

The Heather Society Newsletter

Autumn 2020



Sunset by Egil Sæle

CONTENTS FEATURING

Eileen Bonner Petterssen, Dave Brown, David Edge, Alison Fitz-Earle
David Wilson, Mike Pirie, Kurt Kramer, Kristina Husmann, Audrey
Sprague, Mary Bowerman, Börje Sörensson, John Griffiths, David
Plumridge, Linda Salt, Egil Sæle, Dee Daneri, Ella May Wulff,
Geoffrey Yates, Daphne Everett., Sheila Jelley, Peter Halfpenny,
Richard Canovan



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HOPE

Hope is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And signs the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -
And sweetest - in the gale - is heard
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -
I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest sea -
Yet - never- in Extremety,
It asked a crumb of me.

Emily Dickinson

From rehab with hopes from Eileen Bonner Petterssen

From The Chairman

Whilst one is saddened by The Heather Society as a registered charity reaching its end date we should conversely have optimism and enthusiasm with the formation of the new Heather Society that will arise in the new 2021 year .

I thank all the contributors to this final THS issue newsletter, to all of the Council members who serve and who have served, past and present ,who have provided the foundation, built on what we enjoy today and given of their time to enable the Society to continue over the years. I hope that you will continue to support the new Society in its changed format and whilst it will be primarily web based, it will I hope, if financially viable provide the facility of paper based contact for those who prefer this method. The new Society will require the posts of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer to perform its functions; be aware that without these positions be filled the new Society will be unable to fulfil its function and continue. With the use of modern technology these positions can be performed from a distance and willing volunteers are welcomed.

I look forward to keeping in touch with you on the other side...

David Edge (Chairman)

MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:

A reminder to complete and return the form sent to you recently concerning the new Heather Society database. If you have lost your form please send me an email and I will send you out another..... email to: infoatheathersociety@gmail.com . Please return your forms no later than 31st December 2020.

Remember: If you do not complete this form we will not be able to contact you after 1 January 2021 If you wish to continue to support the new Heather Society, donations can be sent to:

Bank: Bank of Scotland Sort Code: 80-22-60 Account Number: 20068061

Final reminder

Please ensure you have cancelled all standing orders or direct debit subscription payments to The Heather Society.

*Wishing you all a Happy Christmas and a much better 2021
Alison Fitz-Earle*

Website - Aims and Objectives for the Future

As 'The Heather Society' (THS) ceases to exist as a charity next year, so must the website change to reflect this situation. As many of you know, the website was originally created by David Small and I took over ownership in 2014. I will continue to own the site until at least 2026. The original site concentrated mostly on heather cultivars descriptions and cultivation. Over the years 'The Heather Society' became an integral part of the site, to the point where many people thought it was owned by 'The Heather Society'. Branding of the site was that of 'The Heather Society' which added to the confusion.

To remove this confusion, the site will be re-branded to 'Heather World' with a different logo. You will be able to use the same URL www.heathersociety.org to access it.

The aim is to return the site back to its original roots as primarily a place for the public to gain information about heathers. All of the existing information regarding heather cultivars will be on the revised site, along with new cultivars as they become available.

The current information about heather cultivation and other FAQ's will also be there.

The old THS documents, like year books and newsletters, will be available, but in a different place. Since the new society does not have members, as such, the old member area will disappear, but the data contained in that section will be available on the new website.

Nothing of importance will be lost.

The new 'Heather Society' (HS) will be hosted on the website via a new link button.

All of the news, events, key dates, how to donate to HS, and other relevant information will be found in this area.

I hope to add some new functions to the site later in the year.

Things like a Q&A area, new cultivars available in garden centres, etc.

While THS may have retired, the website has not.

I hope you all continue to enjoy the heather world via the website.

David Brown

December 12th 2020



Your THS Council;
Chairman David Edge
Secretary Dave Brown
Treasurer Alison Fitz-Earle
Barry Sellers
Susie Kay
Dr E C Nelson

Minutes of The Special General Meeting of The Heather Society
Held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 12th December 2020
This meeting was held by Zoom. Hosted by David Brown

Apologies

Apologies were received from several members including Ella May Wulff, Dee Daneri, David and Rita Plumridge, Barry Sellers and Charles Nelson.

Opening Statement by the Chairman, David Edge.

The SGM was convened because Rule 21: Dissolution, of The Heather Society Rules, requires such a meeting to be held to enable the society to be dissolved. The Chairman, David Edge, formally welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. He expressed the hope that the members would stay in touch and that the society could go forward successfully in the future as Heather Society.
Closure of The Heather Society as a charity, by year end 2020.

Status of THS funds.

The Hon. Treasurer, Alison Fitz-Earle, reported a balance of £1,823.32. This considers payments recently made to Arboretum des Grande Brûyers (£4,500) and Plant Heritage (£6,500).

The final balance figure at year end 2020 will be less due to scheduled upcoming payments including: -
Final newsletter publication and distribution expenses
Hon. Treasurer's expenses
Accountant's fees (Jason Foxwell)
Publication expenses for supplement to I.R.H.N.

Any funds remaining at year end will be forwarded to the Charity Commission, who will distribute the funds to appropriate bodies/societies. This is expected to be in the order of £700. Members questioned if we should have given more away, but council felt that there needed to be a small amount in the bank to cover unexpected expenses and give back to the Transfer of Intellectual Property from The Heather Society to Heather Society.

The intellectual property of THS will be transferred to HS. The 183rd Council Meeting of The Heather Society, which will take place after the conclusion of the SGM, should ratify the transfer. The Hon. Secretary, David Brown, will send a letter to the Chairman, David Edge, to sign to formalise the agreement.

Future of the society as a not-for-profit Unincorporated Association known as "Heather Society".

THS will close on 31/12/20. The new society, "Heather Society", is currently in formation. "Heather Society" will not have members, but rather donors. Donations will be welcomed, and donors will be made aware of how the funds are used.

The website is currently under reconstruction to reflect the non-charity status of the new "Heather Society", it will be branded as "Heather World".

Closing remarks by the Chairman, David Edge.

The Chairman's closing statement has been circulated to all members by Alison Fitz-Earle and is also available to view online. Thanks, were given to all who have helped support THS, both present and past. The Chairman sought to make members aware that Council Officer positions would need to be filled to enable HS to go forward and flourish. A final newsletter is being prepared for publication and distribution and will be mailed to all members in the new year. It will include articles from members around the world. It is hoped that newsletters will continue to be produced by the new society in the future.

Council Officers were thanked for their time and effort by council member, Susie Kay.

Thanks, were given to all for their attendance.

Meeting concluded @ 14.28

14 members were in attendance.

Signed.... David Edge
Dated 24/12/2020

David Wilson, Wilson's Nursery Ltd.

45175 Nicomen Cr. Chilliwack. BC. V2R 0R2. Canada.

wilsonsnursery@shaw.ca: www.theheatherfarm.com: nursery address; 6539 Hopedale Rd. Chilliwack BC.

In 1963 the first edition Year Book of the newly formed Heather Society laid out the objectives of the club rather cautiously ... "in the hope that the Heather Society can make a valuable contribution ". The goals were to create interest in heather by having meetings, visiting parks and gardens as well as providing cultural information, photo slides for lectures and to encourage "the Trade" into an expansion of production and availability.

In the years ahead their hopes were far exceeded, member societies spread throughout the Isles and to many countries beyond. Now in our electronic world of automated nurseries producing huge numbers of patented and sometimes painted 'disposable' plants many of us wish we could spend a few minutes at the potting bench with some of those founders, Fred Chapple, John F. Letts, D.F. Maxwell or P.S. Patrick. It would be lovely to feel and smell the hand made potting soil, wash clay pots and hear tales of finding special favourites on wild and wind blown heaths and moors.

My first years of life were spent in my fathers nursery on the River Nidd near Patley Bridge, Yorkshire, but my most recent 47 years have been on my own nursery in Chilliwack, British Columbia, two locations of undisputed differences. Though for me those heather covered dales and the 15 million or so heathers I have grown in Canada are completely linked. Linked not just to me, my family and faithful staff but to all the heather gardeners and growers that came before and to those that follow. These plants have become a bond that words are hard to describe.

I have travelled little, certainly not since 1973, but have received visits from or become friends with many amazing 'heathery folks'. From this side of the Atlantic Alice Knight, Dorothy Matheny, Donald McKay and Ella-May Wulff ; from the old world Kurt Kramer, David Small, Peter Bingham and David Edge and of course there are many others and I hope there will be more to come. You are all welcome here! I will always keep some sprigs of white ling nearby so my hopes and wishes come true.

My very best to all. David Wilson.

Dear Friends of Heathers **Kurt Kramer**

Saddened by the fact that the Heather Society has been dissolved I would like to let you know that I received over the years many valuable information and suggestions.

I could participate at some of the meetings of the society and AGM's. I remember the intensive contacts to David McClintock and David Small. Over the last years I bred with following heather species:

Calluna vulgaris, Erica arborea, E. carnea, E. australis, E. andevaliensis, E. cinerea, E. Erigena, E. sicula, E. spiculifolia, E. tetralix, E. vagans and Daboecia cantabrica.

Many interesting new varieties, but also interspecific hybrids were created, see under [www.heidewelt.de/ Arthybriden](http://www.heidewelt.de/Arthybriden)

Should you plan a new group of heather enthusiasts, please inform me so that I can join.

Kind regards,

Kurt Kramer

Kramer@heidewelt.de



A heather planting observed by David Edge and Trish Hardy for a new dwelling in Ireland

From Mary Bowerman

It is with great sadness that we are coming to the end of THE HEATHER SOCIETY as we have known it for many years. However , I have to challenge my own self that we get caught up in so many other things in life , and because heathers come in and out of “fashion” , we seem to put the support and action of such a society further down the list. Some of you have been so faithful in keeping going , inspiring the rest of us – and for this , I warmly thank you.

There is no doubt that to have the right soil and situation to grow such plants certainly helps – and Champs Hill is one of those very fortunate gardens. David, who passed away earlier this year, and I inherited this wonderful place from Alfred and Margaret Bowerman [very early members of The Heather Society] , and with my lack of gardening knowledge I would have found it very difficult to know how to even START designing such a garden.

Since 1986 , we have expanded and spread further and further into the 27 acres ,developing along the lines of those who had much greater knowledge , and now , thanks to the help of Sid [deceased] , his sons Adrian and Lynn working in the garden today , and many of you down through the years , especially John Hall , from whom we purchased nearly 1000 young heathers as he was retiring , we have renewed enthusiasm , a more beautiful garden , and can offer a very warm welcome for anybody who would like to visit. HEATHERS ARE WITH US TO STAY !!

To arrange a visit , please contact us at info@thebct.org.uk , or our website www.thebct.org.uk

From Börje Sorrenson

Hope that everything is well with you over there, we are doing well so far, I know that Brita is still doing some work in the garden when the weather is good.

I would like to contribute with some photos of open-pollinated seedlings from Erica tetralix, maybe that could be of interest for the members? I enclose the photos .

With best wishes. Börje





**John & Valerie Griffiths and the hybrid heathers
E. x griffithsii ‘Valerie Griffiths’ and ‘Ashlea Gold’.**

John writes:

Some of the most enjoyable memories of my time as a member of the Heather Society were the many discussions I had about the feasibility of heather hybridisation, with such knowledgeable heather experts as Pat Turpin, David McClintock, Bert Jones, David Small and Barry Sellers. I was encouraged to take up the challenge of putting theory into practice, and the outcome was many years of interesting and absorbing experimentation. There were

several successes, and even more failures, but

perhaps my favourite inter-species cross was between *Erica manipuliflora* and *Erica vagans*. This was my favourite cross, for three reasons: firstly, I had the lasting honour of having the cross (*Erica x griffithsii*) named after me; secondly, the cross resolved the long-standing puzzle as to the botanical identity of the heather ‘Heaven Scent’, and thirdly, my experiments with the cross brought about the two garden-worthy cultivars, ‘Valerie Griffiths’, and ‘Ashlea Gold’.

The interesting thing about these two hybrids is that they have the same parents, *E. manipuliflora* ‘Aldeburgh’ and *E. vagans* ‘Valerie Proudley’, but whereas ‘Valerie Griffiths’ came from Valerie Proudley as the pollen parent and Aldeburgh as seed parent, ‘Ashlea Gold’ was the reverse of this. Although both hybrids have now been grown in gardens for more than 30 years, there is still a lot of uncertainty about the differences between them. They are both grown for their all-year-round bright golden foliage, and they have similar pale pink scented flowers, forming long loose spikes. They are both lime tolerant. In our previous garden I always found ‘Ashlea Gold’ to be somewhat slower growing, more compact, and kept its bright yellow-gold colour in partial shade better than ‘Valerie Griffiths’. On the other hand, ‘Valerie Griffiths’ was useful where faster and taller growth was wanted. However, other people have reported differently in their gardens, and it does seem that soil pH, degree of sun exposure and other factors can affect the two plants differently.

To try to clarify things somewhat, when we moved into our new garden, which has neutral pH, and very well drained soil, I took one rooted cutting of each plant, and planted them just 12 inches apart in a spot which received plenty of sun and was well exposed to wind, rain and frost. Neither plant has ever been pruned. This was five years ago, and the plants have been monitored regularly.

My conclusions were that, under strictly identical conditions, the golden foliage colours of the pair were essentially the same throughout the year, even in winter. The above photograph was taken recently, on December 1st, and although the two plants have grown into each other somewhat, one can just about distinguish the slightly taller ‘Valerie Griffiths’ on the left from the more closely knit ‘Ashlea Gold’ on the right. However, elsewhere in the garden in shadier positions, ‘Ashlea Gold’ comes into its own, as it keeps its gold colour throughout the year, whereas ‘Valerie Griffiths’ becomes much greener in the autumn and winter. When pruned, ‘Ashlea Gold’ remains very tidy and keeps its shape. In contrast, ‘Valerie Griffiths’ tends to want to do its own thing, and is perhaps best allowed to grow tall and develop its long flowers spikes more profusely.

So if I could only keep one of these plants, which one would it be? Well I am afraid that it would have to be ‘Ashlea Gold’. But don’t worry; the real Valerie doesn’t mind!



Photo Courtesy of Richard Canovan *Erica carnea* ‘Vivelli’ replaces the weeds!see next page

Farewell to The Heather Society

Dee Daneri

It's been almost 30 years since I was first introduced to The Heather Society. I had just visited my first heather garden but was warned that plants were difficult to find here in California.

Thanks to Alice Knight, one of our few heather suppliers here in the Western United States, I found my way to David and Ann Small. A new heather world was about to open as I soon found myself at the Chelsea Flower Show, meeting David McClintock and David Edge.

I returned to California with hundreds of heather cuttings, complete with a proper phyto certificate. Those plants went on to spread throughout Northern California and Southern Oregon. The Heather Enthusiasts of the Redwood Empire (H.E.R.E), a chapter of the Northern American Heather Society, was founded in 1994. A future heather garden for our new botanical garden was in the planning.

A heather garden was introduced to the community center in Fortuna, California, and others carried the torch to insure that a good supply of heaths and heathers would be available to our gardening world. My fondest memories of THS really have nothing to do with plants, but the people who have devoted their lives to making this a more beautiful world. Travels with the experts like Dr. Charles Nelson to such exotic places as the Picos de Europa and the Azores made these discoveries all the more meaningful. Many thanks to Susie and Alan Kay for the time spent organizing many of our travels.

Fond memories of travels with Eileen Petterssen, David and Rita Plumridge, John and Valerie Griffiths, Phil and Lin Joyner, Barry Sellers, Ella May Wulff, Richard Canovan, and my late friend Judy Wiksten. Five years ago I was finally able to visit Dr. Ted Oliver in South Africa and experience the cape heaths in their native habitat.

Farewell to The Heather Society, but you are always invited to visit me here. Be warned there are no heather here in Palm Desert, California. Dee Daneri

The Heather Society: My contribution to the THS Final Newsletter Richard Canovan

My interest in heaths and heathers rose out of my interest in roses in the 1970s. In 1980 a catalogue recommended some cultivars for different uses. Of particular interest were those providing ground cover as well as much bloom. Perhaps the most outstanding was *Erica vagans* 'Mrs D F Maxwell', which was loved by friends and relatives for its beautiful flowers. Another was *Erica x darleyensis* 'Silberschmelze' as apart from masses of silver white flowers its foliage became highly glaucous in cold weather. I became attached and joined the Society.

However, I quickly learnt that my soil was unsuitable for many cultivars then available being slightly alkaline. I only saw that as a challenge. But my aunt became interested after a walk in the old Saville Garden, Windsor: the family home was on acid London Clay. That created new opportunities and challenges. Her favourite for winter bloom was the new *Erica erigena* 'Irish Dusk' so attractive it was stolen from the garden over Christmas 1986. For summer bloom *Calluna vulgaris* 'Glencoe' was top choice, with its gorgeous double flowers of a delicate pink.

Two species seem to thrive in the Swindon garden – *Erica erigena* and *Erica vagans*. With so many beautiful cultivars I tried to make the best of them. The picture taken in September this year shows two *Erica vagans* cultivars 'Yellow John' in the foreground with 'Ida M Britten' behind. To the right is the brilliant *Erica erigena* 'Brian Proudley' with the first flowers of *Erica manipuliflora* 'Ian Cooper', another species with its hybrid that has done so well. That is part of a bed planted after the 2004 Conference with plants supplied by the late David Small who did more than anybody to foster my interest. Another gem is an unnamed *Erica erigena* produced by Kurt Kramer in the early 1990s. I have tried with success several other species and hybrids such as *Erica x gaudificans* and *Erica kramerii*. But my favourite remains *Erica x griffithsii* 'Jacqueline' as it is not only beautiful but has coped with all the extreme weather conditions of recent years. But it is top of 30. That was a gift after the 2001 Conference that has been treasured.

I attended all but one THS Conferences from 1988 to 2016 learning much and meeting so many people with whom to exchange experiences. From 2008 until today I have also been a member of the North American Heather Society. International Conferences plus field trips to Spain and Ireland and garden tours notably on Bainbridge Island in 2008 widened my interest in all aspects and made me many heather friends.

My challenge is to propagate as many of the rare cultivars and new weed seedlings that appear of merit for posterity so that others can share those not commercially available. A side line is persuading garden centres to try *Erica erigena* cultivars as once established they survive drought and flood and may be benefitting from global warming. But they need to be sold in September for early autumn planting: that is vital as the winter of 1996/97 proved.

Richard Canovan

David Plumridge

Our Heather World

On returning to our home village some 35 years ago from Scotland, we were faced with a large bare lawn crying out for beds and borders. What better to use than heathers and conifers for a low maintenance yet attractive garden? We were introduced to them by my uncle Syd Courtney - a heather society member. We have been so grateful to him for his recommendation.



It must have been a mild winter - unusual for a location over 700ft up in the North East of England - because we started to prepare the outline of the beds in February. As the 'garden boy', I moved the hose pipe and pegs while Rita, the head designer, gave directions from the bedroom window. A good selection of plants was available from local growers and planting soon began. Living on the edge of the heather moors and on sandy acid soil, we were fortunate to be able to plant a full range of heathers.

As the years passed, the slow growing small conifers became less so. Sadly, most had to be removed making it now a predominantly heather garden with rhododendrons on the periphery giving colour in the late spring gap. The garden has truly been a joy with Rita occasionally replacing less favoured cultivars with modern varieties - but we still have originals after all these years. 'Foxhollow', for example, being one of the best.

Our lives have been enriched by not only having a successful garden but more so by the social contacts enabled by heather societies, both here and abroad. We have met and made friends with so many lovely people with happy memories of tours and garden visits in this country, the USA, Canada and Europe.

It so sad to see the demise of our heather groups, but at least heather plants are still available. It's pleasing to see local authorities here in the North East using them in perennial planting schemes - even on roundabouts. These bring their use to the attention of the public and it's good to see them used more and more in people's gardens.

It's pleasing to note that Dave Brown will be keeping the web site growing. It's a great source of information for the public and I was pleased to 'plug' it recently on Radio Newcastle when I was invited to talk about my favourite plants in their gardening programme.

Finally, we must thank the stalwarts of heather societies, here and abroad for their dedication and hard work over the years which has enhanced the gardening enjoyment and experience of so many.

David Plumridge



Linda Salt

I attach a photo of myself, taken recently at Wisley, and another showing my mature (or overgrown) heather garden.

The heathers at home have taken second priority to the vegetable garden in recent years, but I have been inspired by visiting Wisley, since July, to do something about them in 2021.



With best wishes, Linda

**Egil Sæle and Anne Lise Grøm, my wife
Heather Society**

North Sea Garden at Nordre Sæle, 5334 Hellesøy, 60 km and 20 bridges northwest of Bergen. Sixteen years ago I started growing heathers in our two acres garden which is part of an old small farm where my ancestors made their living since 1700. The old house is still standing where it was built about 1600. (Dendrochronological examination show that the timber grew from about 1350 to 1550.)My ancestors were what we call fisher-farmers, rowing every week to Bergen with fish alive in floting coffins shaped like small boats. This was always a two days trip. Sheep grazed on the heather moors (norwegian lyng)The forests in our islands, more than a thousand in number in our community, were cut or burnt down more than 2000 years ago, to create pastures.

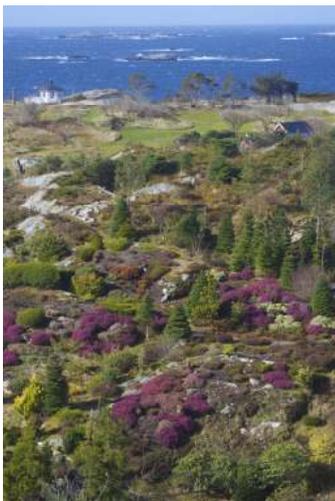
Most of my plants are growing on a slope hill, from the top viewing the North Sea. The species are Erica carnea-darleyensis-cinerea-ciliaris-vagans- mackayana-spiculifolia-stuartii-tetralix-arborea , Calluna, Daboecia and Andromeda.

In the wild we have Calluna, Erica cinerea, Erica tetralix and some Andromeda.

The last years I see more and more of seedlings in the garden, mostly Callunas and E.cinereas but also Daboecias, E.vagans and E. carneas.

If I should mention a favourite among the species, I think it must be Daboecia, with many varieties flowering from June to November in our garden. In January we use to see both Calluna and Erica x darleyensis in flower at the same time.

Every year we have groups visiting the garden, but his year just a few because of covid-19. The visitors also use to attend storytelling and singing in the old cottage where my wife and I present stories about how life was like for the fisher farmers 150 years ago, and we sing traditional songs.



We hope to see some guests from the other side of the North Sea some day!
Best regards

Egil Sæle

Why a heather society?

Ella May Wulff

When you have a group of plants that fills a definite horticultural need, then there is also a need for the exchange of information among people who grow those plants. No one can know it all, and even those who have been gardening all their lives still have much to learn.

There is even more need for the people who become somewhat "expert" in growing the plants to spread the word about them: about how useful they are and how easy to grow, if only a few simple needs are met. Such a group of plants is the heathers, and such a society has been The Heather Society.

For more than twenty-five years, I have benefitted from membership in the society. Although I have not managed to attend many annual conferences, I have been warmly welcomed when I have attended. Other members have generously shared their observations about heathers, their experiences and their expertise with me through our correspondence and through THS publications. I, in turn, have tried to share some of what I have learned about this wonderful group of plants.

It is with great sorrow that I acknowledge the end of this chapter in my life. It has been a good run, but there is ever so much more I have still to learn about heathers. There is a greater need than ever to share our accumulated knowledge with the general gardening public. I hope that the society's website will continue for many years to serve as a source of information about heathers and heather cultivation.



Photo caption:

Twin fawns enjoy snacking on *Daboecia x scotica* 'Silverwells' in the Wulff garden.

Although our local Columbia black tailed deer leave most of the heathers alone (which is one reason I planted a heather garden), they do find *Daboecia* flowers tasty and return to the plants again and again.

Fortunately, the daboecias keep producing flowers all season long, so both the deer and I can enjoy them.

These little guys thought it was great fun to run back and forth through the garden, jumping repeatedly over heather clumps such as *Calluna* 'Fraser's Old Gold' behind the log.

In the foreground is *Erica cinerea* 'Celebration', with *Calluna* 'Fort Bragg' between it and the log.

Daboecia 'Waley's Red' is to the right of the log. The deer nibble flowers on that, too, but 'Silverwells' is their absolute favourite.

I am truly sorry that THS will be no longer, but I hope that the re-structured society and the website will endure for many years longer. Please keep in touch.

Wishing you all health and safety in these trying times,

Ella May

From: Audrey Sprague

<a.sprague@btinternet.com>
Subject: Last Newsletter

In memory of David: he was determined to have a little heather garden here in Exmouth, although he had to dig out the clay. Here it is, four years after our visit to a local heather specialist
My very best wishes to all our old friends in the Heather Society,
Happy memories,
AUDREY (Sprague)



Our best wishes to possibly our oldest member John Plowman and wish him a speedy recovery as we also send our best wishes to Eileen Petterson

A VERY FOND FAREWELL

Geoffrey Yates

Jennifer and I joined the Heather Society when it was first formed in the 1960's with a very strong southern bias but our more active involvement began when John Ardron and Peter Vickers from Sheffield formed a Northern Group based on Harlow Carr which attracted well over 60 members from a wide area as far afield as Nottingham, Birkenhead, Tyneside, Scotland and Cumbria who met regularly throughout the year at Harlow Carr with tremendous support of the then Superintendent Geoffrey Smith who was a heather fan himself. Geoffrey was an outstanding contributor to the development of the gardens at Harlow Carr working with a very small team and on a very small budget and he became one of the outstanding radio and television Garden presenters of all time. He gave tremendous support to the Heather Society Northern Group in setting up the trial which was a great success both in establishing a unique collection of heathers and also the colour chart.

When the project began the popularity of heathers was rising and the confusion over names especially amongst non specialist nurseries was widespread. As an example plants of Erica vagans 'Mrs D.F.Maxwell' bought from more than 10 nurseries were all different in flower colour and the same problem was repeated with many other cultivars. Fortunately P.S.Patrick who worked at the famous Maxwell & Beale nursery in the 1930's could remember where original plantings of the 'true' 'Mrs D.F.Maxwell' were made and the Northern Group were able to obtain true cuttings. The same experience applied to many cultivars and so many elder statesmen in the World of Heather's such as P.S.Patrick, Fred Chapple and many nurserymen in all parts of the United Kingdom were able to assist in the provision of true cultivars. One 'hobby' nurseryman in Cheshire who had been an avid collector of new cultivars throughout the 1930's and 1940's was a wonderful source of plants. Many members of the Northern Group pursued original sources of cultivars and obtained plants for the collection.

The outcome of all this effort was almost certainly the most accurate collection possible and from this a very thorough assessment was made of the best garden varieties to recommend.

Although there were many small nurseries specialising in heather's all over the United Kingdom as well as many larger nurseries who included a good selection of cultivars, remember that we were before the days of garden centres as we know them today.

Every nursery, large or small, had staff who knew the plants and could offer reliable advice to customers. John F.Letts established his Foxhollow garden and nursery which set a style of planting and all year round colour provided by heather's and dwarf conifers. Adrian Bloom planted in a similar style at his Bressingham garden and this type of year round colour from heather's became a justifiably very popular theme. Very sadly the modern garden presenters and writers are besotted with perennials and grasses and even totally ignore winter flowering heather's when presenting a programme from Adrian Blooms garden on Winter colour. This philosophy is a great loss to modern day gardeners as the John Letts style of garden is still the most colourful, easily managed and attractive for year round colour.

Please forgive my forgetting a few names but at 90 years old much of the detail becomes less clear, but I know exactly what is going to be the most popular style of gardening in years to come and heather's will enjoy a great revival. Geoffrey Yates

Jennifer would like her name added to the contribution please as in the days of the trials she spent a lot of time at Harlow Carr involved with the planting and recording. and suggests that I should have clarified that Foxhollow was at Windlesham in Surrey and Adrian Bloom in Norfolk.

In those days we lived in Nottingham and I had become a heather collector as a result of a water feature we built in our garden with several levels with the water coming down a series of falls the top part of which was planted with heather's like Derbyshire moorland.

We started propagating heather's for charity plant stalls at various functions held in our locality to raise funds for a new village hall and church - both very successful.

We started Tabramhill Gardens as a result of a nurseryman friend saying 'if you can grow heather's like that you had better start growing them for us'

We did that mainly to give our part-time gardener a full time job and from there we grew to an output of 500,000 plants a year plus another 500,000 rooted cuttings which we sold to Blooms of Bressingham, and many of the other large nurseries and local authorities mainly because we had large borders with a heather stock bed collection of around 1000 cultivars. All this happened over a period of about 10/12 years which just shows how popular heather's were.

The situation in Holland and Germany was very similar although in Germany they were treated like bedding plants for winter use especially and Kurt Kramer and others developed that trade whilst in Holland Zwijnenburg was the leading light with many other wholesale growers cashing in. We used to go over and see them all yearly and many of them visited us. Good for you keeping the flag flying.

Best wishes. Geoff Yates

Daphne Everett

The demise of the Society has brought back so many memories that my contribution is of just one. So - a sad goodbye to the Heather Society - a big part of my life for the last fifty years, and so many lovely memories of people and places. When we met up every year it was like meeting up with members of an extended family.

As we have all been asked to contribute something for this final Newsletter, I thought I would share just one memory which I hope will make you smile - our first Conference, in Edinburgh, in 1981.

It was a memorable beginning! A young family and a budding mail-order heather business had prevented us attending before. We had naively thought that with a mail-order business, our free time would be our own, but that didn't work, as Inquisitive customers would seek us out any times of the day and weekends.

The day we were to travel, Maurice and I had been attending a Conference in Birmingham, with a dash to the station at the end to catch the train to Edinburgh. Seeing a lot of sandwiches left-over from the Conference lunch, I packed some to take with us in case of need.

The train eventually arrived very late at Birmingham as gales had brought the power lines down on to the rails somewhere before Edinburgh. The passengers on board had been off-loaded onto coaches to complete their journey, and the train eventually headed back to Birmingham.

Unfortunately, the restaurant and snack trolley meals for the return journey were still sitting on Edinburgh station.

So, with the power lines fixed, a very late train set off for Edinburgh again, with a load of hungry passengers on board. What good thinking to have packed those sandwiches you say! Absolutely!

However, not such good thinking to have left them in the boot of the car back in Birmingham!

Our fellow travellers shared a couple of packets of crisps with us on the journey.

We eventually arrived at the Conference venue in Edinburgh in the early hours of the morning and were very, very relieved to find we hadn't been locked out.

Daphne Everett



Mike Pirie

The photo is of me on fieldwork, collecting *Ericas* in the Western Cape in 2019. I have been doing systematic research on the amazing diversity of the genus since 2008, and am now continuing that work as curator at the Bergen University Gardens in Norway. Current projects include phylogenomics of *Erica* (supported generously in part by THS) and helping to establish an international conservation consortium to preserve threatened species.

I and my colleagues particularly in South Africa and Germany have been analysing DNA sequence data since the start of our project to better understand the relationships between *Erica* species.

Sequencing technologies have improved a great deal in recent years, and we are now able to use so-call "next generation" or "high

throughput" sequencing to look closer at the thorniest remaining challenges: the species complexes, hybrids, and other confusing patterns and processes, ancient and ongoing, that lie behind the diversity of species we see today. Rather than sequencing the entire genomes of *Erica* species and populations (which is still too expensive time consuming), the work that THS is now supporting involves a technique known as "hybrid enrichment" to sequence lots of carefully selected parts of the genome to compare across different individuals.

We choose parts of the genome that might show for example, when hybrids have inherited genes from parent plants of different species. We will keep you up to date with progress!

Mike Pirie Råtun 32 5239 Rådalen Norway

Developing the Heather Beds at Holehird Gardens

The Lakeland Horticultural Society took over the management of the 12-acre Holehird Gardens in 1969. The first heather beds were established at Holehird in the early 1970s and since then the number of beds has increased to nine. An important feature of the Gardens is that they are managed and maintained entirely by volunteers. Currently the heather team, responsible for all nine beds, has four volunteer gardeners.

The Heather Society has been instrumental in several developments in the Gardens in recent years. The first arose in 2011 when the Heather Society held its Annual Gathering in the Lake District and included a visit to Holehird to view the summer heather beds. The visit was a great success and afterwards the chairman of the Society, who runs a specialist heather nursery, suggested that Holehird might hold a National Collection of *Daboecia*. This suggestion was greeted with great enthusiasm and, after passing the Plant Heritage selection procedure, national collection status was achieved three years later, in 2014. Currently the collection holds 66 cultivars but more are always being sought: if anyone reading this article has any new or recent cultivars, please get in touch so that they can be added to the collection (email: enquiries@holehirdgardens.org.uk).

In 2018 the *Daboecia* collection received a boost from the Heather Society in the form of funding to renew the older plants. In recent years the collection has suffered from early summer droughts during which some heathers have died; others have become woody over the years and are flowering less well. Some new plants have already been purchased and are being grown on before planting out as replacements in the show beds in the main area of the Gardens.

A second tranche of funding from the Heather Society has transformed two of the five winter heather beds at Holehird. These are located on a hillside overlooking the car park. They provided a beautiful and colourful display at a time when there were few comparable areas to be seen in the Gardens. However, winter heathers were amongst the most severely affected by the drought of early summer 2018, when there was little or no rain for two months, something usually unheard of in the Lake District, though repeated in 2020. Many of the mature heathers in these two beds died and have now been replaced. Thanks to the generosity of the Heather Society we expect the beds to be back to their former glory in two or three years' time. A third Heather Society funded project is also related to prolonged periods of dry weather not previously expected in the Lake District but now becoming the norm as climate change and global warming impact on the area. The two winter beds described above had no watering system and use of watering cans and hoses was impractical for the long term. Heather Society funding has allowed us to install a fully automated watering system which works at the flick of a switch and is much appreciated by the gardeners as well as the plants! We expect the heathers at Holehird to go from strength to strength and hope that our extensive, imaginative displays will encourage others to appreciate a group of plants which are re-emerging as desirable additions to the nation's gardens.



Kind regards from the Holehird Heather Team: Val Jeffreys, Brenda Leese, Jenny Kelly, Peter Halfpenny.



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