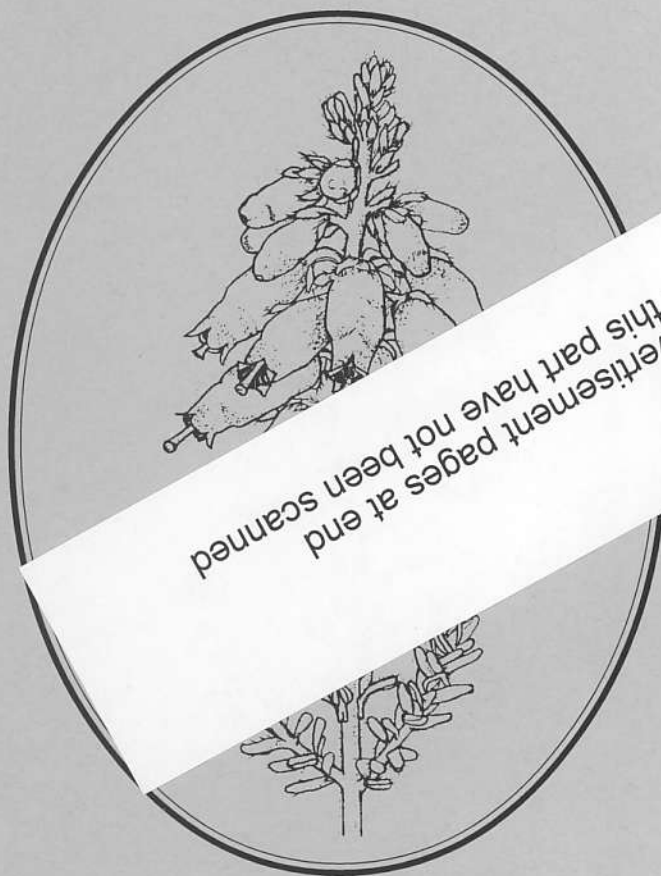


*Bulletin of The  
Heather Society*



*Vol. 7 No. 16*

*Summer 2012*

## DIARY OF EVENTS

### 2012

July	Yorkshire	Garden visit - date to be decided
7-10	September	Annual gathering, Falmouth
8	September	Northeast Ponteland Flower Show, Memorial Hall, Ponteland
20	September	Closing date for Autumn <i>Bulletin</i>
30	September	Closing date for photographs for the annual CD
6	October	Yorkshire A talk - topic still at planning stage Jubilee Room RHS Harlow Carr
	October	Home Counties Meeting - date to be confirmed.
31	October	Closing date for articles for <i>Heathers 10</i>

### A Gift of Membership for 2012

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 2012! 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 2012 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.



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

Cover illustration *Erica Ciliaris* by Brita Johansson

*What a wet spring it has been. However, while we may not have enjoyed it much, the garden plants, including the heathers, seem to have thrived. They might have been dripping with water for weeks on end, but the result is that the garden is looking really lush. In fact, the heather garden made a colourful back-drop for a photograph of the even more colourful Dawlish Town Crier and his escort, who we hosted over the May Bank Holiday. Have you ever spent an evening with a dozen or so Town Criers? Peaceful – it is not!*

## **Chairman's Piece**

### **David Edge**

As I sit inside the house at the computer, I gaze through the window at yet another wet dismal day. A few weeks ago we would have been more than happy to see some wet weather but now the sun would be a welcome change. The driest, coldest and the wettest are terms I hear so frequently these days, but fortunately our heathers manage to grin and bear these conditions, shrugging them off with contempt ... whatever happened to the influx of semi tropical plants into our gardens that we were told would be the trend?

I am most pleased to hear that our secretary, Richard Bowater, has made a successful return to health after undergoing a major operation and I am sure that we all wish him continuing good health.

The Society appears to be somewhat languishing in the doldrums with regard to its day to day activities: yes we have an excellent Conference to look forward to and the website (for those computer orientated) is an excellent tool for supplying information to all but I, and others on Council, welcome suggestions of where we go forward in other areas.

The Society is suffering from a declining membership and its financial reserves are slowly dwindling. Whilst we are not unique amongst societies generally experiencing similar problems we need to plan forward to stall this trend. Much of the input into the Society falls on the shoulders of a few stalwarts without whom the Society would cease to function so, if you, or someone you know would like to put their name forward to attend Council meetings and involve themselves in the Society they would be most welcome. It is not an onerous task and you are able to 'chat heathers' in convivial

company with other like minded souls whilst undertaking a 'good cause'.

I am looking forward to attending the North American Heather Society Conference in August and catching up with our overseas counterparts. The NAHS agenda is 'full' of heather and I find their quarterly publication gives an interesting insight into aspects of heather culture in that region. It should prove a most interesting visit and hopefully I will be fit enough to provide an update on my return.

## **Notice of 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, 9th September 2012 at the Richardson's Falmouth Hotel, Falmouth, Cornwall, during the Annual Gathering.

Nominations are also invited for new council members.

These should be sent by post **before 24th August 2012**, to the Hon. Secretary, addressed c/o The Administrator, Tippitiwitchet Cottage, Hall Road, Outwell, Wisbech, PE14 8PE.

Nomination forms, to be completed and signed by the proposers and candidate, can be obtained from the Administrator (at the address above or by email [theheathersociety.phoncoop.coop](mailto:theheathersociety.phoncoop.coop)).

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

## **Annual Gathering 2012 - September 7<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> Richardson's Falmouth Hotel, Falmouth, Cornwall**

Already, people from far and wide have signed up to participate in our gathering, so should you be thinking about coming, it's time to make your decision. Please do not hesitate to contact me either by email or phone should you think you would like to attend.

We shall be in Falmouth, Cornwall, this year staying at Richardson's Falmouth Hotel, which is set beside the sea. There are several superb speakers including Dr. E.G.H. Oliver, Keith Spurgin & Steve Yandell.

Two gardens are to be visited, Trewidden Gardens on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September and on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September we go to Pinetum Park and Pine Lodge Gardens. Both have features which will interest everybody.

To make the most of our visit to Cornwall, we shall be taking a leisurely walk at Towan Cross, hoping to find some *Erica ciliaris* amongst other heathers.

Sunday evening will give you not only the chance to bid for rare cultivars, but also for you to show and share your knowledge of heathers.

It is time for all those who have registered to pay the full amount of £310 per person by cheque or credit card (credit card payment attracts an extra amount of £5 for processing). Payment should be sent to The Administrator, Dr. E.C. Nelson (address on back of the *Bulletin*), by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

If you are going to attend, do not forget to start those rare precious cuttings so that they are well rooted in time for the annual plant sale at our gathering.

At the time of writing there are only a couple of rooms available, but anybody can come as a day visitor and should you wish to attend on this basis, please send me an email or phone me: a great opportunity to meet like minded people who consider heather to be a wonderful plant whether in the wild or the garden.

*Susie Kay*

Phone 00353 95 43575 E-mail

[susiek@gofree.indigo.ie](mailto:susiek@gofree.indigo.ie)

## **Tippitiwitchet Corner, Administrator's log no. 15**

**email: [theheathersociety@phoncoop.coop](mailto:theheathersociety@phoncoop.coop)**

**Charles Nelson**

### **New members**

We welcome the following new members since the start of 2012:

Alan Smith: Sheffield

Jill & Frank Sisson: Trowell

Betty McDonald: Stoke-on-Trent

Gerald Clayton: Mirfield

Graham Heather: Dagenham

### **RHS membership**

The Heather Society is affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society and like other affiliates has been offered several new benefits by the RHS. One offer, exclusively for members of affiliated societies like The Heather Society, is that if a person joins the RHS through us, we will receive £5 for each new member we enrol in the RHS. This applies only to UK residents.

If you want to take up this offer, please contact The Administrator; details of the offer are on the leaflet enclosed, for UK residents, with this Bulletin.

### **Sweat-shirts**

We have a small stock of our distinctive and very smart sweat-shirts in bottle-green or maroon with the Society's name and the Dorset heath by Brita Johansson in white.. We wish to clear the stock so make this once-only offer to members.

There are limited numbers, in the "standard" medium, large and XL sizes. The offer will last until all the sweat-shirts are sold.

For UK members the cost is £5 (cheques or cash only); for EU members €10 and USA/Canada \$10 - cash (euro notes or dollar bills) preferred. (If you want to pay by debit/credit card, please contact The Administrator.)



## Keep the home fire burning

I returned from sun-drenched Crete a week ago (as I write), having been there for almost six weeks. The island had the wettest winter in living memory and the tree heaths were exceptionally floriferous, I thought. The news here in The Fens (as in most of Britain) is that it was the wettest April for a century, and the garden is sodden (despite the "drought").

*Erica erigena* 'W. T. Rackliff' did not enjoy the past winter but now is serving as some excellent kindling (waste not, want not!) as its stems are very stout. I planted it 17 years ago, but the sudden switches in temperature last February, from minus 16°C to plus 16°C in 48 hours, probably was the death of it. Whether the stump will sprout again, only time will tell. It is very appropriate to burn it, for originally *Erica* was the name of a plant known to the Ancient Greeks which was used for making beacon-fires.

Other plants survived unscathed it seems, including 'Lucy Gena' (although there is no sign of any young growth yet), *E. x arendsiana* 'Charnwood Pink' (has flowers and new shoots), *E. x oldenburgensis* 'Ammerland' (which was growing up through 'W. T. Rackliff' but was unaffected by the weather) and two clones of *E. manipuliflora*, 'Bert Jones' and an unnamed one from Crete.

## Fax contact

There is no direct fax number for The Heather Society. If you wish to send a fax please send it to [+ 44 if dialling from outside the UK] (0) 1202 829564 and mark it clearly "Please forward to The Administrator". The paper copy will be posted to me.

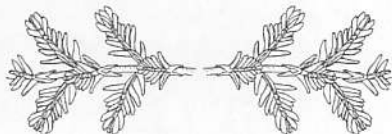
The former fax number (as printed on publications, etc.) does not operate.

A more rapid method of contacting the Society is by email, of course. I aim to answer emails within 24 hours.

## And, finally... the annual appeals

Please keep in mind the 2013 yearbook, which will mark the Society's golden jubilee. Articles on any heathery topic will be most welcome, before the end of October, please.

And, of course, please also take photographs of anything heathery – gardens, individual plants, heather people – for the Society's annual CD, and send them to me by 30 September. If each member took just a single photograph – it is even possible to take these with mobile phones, I hear! – and sent that one to me for the CD we would have an instant 200-photograph collection. Simple! Yes! So please don't just read this and say to yourself "Yes, I will take a photograph of my garden sometime later this week/month/year" – please go and do so now!! It takes no time and will give all members pleasure. Everyone can grow heathers – and take photographs.





## Des Perry

Just as this *Bulletin* was going to publication the Society learnt of the passing away of Des Perry. Des and his late wife Sybil were active members of the Heather Society since 1970 and great supporters of the former South West Local Group of the Society. An article dedicated to the memory of Des, and his involvement with the Society, will be prepared for inclusion in the Autumn *Bulletin*.

### ***Daboecia cantabrica* 'Amelie'**

This clone has been proposed for the Society's Premier Award. To obtain information to support this proposal, a number of trial plants were distributed last year to members in Britain, and have been grown in their gardens for a year. Here are some of the comments recently received.

Flowering varies from few or even very few to "flowered well", with the last flowers between mid-August, to end of September, to early November.

Flower colour was "nearer to H13 (crimson)", and blossoms were described as having a "lovely luminosity".

"Grew well, nice compact shape", and "strong without being vigorous" seems to sum up the habit.

Most plants survived but one member questioned its hardiness after the plant died following two spells of  $-3^{\circ}\text{C}$  each for 3 days.

As to whether there is any better *Daboecia*, the "jury" is divided! 'Blueless' ("although colours are different"), and *D. x scotica* (hardier).

Does this cultivar deserve to be recognized as an outstanding new cultivar?

Yes (4 votes), but there were three members who stated it was far too early to tell!

Do you grow this cultivar? What are your opinions?

Replies to The Administrator (see back cover)

## **A National Collection of *Daboecias* at Holehird**

**Brenda Leese and Val Jeffreys**

**On behalf of The Holehird Heather Team.**

The Holehird Heather Team very much enjoyed meeting members of the Heather Society during their visit as part of last year's Annual Gathering, and was pleased with the advice and general information received. We were particularly delighted when we were subsequently invited to be the host of a National Collection of *Daboecias*. We accepted immediately! We do eventually require the agreement of the Council at Holehird, once we have the required number of cultivars but do not envisage this will be a problem. Brenda Leese, a botanist by background, has agreed to take the lead role, assisted by other Heather Team members.

We have been assessing our existing *Daboecia* count (and trying to locate

the ones we think we have!), as well as preparing one of our heather beds for the new arrivals that will be needed to reach the 75% of the total number of cultivars that a National Collection requires. We are aware that it will take a year or so to ensure the plants we have (and still need) are correctly named in order to achieve the 75%. At Holehird we are fortunate in having three other National Collections (Astilbes, Hydrangeas and Polystichums) and their keepers, from whom to get advice and assistance with the paperwork. We are also very grateful to David Edge for advice (and plants) and the promise of more plants once they become available. We have also received gifts of 'Goscote' and 'William Buchanan Gold' – thank you for those.

We are now looking to increase our count of cultivars. The list below identifies those we do not yet have at Holehird. The Heather Team has a budget to pay for any heathers that can be provided for the collection. So, if anyone out there is able to help with plants or cuttings from the list, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Brenda Leese on [b.leese@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:b.leese@yahoo.co.uk) or 015394 88191 in the first instance.

We look forward to hearing from you!

### **Missing Daboecias:**

'Bellita'; 'Snowdrift'; 'White Carpet'; 'Barbara Phillips'; 'Blueless'; 'Cherub'; 'Cinderella'; 'Cleggan'; 'Clifden'; 'Covadonga'; 'Donard Pink'; 'Eskdale Baron'; 'Eskdale Blea'; 'Eskdale Blonde'; 'Globosa Pink'; 'Harlequin'; 'Heraut'; 'Irish Shine'; 'Joanna'; 'Johnny Boy'; 'Lilac Osmand'; 'Pink'; 'Pink Lady'; 'Polifolia'; 'Porter's Variety'; 'Praegerae'; 'Purpurea'; 'Rodeo'; 'Rosea'; 'Rubra'; 'Bearsden'; 'Ben'; 'Tabramhill'; 'Wijne'; 'Tom Pearce'; 'Vanessa'.

### **Request for donated photos of registered heathers**

**Chris Garnons-Williams <[chris@ivydenegardens.co.uk](mailto:chris@ivydenegardens.co.uk)>**

As a hobby I am creating a small educational website [www.ivydenegardens.co.uk](http://www.ivydenegardens.co.uk), part of which aims to compare the flower, foliage, overall shape, fruit/seed and in flowerbeds/landscape of every cultivated/wildflower plant either grown and/or sold in the UK. Some heathers change foliage colour from season to season and I would like to include all your registered heathers in my website and their foliage in the Foliage Colour Wheels (212 colours) and their flower colours in their own galleries as well as in the Flower Colour Wheels. To do this I need donated photos of the flower, flowers, each change of foliage colour from juvenile to mature to dead or from spring to summer, autumn and winter as well as the whole natural shape. I have done 10% of the native wildflowers as their own page, all of them in their family pages with website links to photos, mail-order for seeds or plants and distribution maps. I am presently doing the American Gladioli registered in 2009 - having done registration year 2008 and the ones supplied by the registrar of English Classified Gladioli for the European Gladioli.



## Connemara Chit Chat

### Susie Kay

Big sigh, that job is over for another year. "THE PRUNING"

Every year I ponder – What is the best way to tackle the task? This is for all of the summer heathers, and, as the years pass by, I just get more perplexed.

I have read all the relevant sections in my books and I eagerly peruse any magazine piece on the subject. But this year I had a new book to consult and I was delighted to find that another person approached the problem in much the same way as me. The late David McClintock apparently did not believe in pruning, as mentioned in our newest bible – *Hardy Heathers*, by Dr. E.C. Nelson. I perhaps do not take it quite that far and do attempt some pruning.

There are quite a few heathers in my garden, some more alive than others, so last year, I did employ a slightly different regime. I had a few plants of *Calluna vulgaris* 'Kinlochruel', which were just not performing, so I did not take the secateurs to them; I just marked them for removal at a later date. A few weeks passed and I noticed a lot of greening, so they were given a reprieve and lo and behold they flowered in abundance and provided a grand show. The same devil may care idea was practiced on quite a few *Erica vagans* plants which have been around for ages. In this case, the flower spikes that were produced became much longer and very floriferous.

As everyone knows, I am not an expert and would not recommend this lazy attitude to the more serious heather gardeners amongst you, but it made me alter some of my views on pruning. I am definitely not a hedgehog, but neither am I a totally free spirit, so my plants appear somewhere in the middle of these two states. New and newish plants would be tidied to encourage a good shape for the future.

All this makes it sound as if I am the laziest of gardeners, but somehow the pruning seems to go on forever. As I cut away with either the secateurs, or the battery powered small trimmer, I find my mind wandering to people that I have met and places I have visited, all because of an interest in heather.

The truly venerable David Small, who gave so much encouragement in the earlier days - in fact once when he and Anne were visiting, he remarked that my pruning was very good. I felt that was high praise. Through David, I went to Germany and Holland, countries I would probably never have visited.

The 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference, introduced me to Kurt Kramer and Jurgen Schroder, more English heather people, along with an American lady, known as Dee, whom I had somehow missed on the Irish trip in 1995. Charles Nelson had organised that, and I was lucky enough to sit next to a wonderful Italian gentleman called Lupo (snip, snip, snip) and memories of Lupo returned when we met again in Spain in 2007. This sends me into a reverie of the excursion to look at heather in North Western Spain. Although we are blessed in Connemara with several species in the wild, it is small beer to what we saw there - all that *E. mackayana* with colours ranging from pure white, through blush to a deep pink. (Down go the secateurs and I go to inspect my

successful "macs" grown from the cuttings obtained on the Spanish trip). One particular cutting from this trip has provided me with some plants I call "Spanish Blush", it is just for my own pleasure and is doing reasonably well in the stream drain. I am not bothering to register it, as it probably only appeals to myself, but I am taking extra care of it and cursed both a dog and a child for jumping on it.

I move onto some *Callunas*, which call to mind how I have seen them growing on the West Coast of America. I had such envy on my first visit to Oregon. Why did they grow so well for Ella May Wulff & Stefani McCrae-Dickey and all the other people we visited. I know they worry about not having enough water in the summer, but you can always add water, but can never take away the excess that seems to turn my poor specimens into brown lumps. At least that means a few less to prune. But my mind is in America now and I am marvelling at how a little flower growing on the mountain behind me has taken me so far away from home. Here are a large group of people gathered to worship the small flowers and offer advice and friendship. Although there is no true wild heather in America, the gardens I have seen are superb and a real credit to their owners.

On Vancouver Island at another International, I meet Mario, a passionate horticulturist from Fort Bragg in Northern California. (Rush across the garden to look at *C. v. 'Fort Bragg'*, surviving, but that is a whole story in itself). All the people I have met in America have been so welcoming and nothing is too much trouble.

An email announced that a N.A.H.S. Conference was to be held in Fort Bragg, so having already met Mario, I had to travel to see the heather gardens of North California. This was made possible by Joyce Prothero and Ella May driving me from Philomath, Oregon. Joyce had already taken two boats and a long car drive from her home on Vancouver Island - such is the power of the little flower.

By now in my ramblings, I have moved to another bed - "Johnny's Rockery"; it was he who placed the rocks with his digger and brought down the telephone line at the same time. The mind goes back to Penrith, 1997, when David Small held a cutting workshop. Judy Wicksten and I sat together whilst we earnestly did as we were told. Judy knew she would not be able to have her efforts sent on from Denbeigh and dutifully helped me, so that I ended up with a large number that were taken away to root under good conditions. Some of these survive today in Johnny's rockery, but David, Judy and Johnny are gone.

Instead of a ramble through the garden, this has become a ramble in my mind of all the people and places, and I haven't even got as far as South Africa. My travels and experiences in South Africa have been well documented over the years, but when I look at the few Cape Heaths, dear Ted Oliver comes immediately to mind. We are to be blessed with a visit from Ted in September at our Conference and perhaps some of you will be as intrigued with the Capes as I was the first time I met Dr. E.G.H. Oliver and his horticulturist, in 1995, in Dublin.

Looking at 'Edeweicht Blush' reminds me of another trip across Holland and Germany with the indefatigable Anne & David and Barry Sellers. We

visited a wonderful exhibition mounted by heather growers, including Kurt Kramer. Kurt and Anne invited me to christen a new heather that had been bred by Kurt. My plant was called 'Rudi' (*E. x kramerii*), which I am ashamed to say has not survived, and I was introduced to "Garden Girls". There are many of these ladies now and they are all bud bloomers. Back in 2002 Kurt was just producing a few for the European market around All Souls Day.

I turn my attention to the winter heathers, which, apart from a curative snip, snip when they are small, have been left to grow into rather large bushes. About three years ago, I took my pruning saw to an *E. erigena* 'Superba', which was well over six feet and reduced it to two feet. Now in 2012, it has completely recovered, (see centre page photograph), and is in full blossom, plus, some seed that it scattered has produced plants in the same area. I also tried this on an unnamed white *erigena*, but this is taking much longer to get back to its original size. One *E. terminalis* was taken to ground level having become far too straggly and unkempt. I just left a few shoots that were originating at its base but did give a snip to these as if I was doing some pinching out of a shrub, and now there is tight packed growth coming back. The moral being, that for a bit of fun, one can sometimes afford to be bold!

But I look in desperation at 'Brian Proudley'. He came from Anne and David and had formed a good wind barrier for plants to either the North West or the South East, depending on where the wind was coming from. The wonderful honey smelling flowers are beginning to fade. They have been with us since November and it is now mid April. On a closer examination of the five plants, I realise that perhaps they are getting past their best. A different technique this time. The tallest stems are cut back, and where the short stems at the base of the plant are encroaching onto other heathers, a radical cut has to be made, to avoid a bare bottom. 'Brian Proudley' has been good to me and I have quite a few offspring around the place. This plant ticks a lot of the boxes for me, very floriferous, grows to a good height, flowers over a long period of time and has a heavenly smell, which is very pronounced on a warm early spring day. I'm afraid two plants were completely removed as perhaps I should have given them some pruning before, but this means I have room for some new winter heathers that our Chairman kindly gave me.

I sit down on a convenient rock and ponder again about people I have met through Erica and wonder if they are out there doing exactly the same as me. I expect lots of them have much better ideas on this pruning lark and maybe they could write about their successes in the *Bulletin* and then I would really know what to do.

Observing what happens in the wild isn't of much use either. In the National park at Letterfrack, sheep have been banned and the *Calluna* is now quite tall, but definitely ragged and appearing in need of a good eating, whereas the plants on our dog walk, again with no sheep around, are ground hugging. This I suppose is due to their proximity to the sea and greater exposure to wind and salt. Yet the Park gets just as much wind and rain as the headlands of North Connemara. And that takes me to thinking about the weather.

*continued on page 12*



Susie Kay's brutalised *Erica erigena* 'Superba'



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**Now a ba**  
 (Sweatshir



Recovered *E. erigena* 'Superba' with 'Thing Nee' in the foreground and 'Arbutus Unedo' behind



Dawlish Tow





sweat shirt.  
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ier & Escort



*Barry's un-named heather*



*The roses and geraniums take over from the Erica x darleyensis for colour in Richard Canovan's garden.*

*Left 'Jenny Porter' and 'Moonshine'. Right 'Jack H Brummage'. All just pruned on this May day in 2011.*

from page 9

The winter of 2011 – 2012 was completely frost free for us, unlike the previous two winters with their freezing conditions. But there was a price to pay for the lack of frost. Constant storms! From September 2011 we hardly had a dry day, turning it into the wettest year since my records began in 1996, and with the rain came huge doses of salt. We all know that a large amount of salt is bad for our health and are constantly being adjured to take less in our diets. It must be that an overdose of salt is not good for the plants either. I am becoming convinced that this is the cause of the demise of a large number of *Callunas* and *cinereas* with nasty brown patches. Did the previous cold stressing make them more susceptible this past winter to the salt? This makes me think maybe the cold is better than the salt laden wind. Our whole garden was totally waterlogged as the rains came down and the big heavy wolfhound was leaving 4 inch deep footprints all over the place. We are sort of dried out now and will probably be moaning later in the summer that we haven't enough water. I am well aware that large parts of England are experiencing drought, so I would willingly send some if it was possible. Every heather gardener has his or her cross to bear with differing weather conditions plus their soil composition and what does well for one is a total disaster for another. I am still sitting on the rock trying to make sense of it all and come to the conclusion that I must persevere with trying to grow the little flowers, since if I had given up I wouldn't have the wonderful memories of trips and people who have dominated my life since 1995. This is not nearly so long as a lot of people I have met through the Heather Society. I salute each and every one I have met with all their knowledge, wisdom and encouragement. Please keep giving it out, especially on the issue of pruning.

### **MacFochie's heather beer** **Charles Nelson**

In an issue of *Heather notes* (the newsletter of the Northeast Heather Society) I spotted an item that prompted me to check that the issue was not dated the First of April. But, it wasn't, so it is not a joke, not even the bit about the Clan emigrating from Italy!

For the benefit of those who never see *Heather notes* here is what was published (reprinted by courtesy of NEHS) - the original item was anonymous but I guessed (correctly) that Dr Donald Mackay was the contributor.

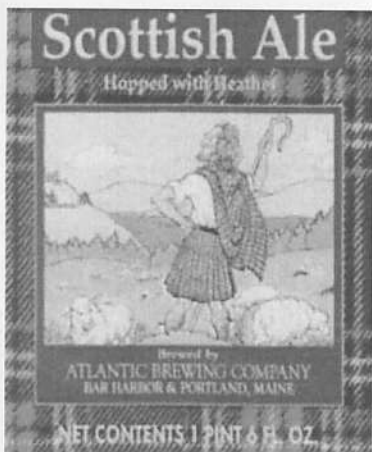
#### **Heather Ale Spotted in Maine**

If you get to Maine, especially in the Mt Desert area, look out for MacFochie's Scottish Ale, which the label declares is "Made with Scottish Heather Tips."

The Atlantic Brewing Company of Bar Harbor helpfully explains on the back label.

"MacFochie's Scottish Ale is named for the Maffucci clan who emigrated to America from the highlands of Italy in the late 19th century. This hearty





ale style is believed to have originated in Edinburgh in the 19th century. Scottish ales tend to be "a wee bit heavy" and MacFoochie's is no exception. We follow the traditional style of sweetness, full body, and a low hop flavor profile. The result is a complex beer yielding robust malt richness and subtle toffee notes." They add: "Our brewers describe this ale as "Dark as night and sweet as love, our Scottish ale has a good dose of peat smoked malt and a unique touch of heather in addition to the hops. Enough strength to keep you warm on a long winter night, this fine ale can be consumed with or after dinner."

Finally, the rather unusual MacFoochie name is explained in a footnote: "The Maffucci name was probably corrupted by the immigration official at Ellis Island in New York."

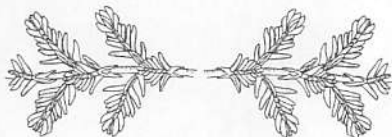
If you can believe that you can well believe in the faerie origin of Heather Ale proposed by Robert Louis Stevenson. You can also take my word that it is indeed a beer very much worth the drinking.

\*\*\*\*\*

Well, I am happy to take Donald's word for it, but still I sent an email to the brewery and asked for some further information. Jon Hill, Brewer at the Atlantic Brewing Company, promptly responded:

Hi! My boss asked me to respond to your email about our Scottish ale: MacFoochie's Scottish Ale. This is a strong Scottish ale with some peat smoked barley and heather. We use dried heather tips we get from North Country Malt Supply. We add it in the brew in mesh bags at a rate of a pound per barrel, half at the beginning of boil, half at the end. I believe heather is from Scotland but when I called North Country they didn't know where it was from as they buy it from someone else.

I asked in return if they could send me a tiny sample of the "dried heather tips", just out of curiosity - after all, I might be able to tell where they came from. Alas, it is evidently far too valuable a herb even to spare a pinch as I have received no response. Maybe the NEHS can get a sample as we would like to see what heather is used - it should be Calluna, but why dried? All the recipes I know, while not stipulating fresh heather, imply that it is picked and used immediately. Who would want to dry it anyway? Has anyone ever seen "dried heather tips" for sale?



## A plea from Richard Canovan

In the 1980s, Barry Sellers hybridised a brilliant *Erica x darleyensis* (see centre pages). The photograph is from one of the original plants he kindly gave me in 1989. Its flowers, from late winter to May, are in very long racemes resembling those of 'Erecta' but in a rich rose pink that deepens to magenta with time, over bright green foliage. The tips in spring are deep pink and silver. But it has yet to be propagated and named. Come on Barry!

[Note added from the Registrar: only when a plant is propagated and distributed should it be given a name and that name registered. Come on, Richard! If you have not propagated this wonderful plant yet, can members expect lots of youngsters to be available at Falmouth, duly named?]

## Would you know where to find our rarest heather?

**Reprinted from *The Irish Times*, Saturday, February 18, 2012**

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On the other side of Mweelrea, where the steep side of the mountain slopes into Killary Harbour, the remains of a pre-Famine clachan perch above the shore. The clachan is called Derry, for the clump of gnarled sessile oaks that crouch among the rocks, but its real botanical distinction is the thicket of chest-high heather growing along the clachan's old lazy beds. While the oak buds still clench on bare twigs, the pink flowers of *Erica erigena*, now called Irish heath, are crowding into early bloom.

I lift this picture from memory, as too many fences and too much rough terrain now stand in my way, but a new book from Charles Nelson, long an energetic student of Ireland's flora, reminds me that the Killary thickets are "one of the most remarkable colonies" of this particular plant, unique among our heathers for blooming in late winter and spring. Dr Nelson's weighty and gorgeous "*Hardy Heathers from the Northern Hemisphere*" (Kew Publishing, £60) persuades me to surrender the term "Mediterranean heather" by which the shrub is still more commonly known in Connacht. But the "Irish" in its name raises questions, as do other rare heathers of the west. *Erica erigena* does, indeed, touch the Mediterranean at Malaga and Cadiz, but its disconnected populations, some of only a few hundred plants, are dotted across Spain and Portugal and extend even to Bordeaux, in western France. It is still more than 1,100km from Ireland's southernmost plants in a hollow on Errisbeg, above Roundstone in Connemara.

In the first book of his Connemara trilogy, *Listening to the Wind*, Tim Robinson described visiting the plants on Errisbeg on a sunny day in February, when "the heather was a vivid pale green against the wintry grey of the surrounding slopes, and a few mounds of it were already covered in tiny pale-lilac flowers. The tubular blossoms are only a few millimetres long, and with a hand lens one can see the chocolate-coloured anthers just showing in their mouths like the tips of velvet-gloved fingers..."

A visiting Welsh naturalist first took note of the plant in 1700, but credit for finding and collecting it generally goes to the work of the Trinity botanist James Mackay in 1829. He traced its scattered colonies northwards, to Claggan Mountain beyond Mayo's Mulrany, where wild goats of ancient lineage still browse upon it, and on through the hills and bogs to the Mullet Peninsula. Dr Nelson shows a great sweep of the heather blooming with bright spring gorse on the windswept shore of Lough Carrowmore.

Its origins, like those of our other rare heathers with southern homelands, formed part of the great - and continuing - debate on the arrival in Ireland after the Ice Age of "Lusitanian" species. Even a few decades ago, Irish natural scientists as eminent as David Webb, WA Watts and Frank Mitchell were ready to think that the "disjunct" heathers of the west (Irish heath, Mackay's heath and St Dabeoc's heath) might have survived in some mild refuge on the offshore seabed, dried out as the Atlantic fell back in the Ice Age. Where Irish heath is concerned, however, the absence of any fossil pollen before the last Ice Age threw its native credentials into question. Work with an electron microscope on deep peat cores from Claggan Mountain found its pollen appearing first in 1431, at the height of maritime contact between western Ireland, western France and northwest Spain. At any of these addresses, the bushy and pliable branches of the plant could have seemed an ideal packing around wooden casks of wine.

The rarest Lusitanian heather in Ireland is *Erica ciliaris*, a mainly Pyrenean plant with little fringes at the ends of its leaves, and usually called the Dorset heath for its sparse presence in that English county. But its one known colony in Connemara is now, says Dr Nelson, "regarded as dubious, the result of a deliberate introduction". In the days before its disgrace, Tim Robinson led me to the precious clump, growing quite unprotected beside the narrow road that crosses Roundstone Bog. (Tim, in his writings, still keeps its location vague.)

Found there in 1965, its credentials as a native plant were supported by the known discovery of its fossil flowers and seeds beneath glacial gravel near Gort, Co Galway, together with those of Mackay's and St Dabeoc's heaths. Since then, the early 19th-century activities of William McAlla, a dedicated but erratic local botanist dealing with English plant collectors, have come under suspicion. As Tim Robinson wonders in *Listening to the Wind*: "Does the guilty shade of Roundstone's great botanist haunt the crags, planting heathers in the night?" Charles Nelson himself still has heretical doubts. "I tend to the view," he writes casually, "that Nature alone has been at work."

## **A heather lover's rant!**

**Lizzie Judson**

I was weeding my garden the other day admiring my winter heathers in various shades of vibrant pink, when surrounding gardens remained drab and lifeless, and I asked myself: "why doesn't everyone love heathers?"

As there was plenty of weeding to do I had time to muse, so here are my

conclusions – and they're not altogether pleasing! Here comes the rant:

Where do most people see heathers these days? On a day to day basis I expect many people see them planted around public buildings or supermarkets. My local supermarket has winter heathers around its large car park. Obviously they have been chosen as they are low maintenance which is what they seem to be getting. They are tidied occasionally but at the moment they are not looking happy – indeed they must have had a bad winter as many are very brown and obviously dead and have looked like that for some time.

At least the supermarket has the excuse that looking after heathers is not their core business. In public show gardens, they have no such excuse. So what's going on? Many have had their heather gardens for a long time in massed heather island beds. These look stunning if properly looked after. But many these days just aren't. Naming no names but gardens that wouldn't dream of having shabby show beds leave flowered heather beds with some obviously dead heathers in them sometimes for months on end, untrimmed, unloved and covered in leaves. Yes I know you're meant to leave the summer flowering ones untrimmed for a while after flowering – but their winter flowering beds often look sad too. As supposed examples of gardening excellence they surely must be able to find some way to keep their heathers looking reasonable whilst waiting for their next trim?

Hurrah for the British Heather Growers Association who do know how to get heathers looking their best – as evidenced by two excellent Hampton Court show gardens. But this brings us to the next problem - people think you have to have acid soil for all heathers. I was admiring the latest Hampton Court garden last year and heard someone behind me saying to her friend how lovely it was. The friend agreed but said it was "no good as heathers need acid soil". Aghh!

Which segues nicely into the next portion of my rant. You can't get much choice in heathers easily any more. My garden, according to various soil testing I've done, is neutral (hence all my winter flowering heathers). But you try getting *Erica vagans* in most garden centres - and **that** actually flowers in summer in non acid soil ... and as for what they often do stock - painted heathers ... words fail me.

Finally, most gardening presenters don't seem to have the imagination Heather Society members have. I remember how gratifying it was to hear Monty Don saying how the Hampton Court garden changed his views on heathers – nice of him to admit it - but it is a shame that TV gardening experts don't do more to help people think of new ways of using plants like heathers.

So what to do? Here are some thoughts.

Everyone can grow winter flowering heathers, they look vibrant when everything around them is dormant, you trim them immediately after flowering and so they never look rubbish. We need to get people to make more of them! How about doing an early RHS show (I noticed there was one in Cardiff in late April) to showcase them – I know that's a little late but is there anything you can do to hold them back a bit??

Lobby major gardens / offer help with their bedraggled heather beds – surely they must be embarrassed about them? Perhaps they need to re-think

their large island beds if they can't look after them and use heather more in mixed plantings...

Lobby garden experts. Maybe Monty Don, as a born again heather lover, would be receptive to more innovative ways of using them?

Be brave! Do we really, really have to leave summer flowering heathers looking sad and untrimmed for half the year? Can't we trim them in autumn – at least those who live in milder areas? I remember an article in the *Bulletin*(?) that to me suggested that it wasn't a lot worse to trim them immediately after flowering. Slightly arrested growth and the occasional dead heather are surely better than all summer heathers looking tired for much of the year. Well I have tried it and am awaiting developments (though I do only have one small test *Erica vagans* so I suppose it is not much of a risk!!)

Finally – be proud! Plant your prettiest heathers in the part of your front garden that everyone can see when walking past – then, who can fail to fall in love with them too?!

## **Unthinkable? A Lawn Tax**

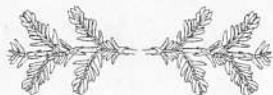
**With acknowledgements to the Guardian – 6 April 2012**

*Richard Canovan spotted this editorial in the Guardian newspaper, and with his mind on heathers, he comments: "Who would have thought that introducing heathers may constitute tax avoidance."*

As gardeners in eastern and southern Britain hang up their hosepipes for the summer, it may be worth considering one way of soothing their pain and at the same time easing the current water shortage in the UK's most populous regions. Discourage the growing of grass. Specifically, grass that is purely aesthetic, kept short, and which absorbs thousands of gallons of mains water in every dry year.

Lawns, once a celebration of status, are nowadays an affront to changing climate. They are an environmental desert, generally a monoculture where any tendency to biodiversity is vexed by the application of noxious weed-killers. Clover, buttercups, daisies and dainty speedwell are all unwelcome. Even worms are to be deterred. Meanwhile, keeping the sward green and encouraging it to grow requires - as well as copious water - regular applications of oil-based fertiliser. And having got it growing, cutting it back again takes more resource- intensive machinery.

Some claim that lawns have a certain benefit as a kind of natural air conditioner. But they serve no socially useful purpose, or none that would not be better served by turning the space over to vegetables. If that sounds over-prescriptive, it would be less effortful to allow a wildflower meadow to develop. Golf courses, and sports fields are shared public spaces and fall into a different category'. But, while a property tax remains a distant dream, a tax on private lawns beyond a certain size is within the gift of every chancellor.





## Group News

All Society events, including group meetings are now listed on [www.heathersociety.org](http://www.heathersociety.org)

### Yorkshire

"The Yorkshire Heather Group's small band of dedicated members met at RHS Harlow Carr in March. At the meeting they viewed a short PowerPoint presentation of President John Griffiths large new garden and the heather planting. This was followed by various discussions on heathers, gardening topics etc. during the tea and biscuits break.

As it was a beautiful, warm, sunny afternoon a walk around the 67-acre garden completed the meeting where the serious topic of discussion was the winter flowering heather beds.

The talk planned for the March meeting, "Photographs of Heathers", had to be postponed as the group secretary was ill and she had the CDs. This took place on 26<sup>th</sup> May when members studied the heather photographs and tried to name the one with missing labels.

The next meeting, which is usually held in late July, is a visit to a garden. No decision has been taken as yet on a venue but one suggestion is a visit to see the National Collection of water lilies at Burnby Hall, Pocklington. The garden is situated just off the A1079 York to Hull road. This garden has quite a large collection of heathers but, due to the neutral pH of the soil in this area, they are all winter flowering ones.

Our autumn meeting is once again back at RHS Harlow Carr on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2012 at 2.30pm. This meeting will take place in the Jubilee Room as the Wolfson Room is already booked. The topic is still at the planning stage."

*Jean Preston*

### Northeast

Sitting with the lights on in early evening, and heavy grey skies with continual rain, doesn't exactly inspire one to think of heathers and Flower Shows. But, somewhere between now and September we have got to encourage these poor sodden plants to burst forth into glorious Technicolor. Yes, on Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup> it will be the Ponteland Flower Show, which will be held in the Memorial Hall, Ponteland. All entries to be staged between 9.00 and 11.00 am., when judging will commence. The show will be open to the public from 1.00 to 4.30 pm, when all exhibits are to be removed. We do hope as many members as possible will enter, and we look forward to seeing you there.

Due to poor weather conditions, last year we were unable to have a Car Outing, but, hopefully, we will try again this year and all members will be notified in due course. In the meantime, have a 'welly' good summer.

*Dorothy M Warner*

### Home Counties

On 17 March 3 members of the Heather Society met outside the cafe at Wisley. We were joined by Andy Collins who kindly took us on a tour of the National Collection of Heathers. The heathers on the whole were looking good in flower, and it was a pleasant change to visit Wisley at the time of the winter flowering heathers. Andy explained that some of the 'gaps' in the planting had now been rectified by young plants, which would take time to grow together for maximum



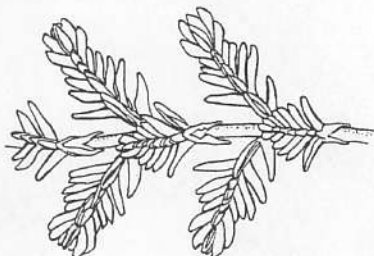
effect. However, some of the gaps had been planted with broom, which did not appear to be best suited as a companion to heathers. Although I am sure others may disagree. There were still a number of recent introductions not present in the National Collection and Andy mentioned that as part of a forward programme this would be put in hand.

Although no talk had been arranged for this event it was pleasing to walk around the gardens and the big glasshouse to see the array of plants being displayed. Some of the rhododendrons and camellias were even in flower due to the mild weather.

Andy mentioned that the following week a plant fair was to take place and John Hall would exhibit heathers. I went along the following week and saw the fine display of heathers for sale by John Hall. This was all the more pleasing as the garden centre had only a few tree heaths for sale.

In 2013, if the plant fair takes place again, then a Heather Society event will be arranged to coincide. Many thanks to those members who attended on 17 March.

*Barry Sellers*



## USEFUL ADDRESSES

**Society's Website:** [www.heathersociety.org.uk](http://www.heathersociety.org.uk)

- Chairman & Steering Committee** *Policy matters, major events etc.*  
Mr. D. Edge, Forest Edge Nursery, Verwood Road, Woodlands, Wimborne, BH21 8LJ. *Tel:*: (01202) 824387 *Fax:* (01202) 829564
- Treasurer** Mr. P.L. Joyner, 84 Kinross Road, Rushington, Totton, Southampton, Hampshire, SO40 9BN. *e-mail:* philjoyner@btinternet.com *Tel:* (02380) 864336
- Secretary** *Council Matters*  
Mr. R. Bowater, 16, Hamilton Drive, Ratcliffe on Trent, Nottingham NG12 1AG.  
*e-mail:* richard.bowater1@btinternet.com
- Slide Librarian** *Photographic Archive & Hire of slides*  
Mrs J. Preston, 21, Church Street, Dunnington, York YO19 5PP.  
*Tel:* (01904) 489624
- Yearbook Editor & Registrar** *Articles for the Yearbook / Naming of Heathers*  
Dr. E.C. Nelson  
For details - see back cover
- Bulletin Editor** *Notes, articles for the Bulletin*  
Mrs. D. Everett, The Bannut, Bringsty, Herefordshire, WR6 5TA.  
*e-mail:* everett@bannut.co.uk *Tel:* (01885) 482206
- Administrator** *Subscriptions, Orders for publications etc.*  
Dr. E.C. Nelson  
For details - see back cover
- Conference Manager** Mrs. S. Kay, Lettergesh East, Renvyle, Co. Galway, Republic of Ireland  
*e-mail:* susiek@gofree.indigo.ie *Tel:* (00353 95) 43575
- Group Organisers** (*Remember, you will be very welcome at any local meeting or visit!*)
- East Midlands** Mr. A. Hall, 10, Upper Green, Nanpantan, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 3SG.  
*e-mail:* halla32@tiscali.co.uk *Tel:* (01509) 238923
- North East** Mrs. D. M. Warner, Littlecroft, Click-em-in, Ponteland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE20 9BQ.  
*Tel:* (01661) 823299
- Home Counties** Mr. B. Sellers, 8 Croft Road, Norbury, London SW16 3NF.  
*e-mail:* sellersbarry@aol.com
- South West** Mr. P.L. Joyner, 84 Kinross Road, Rushington, Totton, Southampton, Hampshire, SO40 9BN. *e-mail:* philjoyner@btinternet.com *Tel:* (02380) 864336
- Yorkshire** Dr. J. Griffiths, Preston Lodge, 60 Hall Road, Little Preston., Leeds. LS26 8UR  
*Tel:* (01132) 863349