

BULB LOG 03.....18<sup>th</sup> January 2012**Mither Kirk**

Known locally as the 'Mither Kirk' the Church of St Nicholas sits in the centre of Aberdeen. Studying this picture clearly shows a number of periods of development and recent archaeological digs show that there has been a religious building on this site since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The prominence of the site is somewhat lost by centuries of development, including the creation of a viaduct in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (which is the main thoroughfare, Union Street) which have disguised the fact that it sits on the top of a hill.

Look more carefully at the grassy area near the bottom and you will see the reason for taking the picture - a group of Galanthus is in full bloom.

This is a relatively recent planting made around five years ago when a number of bulbs including Narcissus, Crocus and Galanthus were planted here. Many have not survived the tramping and premature cutting of the grass while others simply could not cope with our weather so it is nice to see this group thriving.



## Derelict garden



I have been fascinated watching this derelict garden over many years as I walk past it every day. Originally it was obscured from view by a tall wall, the true height can be seen at the middle right hand edge of the picture. When the wall became unsafe the council forced the owners to repair it and they had a small wall constructed that gave us full view. If you ever wonder what would happen to your patch if you never did any gardening then here is a good guide!



First the weeds would run riot but after several years trees would begin to dominate and as they get big enough they shade out much of the ground and the weeds are kept in check. I would love to plant some Erythronium and Trillium here but I suspect this natural regeneration will come to an abrupt end when a developer gets planning permission to stick a house (or several houses) on the site.



### Bulb Bed

Back in our own garden there are many signs of growth in the bulb bed but none are more advanced than the Colchicum leaves. I have never known them to be this developed so early in the year – obviously it is temperature that stimulates them and in the mild conditions, with a plentiful supply of water, they have grown.



Celmisia and  
Colchicum leaves



### Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin'

What triggers a bulb into growth is a fascinating and complex subject but there can be little doubt that cold holds them back from flowering.

Also it has to be the ground temperature more than the air temperature that stimulates the growth. Some plants are also more conditioned to respond quickly and among the fastest to respond is Iris 'Katherine Hodgkin'. It will shoot up and flower in a few days if conditions are right but this is the earliest I can remember it appearing.

### Narcissus bulbocodium

On the other hand I do not normally expect to see Narcissus bulbocodium flowering this early in the open garden. The forms we have planted out tend to be the ones that flower later so I am somewhat surprised to see some in flower now.

The one thing I should add is that these are self seeded from the original plantings I made so there will be variability in both look and tolerance of conditions in the seedlings. This variation will include when the individuals will come into flower subject to the ambient conditions.



### **Narcissus bulbocodium**

This one that has opened so early in the garden also has a prominent green marking along the back of the petals and a good deep yellow corona.

You will always find that flowers that develop in the open air will have more intense colour than the same clones would if they had been grown under glass.



### **Narcissus bulbocodium**

One of the advantages of growing them under glass is it allows greater scrutiny of the development. The next sequence of pictures is looking at the different stages as a Narcissus bulbocodium flower opens – I want you to look closely and see what is there.



## **Narcissus bulbocodium**

The stigma protrudes from the still folded flower and this detail shows that it is clearly receptive to being pollinated even at this stage.

Also I want to point out that the many small hair like structures that cover the stigma are also evident on the ends of the petals.

I have observed this feature on the flowers of many bulbs such as Fritillaria but have never been able to understand exactly the purpose they serve.



## **Narcissus bulbocodium**

Like the wings of a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis the neatly folded corona gradually unfurls to form the lovely funnel shaped corona.

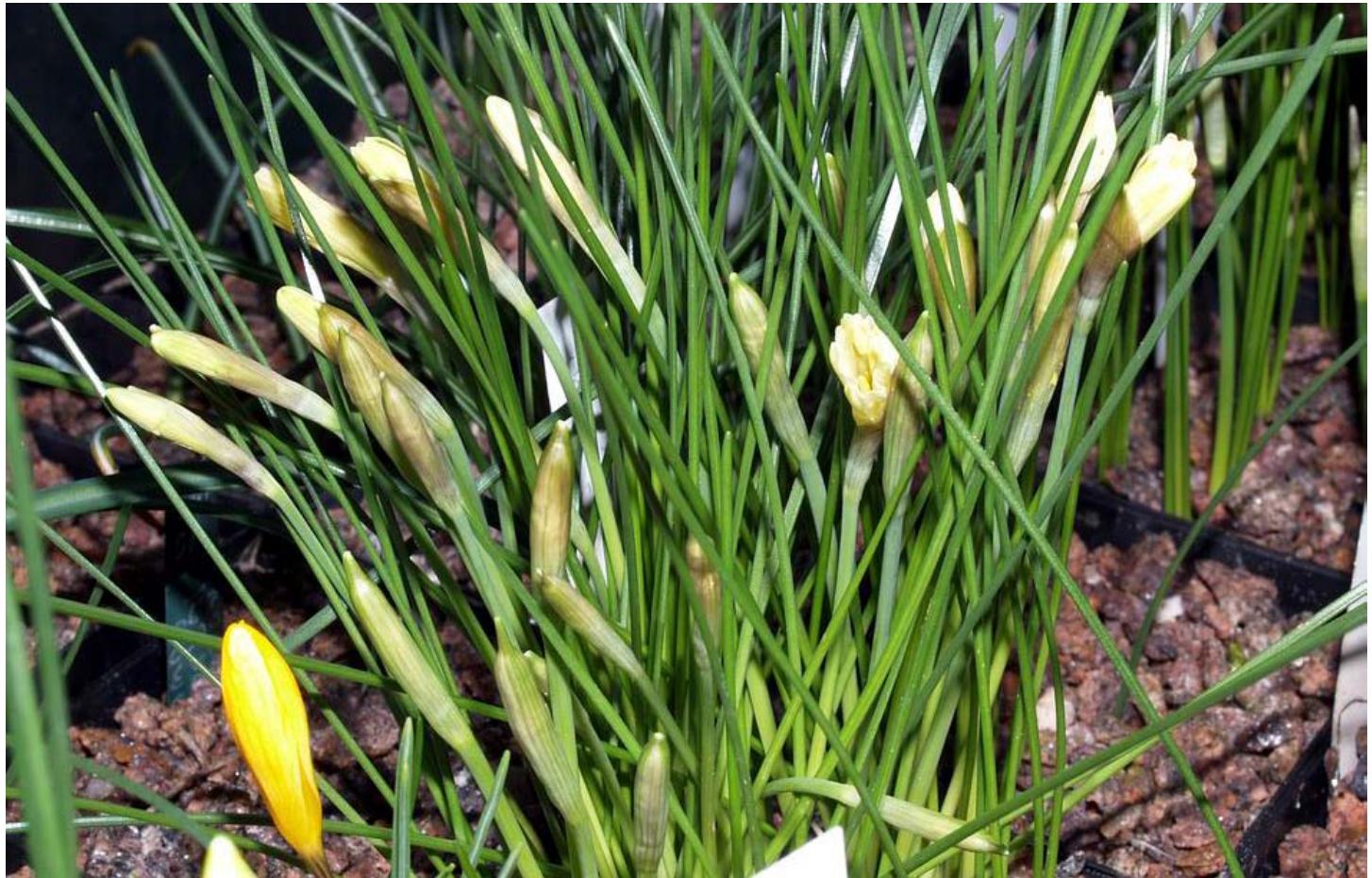


### **Narcissus bulbocodium**

This is the same clone but an older flower to show how the colour of the corona sometimes fades out after a few days to match the colour of the petals.



The flower stems of Narcissus 'Don Stead' dip down as the freezing conditions hinder the uptake of water.



### Narcissus 'Don Stead'

Another pot of Narcissus 'Don Stead' is still in bud but illustrates well how many flowering stems (30) you can get from a 7cm pot of bulbs if you get the feeding and watering correct. I will of course highlight my regime as we move through the season but for now it is important to maintain reasonable levels of moisture to sustain the plants. In freezing conditions I never water but when we have sunny days I will water where necessary.



This chance juxtaposition illustrates well the colour variation that seedlings from this group can have.



### **Narcissus romieuxii**

If you look at the stigma of this Narcissus romieuxii you will notice that it is laden with pollen. I have not fertilised this plant so even though I have not observed any insects something has pollinated this flower.



**Crocus chrysanthus**



**Crocus civijicci**

A few Crocus are starting to show colour now a wild raised seedling which at this stage I suspect is Crocus chrysanthus and the first deep yellow Crocus civijicci appears in a frame.



I have moved **Eranthis pinnatifida** from an open frame to a bulb house partly to protect the emerging flowers from physical damage and slugs but mostly so that I can enjoy their stunning beauty which, as the picture below shows, is revealed even before the flowers are fully formed



**Eranthis pinnatifida**



The final two pictures for this week show that the second year seedling leaves of ***Fritillaria chitralensis*** emerge at exactly the same time as the shoots of the mature plants poke through. Ignore the stray Narcissus seedling!

