

Daffodils and Postcards Part 2

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As a child I always wanted a postcard of places that I had visited (and still do today), I never let a postcard be thrown away and I inherited, along with my Nana's button box, a box of old postcards.

So the foundation of my current obsession with daffodil postcards is deep rooted and like Jan Dalton, I also have, if more recently acquired, a reasonably large and wide-ranging collection. Jan's article in the 2008 newsletter showed how the development of the postcard and the daffodil had many parallels. This article is much more of an indulgence in the collection of daffodil postcards with some reference to daffodil conservation and history. Quite simply, I will collect any card that has the hint of a daffodil. I am now gradually scanning and cataloguing the contents of bulging boxes and bursting albums into organized categories. These are mainly Topographical (UK and overseas), Realistic representations (including art) and Greetings (mainly Edwardian/Victorian and Easter cards). Each category has many sub-headings.

By collecting UK topographical cards I aim to have a nationwide record of daffodil plantings. Like Jan, I am indebted to the good ladies of the Women's Institute who had a Daffodil or spring photographic theme some years ago. They photographed daffodils in the landscape across the country and included some significant wild daffodil plantings, local plantings on village greens and unidentified beds and borders in friends and neighbours gardens. At some future point I shall track some of these places down and compare the postcard with the current view. How will the daffodils have fared? Will additional plantings have been made? Or will a new road widening scheme or bus lane have flattened the lot? The humble postcard can be a useful record. Many of these WI cards and this style of photo card are now being reproduced as cards and calendars sold on behalf of cancer and hospice charities that have adopted the daffodil as a symbol of hope. An example is shown in Fig 1 opposite.

Other sources of wild daffodils such as Dymock, Gloucs are captured by Woodland and Wildlife trusts and The National Trust. The National Trust, though tending to concentrate on summer gardens when the properties are open have some excellent cards of spring gardens at places such as Cotehele (Cornwall), Stourhead (Wiltshire) and Nymans (Surrey). As spring holidays and weekend breaks become more popular I hope the postcard producers will record some of the more recent mass daffodil plantings rather than the more common summer bedding.



Fig 1 Wild daffodils at Stopham Sussex - Mrs M Fooks, Duncton W.I

I file the UK cards county by county and it gives a general indication of where daffodils can be seen in abundance. I have few cards for counties such as Bedfordshire, Cheshire, Hertfordshire– does that mean there are fewer daffodils to be seen or that they are not highly regarded? In contrast Yorkshire has by far the largest number (although like canny Yorkshire folk they tend to get value for money and use the same view over and over again in a slightly different style) I am particularly interested in cards from Cumbria and the Lake District because of their daffodil connections and because I visit the area every year (but as yet not in the Spring). Similarly cards from the Isles of Scilly are particularly prized if they show the cultivation and packing of the flowers. I once had an interesting conversation with a postcard dealer who was talking up the price of a card because of the “value” of an old lorry in the foreground whilst I was desperate to acquire it as it showed daffodils being collected in the field. Daffodils must beat lorries any day!



Fig 2 From field to tying house

Despite the daffodil being a national emblem of Wales the daffodil does not feature on many Welsh cards and I have but one depicting naturalised plantings of the Tenby daffodil. Northern Ireland with a long history of producing quality daffodils appears to have few cards. But Scotland fares rather better with some fine plantings in castle grounds although more of the Brodie of Brodie's daffodils would be welcome.

Topographical cards from overseas can be quite useful in pinpointing where there are naturalised plantings. However there seem to be many more dating from Edwardian times than the present day. Having sought daffodil postcards myself on recent trips to Spain I can only conclude that the magnificent site of naturalised fields of daffodils was much more appreciated by early travellers than they are today. Fortunately Swiss, French and also Italian cards are much more available. These can give useful hints as to the location of the flowers because villages and geological features such as mountains (often with their height) and rivers will be named. With card in hand it should still be reasonably easy to narrow down the daffodil location.

Richard Smales wrote a very interesting article about the perfume industry and the daffodil "en Provence" in the 2007 Journal. I was therefore rather pleased to find a postcard showing the Cueillette de narcisses and the rather interesting "chariot" that removes the flower heads from poeticus.

Occasionally a little gem will emerge from a dusty box at a postcard fair. One such card is a faded specimen but much prized by me as it shows daffodils in a Moroccan market. Alas despite many acres of daffodils being grown in the Netherlands most postcards will focus on plantings of tulips or even hyacinths.

Early greetings cards are a delightful source of daffodils. Postcards were commonly sent for birthdays and anniversaries and many have general greetings often accompanied by a verse. Others



Fig 3 Cueillette de Narcisses

will be addressed to a specific relative such as father, sister, daughter, nephew etc and flowers were obviously considered a suitable subject for both sexes. I love to read the messages on the cards. These can often be beautifully written and quite formal even between parent and child or a hasty pencil greeting from girls in service.

Fig 4
Do you ask what the
flowers say

I particularly like the fact that you could send a postcard on the morning of your departure to advise your host of the time of your arrival later that day or to notify them that you could not get the day off after all. Much more civilised than a text message.

More poignant cards are those from much-missed sons at war or those with only a signature and the official censors stamp. I also have a German greetings card on which the sender has boldly written Heil Hitler across the front and drawn a swastika – one that I really should get the full message translated I think.

Roses are probably the most photographed flower on these early greetings cards but there are still plenty with daffodils that are taken from photographs of actual flowers and so help to chart the breeding and development of the daffodil.



Fig 5
Many Happy Returns - hand coloured.

Sometimes these can be luridly embellished with, for example, lurid hand colouring, a bright red outline around a white flower, a liberal sprinkling of glitter or the recipients name in script across the front! There are also many examples of artificial flowers being used. None of these embellishments are an improvement in my opinion but in harder times a little extra effort to make a greeting more special is rather touching.

Daffodils are commonly included on Easter greetings postcards and I have many with some beautifully drawn daffodils as well as photographic reproductions. Crosses, chickens, rabbits, bells and religious texts are common accompaniments but those from Europe tend to be more colourful and often accompanied by symbols of local celebration such as decorated eggs.



Fig8 Mephistopheles by Nan Heath

Botanical paintings are also much prized to chart the history of the daffodil. Many of these are very stiff and formal as befits the style of a precise record of a specimen. However there is a set of 16 cards painted by artist Nan Heath of the Scilly Isles that is more freely drawn that deserves special mention. Nan Heath (1922-1995) sketched and painted daffodil varieties that grew on the Isles of Scilly carefully recording the name of the variety and reproducing some of their special characteristics of colour, form, texture, size and stem., probably drawn in the field without thought of future publication as a lovingly recorded and useful record for identifying daffodils.

Like all collectors I have a growing section under the Miscellaneous category. These include a handsome cow, a large number of German children dressed as rabbits each clutching daffodils, designs for pottery, fabrics, tiffany lamps, assorted members of the Royal family, various forms of transport and fairies. They are of no practical use in recording the history of my favourite flower but they make for an eclectic collection and make me smile.

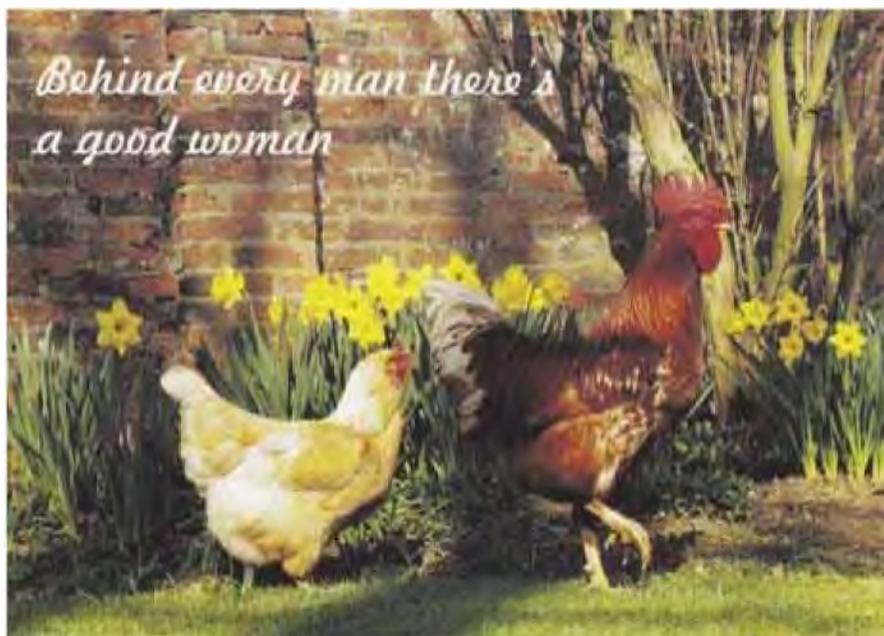


Fig 9 Behind every good man

And what of those lean times when no cards can be found? I switch to my daffodil thimble collection a dust gathering two hundred and twenty five to date, some of beauty and value but many vulgar and tacky and possibly the subject of a future article.