

The Friends of Osterley Park

In
support
of the
National Trust



NEWSLETTER

Issue 120 Spring 2021 £1 (free to members)



Magnolias at Osterley



Dear Friends

Welcome to our 120th Newsletter.

The arrival of spring will bring new hope and we trust that the plans for coming out of lockdown will be successful. Everyone is hoping that life can get back to some form of normality for families, workplaces and schools. I'm sure that nearly all the Friends have had their first vaccination. I had mine in January and am waiting for a date for the second one.

Our last Newsletter included the booking form for our 2021 holiday to Newcastle, arranged by Douglas, to take place in August (hopefully). Vik and Margaret have been planning Coach Trips and visits after June. We hope that our Coffee Mornings will continue so that we can again meet on a regular basis at Osterley.

We have yet to hear from the National Trust about their plans for fully reopening. Osterley Park has remained open for walkers, cyclists and booked car park places. We have been up quite regularly, getting takeaway coffees from the Stables Café and walking in the gardens. The garden team, led by Andy Eddy, are to be congratulated on keeping the gardens so full of interest. During this last month, there has been an abundance of daffodils throughout the park.

It was wonderful to see Carol Kirkwood, BBC Breakfast weather presenter, doing the forecast on Easter Saturday from Osterley Park.

Thank you for renewing your membership. Your support will help us work with Neil Cole, General Manager, and the property to help meet their needs for the future.

Do continue to take care.

John

As you may expect, everything about UK holidays is uncertain. But it's looking good.

I haven't been able to book any of our planned visits yet, but it's expected that the National Trust and other similar sites will open from mid-May / mid-June so I'll book each as soon as I can then.

Our accommodation at Newcastle Travelodge is reserved with a deposit. Currently, they are not doing breakfast, but I anticipate this will change in June. Our coach is booked. It's 48 seats and as I expect we will be 25-30 people, there should be a number of 'single' seats. Train bookings are currently unavailable more than 8 weeks ahead (used to be 13-26 weeks), but I'll book when I can, probably mid-June.

I hope everyone has had their first "jab" (I had mine in January) and some may already have had their second or will soon (mine is due mid-April).

Overall (to misquote Professor Van Tam), we are in dark, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel which we are approaching (hope it isn't a train about to run us down).

In the spirit of optimism, I am personally planning a European holiday after September.

100 Club

Douglas Craik

Again, we have not yet been able to have a draw this year, but I expect this will be possible soon.

I'm pleased that several members have made their first, or added an additional subscription, to the Club.

One of the loveliest aspects of being Head Gardener at Osterley is being able to shape the way the garden looks and how our visitors enjoy it. There weren't many special plants when I first came here, apart from the wonderful tree collection, so I have tried to build up a collection of interesting and beautiful species that are historically accurate or ones that fit with the 'spirit of place'.

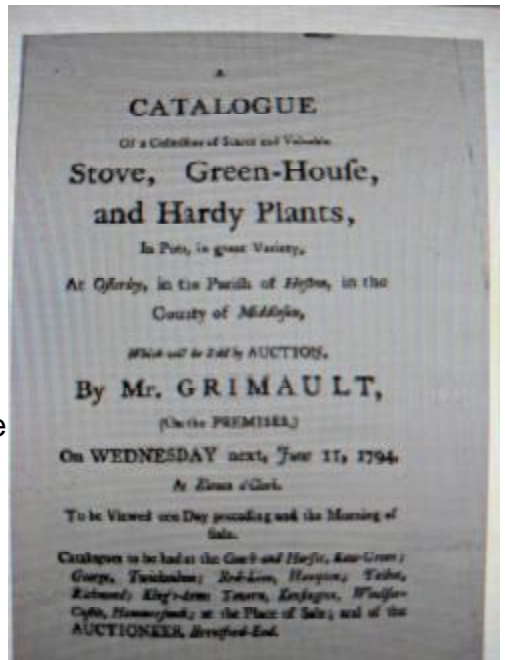
For instance, we now have a huge range of plants in large and small terracotta pots for display in the Garden House. Most of these we know to have been grown here in the 18th century due to a plant sale that was held after Mrs Child's death when her carefully built up collection was dispersed. We still have the catalogue of this



sale and it makes for very interesting reading – if you can decipher the old Latin/common names for plants that were widely in use at that time. It is however an extremely useful guide for me as Head Gardener to have such a comprehensive list that I can use to trace down plants that were actually here on a specific date. Many of them are surprising and Mrs Child must have had considerable knowledge and/or deep pockets to have built up such a collection. Of course, she may have had a Head Gardener with equal understanding to support her.

Some of the plants on the list look quite modern to our eyes such as olive trees and agaves – plants that are in vogue at the moment but do not appear in any contemporary accounts of the times. Indeed, writers such as Austen et al do not mention such rarities and we think of them as being especially modern due to their architectural form and thus, they could not possibly have been grown in the garden of an English lady in the 18th century!

Now that the Garden House has been fully restored and we 'store' our lemon tree collection under cover in the nursery, we do not heat this building during the winter months. Thus, I now put on display in this space a new collection of winter hardy trees, shrubs, plants and bulbs with winter interest. None of these are specifically 18th century and so we can play around with what is lovely to look at or more importantly, those with scent. As this enclosed space heightens any perfume that they may have, plants such as hyacinths or early jonquil type daffodils are very popular with our visitors.



I have been very lucky as a Head Gardener to have such a building fully restored and still be able to use it for its original purpose – displaying plants – long may it continue.

Coach Trips

Vik Sharma

Hope everyone's keeping safe and well, and has had their first, perhaps even second, Covid-19 jab. Given the current circumstances, we would be lucky to have any trips this year. However, I'm hopeful about squeezing in a couple of mini trips later this year in July and September. There's a narrow window of opportunity, but I will be on the case as soon as there's a decent chance to do so, keeping everyone's wellbeing and government guidelines in mind.

Here's a list of key dates, as of today. These might change as time progresses and the situation in Europe evolves – which we need to keep a close eye on – but as soon as there's half a chance of booking a coach trip I shall let you know.

12 April: Non-essential shops open

- Pubs and restaurants can open again from the same date, but only outside, so pub gardens and outdoor dining will be back.
- Groups can gather, but with limits: either up to six people or two households.

17 May: Pubs and restaurants can open indoors

- But people must order, eat and drink while seated. Remaining outdoor entertainment, such as outdoor theatres and cinemas can open.
- Groups of up to six people and two households will be allowed to meet indoors, so people can enter each other's homes.
- Hotels and B&Bs can open, as can indoor sports and gym classes.

21 June: As close to normal as possible with all legal limits on social contact lifted.

Membership update

Keith Rookledge

A big thank you to those of you who have renewed your subscriptions to the Friends. So far, some 45 of you have renewed and we know when all the Standing Orders come in at the end of this month there will be a lot more. Last year, we had some 225 members. However, there were very few newcomers (understandable with the lockdowns). So, if you have friends, please encourage them to join in their own right.

We are grateful to those of you who have applied Gift Aid to your membership and also to those of you who have made a donation to the Friends with your renewal.

While we are quite happy to accept cheques, a Standing Order could make things easier, both for you and us. I have to visit the bank to pay in the cheques, not an issue, but a bit more difficult in this new normal!

Finally, we have donated some £300 for the purchase of seeds for the garden. As the National Trust has curtailed all initiatives, we await to see what else we can help with.

The National Trust is featuring “Blossom Season” this spring by inviting members to take part in ‘Blossom Watch’, sending in their pictures of spring flowers and trees.

This inspired me to feature one of the most splendid floral trees in the world which thrives at Osterley – the Magnolia. Andy Eddy, Head Gardener at Osterley has helped with photos and information on Osterley's magnificent examples.

So how did this flowering tree, found on the southeast coast of North America and in China and India along the tropic of Capricorn, get its name? Swedish doctor Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) set up a system for naming plants. The Linnean Society was founded in London in 1787 and holds all his papers. When asked to name this specimen from the USA, he called it after another medical doctor and plant collector, Pierre Magnol (1638-1715) from Montpellier in France. He may have seen the first plants to arrive from America in the 1680s called Virginia after the British settlement there. Barbara Oozeerally, Jim Gardiner and Stephen Spongberg's book published by Kew Gardens called '*Magnolias in Art & Cultivation*' says that Henry Compton, Bishop of London (1632-1713) and gardener, sent John Bannister to the American colonies as a missionary with the additional task of sending him plants growing in America. Magnolia Virginia was one of the small trees sent. Magnolia takes about 25 years to grow from seed and about five years to flower when a tree – so Bannister must have sent a tree.

At Osterley we have five varieties: Magnolia Grandiflora or Southern Magnolia, Magnolia Tripetala or Umbrella Tree, Magnolia Campbellii, Magnolia Soulangeana and Magnolia Sprengeri.

In '*The Origin of Plants. The People and Plants that Have Shaped Britain's Garden History*' by Maggie Campbell-Culver, she describes Magnolia Grandiflora as “an aristocrat with exquisite manners.” It arrived from America in 1734 and was initially known as the laurel magnolia because of the dark, glossy evergreen leaves.

Our Quaker friend, John Bartram of Philadelphia who featured in a previous newsletter, is credited with finding this variety at Bulls Bay, South Carolina, thus it is called the Bulls Bay or Southern Magnolia. The perfumed flowers are at least 12 inches across and blossom from early spring into September. We know that a Magnolia Grandiflora was growing in Sir Charles Wager's garden at Parsons Green in 1737 because artist Georg Dionysius Ehret walked from Chelsea to Parsons Green daily to watch the Magnolia Grandiflora bloom and to paint it as it came into flower. Later, another magnolia was named Ehretia after him.

At Osterley, five huge and magnificent white flowered Magnolia Grandiflora grow up the walls at the back of the house overlooking the Great Meadow. These were severely pruned to keep their shape on the walls last year so may not have many flowers in 2021. They feature on the cover. Admire another Grandiflora which can be found in Dickie's Border and should put on a fine show with many flowers.



Tripetala Magnolia is also known as the Umbrella Tree because leaves spread from the end of the branch opening like an umbrella. It was one of the first magnolias introduced into Britain by John Bartram in 1752 and can be seen in the American Border planted during the restoration in 2008.

The Eastern Magnolia was introduced by Sir Joseph Banks during the 1780s. It was seen by Richard Salisbury, Secretary of the newly-founded Horticultural Society, in 1806 as looking like “a naked Walnut Tree with a lily at the end of each branch,” which bloomed in early spring. A ‘lily tree’ was planted in Hertfordshire in 1801 and in 25 years grew to be 6 metres, about 20 ft. tall bearing more than 900 blossoms at a time. What a flowering tree!

Details from '*Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*' by W.J. Bean, 7th ed. John Murray, 1951.

In the magnolia beds by the gate entrance to the walled garden, you can see two beautiful magnolias. One is *Soulangeana*, named for Chevalier Étienne Soulange-Bodin, aide to Napoleon, who lived near Paris and founded the French Royal Institute of Horticulture. Another can be found in the Arboretum. This was the most popular variety grown in Europe and has light pink 3 to 6 inch blooms from April to June. To make this saucer or bowl flowered variety, Soulange-Bodin crossed two Chinese magnolias, *Desnuda* and *Liliiflora*, by using pollen from *Liliiflora* on *Desnuda*.



Our *Soulangeana* hybrid tree has spectacular flowers in pink but can also have yellow flowers. It was announced in the Linnean Society of Paris in 1827. Both varieties were grown independently for the Emperor of China from the 7th century to provide flowers both inside and outside rooms in the Forbidden Palace and sacred temples to Buddha.

Magnolia Campbellii, known as the Queen of Magnolias, is a native of the Himalayas first seen in Nepal and named by Sir Joseph Hooker in 1855 for the governor of the area, Archibald Campbell.

Although, it was first noted and described for western eyes by William Griffith, a surgeon working for The East India Company in Bhutan in 1838 as a stunning cloud of white flowers. Hooker later describes the vibrant pink variety which we have at Osterley in The Arboretum. This Queen can grow to 150 ft. high and has deep rose to crimson coloured flowers 4 to 5 inches across in bloom from February to April. It prefers to live at 8 to 10,000 feet in a cool climate. This is Andy's picture of this colourful young tree.

Magnolia Sprengeri Diva found in Hubei and Sichuan in China was brought from there by Ernest Henry Wilson, a botanist who worked at Kew but was recommended by his boss Sir William Thiselton-Dyer to Veitch & Company of Chelsea who were looking for a young man to travel abroad collecting plants for them. He went to China from 1899 to



1902 and again from 1903 to 1905 via the United States where he met Charles Sprague Sargent, director of the Arnold Arboretum. On Sargent's retirement, Wilson was made the director. He returned with amazing plants and seeds including this Diva on his first trip but it is named by Italian missionary Silvestri who collected it again in 1912. It has rosy carmine flowers or pink / white flowers. At Osterley, it can be seen growing behind the Robert Adam Garden House.

The magnolia, a flowering tree surrounded by superlatives: aristocrat, queen, diva, has given pleasure around the world to kings, queens, mughals, Chinese and European emperors plus everyone who has enjoyed the splendour of its magnificent scented blossoms.

We have seen Andy's beautiful examples of Osterley's exquisite flowering magnolias – now it's your turn! Walk around Osterley Park and send your photos of our perfect spring blossoms to the National Trust to show off the pleasure we take in these exceptional flowering trees.

Our Financial Year ends on the 31st of December (Hogmanay, not a good time for a Scotsman to balance books - or anything else). The full figures will be in our next AGM papers, but the headlines (rounded) are:

Income of £4,000 (2019 was £12,000), mainly membership subscriptions and 100 Club donations but £130 (2019 £453) from Coffee Mornings at the start of the year and similarly £340 (£1,600) from “buggy” donations with individual donations from members of near £300, the same as 2019. Our Gift Aid income dropped to £600 (£1,000) as much of it came from buggy collections.

Our main expenses were £350, about the same as 2019, almost all was Newsletter printing and postage.

This allowed us to make donations to the National Trust of £3,200 (£11,300). £300 (£145) to the garden flower growing but nothing to buggy maintenance (which hadn't been in use anyway) and costume makers who were also dormant (the activity not the people).

£3,000 (£5,000) went to our Reserve Account held by The Trust for future use. No doubt there will be many demands when the House fully re-opens and we stand ready to respond.

Friends events and excursions

Please note: due to the coronavirus, all of our events and excursions have been cancelled for now, apart from the planned 2021 holiday from 9-14 August (see page 3 for the holiday update). Our planned visit to Burgh House will happen once their tours likely start again from July onwards. We're waiting to hear back from Watermen and Lightermen Hall about when we can reschedule our visit.

We're continually reviewing the situation and hope to advise of rescheduled and new events in the July newsletter, if not before.

Issue	Published in	Contents
Winter	January	Membership renewal, first three Coach Trips and first three London Visits
Spring	April	AGM papers, membership cards
Summer	July	Next three Coach Trips, next three London Visits
Autumn	October	Next Summer Holiday booking

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The 'Friends' website gives you all of the current news, meetings, events, publications, and membership information relating to the work of the Friends of Osterley Park in supporting Osterley House and Park. www.e-voice.org.uk/friendsofosterleypark

Next Newsletter

To be published in July 2021. Any contributions to the Newsletter Editor (editor.foop@gmail.com) by **20th June 2021**.

The Editor may edit contributions as necessary.