



FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026: Issue 113



News from the Director

It has certainly been a very busy period since the last Newsletter with many exciting events ranging from a Murder Mystery to a horrifying Halloween experience in the Undercroft; this involved some all too willing volunteers wishing to take part in the 'Stansted Scare'!

I am very pleased that our Armistice Day Service has become a well-supported event in the Stansted Calendar; my thanks to all who attended and participated and, particularly, to the Field Gun crew who marked the start and the end of the 'Two Minute Silence' with the firing of the gun.

The Armistice Talk 'War & Peas' was delivered by Rear Admiral John and Jenny Lippiett recounting their experiences of the Falklands War while John was serving in the South Atlantic in HMS Ambuscade and Jenny was at home in Westbourne looking after the children. A very poignant talk describing the pressures and anxieties from both angles.

As ever, the Housekeeping staff dressed the magnificent Christmas tree in the Main Hall in a really stunning way and Sasha and Millie created an impressive fir tree shaped structure in the Library consisting of over 400 books! It was such a labour of love that it will probably stay there until next Christmas. A wide range of events kept everyone entertained from the presence of Father



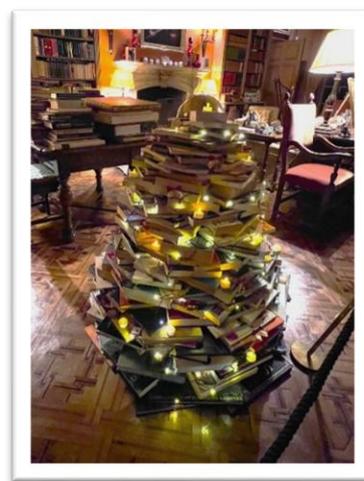
Photo Credit : Robert Godwin



Christmas in the Crypt; donkey rides on the Forecourt, House Tours involving the 'Petworth Voices', a brilliant concert by Peter and Verity Auty and the highly atmospheric production of 'A Christmas Carol' throughout the House.

The Carol Service in the Chapel was well attended being led by the Reverend Christopher Hancock with Richard Barnes on the organ and a composite choir delivering some wonderful accompaniment which, thankfully, distracted from the excessive wafts of Frankincense smoke permeating the Chapel!

On the broader Estate front, the new biomass boiler, installed at great expense, is now up and running and we were very lucky indeed that we were able to conduct this work over the warmer part of the year. Our residential cottages and commercial offices remain fully



let and, hopefully, we will have a measure of stability in this regard in 2026. The aim is to construct 2 commercial units in the Maze Courtyard to meet the growing demand for small businesses wishing to establish themselves at Stansted. A new Visitors' Information Point will be also be constructed with funds provided by FOSP. The footfall passing through the retail elements in the Walled Gardens remains very high and it demonstrates the benefit of being a destination venue which provides a variety of activities.

Our 2026 Events Programme is brimming with lots of enticing options for top class entertainment ranging from The Proms and Open-Air Cinema, to the South Downs Food Festival and our own Summer Festival all of which are guaranteed to raise morale in these testing times!

I am very grateful to the Friends for all that they do to support the Estate, providing energy and verve to the whole affair! We look forward to an exciting 2026 at Stansted Park.

David Bennett



Notes from the Head Forester

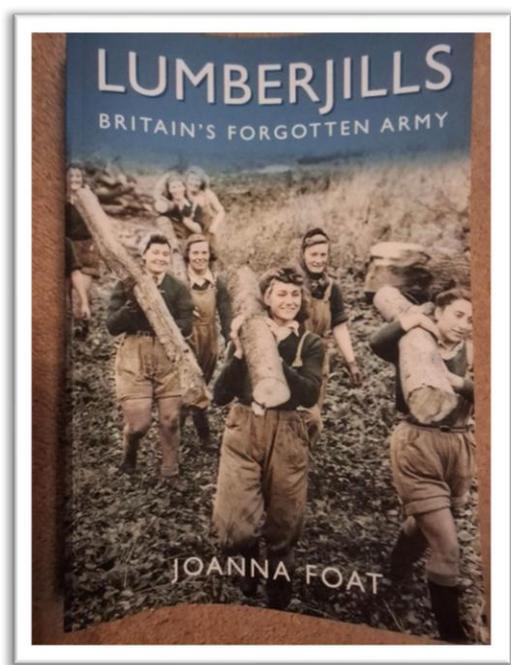
After three planting seasons I put in the last tree of the restocking of Compartment 3 on the 22nd of February. The 4.0ha of spruce crop was felled in August/September 2023 and any good broadleaves that had self-set amongst the original planting were retained for biodiversity and landscape benefit. I cannot find anything in the records as to why a belt of Douglas fir was planted across the width of the original plantation just short of the northern boundary, but we have retained the majority of this as a landscape feature, nesting site for raptors and a source of seed to add natural regeneration amongst the planted trees. There was no ride through this block, so we have added one of 10m width diagonally across the area and along with the rough grass between the trees this has proved attractive to hunting barn owls.

Four blocks of chestnut coppice have been cut by our contractors this winter with extraction of the produce to ride side to be carried out in March when hopefully the ground will be drying up. The renewed popularity of naturally durable chestnut for numerous fencing applications continues which enables us to continue this traditional style of woodland management which alongside the wood, produces numerous wildlife benefits.

A recent task the in-house team have undertaken is the clearance and opening up of the northern end of the Broad Walk lime avenue now that it is twenty five years old which had become rather overgrown. This has enabled a clear view from the top right down to the Main Avenue and out to Southleigh Forest in the distance.



On guided walks through the forest, I often point out the superb crop of Douglas fir towering over part of compartment 8. These trees were planted in 1946 by the Lumberjills, the Women's Timber Corps which was the forestry arm of the Women's Land Army.



One of the presents I received for Christmas was the book *Lumberjills, Britain's Forgotten Army*. I knew a bit of their history and have always admired the enormous contribution women made as my mother was a land girl working on farms in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire throughout the conflict. What the book brought into sharp focus was the sheer back breaking effort, often after little training that these girls put in and at times against prejudice from officials and the traditional woodmen. However, they were soon producing results as good as their male colleagues. In the book, one of them recalls working on the Earl of Bessborough's Stansted Estate where she was felling chestnut coppice to be used once wired together for trackways to land tanks and other vehicles onto the D Day beaches. Another tells of her time clearing the ground after the trees were felled and replanting the area on the Watergate Estate, our neighbours to the east, which was then owned by the G-Plan furniture makers. So, eighty years later these magnificent conifers still stand as testament to the Lumberjills supreme efforts.

Michael Prior

Spring Guided Walks

Wednesday 15th April, 2.00pm - to look at recent work in Oak Copse, meet in the Mansion car park.

Wednesday 20th May, walk theme to be decided, meet as above - more information to come...



Late winter and spring in the garden..

Despite the wet windy weather we have endured over the winter, as we race towards spring the garden greets us with promise of colour and excitement.

Already we have seen our first daffodils and snowdrops. The Hellebores nod with an air of old-fashioned dignity and the deciduous trees begin to show their buds in readiness to be re clothed in a myriad of colour and texture.

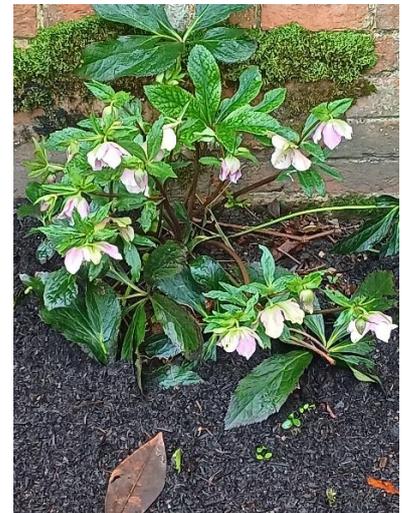
Winter has been a really productive season, despite the previously mentioned wet weather, and we have been able to mulch beds, prune/train climbers and cut back perennials ready for their new growth. Spring will see some plants placed into the borders around the walled garden and seed sowing will begin in February. Some seeds were sown in early winter such as hand collected Sweetpea seeds, Larkspur and Hesperis matronalis (Sweet rocket). These have survived so far, though winter sowing can be fraught with problems such as damping off and hungry mice! However, we seem to be off to a good start by keeping watering to a minimum and using fleece for protection. The Tagetes, Zinnia and Cosmos, grown inhouse last year, worked wonderfully in the central borders up until the first frosts and so this will be attempted again.



A frosty scene



Freshly trained roses



The humble Hellebore

Plants to look out for in the spring include Scilla peruviana, Forsythia, Muscari, Hellebores, Sarcococca confusa, Tulips.

The list is endless but remember to also enjoy the late winter colour and structure provided by plants such as Dogwood (Cornus alba) and Rubus thibetanus.

Jan Atkinson - Contract Gardener

Regular Events

St Paul's Chapel Monthly Prayer Meetings

These will start again on Thursday the 8th January and the first Thursday of each month as before.

Complimentary light refreshments will also be served after the service - tea/coffee/biscuits. Entrance will be via the Pavilion Tearoom, through the Dutch Garden Gate to the Chapel. Everyone is always most welcome; and it would be appreciated by our Housekeeping Team if you can let us know if you are likely to attend so we can make sure we cater for enough people.

Guided Tours of Stansted House



Starting on the 1st February, guided tours will take place throughout the summer. The house opens to the public on the 5th April. Further information regarding these regular events can be had by phoning the Office on 023 9241 2265 Option 5.



and in 2025..

‘Deer in the South East. Their Impact and Management’

a talk by Jody Orchard from the Forestry Commission

On 23rd October we had a talk given by Jody Orchard, the Deer Officer for the South East for the Forestry Commission. An area that included Stansted.

He illustrated very clearly the damage that the deer make to individual trees, both eating new growth and on the bark of established woodland. The damage to crops can be seen quite clearly.

The main breeds of deer seen in our area are Fallow, Roe and Muntjac. Of these the Fallow are most numerous and visible as they move in herds. Roe deer are more solitary and usually seen in pairs Muntjac are more difficult to spot as they are much smaller. and tend to live in dense woodland and scrub.

We learned that whereas the fallow deer gives birth once a year, the muntjac can conceive again a few weeks after giving birth and can give birth to three fawns in two years.

The result being a constant increase in the numbers of these two breeds. This asks the question of how to manage this growing deer population.

One solution is fencing however this could be very expensive. We heard the use of sleeves for new planting can mean as the tree sprouts above the top it makes a tasty snack

and herds running through a new plantation can knock over the sleeves.

Enclosing an area of woodland will always be vulnerable as parts can be knocked down or holed by the deer or other animals



Muntjac Deer

Photo Credit : The British Deer Society

The other management method is culling by shooting. This subject was not covered in any detail, but we learned this is controlled and farmers can organise their own culls in the appropriate season.

It seems therefore that there is no easy way to manage the growth of the deer population, balancing the demands for maintaining the woodland and for the farmers.

The talk was very interesting for us to understand the impact of the deer on the woodland and how we can identify where the deer have been.

Friends Yuletide Tea – Wednesday, 3rd December 2025 @ 3:00pm



Raffle Cake and Raffle Cake Winner



On a cold day in December, 56 Friends came to this year’s Yuletide Tea to enjoy a delightful afternoon of tea and coffee and wine and sandwiches and cake, with background music played on the piano by Vanessa Bowler. There was also a raffle for the delicious looking cake made by Ruth Hyatt.

The house had been decorated for Christmas with the beautifully adorned tree dominating the main hall.

We’d like to say a **big thank you** to everyone who came and to the helpers who gave up their time to make this tea a success.



..and what's next for Friends in 2026?

AGM Wednesday 25 February @ 10.00 am

Do join us at Stansted House for our Annual General Meeting.

The business of the morning is usually fairly brief and afterwards Jess Williams, the Foundation's Visitor and Collection Coordinator, will give a short talk about the Foundation's new projects and plans for the year, and answer any questions raised.

This will be followed by tea, coffee and biscuits.

For catering purposes, could you please telephone the Office on 023 9241 2265 if you're going to join us.

Entrance will be via the North Entrance, through the black automatic gates, bear right and park in front of the House.

We look forward to seeing you.

Special Spring Coffee Morning - Thursday, 26th March @ 10:00am

This special spring event will give you the opportunity to meet old and new Friends in the beautiful surroundings of the Music Room and Main Hall of Stansted House.

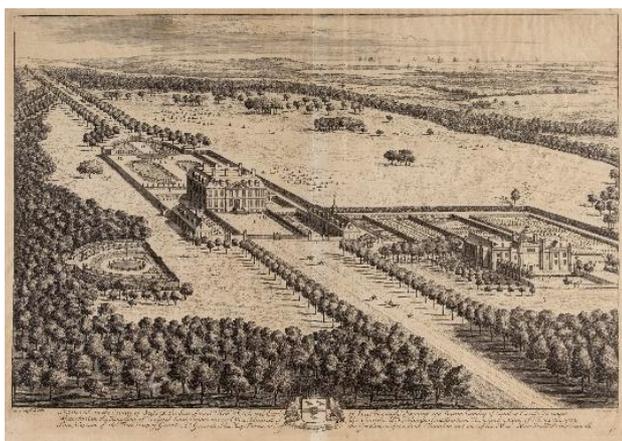
We are fortunate to have our resident pianist, Vanessa Bowler, playing in the Music Room, and we will be serving delicious selection of homemade and bought cakes, and endless cups of coffee (or tea). We can cater for gluten free diets but are unable to cater for other food allergies. Please let us know this when booking.

Members £6.00, non-members £8.00 and to book and pay by card, call the Office on 023 9241 2265, with your Membership Number handy.

Entrance will be via the North Entrance, through the black automatic gates, bear right and park in front of the House.

Again, we look forward to seeing you.

Spring Talk Thursday, 30th April @ 2.00pm



Kip (Johannes, engraver). Stansted in the County of Sussex, c.1710

We are very lucky to have Mark Seaman, Chairman of the Chichester and District Archaeology Society to talk to us on the subject "How True to Reality was the Kip Engraving of Stansted?"

More information to follow...

Visit to Penshurst Place - Wednesday, 17th June

Save the Date! Penshurst Place is a historic building near Tonbridge, Kent,. It is the ancestral home of the Sidney family, and was the birthplace of the great Elizabethan poet, courtier and soldier, Sir Philip Sidney.

Described as 'the grandest and most perfectly preserved example of a fortified manor house in all England', the Sidney family home of Penshurst Place has been the place for poetic inspiration and lavish Royal hospitality for over 650 years. There is evidence that Henry VIII used Penshurst Place as a hunting lodge the property being only a few miles from Hever Castle, childhood home of Henry's second wife Anne Boleyn.

Records for the gardens date back to 1346. They are divided into 11 garden rooms by over one mile of yew hedging, with each room offering a unique theme. Among them is the Italian Garden, originally laid out in the 1560s by Henry Sidney as a kitchen garden.

Further information about this visit and when and how to book will be provided nearer the time but please check out [Penshurst Place and Gardens](#) for information about the house and gardens.



The South Downs Food Festival returns to Stansted Park on the 6th and 7th of June 2026, bringing a spectacular weekend of food, drink, and celebration. Partnering with Chefs In Schools and raising funds for Rowans Hospice, we are proud to champion the region's finest producers.

Join cookery demonstrations, a live fire BBQ, live music, talks from producers, chefs and authors, craft cocktails, high tea on the terrace and plenty of family fun as we inspire the next generation to feast on healthy and delicious food.

Find out more at www.southdownsfoodfestival.com

As usual, FOSP will have a stand at this Food Festival as well as the Summer Festival - come and say "hello" when you visit.

The Summer Festival, 27th and 28th June

The Summer Festival is now in its 6th year and continues to grow in respect of visitor numbers and the variety of entertainment that is provided. This is the Foundation's capstone community event of the year and provides a wonderful opportunity for all members of the family to come and enjoy Stansted Park. There is something for everyone ranging from some excellent music, energetic Bataala Drummers; magic and Punch & Judy Shows, 200 Napoleonic Reenactors, Tractor & Trailer Rides, Forest School, Rural Crafts, Classic Cars and displays from Veteran motorcyclists and our very own Woods & Parkland Department.

We welcome volunteers for the Festival - help is needed at Event HQ, the Main Entrance Gate, the House, or around the Grounds assisting attendees. **If interested, please contact the Estate Office on 02392 412265, Option 5. Any support will be gratefully received.**





save the date!

Friends Summer Party

8th July 2026 @ 6:30pm

in the Pavilion Tea Rooms





Stansted Foundation's Music Concerts

News from The Music Room

Discounts are available for FOSP members - please check your emails for booking details or for discount codes to use.

It looks like another exciting year of music in the Music Room Afternoon concerts 2026! We have five concerts planned opening with Los Ladrones on 12th March. The quintet will be performing 'A Princess of Kensington' and 'Merrie England' by Basil Hood and Edward German. These two operettas will be presented in concert version, accompanied by Nigel Smith, piano, and directed by Geoff Porter. Los Ladrones has opened our concert season every year since 2019.

On April 12th we will be entertained by Erin Nizolak, American operatic soprano, who will be joined by Deborah Gatland, violin, Richard Dewland, piano, and Bridget Dean, mezzo-soprano; they will be bringing us a variety of songs based in mythology, sacred music, poetry and opera. Violinist Fumi Otsuki, will join us again on May 21st, accompanied on piano by Gisela Meyer. His classical programme will include original pieces composed by Fumi.

We also have concerts scheduled on Thursday 10th September when we will welcome the return of The Rotherhurst Ensemble and on the 8th October when Charlotte Constantine, soprano, will make her debut performance at our Music Room afternoon concerts.

I very much look forward to meeting you in The Music Room this year. A very warm welcome awaits you. Afternoon refreshments are served during the interval. Please visit [Stansted Park](#) website for further details.

Maggie McMurray

Stansted Park Cricket Club

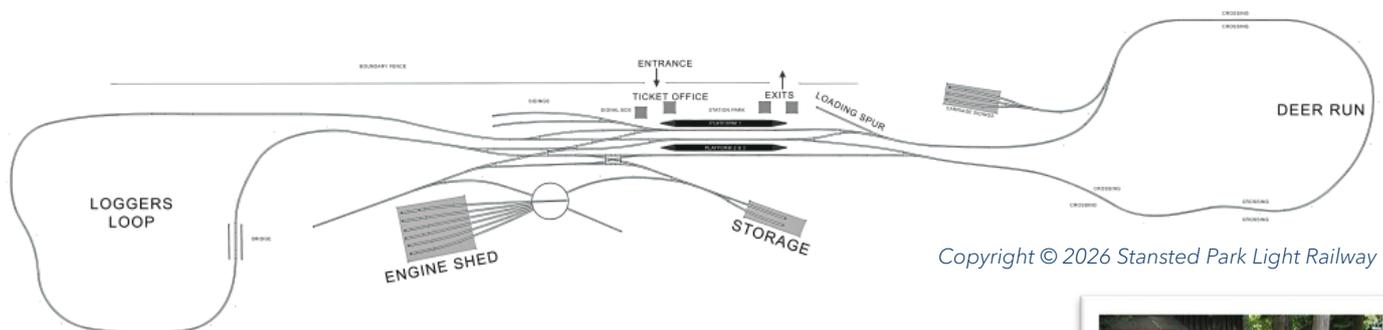


The game of Cricket has been played on the stunning lawn in front of Stansted House since 1741 and on that occasion Slindon beat Portsmouth.

Formed in 2008 the Stansted Park Cricket Club plays Sunday and T20 cricket and the club boasts a full fixture list from early April through to late September.

All fixtures can be found on the [Stansted Park CC](#) website along with details of how to join should anyone like to consider playing instead of watching. The Honorary Membership Secretary is Ian Graham.

Stansted Park Light Railway



Copyright © 2026 Stansted Park Light Railway

The railway opened in 2005, with quite humble beginnings and is run entirely by volunteers but over the years the number of volunteers involved has grown to where we are today.

Running a return trip of approximately one mile, the train leaves the main station up past the carriage sidings, around to the gate crossing, then down the deer run (if your very lucky you will see some wild deer in the fields to your left), then onto the Bamboo crossing, through the cutting and back to the down line of the main station area. Passing the engine shed and turntable on your left, the line continues across the bridge, around the forest end and back into the main station area to depart.



The railway is now closed for essential maintenance will re-open on Wednesday, 4th March.



a contribution by Vanessa Bowler - A Letter from Eric Bessborough to Irving Rosenwater.

COLLECTORS Corner

Irving Rosenwater (1932-2006) was a well-known cricket statistician and author whose book *Sir Donald Bradman - A Biography* (1978) was considered to be his finest achievement. He wrote to Eric, tenth Earl Bessborough, in 1975 with a question concerning Sir Frederick Ponsonby and received the following courteous reply:

Stansted Park
Rowland's Castle
Hants PO9 6DX

3rd May 1975

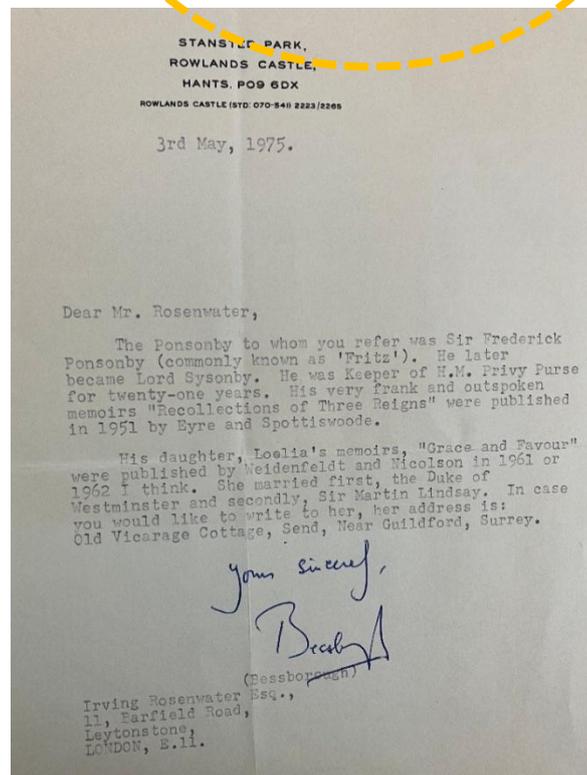
Dear Mr Rosenwater,

The Ponsonby to whom you refer was Sir Frederick Ponsonby (commonly known as 'Fritz'). He later became Lord Sysonby. He was Keeper of H.M. Privy Purse for twenty-one years. His very frank and outspoken memoirs "Recollections of Three Reigns" were published in 1951 by Eyre and Spottiswoode.

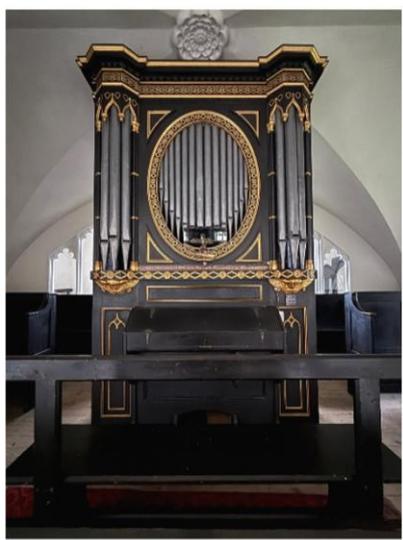
His daughter, Loelia's memoirs, "Grace and Favour" were published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in 1961 or 1962 I think. She married first, the Duke of Westminster and secondly, Sir Martin Lindsay. In case you would like to write to her, her address is: Old Vicarage Cottage, Send, Near Guildford, Surrey.

Yours sincerely,
Bessborough

Irving Rosenwater Esq.,
11, Barfield Road,
Leytonstone,
LONDON, E.11.



St Paul's Chapel Organ Appeal



Built by the Casson Positive Organ Company in 1922, the organ at St Paul's is situated on the balcony at the West end of the Chapel. The organ was donated by Vere, the 9th Earl of Bessborough in 1926 in memory of his mother, Blanche, Countess of Bessborough.

Despite careful maintenance over many years, this historically significant instrument is no longer able to play its full part in the rich life of the Chapel. It now needs complete refurbishment to restore it to its former glory and the Foundation is engaged on a fund-raising project to secure the £40,000 that is required.

A specialist restorer has been instructed and so we are now committed!

The intention is that a third of this sum is provided by the Foundation; a further third by grant awarding bodies and the final third by private donations and fund-raising efforts. We are well on the way and have raised £17,000 to date and we warmly invite your kind support. Details can be found on the website.. [Support the Foundation | Stansted Park | Hampshire](#)

This work is the first phase of a wider restoration of this fine Grade I Listed Chapel, helping to preserve it for future generations.



West Portico Lantern

Funded by FOSP, this this has been a long time in the planning and the making so next time you visit Stansted House be sure to cast your eyes upwards as you walk up the steps into the main entrance.



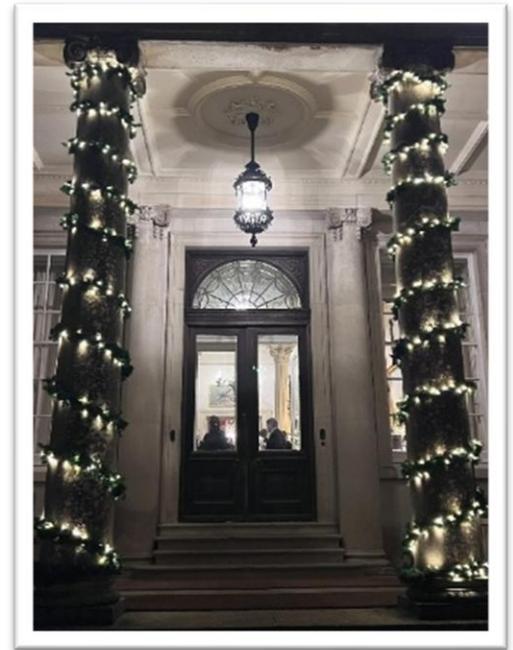
For some time, since the old and probably original lantern was removed for safety reasons, there has just been a wire hanging which has not very pretty or health and safety conscious. Well, look up now and lo and behold a new lantern has been installed.

Constructed using the very fragile and often rotten original as a template the builder, Ian Gorman, in his Chiswick workshop, spent many hours making sure it was the correct size by using paper patterns he had made from the original parts.

All the steel components were bent and hammered into shape by hand and riveted together, as the original had been. The decorative finials were machined from solid brass, and the large internal reflector dome/ceiling cup was also copied from the original and spun by hand at Lloyd Metal Spinners in Ikenham.

The glass was made by a company called B&S Glass, a London-based glass specialist company, who used kilns and metal moulds to heat and manipulate the glass to the required shape.

It's lovely to have a light shining in the main entrance again - a wonderful replica of the original one!



Summer Newsletter

latest copy date : - 22nd May

Please send any copy to peter.dudman1@virginmedia.com by the above date for inclusion in the Summer Newsletter - we have some ideas for future articles to add during this year but any ideas and comments from members are always gratefully received.

Coming in the Summer Newsletter

- Improvements to the visitor experience - FOSP has made a large contribution to this major Foundation project -
 - Welcome Screen
 - A what's on screen
 - Events Panel
 - Charity Panel
- A day in the life of a Stansted Volunteer
- The Stansted Light Railway is 20yrs old.....



And don't forget, if you'd like to be part of the Summer Festival, helping at Event HQ, the Main Entrance Gate the House, or around the Grounds please let us know. Call the Estate Office of 02392 412265, Option 5



Dates for your diary...

To see the full itinerary and up to date lists of coming events and house tours either visit the Stansted website www.stanstedpark.co.uk.whatson, or contact the Office by email - enquiry@stanstedpark.co.uk or phone 023 9241 2265, option 5. FOSP Members can get discounts on a lot of Foundation Events and emails are sent out regularly with discount codes.

FRIENDS OF STANSTED PARK EVENTS

How to get here: Unless otherwise directed, please use the North Entrance to attend FOSP events. Drive through the automatic gates, veer to the right where the drive forks and park in front of the House.

- AGM - see page 5.....Wednesday, 25th February @10:00am
- Special Spring Coffee Morning in the Mansion - see page 5.....Thursday, 26th March @ 10:00am
- Spring Talk: "How True to Reality was the Kip Engraving of Stansted?" - see page 5Thursday, 30th April @ 2:00pm
- Talk by Mark Seaman, Chairman of the Chichester and District Archaeology Society
- Visit to Penshurst Place - see page 5, more details to come.....Wednesday, 17th June
- Summer Party - more details to comeWednesday, 8th July

STANSTED PARK HOUSE EVENTS

Please use the underlined links to web pages for more information or visit the [What's On](#) page for Stansted Park. Please note that information can change and the website will show the most up to date information.

- [Guided tour of Stansted House](#).....Sunday, 1st March
- [Music Afternoon with Los Ladrones](#)Thursday, 12th March @ 2:30pm
- [Spring Floristry Workshop](#)Saturday 14th March
- [Mothering Sunday, Ponsonby Women Tour](#)..... Sunday, 15th March
- [Mothering Sunday at Stansted House](#) Sunday, 15th March
- ["Is it too late to save the Ocean?"](#)Thursday, 19th March
- [Trail Hike 2026](#)Saturday, 21st March
- [Trail Run 2026](#)Saturday, 21st March
- [Calligraphy Workshop with Jodie Rose Calligraphy](#)Saturday, 21st March
- [Lo & Behold Another Wedding Fair](#)..... Sunday 22nd March
- [Guided Tour of Stansted House](#) Sunday 5th April
- [Easter at Stansted House](#) Sunday 5th April - Sunday, 12th April
- [Creative Writing Workshop with Vanessa Curtis](#) Friday, 24th April
- [Guided Tour of Stansted House](#) Sunday, 3rd May
- [Candlelit Comedy at Stansted Park](#)..... Friday, 8th May
- [Calligraphy Workshop with Jodie Rose Calligraphy](#) Friday, 15^h May
- [Steeleford Supercar Show](#) Sunday, 31st May
- [King Arthur and the Holy Fail](#)Wednesday, 3rd June
- [South Downs Food Festival 2026](#) Saturday, 6th June & Sunday, 7th June
- [Stansted Summer Festival 2026](#).....Saturday 27th & Sunday 28th June

COMMITTEE MEMBER CONTACT DETAILS

- ChairmanNigel Smith-ngs.1957@hotmail.com
- Secretary Anne Burton-anneburton99@gmail.com
- Treasurer.....Sarah Hutchinson-hutchsj@yahoo.co.uk
- Membership SecretaryPaul Bennett-friendsofstanstedpark@outlook.com
- Newsletter Editor..... Peter Dudman -peter.dudman1@virginmedia.com

For membership enquiries, please contact [Paul Bennett](#). Membership cards will be issued to new members only. [Membership Renewals](#): When renewing your membership, would you please consider setting up a Standing Order to save on volunteer time. Our Bank Details are: Sort Code 60-10-20 Account 61788627. Please give your membership number as a reference.

Consider keeping a photo of your membership card on your phone for ease of access.