

Christmas gift idea – shop at The Georgian House



This house in Charlotte Square has a gift shop where you can “take Christmas by the antlers” and get ahead with your Christmas shopping. The shop at the Georgian House has an array of high quality, distinctive gifts available for purchase including silk scarves, cashmere scarves and gloves, natural skincare and soaps, Christmas decorations, confectionery, children’s toys and stocking fillers.

A little view into the past is offered to visitors to the National Trust for Scotland’s Georgian House in Edinburgh. There you will see how Christmas was celebrated in the past as the house opens its doors in December for the first time in many years.

Charlotte Square was designed by Robert Adam as the paradigm of the Georgian ideal in the centre of Edinburgh. With its sweeping crescents, broad boulevards and elegant squares, the New Town offered affluent citizens the opportunity to escape the overcrowding of the Old Town.

The conservation charity’s property at No. 7 Charlotte Square, was built in 1796 for John Lamont, 18th Chief of the Clan Lamont, and he lived there with his family until 1815. The house has been magnificently restored to illustrate a typical Edinburgh New Town House of the late 18th and early 19th century.

It will be dressed for Christmas with traditional greenery – holly, and mistletoe – a Christmas tree, and poinsettias. It will also feature the less familiar Kissing Bough or Kissing Ring – a garland of greenery under which kisses were

exchanged – which was usurped as the focus of family festivities by the Christmas tree by the late 1860s.

Dr Sheonagh Martin, Property Manager, said:

“For the first time in 13 years we are opening the house in December. We want to give our visitors a glimpse behind the facade of a typical Edinburgh townhouse to show how Christmas would have been celebrated in the late 18th and early 19th century by New Town families and their households.”

“We researched the kind of greenery and other items Georgian families might have used to decorate their home over the festive season. Visitors may find some of the results of this research surprising. For instance, the Christmas tree, is often thought to have been introduced to Britain from Germany by Prince Albert in the 1840s. However, this is not wholly correct. They were known in Britain from the late 18th century, particularly in the Royal Household. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge mentions a Christmas tree decorated with uplifting messages written on coloured paper,” she added.

The first precise record of a Christmas tree was one arranged by a German member of Queen Caroline’s household for a children’s party in 1821. This ‘tree’ was actually a branch of evergreen fixed on a board, decorated with gilt oranges and almonds. Three little trees in pots given by Princess Lieuen in 1829 for another children’s party were more like Christmas trees with which we are now familiar.

In Britain, the Christmas tree was popularised by Victoria and Albert. In the 1840s, the custom became better known as pictures and accounts of the royal trees at Windsor circulated in newspapers and journals. Christmas trees became fashionable and were familiar in most parts of the country by the late 1860s, and slowly replaced the older native Kissing Bough or Kissing Ring.

Dr Martin said: "The Kissing Bough was a garland of greenery that hung from the ceiling in the main living room. It may well have hung in the Parlour, but with a Christmas tree in the hall we have placed ours in the kitchen for the servants to use. Shaped like a double-hooped May garland, or a crown, and decorated with red apples, coloured paper, ornaments, candles, and – most importantly – mistletoe, the Kissing Bough was the centre of the family's festivities. Under it carols were sung, games played, and many a kiss exchanged! "

The Christmas decor also features some more familiar favourites including the poinsettia – named in 1828 after Mr Poinsett who came to Britain from North America, where the poinsettia was the traditional Christmas flower. The distinctive scarlet flower originated in Mexico where it is known as "Flower of the Holy Night".

The Georgian House can be seen dressed for Christmas until December 20 (Thursday to Sundays only from 11am to 3.30pm). Standard entry applies. No booking required.

For further information visit www.nts.org.uk or call 0131 226 3318.