

The Gibside daffodils kept growing also at Lodge Hall; now also at The Slings  
Daily Mail, Wednesday, April 24, 1991      Daily Mail, Wednesday, April 24, 1996

## BLOOMING AGAIN, THE LONG-LOST DAFFODILS BELOVE BY TRAGIC COUNTESS

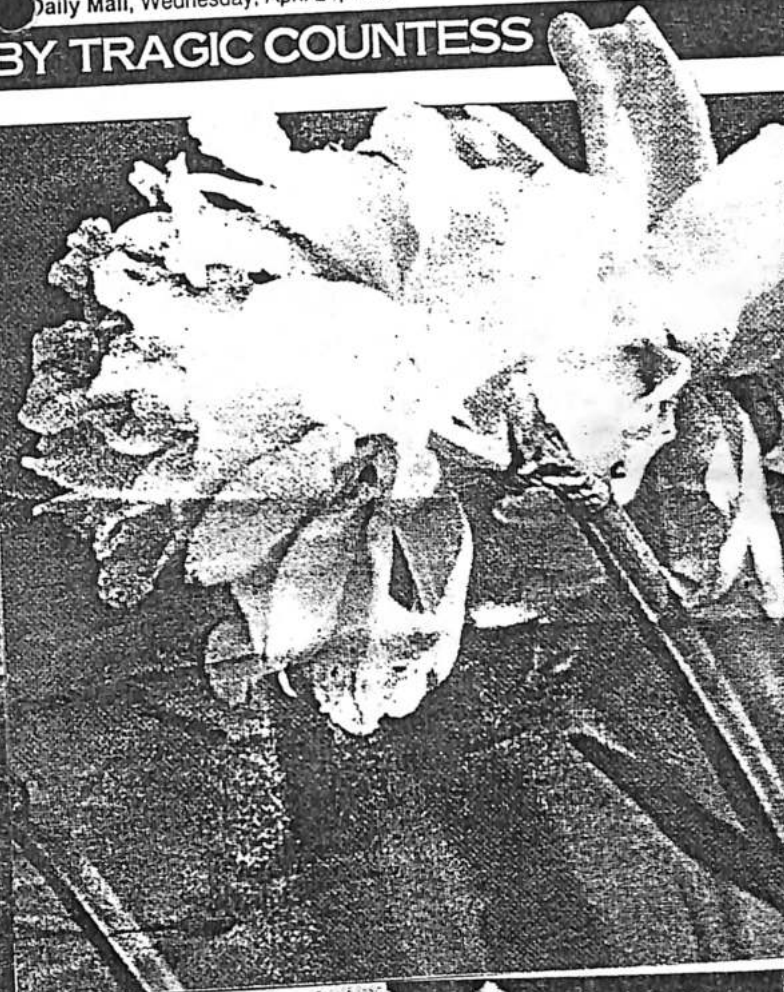
# The crop of gold that was buried for a century

By ROGER SCOTT

THEY were a blaze of colour long before Wordsworth wrote his famous lines immortalising the daffodil.

For generations of visitors, the dazzling display at the Gibside estate in County Durham was an irresistible draw.

When the blooms disappeared in a tangle of neglect late last century, it seemed the Gibside Daffodil had been lost for ever.



The bright yellow daffodils which have sprung up at Gibside (above and right) differ dramatically from a common or garden daffodil (left). There are more petals and

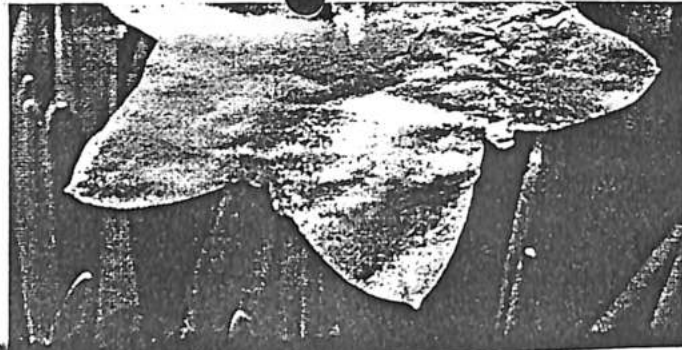


... following a massive clearance programme by the National Trust and the Forestry Commission, the flowers have made a remarkable re-emergence.

After lying dormant in the darkness for so long, the plants burst into colour again this spring as the sun shone down on them for the first time in a century.

The survival story of the daffodils has shed new light on the equally astonishing life of the woman who some believe introduced them to the estate, Mary Eleanor, Countess of Strathmore — known to history as The Unhappy Countess.

She was the daughter of George Bowes, a Whig MP and coalfield owner who was



... instead of a firm centre trumpet there is a clutch of softer petals, almost like a carnation. The Gibside Daffodil is thought to have been developed from the wild *Narcissus pseudoNarcissus*. Horticulturalists have developed 24,000 recorded varieties of daffodil, of which 600 are



great gardens at Gibside.

He died in 1760 but his love of gardening — along with his fortune — passed to Mary Eleanor. She became a keen botanist and kept hothouses in Chelsea, where she nurtured delicate plants from abroad.

It is likely either she or her father introduced the daffodil bulbs to the estate.

In 1767, at the age of 18, Mary Eleanor married the ninth Earl of Strathmore and bore him five children during a nine-year marriage.

But her life took a tragic turn when the Earl died and she fell

in love with a penniless Irish adventurer named Andrew Stoney.

Under the terms of the Bowes will, Stoney took the family name — and began squandering the family fortune.

He treated his wife so cruelly that she was forced to seek the protection of the courts. But he defied an injunction and abducted her in 1787.

As he tried in vain to force her into signing away the remainder of her wealth, he was pursued by court officers and

relatives across the countryside.

After a ten-day chase by stagecoach, he was arrested and thrown into jail.

He spent the rest of his life in prison conducting a fruitless legal battle to gain control of the estate. His notoriety lives on in the expression 'stoney broke'.

Dubbed The Unhappy Countess, Mary Eleanor was left devastated and died in 1800.

Gibside continued in the Bowes family but much of the

estate was sold off in 1874 and the gardens became neglected.

Since the Sixties, the National Trust and Forestry Commission have been gradually taking over management of the estate.

The reappearance of the daffodils has made all that work worthwhile.

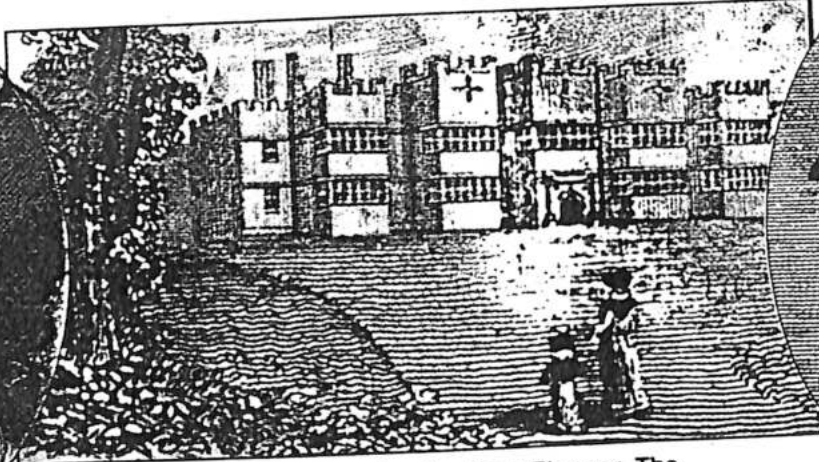
Sally Kingston, registrar of the Royal Horticultural Society's international collection of daffodils, said: 'It was a very exciting moment when I first saw them. I was amazed at how large and vigorous they are.'

'Daffodils have an amazing capacity for staying dormant if they are overgrown and will come again when the light reaches them.'

Jan Dalton, of the Daffodil Society, said: 'It is special because it is one of the earliest varieties to be recorded in literature.'

'It is very hardy and will stand for hundreds of years where it is planted.'

A basket of the Gibside bulbs was presented to Prince Charles when he made a private visit to the stately home — where the Queen Mother's forebears once lived — earlier this



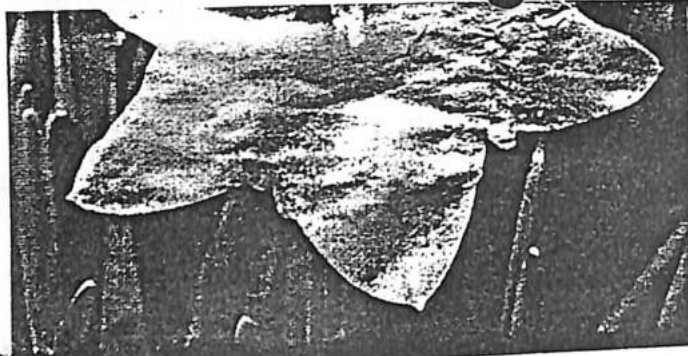
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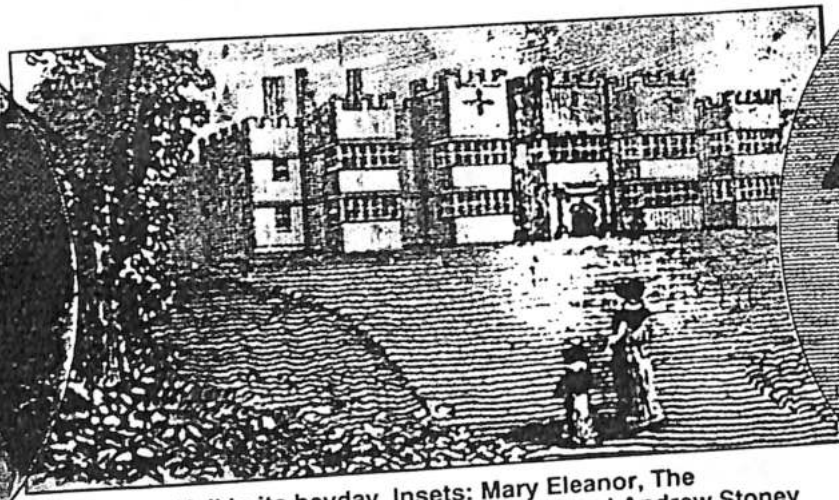
A basket of the Gibside bulbs was presented to Prince Charles when he made a private visit to the stately home — where the Queen Mother's forebears once lived — earlier this

month. It is hoped that the variety, called telamonius plenus, will be flourishing in his garden at Highgrove next spring.

The Gibside Daffodil is thought to have been developed from Narcissus pseudoNarcissus, one of two wild daffodils native to Britain.

Varieties of the Gibside are found in the gardens of some of the country's oldest mansions.

Mrs Kington now wonders whether some of them might in fact be the Old English double daffodil, a similar variety recorded in 17th century literature and thought to have been lost.



Gibside Hall in its heyday. Insets: Mary Eleanor, The Unhappy Countess, and her second husband Andrew Stoney