



Its red-brick facade is known to fans of Regency-era romance series *Bridgerton* as the Grosvenor Square home of the Netflix TV hit's titular family. Off-screen, however, Ranger's House lies across the River Thames in southeast London, nestled between the leafy neighbourhoods of Greenwich Park and Blackheath.

Visitors to the Georgian villa, cared for by English Heritage, won't find the eye-catching wisteria that adorns the Bridgertons' abode. Even the front door receives a makeover for the cameras, turning from dark grey to green with a lion swapped for a golden knocker. But there is still plenty of overlap between fact and fiction.

Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, portrayed in *Bridgerton* and the spin-off *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, was sister-in-law to Augusta, Duchess of Brunswick, who lived at Ranger's House, while many of the home's

Left: The well-to-do Bridgerton family from Netflix's hit show, *Bridgerton*
Below: The 18th-century Ranger's House stands in as the exterior of the Bridgerton family's home in the series

© HISTORIC ENGLAND/JIM HOLDEN/NETFLIX

Dramatic Setting

Kate Youde steps inside the real-life Bridgerton home, which has seen its own fair share of Georgian and Regency scandal



real-life residents were embroiled in drama to make them the talk of the town.

The first series of *Bridgerton* opens at the start of the social season in 1813. However, the story of the Ranger's House, which celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2023, begins 90 years earlier, when it was built for Francis Hosier, Vice-Admiral of the Blue, a senior rank in the Royal Navy, in about 1723.

Hosier led action to blockade the port of Porto Bello in modern-day Panama to prevent Spanish ships from carrying valuable cargo back to Spain during the Anglo-Spanish War between 1727 and 1729.

"Loitering at sea is an absolute recipe for disease," says Megan Leyland, senior properties historian at English Heritage. "Yellow fever takes hold and eventually around 4,000 men die in this military action including Francis Hosier." His dramatic demise in 1727 is immortalised in Richard Glover's 1740 ballad, *Admiral Hosier's Ghost*, which directed criticism for the deaths towards Robert Walpole, the then prime minister.

Hosier's house became the country retreat of leading societal figures. Politician Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield, who inherited Ranger's House from his younger brother in 1748, used it to enjoy what he called "philosophical quiet".

It was here that Lord Chesterfield, responsible for one of the two wings added to the house – a large gallery to

display his art collection, wrote around 200 of the 448 letters of advice he sent his illegitimate son.

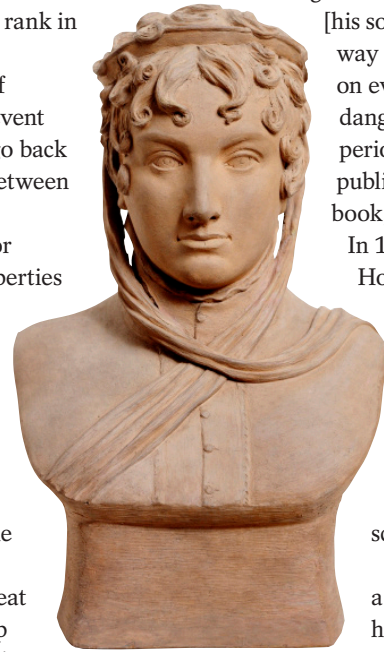
While his marriage was without children, Chesterfield had fathered a son with a French governess in 1732, the year before his wedding, when an ambassador in The Hague. "He decided that he needed to make sure that

[his son] was well prepared for society and the way to do that was write him letters of advice on everything you could need to navigate the dangerous world of politics and manners in the period," says Leyland. The correspondence was published after Lord Chesterfield's death as a book, still available today.

In 1813, the year *Bridgerton* begins, Ranger's House belonged to Augusta, Dowager Duchess of Brunswick, elder sister of George III. She had lived here since 1807 after fleeing to England at the age of 70 from her home in Germany, with the King's permission, because of the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars. She arrived to "a royal family wrought with scandal", says Leyland.

The Duchess's daughter, Caroline, of whom a terracotta bust is displayed in the house, had married her cousin, George, Prince of Wales (George III's son and later George IV) in 1795. The prince's incentive for the union

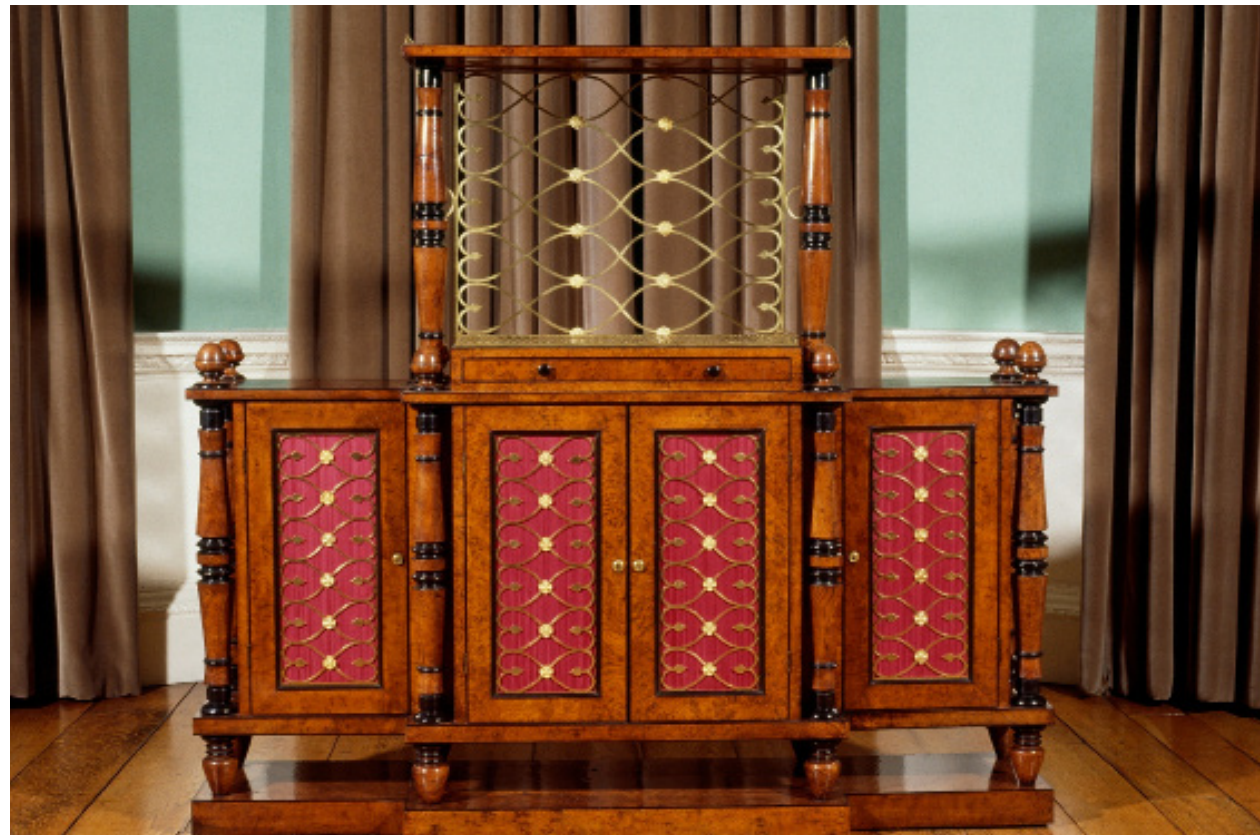
was that his father had agreed to settle his significant debts. The marriage was "a disaster from the outset", says Leyland. "Apparently when he first saw her, he called for brandy." ➤



Clockwise, from left: A terracotta bust of Princess Caroline at Ranger's House; the Rose Garden; the house is home to the Wernher Collection of art; the oak display cabinet commissioned by Queen Charlotte for her niece, Princess Sophia Matilda



© HISTORIC ENGLAND/PAUL HIGHNAM/JEREMY RICHARDS/JIM HOLDEN





Clockwise, from top left: A portrait of Augusta, Duchess of Brunswick c.1762; the Wernher Collection includes paintings, porcelain and furniture; the Wernher Collection has more than 700 pieces; a portrait of Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales, c. 1816; the art collection was amassed by 19th-century businessman Sir Julius Wernher



The couple lived separately after the birth of their only child, Princess Charlotte, in 1796, and Caroline took up residence the following year at the since demolished Montagu House, which neighboured Ranger's House. In 1806, she was the subject of the 'Delicate Investigation' into claims she had been unfaithful to her husband and had an illegitimate son. A commission concluded the claims were unfounded, but Leyland says her behaviour with certain men was deemed "inappropriate".

Caroline had established a "rival royal court" in Blackheath and the grand entertaining continued after her mother moved next door, says Leyland. One event, the Princess of Wales's Grand Fete in 1808, took in both houses. Guests moved via a walkway illuminated with lamps from Montagu House, where a 100ft temporary ballroom was decorated with flowers, to a "fifth supper room" laid out for nearly 100 guests at Augusta's home. "You do get a bit of a flavour of *Bridgerton*," says Leyland, who adds that the everyday movements of Augusta and the royals were reported in newspapers just as the fictional Lady Whistledown updates her readers on societal gossip.

Princess Charlotte, whose death in childbirth in 1817 is referenced in the *Bridgerton* spin-off as it meant there was no legitimate heir to the throne, was a frequent visitor to Ranger's House but fell foul of her opinionated grandmother's plain speaking. "Augusta had quite a reputation for gossip, for not mincing her words," says

Leyland. "At one point she said [to Charlotte in 1811], 'You are grown very fat and very much sunburnt.'"

Augusta died in 1813. It was in 1815 that Ranger's House became the grace-and-favour residence of the Ranger of Greenwich Park, an honorary title bestowed by the Crown. The first ranger to live in the property was Princess Sophia Matilda of Gloucester, Augusta's niece.

The only original piece of furniture on show in Ranger's House is an oak dwarf display cabinet that Queen Charlotte commissioned in about 1814 and gave to Sophia Matilda. The property's longest-serving resident, the princess lived at Ranger's House until her death in 1844.

A later royal occupant, 12-year-old Prince Arthur, son of Queen Victoria, arrived in 1862. The last Ranger of Greenwich Park, Field-Marshal Lord Garnet Wolseley, left in 1896, and

Queen Victoria gave the house to the Commissioners of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues in 1897 to help secure the restoration of Kensington Palace.

Today, the house displays the Wernher Collection of medieval and early modern European art, (the interiors of the Bridgertons' home were filmed elsewhere). But Leyland says there is still "a wonderful sense of the spaces that this long line of historical figures enjoyed and occupied, and the beautiful facade of Ranger's House stands proud, as it does in the Netflix series." ■

For information on visiting Ranger's House, go to www.english-heritage.org.uk

The marriage was "a disaster from the outset. Apparently, when he first saw her he called for brandy"

