Extract from "THE HISTORY AND THE PROPERTIES OF THE ENGLISH FLORIST'S TULIP"
a lecture "delivered at the Great Tulip Conference of The Royal National Tulip Society on May 12, 1897" by J. W. Bentley.

Properties of the Tulip

The tulip is a bulbous plant, perfectly hardy, and of easy cultivation. The Florist variety differs from the Dutch Early in being larger, growing as a rule much taller, and blooming about three weeks later. Rules governing the properties of the tulip which are laid down by growers, although they may appear arbitrary and narrow, have all been suggested by the capacity the flower has shown to come up to them, and in my opinion need no justification. I will state briefly what constitutes excellence in a tulip. It must have a stem strong enough to support the flower upright, the flower must have six petals all equal in size and shape, and the flower when expanded should resemble the half of a hollow ball. The petals should be rounded on the top and not pointed, and they should fit closely together to make a semicircular cup. The ground colour should be either clear yellow or clear white, the anthers bold and black, and the base - as that portion inside the flower immediately surrounding the ovary is called - should be a stainless circle of pure white or yellow.

Tulips are divided into three classes, which are technically known as Roses, Byblœmens, and Bizarres. Roses are white ground tulips marked or coloured with some shade of rose, scarlet, crimson, or red. Byblœmens are also white ground flowers, the marking colour being some shade of purple or black. The nearer the Rose class approaches to scarlet, and the Byblœmen to deep purple or black, the better. The Bizarres are yellow ground flowers marked with shades of orange, scarlet, brown, and black. They are more numerous, and generally speaking more vigorous growers than the white ground classes.

These classes are subdivided again into breeders or mother-tulips, as the Dutch call them, feathered flowers and flamed flowers.

The breeder is the seedling form of the tulip. It has no stripes or markings, and is coloured with one uniform shade of colour. The tulip has a power which no other flower, so far as I am aware, possesses, of breaking, or rectifying, as it is called. This means that some year or other a breeder blooms all variegated or striped and edged with colour, instead of the old self-colour it possessed before. The foliage also, which in a breeder is a solid shade of green, becomes mottled and remains so ever after. Those varieties which break into either of the forms esteemed by the growers are valued, but many varieties which are good as breeders invariably break into other nondescript forms, and are known as bad breakers. A breeder is said to break feathered when the marking colour is confined to the edges of the petals only; any break or skip in this marking, or the presence of colour on any other portion of the petals than the edge, are considered faults. When a breeder breaks flamed, it has, in addition to the feathering round the edge, a central pillar or beam of colour in each petal, which throws off branches uniting gracefully with the feathering colour on the edges. The beam should be distinct and not broken by intrusive ground colour, and the branches should be fine and distinct, allowing the ground colour to be seen between them. The tulip increases by offsets, and the offsets, partaking of the character of their parents, perpetuate it; and the offsets of a good break become what is known as a good strain of any particular variety. It is of the utmost importance, in procuring tulips, to obtain good strains; the name alone is of small value, as a good variety often breaks badly, and such breaks should be destroyed as valueless.