



Constance Adelaide Penswick-Smith 1878- 1938

Revived Mothering Sunday

Constance was born in Dagnall, Buckinghamshire the third of 7 children, her father Charles Penswick Smith was the vicar there and her mother was Mary Caroline Baylis from Redditch. The family moved to Coddington, near Newark, in 1890 when Constance was 12 in 1890, where her father became the vicar of All Saints. She was schooled at home and at a Dame school in Newark - where there is a blue plaque - and later at a school for young ladies in Nottingham. She left school age 17 and returned home to help educate her younger brother Charles. She hated her name Adelaide and so changed it by deed poll to her father's second Christian name (from Brenda Smith niece in an article for Evening Post 28.3.84) Constance needed to earn her living so went to Germany for 2 years as a governess before returning to Nottingham and working for Dr Thomas Mallett in Park Row as a dispenser of medicines at the Hospital of Skin diseases. Initially she lived as a boarder at 14 Newstead Grove (1901 census) and then at the Girls Friendly Hostel at 4 - 6 Regent Street where Ellen Porter was the superintendent - with 10 other working women, a visitor and 6 servants (1911 & 1921 census). She lived with Ellen for the next 40 years. Constance was inspired by a newspaper article on the plans of Anna Jarvis an American woman from Philadelphia who introduced Mother's Day in the USA in 1908 after the death of her own mother. By 1914 the US president had proclaimed it a national holiday. Constance was keen to create a more religious day in the UK. Firstly, Constance approached the Mothers Union, but as much as they approved of the idea, they thought that the custom had been dead for so long that a revival was virtually impossible; but she refused to be discouraged. Constance was determined to link back to traditional Anglican liturgical practices when the fourth Sunday in Lent was Mothering Sunday. She published in 1913 *In Praise of Mother: A Story of Mothering Sunday*. As well as *A Short History of Mothering Sunday* in 1915 which went into several editions. At some point Constance and Ellen moved to 25 Regent Street (T C Hine's old house) from which Ellen ran a nursing home and Constance had the HQ of the Mothering Sunday Movement. (adverts for 1924 & 26.) Constance collected and published information about the day and its traditional observation, this included research into traditions such as the making of simnel (fruit cake boiled and baked) and wafer cakes. She designed Mothering Sunday cards, collected hymns, prayers, wrote articles and plays and together with her 4 brothers, who were all Anglican vicars, held services in their churches. Her most influential

book was published in 1921 *The Revival of Mothering Sunday* and reprinted in 1932. She advocated for Mothering Sunday as a day for recognising the Mother Church, mothers, Mary, mother of Jesus and Mother Nature and based her work on medieval traditions. Constance established 'The Society for the Observation of Mothering Sunday.' At first her movement was rejected by many established religious societies, but gradually the clergy did become interested, particularly Rev. Killer of St Cyprians in Carlton in Nottingham, who used the hymns that Constance had selected. Constance and Ellen on retirement went to live in Rev. Killers' parish, at 27 Marston Road which became the new HQ for the Mothering Sunday movement. When the new St Cyprians church was dedicated in 1936, a canister containing orders of service, and other material was placed beneath the altar. Gradually it became an established event and featured 'clipping' – when a special hymn is sung, and the children process to collecting primroses or violets for their mothers. and continued her work from there establishing Mothering Sunday as a widely observed day throughout the British Empire. In 1932 she published *The Feast of Mothering: How to make simnel cakes, furmety, mi-carême custards, and other delights*. By the time of her death, it was said to be observed in every parish throughout Britain and every country in the British Empire. Constance died for heart failure brought on by acute tonsillitis and streptococcal cellulitis of the neck; she died in Nottingham General Hospital. She is buried at All Saints in Coddington next to her father – white marble crosses and bases hold their inscriptions and are easily visible. In her will she left £906. 18. 9 to Rev Robert Cecil Smith and Rev Charles Whadcoat Smith. Her friend Ellen Porter, carried on the work of the Movement from their home in Marston Road, Nottingham, until she died in 1942 at the age of 74. The 'lady chapel' at Coddington was dedicated to Constance's memory in 1951. There is a plaque to her in the centre of Newark at Church House, 3 Church Walk where she had attended school.

