



Mrs. Miniver's Rose

By Leslie Garvis, President

Being a history buff and genealogist, I am a huge fan of period pieces and it goes without saying that includes the PBS series *Downton Abbey*. When my husband's mother passed away a few years ago, I wanted to get a rose bush in her honor. Roses were her favorite flowers and she grew them in her garden so it was only natural that I get a rose bush to honor her memory. It was the search for a rose to honor her memory that led me to the Fort Worth Rose Society.

My mother-in-law's name is Anna so I started my search by looking for roses with her name. The first rose I came across was 'Anna's Promise'. This beautiful Grandiflora rose was named for Anna Bates, one of the maids on *Downton Abbey*. Of course, I was immediately taken in by this rose, not only was it beautiful but it had a tie to one of my favorite shows.

I also discovered that there were a series of roses named for some of the ladies of *Downton Abbey*. In addition to Anna's Promise, there is 'Violet's Pride' named for the Dowager Countess of Grantham played by Dame Maggie Smith (my favorite character of the series) 'Edith's Darling' named for Lord Grantham's Daughter Edith and 'Pretty Lady Rose' the niece and goddaughter of the Dowager Countess.

Since *Downton Abbey* has so many fans, I thought it might be fun to do a little piece in this month's newsletter about these roses. During one of the episodes in Season One, the town held its annual flower show where local growers show off their flowers. If you haven't watched this episode, I highly recommend it – the grand prize winner was a beautiful red rose.



'Mrs. Miniver'



While looking for a photo of this *Downton Abbey* flower competition to include in this article, I came across a very interesting story about the rose that was the winner in this fictional flower competition – 'Mrs. Miniver'.

I had no idea this was a real rose, one with a very historical past. Being the history buff that I am, of course my investigative side kicked into high gear and this fun, fluff article about *Downton Abbey* roses has turned into a history piece on a very rare rose!

Mrs. Miniver's Rose (cont.)



In 1942, MGM released a movie called Mrs. Miniver. This movie was based on a book of the same name written by English writer, Jan Struther. It was a story about a family in rural England during WWII. The plot follows the family living through the trials and tribulations of WWII. The heroine of the story even aids in the capture of a wounded German pilot who was hiding in her garden.

As I found out more about this movie, I realized that the town Flower Show in Downtown Abbey was very similar to the storyline of this movie from 1942. It should be noted that Julian Fellows, creator of Downton Abbey, has denied any plagiarism and claims the similarities are purely coincidence.

In the 1942 movie, the local station manager, gains permission from Mrs. Miniver to name his rose after her. Mrs. Miniver was the lady who captured the German pilot and was highly regarded in the town. Just like in Downton Abbey, the local grand dame, Lady Beldon of the Manor (who wins every year) cedes her win to the 'Mrs. Miniver' rose.

This movie was so popular on both sides of the ocean that it won six academy awards including best picture, best actress, best supporting actress and best director and was a huge box office hit. The popularity of this movie in 1942 prompted Jackson & Perkins to introduce a hybrid tea rose called 'Mrs. Miniver'. This rose was bred by Cesar Chambard before 1940 and the patent application shows the name Marguerite Denoyel of Venissieux. Ms. Denoyel was Chambard's niece and held the patent after his death in 1940. Before Jackson & Perkins introduced this rose to the U.S, it was introduced in France in 1940 as 'Souvenir de Louis Simon' by Roseraies Orard located in Feyzin, France. This nursery is still in business today.



Roseraies Orard Nursery in 1930



In 2014, British journalist and former BBC Good Food editor, Orlando Murrin set out on a quest to find the 'Mrs. Miniver' rose, which had all but disappeared. Mr. Murrin, an avid gardener, held on to the hope that somewhere there was a 'Mrs. Miniver' still growing in someone's garden.

Orlando was able to enlist the help of Becky Hook of La Roseraie du Desert. This nursery, located in the south west of France, north of Tarbes and west of Toulouse, specialized in old roses.

Sadly, I discovered that the nursery was put up for sale a few years ago as the owners decided to move to the U.S. I have been unable to find out if it actually sold or not. Mr. Murrin's search for the 'Mrs. Miniver' continued for a couple of years without success until the fall of 2016 when amateur rose grower, Martin Briese, a friend of Becky Hook, offered to give him some cuttings from his own Mrs. Miniver rose. In 2017, 75 years after the release of the Mrs. Miniver movie, Mr. Murrin began growing the 'Mrs. Miniver' rose on the rooftop of his home in Exeter, UK. He has since teamed up with St. Bridget's Nurseries, also in Exeter, in hopes of bringing this rose back and making it available to the public once again.

Mrs. Miniver's Rose (cont.)

St. Bridget's had planned to have this rose ready by August of 2018. I have reached out to the nursery to find out what happened with the rose and if it ever became available. I heard back from Tammy Falloon, Managing Director of St. Bridget's. They were indeed successful in propagating the rose from bud wood collected from Mr. Murrin's rose bush using the traditional craft of grafting: rose budding. Since they only had one source, their initial offering the first year was limited but they were able to increase their supply in successive years. Unfortunately they had to restructure their business this past year and are no longer growing their own roses. They have several 'Mrs. Miniver' rose bushes available for purchase but sadly, they cannot ship to the U.S. This rose continues to be popular and is now widely available in the U.K. Who knows, maybe one day someone will bring them to the U.S. I don't know about you but now I am on a quest for my own 'Mrs. Miniver' rose!

The St. Bridget's Nursery in Exeter looks like an amazing place complete with its own cafe. If I ever make it to the U.K., it is defiantly on my list of places to visit!



Sources and Links

British Articles:

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Mrs. Miniver Movie Trailer:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035093/>

Nurseries:

<http://www.frenchtearose.com/about>

www.roses-orard.com

www.stbridgetnurseries.co.uk

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DOWNTON ABBEY



'Anna's Promise' ®

The first of the Downton Abby collection, Grandiflora "Anna's Promise" was introduced by Weeks Roses in 2015. Named for Lady Mary's Maid, Anna Bates, this rose, much like its namesake, is strong and hardy as well as beautiful. Hybridized by Tom Carruth, its rose has a bicolor golden tan & pink blush with a copper reverse and deep, glossy green foliage. This rose can reach heights of 5-6 feet. The blooms are double, single or in small clusters with a petal count of around 35. Blooms are up to 4 inches in diameter. Parentage: Voodoo x About Face.

'Pretty Lady Rose' ®

Lady Rose's namesake signifies her character's strength and elegance. This Hybrid Tea has large old fashioned, English style deep pink flowers with a sweet peony-like, spicy fragrance. Upright and bushy, this rose grows to a height and width of 30-36 inches. The blooms are large, 4-5 inches in diameter with a 45-65 petal count and bright, glossy, medium green foliage. Introduced in 2016 by Weeks Roses, its hybridizer is Christian Bédard and its parentage is Grande Dame x Doris Day. Hardiness Zones: 6-9.





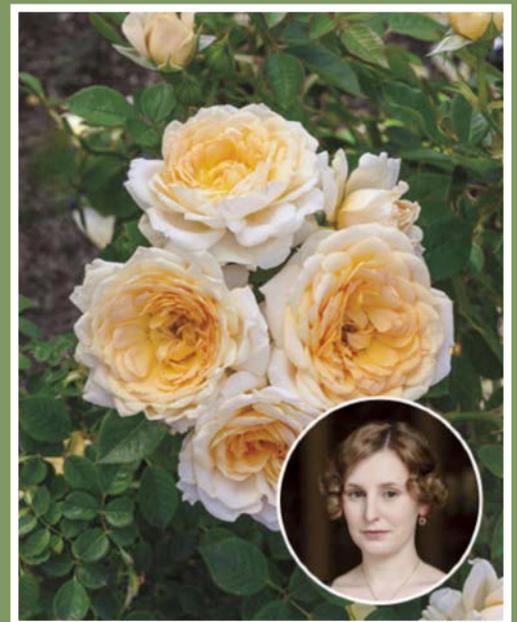
DOWNTON ABBEY



'Violet's Pride' ®

Introduced by Weeks Roses in 2017 and named after Violet Crawley, the Dowager Countess of Grantham, this Floribunda rose has a double lavender bloom with a magenta center. The color was inspired by the lavender dresses worn by the Dowager Countess. Disease resistant with a strong grapefruit fragrance. The bush is even and round and grows to 3-4 feet high and 3 feet wide with a petal count of 35-45. Blooms late spring to fall. Hardiness Zones 5-10. Botanical Name: Rosa 'WEKwibysicpep' PPAF . Hybridizer: Christian Bédard. Parentage: {(International Herald Tribune x Rosa soulieana derivative) x (Sweet Chariot x Blue Nile)} x [Blueberry Hill x Stephen's Big Purple]} x (Crystalline x Perfume Perfection)

'Edith's Darling' was inspired by Lady Edith Crawley and her beloved daughter Marigold. This shrub bush is short, bushy and compact and is perfect for a border or compact space. The flowers are a soft apricot gold with a lighter edge and glossy, dark green leaves. The blooms are 2.5 to 3 inches in diameter and has a 50-65 petal count. This rose has a fruity, fresh cut apple fragrance and is disease resistant. Introduced by weeks in 2017. Hybridizer: Christian Bédard. Parentage: All a'Twitter x Julia Child. Hardiness Zones: 6-9.



'Edith's Darling' ®