caused much damage to the less hardy varieties. At Lyneham both the mean maximum and mean minimum temperatures were 5 deg C below normal. However, unlike further west and north, there was not the combination of clear skies and deep snow to produce really low minimum temperatures. Frosts nearly as severe recurred in late January without snow. Nor were there the damaging snowfalls like in 2009 and 2010. Rather the thick cover of dry snow seems to have protected the plants, helped by two cold spells in late October that brought sharp frosts and induced early dormancy rather than much soft late growth as happened in 2005 and 2009. But there were many days with freezing winds and persistent frost. Both the winter and spring have been extremely dry: March and April have been drier than the drought year of 1976.

Erica manipuliiflora and *Erica x griffithsii* have suffered only minor defoliation and should recover. *Erica x gaudificans* – even in pots – and *Erica sicula subsp. bocquetii* have confirmed themselves as extremely hardy plants with no damage. My one plant of *Erica x darleyensis* 'Aurelie Bregeon' appears undamaged. Even plants in pots of *Erica mackayana*, *Erica tetralix* and *Erica umbellata* collected in Spain in 2007 survived. Older plants suffered more damage, including *Erica x veitchi* 'Gold Tips'.

The main victims have been cultivars of *Erica erigena*. With the exception of 'Rosslare' which has only been planted for six years all cultivars have suffered a degree of defoliation. This has been severe on 'Glaucua' and "Superba' where it appears to have been associated with lifting of the bark. This is probably a cumulative impact of three successive harsh winters. The exceptional dryness is not helping recovery. They will have to be cut back hard in the hope of stimulating new growth.

The other feature was the lateness of the blooming of early flowerers and the earliness of the spring flowering varieties. The record breaking warm April has led to early fading and a concentrated pruning season.

Richard also writes: This is Philip Eden's Weather OnLine summary of the severe weather in November to December 2010:

The Central England Temperature (CET) of minus 0.5°C (31.1F) was 5.6degC below the long-term mean, and the lowest for December since 1890. The last calendar month with a sub-zero CET was February 1986. The CET for the coldest 30-day period, from November 27 to December 26 inclusive, was



Split stems on

Erica australis 'Mr Robert'

minus 1.6°C - unprecedented for any 30-day spell so early in the season.

That really tells the story for all our experiences so might be helpful. He is past President of the Royal Meteorological Society as well as Weather Editor for the Daily and Sunday Telegraph. Thank goodness there were those early frosts.

For April he writes:

Four years ago I wrote that few months could have left so much statistical debris in their wake than had April 2007. Well, April 2011 has matched it. In the Central England Temperature record, which stretches back to 1659, the warmest April before 2007 had occurred in 1865 with a monthly mean temperature of 10.6°C. In 2007 that was broken by the wide margin of 0.6°C, and now in 2011 that in turn has been broken by the even wider margin of 0.8°C.

The Central England Temperature (CET) of 12.0°C was 3.9°C above the long-term mean, and the highest for April in the entire CET record.

That also puts things into perspective and explains the foliage colour. No wonder my heathers do not know what is happening! At this rate *Erica terminalis* will be out by the spring bank holiday. I just hope the summer is not like 2007.

Daphne Everett reports on winter damage in Herefordshire

All large plants of *Erica erigena* were either killed or severely damaged, whereas a little hedge of two year old plants came through unscathed.

Erica vagans badly damaged

Erica x griffithsii badly damaged

Erica mackayana 'Dr Ronald Gray' a very few signs of life

Erica mackayana 'Shining Light' - completely dead

Erica ciliaris damaged - but recovering

Erica x darleyensis - a little damage

Erica x watsonii badly damaged

Calluna vulgaris, *Erica carnea*, *Erica tetralix* and *Daboecias* came through with little damage

For winter damage in Ireland - see Susie Kay's "Connemara Chat".

When is a Knot Garden not a Knot Garden?

Daphne Everett

The answer is - after the hardest winter for over 100 years.

Our knot garden has played an important part in our garden for the last twenty years. It has featured in many magazines, appeared on Belgian TV and has even been copied by Sir Roy Strong for his garden, 'The Laskett', so seeing it looking so sad after this last hard winter, with all the little hedges completely dead, was quite a blow.

We hadn't planned on 'planting' a heather knot garden originally - it was the expense of having to buy several hundred box plants that made me sit back and have a re-think.

At that time we had a nursery with around 250 thousand heathers growing in it, so I was sure I could find a couple of varieties that would give –a similar effect, and *Erica erigena* 'W. T. Rackliff', with its bright green foliage and tidy growth, and its yellow sport, 'Golden Lady', seemed ideal. The darker foliaged cones in the beds were of *E. erigena* 'Irish Dusk'.



However, they say every disaster creates an opportunity so, after a few days spent mourning the knot garden's loss, we ripped everything out (dead heathers make a very hot bonfire!) and I started to think about its replacement.

Rather than replant with *Erica erigena*, I decided to try *Erica x darleyensis* this time. 'Kramers Rote' seemed a good choice for the green hedges and I had plenty of plants in the garden I could get cuttings from, but, finding a yellow foliaged *darleyensis* was more difficult - most of them, like 'Tweety' and 'Mary Helen' were too bronze, so I decided instead to use *Erica x griffithsii* 'Valerie Griffiths'.

This was not a good idea as it happened. 'Valerie Griffiths' had suffered badly in our garden and was looking rather sad. And although I tried all the likely mail order nurseries, no one had any large plants for sale that I could strip for cuttings, in fact no one had any for sale at all.

Then, in a puff of smoke (well- maybe that's a lie) my fairy godfather appeared, in the shape of John Hall of Whitehall Nursery in Hampshire. He offered me some plants of the golden foliaged *Erica x darleyensis* 'Moonshine' and, most generously, sent me three huge plants (from which I could get more than enough cuttings) completely free of charge. Aren't heather people wonderful?

I now have around a thousand little plants growing on in our nursery area and, with luck, the knot garden will be replanted this autumn.

Q. & A. from The Heather Society's new website

Q: A long shot: My name is John Simmerson and my sister's name before she was married was Margaret Simmerson. We are related to the late Alan Taylor who died in 1991 and we know he was in process of naming some heathers after us. My sister's name is in a book of heathers but mine is not. I was wondering after all these years if these heathers are still grown or can be grown as Alan was going to send us some but died suddenly. If possible it would be nice to obtain some to grow in our garden as a memento of Alan.

John Simmerson

A: Both *Calluna vulgaris* 'Margaret Simmerson' and *Calluna vulgaris* 'John Simmerson' were named - the names are recorded in our database. Alas, there is nothing to indicate that the plants are known in commercial production, and thus the chances they are extant is rather small. The information we have is scant:

'John Simmerson': *Yearbook of The Heather Society* 2 (8): 57 (1979).

No description known.

Found by Mrs Edith Godbolt (Altadena, Crowborough, Sussex, England) in 1976.

'Margaret Simmerson': *Yearbook of The Heather Society* 2 (8): 57 (1979); T. L. Underhill, *Heaths & heathers*: 154 (1990; 2nd edn).

Flowers cyclamen-coloured.

Found by Mrs Edith Godbolt (Altadena, Crowborough, Sussex, England) in 1976.

Does any member of the Society still grow either of these heathers, or know of live plants in any garden?

[Note: *Calluna vulgaris* 'Edith Godbolt' is another of the heathers associated with Alan Taylor. According to the database it was a seedling raised by Taylor and introduced by Denbeigh Heather Nurseries in 1975; 'Edith Godbolt' is very floriferous, with lilac-pink (H11) flowers.]

Charles Nelson

Q: This winter I have bought, from a variety of sources, a selection of *Calluna* of the red winter-foliage type. They all survived the worst weather but have now died. They seemed to "dry out" (although were kept moist) and the "leaves" and stems became brown and crumbly. They are in pots and next to a selection of *Erica* which are doing well. I would like advice on the probable cause of death, and care of any future *Calluna* I may buy. I live in Lancaster and hope to grow the plants in pots or troughs.

Richard Jones

A: It is probably easiest to approach the problem by firstly eliminating possible causes.

Pests: Heathers are susceptible to attack from vine weevil. The symptoms may be visible on the main stems just at or below soil level where the exterior

bark (cambial layer) is eaten. Symptoms are not usually noticed until warmer weather when the plant cannot sustain itself in warmer conditions and appears to die of drought. The compost in the affected region is often seen to be of a finer composition. Whilst all plants in a range of pot sizes can be affected, plants in the smaller containers are not usually attacked. 1-litre heathers or larger more established plants suffer greater risk of damage. Affected plants should be removed as soon as signs are visible and removed from site.

Disease: It is unlikely that the plants would have died so quickly of disease, especially in the colder months.

Compost: It is unlikely that adverse soil conditions would cause death of the plants so quickly unless they have been over-fertilized, but then the other *Erica* would also have been affected if they received the same treatment.

Watering: You state that they were kept moist so lack of water should not be a factor needing consideration.

Root death: This is the most likely cause of plant death with the symptoms you describe. Assuming the plants were 'hardened off' they should have survived the winter without a problem. If the roots/compost was frozen and the foliage was exposed to dry, cold winds over a period that would replicate damage akin to drought. As we have just experienced one of the coldest winters for generations, *excluding the possibility of vine weevil attack*, then my view is that this is the most likely cause of death although I cannot explain why they should have succumbed and not the other heathers in the same vicinity, albeit winter-flowering *Erica* are more tolerant of adverse soil conditions.

Plants should grow well in tubs or troughs given the correct soil, but they must not be allowed to dry out as they do not forgive you that injustice. Container-growing is not a problem as all commercial producers adopt this production system. A sunny position, light feeding, correct soil, an occasional trim and sufficient to drink will keep them happy.

I hope this is of help and wish you renewed success.

David Edge

Q: I have a shady place in my front garden beneath my bay window would heathers be suitable to plant here?

A: Heathers do not in general thrive in shade - they will grow but they will not flower well and will not develop their foliage colour.

Charles Nelson

Q: My son gets married on 30 May and I would like to use a heather which is in bloom at the moment in my garden for our buttonholes. Can you advise me on how to preserve the heather for the next two and a half weeks - how best to dry it or should I leave it on water?

Lorraine McDonald

A: Drying heathers is a rather uncertain business because, when dried, heathers tend to drop all their flowers and leaves leaving flowerless sticks behind. They can be dried, but any touching or moving is going to be rather catastrophic - so even trying to make the buttonhole will not work.

Dried heather in an arrangement may keep but only because it is static. The best way would be to find a source of fresh heathers and use the fresh flowers, picked the day before (not more if you can help it).

Charles Nelson

Q: My daughter is getting married at the end of October and I would like to make table-napkin decorations using heather and ribbon. Her bridesmaids are wearing a wine-red colour and I would like to know if there are any heathers that flower during the month of October. The colour chart shows two colours: H9 (beetroot) and H5 (ruby).

Jenny Marshall

A: There are some *Calluna* (ling) varieties that have this flower colour, but predicting that they will be in their prime in late October is hazardous. Flowering times are only very approximate and depend on numerous factors, not just weather.

On The Heather Society's web site, click on the upper bar "Heathers", and then select "Calluna". This provides an alphabetic list of ling available commercially in the UK. You need to search each of the separate pages for "H9" or "H5" to find the names of the heathers. For example on page A it will match 'Allegretto' which starts in August and continues into October - but these are approximate.

Be aware that most of the varieties that you will find are the so-called "bud-bloomers" - that means the flowers never open wide but remain as tight, pointed buds. From a distance they can be colourful, but from close-up will perhaps look rather sparse.

You might be wiser to choose a double-flowered variety such as 'Peter Sparkes' or 'Kinlochruel', and not worry about matching the colour of the dresses, but finding the heathers in their prime in late October is going to be a problem.

Charles Nelson

Q: I happen to have some heather seeds - I believe from the looks of the branch they are *Calluna vulgaris* - and from everyone I talk to, it seems a very difficult undertaking to get them to germinate and then to get them to grow in flower gardens. I am in Central Alberta, Canada, and I believe it is considered zone 3 over here. I was just wondering if you have any advice or hints on how to germinate these very beautiful plants. Thank you.

Brian Collier

A: There is no great difficulty germinating the fresh seeds of ling (*Calluna vulgaris*). Try to remove the seeds from the remnants of the flowers. Sprinkle the "clean" seeds thinly on top of some well-firmed-down compost - use a lime-free potting compost suitable for rhododendrons and camellias. Water with a fine spray using rainwater if possible, and allow to drain. Cover the pot or seed-tray with glass or transparent plastic (or enclose the pot in a plastic bag) to prevent the compost drying out. Place in a cool, well-lit place, but not in direct sunlight, and wait patiently. When the seedlings are large enough to handle they can be very carefully potted on.

Calluna is a very hardy plant, but its hardiness is adjudged to extend to

USDA zone 5, with only a few cultivars suitable for zone 4. Naturalized populations of ling do occur in coastal areas in western (Vancouver Island) and eastern (Newfoundland) Canada. Growing it in zone 3 is going to be a problem as the plants will need protection during winter.

Charles Nelson

Group News

North East

There is no news from the North East Group this time.

Yorkshire

Our group had an excellent meeting on Saturday, 12th March at Askham Richard when we were pleased to welcome a new member to our small regular band.

Although my home in Askham Richard only has a small garden, the winter heathers were looking good and discussion ensued on how members' plants had survived a second very cold winter. It was interesting to note that *E. manipuliflora* had coped well when supposed to be tender, but the Irish, *E. erigena* had succumbed to the frost.

The second meeting of the year was held Saturday, 28th May. The topics discussed were the RHS garden itself and the THS slide library, as this is desperate need of digital photographs. The 35mm slides are fading and losing their colour.

The group will next meet on Tuesday, 5th July at 2.00pm to visit the 14 acre Breezy Knees garden on the outskirts of York.

A further Yorkshire group meeting will be held at RHS Harlow Carr on Saturday, 17th September 2011. The programme has to be arranged for that meeting.

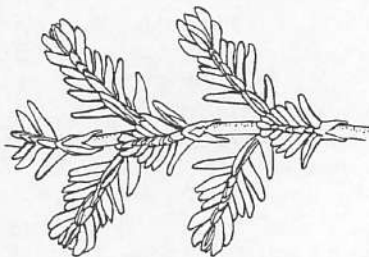
Jean Preston

Home Counties

There is an event arranged for Wisley on 1 October with the Surrey Beekeepers Association about heathers and honey.

I have been asked about changing the location within Wisley, but in any case we will meet as usual at 10.30-10.45 outside the main entrance with a tour of the National Collection followed by lunch with the event with the Surrey Beekeepers starting at 2 pm about heathers and honey.

Barry Sellers



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