

Daffodil National Collection at Brodie Castle

National Trust for Scotland Maintains Century Old Narcissi Breeds



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Brodie Castle in Winter - *photo by M Woodward*

The development of modern daffodil cultivars involved hard work and careful record keeping over five decades and recovery of old Brodie varieties is still proceeding.

It is appropriate that Brodie Castle should still hold part of the [National Collection](#) of daffodils. Already famed for generations for its flower and vegetable shows, the first exhibition to specialise in daffodils was in 1899. From then on well over four hundred new varieties were bred by Ian Brodie, the 24th laird. It was he, along with two Irish breeders, who created from Wordsworth's much smaller woodland plant the vast and colourful variety of daffodils available today.

Historical Tales

An old photo in a Library album shows a grinning gardener holding up a large bulb. 'This costs more than my year's wages,' is scribbled underneath. '£25,' has been pencilled in separately. That bulb, named 'Fortune', was worth far more in the end because it became the parent of every trumpet daffodil in existence with an orange centre

In a recent tape-recording a lady born in 1905 at Darklass, one of the farms then on the Brodie estate, describes how angry her father had been when as a five-year-old she picked the garden daffodils although she was permitted to gather any other flowers. Her speculation is that the daffodils were illicitly obtained rejects from the castle breeding programme. It is much more likely that this was a new variety being grown on the farm 'up against the wall' to keep it free from cross-fertilisation. Many of the successful surviving varieties still the bear names of other Brodie properties all over Scotland, although there is not one named Darklass. Perhaps Ian Brodie did not consider this cultivar worth persisting with.

If only DNA samples were available to help identify these old varieties. But meticulous breeding records do survive; using these, the National Trust for Scotland has been breeding back many of them and a small selection of surplus bulbs is sold each autumn. In addition old varieties are still being recovered from sources worldwide.

Daffodil Disasters

During the long decades of daffodil breeding at Brodie Castle disasters did happen. One oral history contributor describes how a new gardener's lad from town managed to hoe the budded tops off the emerging bulbs - twice within three weeks. After that he was put on to loading the smokeless coke for fuelling four of the five greenhouses through the coal hole which is still visible in the east wall of the five acre kitchen garden. The hard, heavy shovelling would have made the lad regret his ignorance and carelessness. This garden is no more than a grass field today, apart from where the daffodil breeding is being done.

In a another incident a group of children, wishing to make a toy farmyard, tumbled the bulbs from several separate labelled boxes into one. The irreversible mixing of six years of breeding results earned the oldest child, who confesses she should have known better, two days on bread and water.

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- [Plasterwork Ceilings from Four Centuries at Brodie Castle](#)

Less comprehensible was somebody's inattention when the [National Trust for Scotland](#) took over the castle in 1978. Failure to oversee workers led to all the identifying tags in the breeding plots being pulled up, which destroyed a generation of work.

However, the Trust, assisted by the College of Agriculture at Aberdeen, re-established a breeding programme. Using the meticulous records kept in the past, many old varieties have been reproduced and appeals worldwide have added more to the list. Of the original four hundred plus viable Brodie-bred varieties which were put on the market at least 120 have been reliably recovered.

Covent Garden Sales of Brodie Daffodils With some 25,000 flowers grown each year during his breeding programme, Ian Brodie had to fund the experiments, and how better than by selling the best of the flowers. In the castle today a curious flat wooden box with rope handles is used as an Objects Box of Victorian curiosities for Education visits. On the outside is stamped Brodie Castle, Moray. Children are told that this is the last surviving flower box and had been used for transporting the daffodils from Brodie Castle Station nearby (it no longer exists) to the cities of Britain.

The flowers were picked early in the morning, with the buds barely showing any colour. They were bundled in dozens, then laid in overlapping rows separated by twists of paper, a gross (144) of bunches in each box. After delivery to the station they would be loaded on the fast train and would be on sale in Edinburgh or Glasgow by lunchtime, or Covent Garden in London early the following morning. The boxes were then returned and the process would be repeated until the end of the season.

Since they were unique, Brodie daffodils were much sought after by London housewives and hotels, and graced the rooms of the highest households in the land. Wordsworth's humble woodland flower had come a long way.

Sources. Brodie Castle archives; NTS oral history tapes

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