

A Tree for All Seasons

A poem to mark the planting of an Indian Chestnut Tree

by Mothers Union at Howick Hall Arboretum

Tuesday 2nd August, Platinum Jubilee Year 2022



The Mothers Union theme for 2022 is ‘Transformation – Now!’ The planting of this tree is symbolic of Mothers’ Union’s intention to bring transformation for the welfare of present and future generations.

The tree was planted in the Hall’s ‘Bog Garden’ by Margy Tasker-Brown, President of MU Newcastle, and in the presence of Lord Howick, who grew the sapling from a conker he brought back from the foot of the Himalayas.

Howick Hall is the ancestral home of the Grey family, known by some as the ‘home’ of Earl Grey Tea, though incorrectly. The 2nd Earl Grey, Charles, served as PM from 1830 to 1834 when the Great Reform Act was passed.

Howick’s Arboretum, known as a ‘United Nations of Trees and Shrubs’ was initiated in 1985 and opened to the public in 2006. It now has over 11,000 trees and shrubs grown from seeds collected in the wild from nearly every country in the world. It is one of the few places in the UK where red squirrels find a safe home. The Arboretum was primarily the vision and work of Lady Mary Howick who died in 2001. Lady Mary was the daughter of the 5th Earl Grey and mother of the present Lord Howick.

The poem was written by Anne Marr, MU Chaplain, and was partly inspired by the words in italics: ‘I think that I shall never see’ by Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918) born in New Jersey and killed while fighting in WW1.

A Tree for all Seasons: Howick

Boldly...how our Chestnut now
stretches arms with youthful pride.
Planted in its Howick home,
in woodland inter-nation-wide,
it stands with fellow immigrants -
a life of promise packed inside.

Thru' summer-tide the leaves lend shade
and shelter for the wooded glade.
Thru' ever-changing shades of green,
with palms in prayerful pose spread wide,
they transform sunlight's radiant rays
absorbing power at Whitsun-tide.

The autumn chestnuts, glossy brown,
will scatter widely on the ground,
delighting squirrels; children too:
and autumn reds and copper hues
will spread a carpet all around...
a thankful feast at Harvest-tide.

Branches, bared in winter-tide
against the winds and bitter frosts,
will bear the pains of stress and loss
and pregnancy of Advent-tide.
Yet even then, amidst the cost
of life's relentless giving-ness,
they'll gently hold the veils of snow
and herald news of Christmas-tide.

And hidden 'neath the forest floor
the deeper story, rooted wide,
spells 'love and life and sacrifice' -
Epiphany of Lenten-tide.

The spring will welcome candle flowers,
tinged with red of Passion-tide,
that burst their tomb-tight prison buds
and unfold white for Easter-tide.

Our chestnut tree - a miracle
of Eden's fruitful destiny -
will greet for countless days the sun
from break of dawn to even-tide:
A tree of mighty majesty -
a parable for all ... to see
the Word of creativity -
prodigious generosity.

And echoed wide around the globe,
in praise of God's eternal plan,
the bees and butterflies and birds,
and worms and fungal wood-wide-web
with oaks and olives join their song...
and beech and willows, cypress, pines,
acacia, kauri, redwoods, vines...
and every tree in Kingdom-tide.

And so we stand in humbleness
with prayers and poems of thankfulness
and wonder how our tree may grow
in seasons we will never know.
Will it weather every storm
within this land of great Reform?
Will its seasoned life transform
the landscape of the years to come?

*It's doubtful we shall ever see
a poem lovely as this tree!
Poems are made by fools like me
but only God can make a tree.*