

The Duty and Pleasure of Memory: Constance Markievicz

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Abstract:

The year 2018 marks a hundred years since the proclamation of the Representation of the People Act and of the Qualification of Women Act by the UK Parliament. It also marks a hundred years since a woman – Constance Markievicz – was first elected in Westminster. A protagonist in the Irish fight for independence, serving almost five years in prisons in England and Ireland, Markievicz devoted her life to political and civil reforms. She became a member of the first Irish Parliament, and in 1919 was nominated Secretary for Labour, thus making also the first female Cabinet Minister in Europe. Women like her contributed to make history and were often the victors, but somehow became marginalised in official chronicles or went lost in the folds of time. Long trapped in the selective mechanisms of collective memory, these women are finally being acknowledged their fundamental role in the shaping of modern nations. Where Markievicz is concerned, the duty and pleasure of memory prompts the work of people engaged in reassessing and promoting her legacy. Two such examples are Olivia Crichton-Stuart, a great-great child of Markievicz's, and Constance Cassidy-Walsh, since 2003 co-owner of Lissadell House, the Gore-Booths historical property, to which she and her family have since committed. What follows is an informal conversation with both.

Keywords: Constance Markievicz, Commemorations of 1918, The Gore-Booths and Lissadell House, Women in history, Irish Independence

So we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too—
Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out—
(Shakespeare, *King Lear*, V.3.13-16)

Freedom's not an idea, it's a passion!
(Bond, *Lear*, 1978 [1972], 90)

The year 2018 marks a hundred years since a woman was first elected in the Westminster Parliament, the occasion being the General Election of 14 December 1918. A year later, another woman, the American Nancy Astor, would achieve a similar result, but unlike her predecessor she took her seat in the House of Commons. Back in 1918, the Sinn Féin candidate for Dublin's St. Patrick Division, Constance Markievicz had refused to do so since admittance to the Commons entailed an oath of allegiance to the monarch and to the very power she and other "Shinners" "meant to overthrow". When the results of the election became public, Markievicz was in jail, having been arrested for her role in the Easter Rising in 1916 and also sentenced to death, but spared execution "solely and only on account of her sex" (Markievicz 1987 [1934], 24). She was an aristocrat, born into the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and brought up between London, Dublin and Sligo, in the west of Ireland, the place which would inspire her to pursue equal rights for all disadvantaged people – the poor, the tenants, women, the uneducated mass – and to dedicate her life to the cause of freedom – for Ireland, her people, and all individuals. A "new woman" involved in feminist emancipation movements alongside her sister, she gave birth to the first Irish branch of the Boy Scouts – the future army of the free State – and became a protagonist in the Irish fight for independence, between 1916 and 1923. Markievicz spent various years in prisons in England (Aylesbury and Holloway) and in Ireland (Cork and Dublin), at times being amnestied or on the run, but always very active on the front of political and civil reforms. She became a member of the Dáil Éireann, the first Irish Parliament, and in 1919 was nominated Secretary for Labour, thus making also the first female Cabinet Minister in Europe (a post she held until 1922).

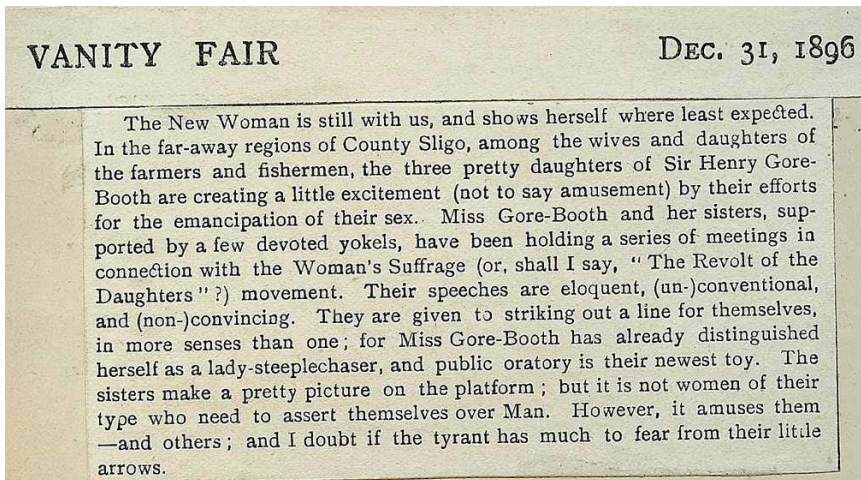


Fig. 1 – "The New Woman" question (newspaper cutting, 1896) – the "three pretty daughters" are Eva, Constance and Mabel Gore-Booth

The year 2018 marks a hundred years since all that, and since the proclamation of the Representation of the People Act, which enabled all men and some women aged over 30 to vote for the first time, and of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, which allowed women to stand for election to the House of Commons. Both 1918 acts are being commemorated as part of the “Vote 100 Project”, a four-year programme of activities recently launched by the UK Parliament¹. The scheme echoes the need to “recognise the role that women have played in the house of Commons and in public life”², and it represents a significant change in the way the question of memory is dealt with today, including the acknowledgement of political figures such as Constance Markievicz³. In this respect, the celebratory events of 2018 should facilitate a contemporary reflection on the legacy of women who made history and were the victors, but somehow and for a long time went missing from official chronicles, gradually marginalised if not lost in the folds of time. Trapped in the selective and defective mechanism of collective memory, women like Markievicz could finally gain their due place in modern and contemporary history, while a new look at their accomplishments will hopefully reconnect present generations with their historical past, letting them see it differently, make sense of the here and now, imagine how the future may be, and the extent to which all of us can effect change.

The story of Constance Markievicz is the story of a woman who “did what she thought was right and stood by it” (Markievicz 1987 [1934], 26). She “went out to fight for Ireland’s freedom” (*ibidem*), passionately devoting her life to the right of sovereignty for a country devastated by colonial power. Ridden with several incongruities, overshadowed by mutually contradicting sources, most biographical accounts of her life make a scholar’s work daunting and an historian’s task especially challenging. A faithful profile of this late-Victorian political activist (who was born 150 years ago, in 1868) entails a significant amount of reading and a good degree of discernment between myth and fact. It requires also a serious questioning of the cultural milieu of which her image (past and current)

¹ “Vote 100”, <<https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/vote-100/>> (05/2018).

² Theresa May speaking to the House of Commons on 25 October 2017, reported in <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-10-25/debates/908056A9-60E1-451D-B225-717B3F1C75D7/OralAnswersToQuestions>> (05/2018); and in the *Belfast Telegraph* of 27 October 2017: <<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/centenary-celebrations-could-be-held-at-westminster-for-sinn-fein-abstentionist-36267404.html>> (05/2018).

³ As part of the women’s right to vote centenary commemorations, to mark the anniversary of her election in 1918, the Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament) will present the Parliament of England with a portrait of Countess Markievicz. At Lissadell House the exhibition “The Voice of Women – 100 years of achievements?” opens on 28 March 2018, to honour “the work of women engaged in the emancipation of women through suffrage” and assess the impact of Markievicz’s 1918 election upon the actual representation of women in public life and in politics, <<http://lissadellhouse.com/2018-events/>> (05/2018).

is a legacy. A “monster” for some, and a “heroine” for others⁴, “Madame” (as she was known in her days) was and still is a controversial character. In the aftermath of her arrest, in 1916, distorted and discordant versions of her trial record circulated which depicted her as a “self-pitying woman” pleading for mercy of the court-martial, or else as a “looney” (see Quigley 2016, 58-59, 62-63) who begged to be executed⁵. Many could not forget nor forgive her English roots, the fact that Constance Markievicz belonged to the Ascendancy and therefore was one of *them*, ultimately an English woman with no right to the Irish cause, a self-proclaimed patriot with an attitude. Yet, upon her death, in 1927, an estimated crowd of 300,000 people followed her coffin along the streets of Dublin to pay their tribute and bid her their last goodbye.

Prejudice and personal idiosyncrasies have left a deeper and a more enduring mark in the collective memory, owing largely, though not exclusively to Seán O’Faoláin’s ungenerous biographical account of 1934 (reprinted in 1967 and 1987)⁶. In response to that volume, and to honour the memory of two revolutionary sisters – Constance and Eva Gore-Booth – in the same year, 1934, Esther Roper gathered Markievicz’s prison letters and published them together with poems, newspaper cuttings, and several tribute photographs of the time (see Markievicz 1987 [1934])⁷. The dominant mood of Roper’s volume is the urge to acknowledge Madame’s place in the cause of freedom for Ireland and the Irish. Driven by the duty to remember, her alternative portrait literally laughs at gilded butterflies, also suggesting how memory is a matter of responsibility as well as a pleasure⁸. And indeed, *Prison Letters of Constance Markievicz* discloses a charismatic personality – the alluring “rebel Countess”

⁴To Josslyn, her brother and administrator in the years of her imprisonment, Constance wrote: “Don’t bother about rumors, My enemies will make a monster of me; my friends a heroine & both will be equally wide of the truth” (letter dated 17 October 1916, *Lissadell Papers*, D4131/K/1, Public Record Office for Northern Ireland, Belfast).

⁵This was based on Constance’s reaction to the verdict which spared her life: “I do wish you lot had the descency to shoot me” (Quigley 2016, 70). Patrick Quigley dedicates a whole chapter to the vicissitudes of Madame’s “Two trials”, including newspaper reports at home and abroad and the ensuing reactions from the general public. The troubled history of Constance Markievicz’s trial is recounted by Esther Roper in her introduction to the *Prison Letters* (Markievicz 1987 [1934], 25-32). Subsequent references to the *Letters* are taken from the 1987 edition.

⁶The volume helped consolidate the stereotype of an “average” and privileged woman, who was spoilt, knew not what to make of her spare time, and thus ended up pursuing the thrill of armed violence. I have discussed this aspect in “Biting the apple of freedom”, an introductory essay to *Lettere dal carcere di Constance Markievicz* (2017).

⁷Esther Roper had been Eva’s life companion. Her volume was published and reprinted in the same year as Seán O’Faoláin’s first and third editions of *Constance Markievicz*. The second edition, significantly, appeared in 1966, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising.

⁸“We will all laugh at gilded butterflies”, old Lear tells Cordelia towards the end of the play (V.iii.12-13), confident that sooner or later false tales and malignant people will be exposed (Shakespeare 1992, V.3.12-13).

(Markievicz 1987 [1934], 112) – a sensational woman with a captivating story well worth re-discovering.

The past may be a foreign country “where things are done differently”⁹, but there is something ominously familiar about that place. While in prison, when confinement must have felt unbearable, Constance found relief in art¹⁰, her first love, and in recollections of Italy, which she had visited in 1896 with Eva and which would always occupy a special place in their hearts. It was then, in Bordighera, “by the tideless sea [...] under olive boughs” (qtd. in Barone 1999, vol. I, 51), that Esther and Eva had become acquainted and fallen for one another; years later, in 1920, preoccupied for Constance’s condition in jail the couple appealed to Pope Benedict X in the Vatican¹¹. Madame’s pictures from Italy are often amusing: in a letter to Eva, for instance, she evokes an unusual dish she had tried – “I remember things they called ‘ucellini’ at least it sounded like that – but I don’t know what they looked like with their feathers on, as I always saw them, almost daily, in stews!”¹². For Constance the Belpaese was a “lively” place which “fill[ed] one with hope”, it certainly filled her with the hope of a free and egalitarian Irish State. The women of the Risorgimento she found highly inspirational, representing a precious model for her fellow contemporaries and for those seeking to debilitate patriarchal rule in public and private contexts, especially in Ireland.



Fig. 2 – Eva to Constance – a postcard from Rome, 1920
Courtesy of Constance Cassidy-Walsh

⁹ To paraphrase the incipit of L.P. Hartley’s novel, *The Go-Between* (1953, 7).

¹⁰ While in solitary confinement, in Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin (1916), Constance wrote poetry on toilet paper; in Aylesbury Women’s Prison, in London (1916-1917) she was allowed to keep a prison journal, a 55-page notebook “rich [...] of drawings, poems and sketches that give us an insight into the beliefs that nourished the revolutionary generation”. Cfr. Quigley 2016, 50, 3, 165.

¹¹ The episode is recounted by Esther Roper in Constance Markievicz, *Prison Letters* (1987, 104).

¹² Letter from Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, 1 April 1921, *ibidem*, 269.

Italian culture and history are central to Madame's reflections on Irish politics, and yet scholarly contributions to the topic have been cursory at the national level except for Rosangela Barone's unrivalled *The Oak Tree and the Olive Tree* (1991), and Marta Petrusiewicz's historical profile of 1998 (*Un sogno irlandese. La storia di Constance Markiewicz comandante dell'IRA [1868-1927]*). It thus seems appropriate to recall the Gore-Booths' Italian connection among the pages of the present journal, and to go back to that moment in European history when "Convict 12" asked (herself) why the Irish were still "the only people left in chains" (Markiewicz 1987 [1934], 269). Markiewicz grew firm in her conviction that the road to freedom began somewhere *in the past*, and that was where she would trace the roots of all evil – What had gone wrong?, What had the Irish "done differently from other nations?" (246). There was no easy reconciling the effects of English colonisation with memories of the mighty High Kings and Gaelic heroes; for sure the glorious past of saints and scholars looked truly foreign to her, but it was Ireland's past nevertheless. Today, in post-national societies, at a stone's throw from the Brexit, a dialogue with that past appears to be all the more necessary, and where Constance Markiewicz is concerned, valuable work is being carried to remember her and reassess her legacy. Two fine examples are Olivia Crichton-Stuart, a great-great child of Madame, and Constance Cassidy-Walsh, the present owner of Lissadell House, the historical estate she and her husband acquired in 2003, and to which the whole family has since committed. I was first introduced to them by Pamela Cassidy, Constance's sister, a very generous and patient lady who made time for me and helped me liaise with my incredibly busy interviewees – both of them working women/wives/mothers/professionals.

Brought up in the north of England, Olivia Crichton-Stuart is an artist, formerly a university lecturer in music, now an alternative medicine practitioner with a fascinating life story to tell. She has travelled the world before settling in Cambridge, UK, where she now lives with her husband and two children (one of them is a very promising choir boy aged 7). Mrs Cassidy-Walsh, daughter to a judge and a woman Senator, is herself a barrister, in fact one of the few women Senior Counsel in Ireland. Originally from Co. Kildare, she is married to Edward Walsh, a Senior Barrister, and they have seven children. The family lives between Dublin, Lissadell House and the east of Ireland. Constance is also a very active volunteer, helping the poor and homeless and organising fundraising events for Fr. Michael's Capuchin Day Centre in the capital city. What's in a name, one is almost bound to say!

The following pages result from an informal conversation with both women. I deliberately pose similar questions, for the most part, but the answers end up moving towards opposite directions. Mrs Crichton-Stuart depicts the idyll of her childhood days in Ireland, among caring relatives devoted to the arts and with a profound, almost Romantic and enduring sense of beauty, in spite of pending difficulties, and the early signs of decadence of their class. A precious testimony

of the Gore-Booth's grandeur and of their place in a by-gone era, the first part of the interview offers a nostalgic view of a crucial phase in the history of Ireland, from the big house tradition to the fate of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. Constance Markievicz's ideas and actions have since affected the way in which society has viewed the family name, both in Ireland and England, and this too, as Olivia points out, forms part of Madame's legacy. There is a genuine pride and a great affection towards her relatives in her words, and a strong sense of responsibility towards the past and its memory for present generations. The genealogy tree below was created *ad hoc* and in keeping with the interview's mood and contents. The second part of the interview projects us into the future, and it is a future that looks for (and looks back to) a past to be revisited, for duty as well as for pleasure. Fully restored to its original magnificence, after five decades of neglect, Lissadell House is now open to visitors and scholars who can enjoy the sights and atmosphere of the place, learn of the extraordinary Gore-Booth family and view documents of rare historical value¹³. It takes an incredible amount of time and energy to keep the site up and running, and this is the challenge of a team of passionate people with a great cause well worth their efforts.

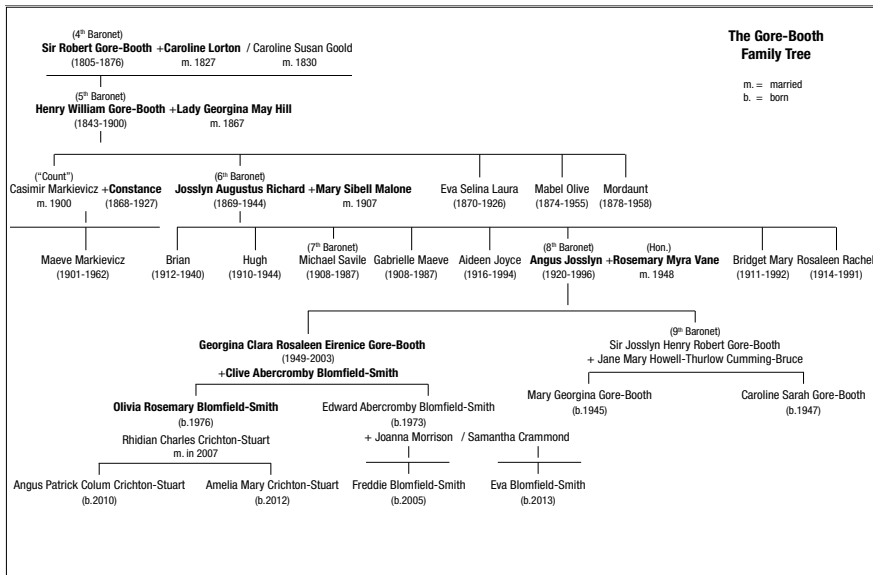


Fig. 3 – The Gore-Booth Family Tree

¹³ These are part of the Lissadell House Heritage Collection, from which some documents have been published recently (eg. *Constance Markievicz Journal 1916*, published by *Willow Ireland* in 2016; and two Lissadell Brochures: *The prison poetry & sketches of Countess Markievicz and Eva Gore-Booth. Her Poetry & Sketches*, both published in 2017). See <<http://lissadellhouse.com/>> (05/2018).

In conversation with Olivia Crichton-Stuart:

LS: What was it like to grow up in a family such as yours?

OCS: I suppose like many families there are all sorts of different points to consider in answering this question, the first part, of course, is what was a family such as mine like and then what was it like growing up in it? All sorts of influences, characters and situations come into play.

Being Anglo-Irish is one situation which I think many people find a bit unsettling. I know Aileen, my great-aunt said she neither felt English nor Irish. In England it would be easy to mistake us as completely English as we all talk with an English accent but, if you know the subtleties of it you begin to catch on to a few words, turns of phrases and the odd subtle accent that I associate with Aileen's way of talking and the Anglo-Irish in Ireland in particular. Lissadell however has the happiest memories for me, and for my mother I know it was her spiritual home but in Ireland people think you are not Irish and in England I don't, and I know my mother didn't feel totally English either. Nomads in a funny kind of way wanting to belong somewhere.

LS: Would you say that Constance Markievicz felt the same?

OCS: Who knows? What I do know is that many of us, particularly the women of the family are continually drawn back to the sublime beauty of Sligo and its ever changing scenery. There is something very magical and spiritual about it which inspires music, art, and poetry. Not only does it inspire it, it seems to run through many of my family. My view is that my family were, and are incredibly sensitive. Sensitive of mind, sensitive to other people's needs, sensitive to the surroundings both negative (war, poverty, seeing the hardships of others) and positive (beauty in nature, happiness and joy of others, arts), sensitive of other's views and sensitive physical health. How they each reacted to it is in very diverse ways although some things are pretty universal. They were extremely aware of what was going on around them. I believe this sensitivity brings with it an increased awareness of beauty around them but also, particularly in women, who are by nature empathic, an awareness of other people's suffering. They were affected by the many wrongs in the world. I believe that sensitivity needs to be expressed in music, art, poetry and creativity which was another characteristic of many of my family. This can cause turbulence but it can cause great joy.

LS: It is interesting to discover, as you talk, how Lissadell and the Sligo area nourished everyone's sensitivity, not only Eva's and Constance's.

OCS: The arts were enjoyed by all and to a greater or lesser extent each member explored their particular favourite mode of expression. We all

know that Eva was a poetess and that Constance an artist. Those members of the family that I was lucky enough to remember whilst growing up were Aideen, who loved nature and used to get up early to hear the dawn chorus and was greatly troubled by the waning birdlife at Lissadell, she loved art and enjoyed music and dancing and company. Bidy (Bridget) loved art and painted in vibrant colours; she was a bit more serious but generous and kind like Aideen even if she had very little. Rosaleen was a very kind, gentle and caring soul, she loved music and played the harp, she loved animals and birds (she kept rescue donkeys and peacocks). My grandfather, Angus, was very sensitive and kind by all accounts from my mother and what my grandmother told me. I remember him only when he was mentally ill. He was very gentle with me and when I spoke to him about music he would talk for hours about it and sometimes slip into the language of the composer he was speaking about – Russian I remember at one point. The war was perhaps too much for him to bear. He married for love, a loving, gentle and generous woman (my grandmother Rosemary). He was diagnosed with schizophrenia when my mother and uncle were very little. Apparently at the time he played a huge amount of piano music and also was once heard getting up to play the organ in the night. My mother believed he did it to relieve his internal pain. I understand he also played the violin and I remember finding a flute and a clarinet at Lissadell which may have been Brian's or Hugh's. I am uncertain but I think that is perhaps what Aideen said. Gabrielle played the organ. The very building was designed for music. The gallery which is at the core of the building was designed to improve acoustics for music with curved doors and an organ was placed in the middle and a beautiful walnut piano. I later learned that music was even commissioned for Sir Robert Goore-Booth in Italy¹⁴. The flute was an earlier instrument and so perhaps it belonged to a previous generation than Brian and Hugh's. It was not laid out like a modern flute.

My mother was an artist who also loved poetry and music, she would always have music playing on the radio or a tape while I grew up. In particular she loved quartets, singing herself and big orchestral work. (She was not allowed to go to Art college as it was considered inappropriate for a girl of her social standing... Which just shows how much Constance must have had to battle for approval two generations before her). She enjoyed singing and playing the piano but was very sensitive to the world and everything around her. She found that even the news was too dreadful to listen to, refused to listen to it or get a newspaper at one stage and often hid in her shell but had

¹⁴ The family's Italian frequentations include a long-lasting friendship with composer Antonio Andriani, who set to music some of Eva's poems, which Eirenice Gore-Booth, her great niece, used to sing.

a great sense of humour, as did my grandmother, and could be quite militant at times but didn't have the courage to go with it. Incredibly frightened of the world around her but tried to hide it. I studied music (nearly studied art but decided that music was my greatest love). My two children have shown great signs of the arts in them.

What runs through and through my family is the need to express themselves creatively. They drew comfort from expression in art, music, poetry, nature, creativity and imagination in difficult situations. Recognising the beauty in all things and being able to create beauty, even if it was just in imagination – despite prison, despite mental health problems, despite weak physical health, despite political/acrimonious situations. It is what sustained them.

LS: One of Constance's worst detractors, Seán O'Faoláin, saw no real talent in her. In his opinion her interest in the arts was a question of class privilege, if not a reflection of her being a spoilt and bored girl.

OCS: Being from a privileged background meant for the men and for modern women an education and influence (I was the first generation to go to university). Some may view it as a privilege which comes with responsibilities but many may not. Sadly it is those that do not view that way that are often remembered more keenly with bitterness, and often those that do are "tarred with the same brush". This association and attitude that being from a certain class means that you must be a selfish and thoughtless individual is something I think we were and are all aware of and have come across many times. I always hoped that people would see me for me and I think many of us as a family would have said/say the same.

One thing that I was taught by my mother and will continue to teach my own children is never to behave as though someone is below you in any way, intelligence, social scale, education etc.

LS: And this is what Constance, and her father before her, also did. I am thinking of the tenants and of how the Gore-Booths opposed to the evictions – sadly a common practice in those years.

OCS: The attitude towards those that worked on the estate that my mother had been taught from her mother and that same attitude that Aideen, all her siblings and Constance and Eva had was similar. They all visited the estate workers, particularly after retiring to see that they were ok. I remember this clearly as a child and there were several old folk we would visit in England who would often offer me sweets and one would always send me a Kitkat and a handkerchief for my birthday when I was little. They were like extended family. When we came to Lissadell every summer

and then began to come at Easter time too, there was always a great list of visiting we had to do and we became friends with some of the workers grandchildren. Many of whom were retired estate workers and their families. Aideen always felt it was extremely important and she also felt that it was her duty and obligation to watch out for them too. I think many men who have grown up in this environment find it difficult to show the empathy that the women could as they were rather taught to hide their feeling and emotions.

LS: The women seem to occupy a very special place in the history of the family, they certainly do in your recollections. How about the men?

OCS: My mother had quite an unusual childhood, her mother (my grandmother Rosemary Gore-Booth) came from an English aristocratic family from the North of England and, as far as I understand, she met Angus Gore-Booth in the war. They were both very sensitive souls. Angus was extremely intelligent, very sensitive and very musical and I think was one of those brains that was on a knife edge of brilliance, creativity and mental illness. Had he been in a different time and a different situation perhaps mental illness may not have succumbed as it did. Rosemary Gore-Booth (born Vane) was the daughter of the 10th Baron Barnard. She was one of the most generous, kind and long suffering people I knew. My mother was the eldest child and my uncle Joss, the current baronet, was the youngest. It was when my uncle was a baby and my mother not much older, that Angus, my grandfather was diagnosed with schizophrenia. At the time he had thought it wise to live in a caravan in winter, which I have since found photos of. He began to be considered rather unsafe to be around children, although he greatly loved them. Then, mental illness was seen as something not easily treated and also something many families at the time hid away as if it were an embarrassment. A young mother, my grandmother, came home to England to ask for help and support from her family in bringing up her children. I think it was an incredible sadness for her as, unlike many marriages in those days in the social class system where parents urged their children to marry so and so as "they were the right sort", she married for love according to my mother. I have one letter from my grandfather (Sir Angus Gore-Booth), after 17 years thanking my great grandmother and God for the kindness and generosity of my great-grandmother in helping my grandmother bring up my mother and uncle. He was thankful and appeared to be understanding of his inability to have brought them up. My grandmother sadly succumbed to Parkinson's disease and so needed more help than first anticipated. My great-grandmother therefore had a huge influence on their upbringing, as she did mine. She lived well into her nineties (my teens).

LS: What are your memories of those years, when your grandmother was alive and the family lived in England? Did you manage to visit Ireland?

OCS: My mother, Eirenice Gore-Booth, and uncle Joss were largely brought up in England in their grandparent's home, Raby Castle, until their grandfather died (10th Baron Barnard). It used to be very cold in the castle and later my mother would never put the thermostat above 10 degrees centigrade to save fuel but also because she had grown up in a big old drafty house feeling cold! Having heating was somewhat a luxury!

My mother chose the antithesis of the right husband for herself. I think she thought her husband was a strong crutch, but later discovered the blustering behaviour was hiding deep insecurity but expressed all in the wrong ways that my mother didn't have a hope of changing. The result was a very broken family and my mother, brother and I growing up in a little house in the village below the castle where she grew up. The greatest highlight of my childhood, and I know the highlight of my mother's life at the time, was to "escape" to Lissadell to see family, paint, sing and enjoy the beauty of it all. She would pack up the car and she would try to be brave and drive up to Scotland, stay with cousins there and then on to the ferry across to Ireland. We would see Rosaleen in Northern Ireland and latterly Bidy and then on to Lissadell (Aideen, my great-aunt) and Angus (my grandfather). At the time[,] the political situation in Ireland was not stable and ironically she was always nervous driving our English number plated car all the way through Northern Ireland. In fact at one stage when we were at Lissadell, we even thought we were being followed. It was quite frightening.

LS: This is where your sense of being "a nomad", as you said, the feeling of never being treated like a local begins? How did people's behaviour towards you change, while in Ireland and while in England?

OCS: We never knew how people viewed us and what reaction people would have to us. Were we English? Were we Irish? Were we that terrible Anglo-Irish family that Constance shunned? Were we welcomed and celebrated as family of Constance? Did people judge us for the people we were and not who or what we might be associated with? Half the time we didn't know whether we were walking into what might be possibly dangerous or walking into a welcome. Aideen had a few frightening stories and so she must have felt the same much of the time.

I know there were situations where people in England would think we had a rather embarrassing background and treated us as if it was rather unfortunate... It didn't help also having divorce and mental illness in the family for my mother and her generation. At the same time there was the grandeur of the family that was respected somewhat. Certainly in England Constance

would be the subject of a tricky conversation, but in Ireland sometimes one would be treated as if we were somehow special. I remember in an exhibition my mother held in Dublin a gentleman was so taken up by the family resemblance and the idea he was in the presence of a relation of Constance that he knelt down to the mother who didn't know quite what to do other than wait until he got up again and carry on talking.

LS: What was it like living in Ireland, when you stayed at Lissadell?

OCS: There was lots of fun to be had even in a cold house that quite often resembled a museum. I used to bicycle around the gallery at Lissadell. My brother and I would take turns playing the piano and when he played I would dance around the room pretending to be a ballerina with great jumps. I used to sing and play for hours enjoying the amazing acoustics of a room that was designed for music in between the times when Aideen was showing people around. Sometimes I would go with her and then she would make me sing. She used to do the same to my mother. The house was great for hide and seek, particularly the basement which was not so organised as it is now. I used to run down the corridors upstairs and if no one was looking try to pretend to be Mary Poppins and slide down the last banisters. There was an antique wheelchair which my brother and I quite liked to sit in and wheel around. I remember looking at the butterflies which would get trapped in to the upstairs rooms and dry in the sunlight. There was a long speaking tube to talk down on the back stairs and that was also quite fun for a while too. If we were bored, we would head outside and entertain the tourists (a few would ask for autographs because they noticed us come out of the house and were probably disappointed that because my mother had married our names were not Gore-Booth!). We would swim and play on the sand which I always thought was rather magical (I even collected what I thought was magic sand to take back to England), ride our bicycles, I and my mother liked to ride horses which we did with friends. Aideen bought a Shetland pony called Tara which I used to ride. We would play with other children nearby. My mother was a pretty fearful person but [also] a pretty fearless rider. Aideen got her riding side saddle in Ireland too. Mummy and I would also paint and Edward, my brother, liked to fish. Aideen would tell us stories and take us around all her friends, many of which were retired estate workers or families of them. She would often get me to sing to them which I sort of enjoyed but was also a little embarrassed.

My mother's paintings, which she sold by exhibiting them on the billiard room table, would pay for our trips to Ireland and we would have a few treats and go out for dinner, buy lobster to cook with the proceeds. Aideen loved food and entertaining and so did we. She used to dress up in her favourite outfit and say she felt like the "Bees Knees" [*The Bee Gees*] and she

would say the food was “dishious” (which was supposed to be delicious with a mouthful as children we thought that was very funny ... Only elders can speak with their mouthful) or “Numnum” ... I think because she had spent so much time with children. She used to comb my hair a hundred times as she said that it would shine even brighter that way.

My uncle Joss who inherited Lissadell from my grandfather, Angus Gore-Booth, made some improvements, but that was only shortly before he sold Lissadell. When I was a child the running water upstairs wasn't drinkable and so Aideen would give us a jug to take up stairs to bed. We would make hot water bottles miles away from our bedroom and take them up to a horse hair bed which sagged dreadfully on one side and went up at the head and the feet and so you were often propelled out of bed. When I was little I shared with my mother and so invariable rolled over her side in the night. My brother often brought a friend with him from school and stayed in the room above the bow room (at the time you couldn't see out to the sea as the woods had got so overgrown). Sometimes the electricity didn't work and we used candle upstairs. There was one working light in the hall that hung in a corner of the corridor that ran all the way from one side of Lissadell to the only other bathroom upstairs at the time which was on the other corner of Lissadell (a corridor at right angles). If I needed the bathroom in the night, I ran from our bedroom down to the corner (as fast as possible through the bit where I thought there was a ghost), hoped not to get splinters in my feet as I could never be bothered with finding my slippers (it often felt like an old boat underfoot and the pictures that I past on my scamper were of the expeditions of the ship Kara amongst icebergs that Sir Henry took). When I got to the bathroom, we had to use a bucket to flush the “lav” as Aideen would have said it as the flush didn't work! Nothing ever really worked properly. There was an enormous Victorian bath with sides that at some stage used to spray water out whilst standing, it no longer worked and is no longer there, but you could only get about an inch of hot water from a little tap on the side that had been added and actually the best thing I decided to do with the bath was to use it as a slide – slide down and splash into the inch of water in the bottom!

LS: Your memories of Lissadell recall images evoked by Eva and Constance in their children diaries, an almost idyllic place they would go back years later, in their correspondence, at difficult times, when circumstances forced them to live apart. I wonder how much about their story and especially about Constance's engagement in Irish politics you had a chance to learn at home, in school, and later on, as an adult through the media, for instance, or through scholarly attention.

OCS: I learnt nothing of Constance at school. I remember mentioning it in a history class once and my teacher did know who she was but was in-

terested more in what I had to say about than in what I could learn. I was educated in England. I learnt from my family that she was a very famous woman that in Ireland was celebrated for her bravery and courage, but in England she was someone that at best was remembered as the first elected female into the House of Commons. I have learnt most of the finer details from books but latterly even BBC Radio have taken an interest and I have heard several interesting programmes. What people forget is when a family has such a history, they have a tendency to talk more about current news, who is doing what and menial discussion as opposed to their own history. I always wish they had spoken about it more. As children we might be intrigued but often dismissed that history as there are other matters to attend to. I remember Aileen discussing what has become known as “the Lissadell Affair” and what happened to Gabrielle as it was her part of the history that mattered the most to her.

[At the death of her father in 1944 (Josslyn, the 6th Baronet), and since the only male heir (Michael) was unfit to assume the governance of the estate, Gabrielle Gore-Booth took charge of the property. She was aged 26 at the time. With Aileen, her sister, and their mother, Gabrielle would soon be reduced to near poverty and eviction by the almost dissolution of the family estate in the 1960s]¹⁵.

LS: It is a truly sad story, and in a way the “Affair” marked the beginning of the end of the Gore-Booth era at Lissadell¹⁶. Going back to Constance, what is your opinion of her as a woman? Reading through her Prison Letters there

¹⁵ “Gabrielle managed the estate under the supervision of the then Solicitor General [...]. In 1952 a new Solicitor General was appointed, and he took a more active role in managing the estate. He found that the family had run up a large overdraft as a result of death duty payments and the general agricultural economic depression. [...] In September 1954 Gabrielle discovered that timber receipts of £5,750 were not recorded in the year-end accounts. A confrontation followed; the accounts were amended, but relations between them became strained. In February 1956 he sacked Gabrielle, and appointed a new manager. Gabrielle retaliated by locking all the gates of Lissadell. [...]. Court action led to years of delay before their claim for an inquiry into the management of the estate was dismissed as ‘reckless’, ‘absurd’ ‘fantastic’. [...] Calls for a public inquiry were followed by an investigation by RTÉ’s current affairs programme”. From a dedicated section in the Lissadell House Online page, <<http://lissadellhouse.com/countess-markievicz/gore-booth-family/gabrielle-gore-booth/>> (05/2018). A touching and insightful account is found in Gore-Booth 2014.

¹⁶ In 2003, Sir Josslyn (the 9th Baronet) and his wife Lady Jane bid their farewell to the House. He claimed that “the place would never be profitable” and pointed out that “neither of their daughters, Mary, 18, and Caroline, 16, should be ‘burdened with the responsibility of this place’ because it had been a burden to them as well as a privilege”. See “Final farewell to Lissadell House” (2003), an interview with Harry Keany (<<https://www.independent.ie/regional/sligochampion/news/final-farewell-at-lissadell-house-27547894.html>>, 05/2018).

is strong sense of coherence and integrity throughout, the fact that she remained truthful to herself and the cause she embraced to the end.

OCS: She was a very courageous woman who wanted to put what she saw as a great wrong right. Because she was a woman she probably saw the great unfairness of her own situation and thus saw unfairness highlighted in brilliant colour in many different forms around her which angered her and made her want to fight back. I can really appreciate her boredom and feeling of being confined by her class, her sex and expectations of her by her family and thus her willingness to fight against it all and overthrow the whole system on behalf of everyone that has suffered the system which, in many ways, was driven by the English peerage/government. I am sure she was many a time undermined and dismissed in her own family on the basis she was a “silly” woman that wasn’t allowed to be intelligent or have a view, wasn’t allowed to use the power of influence that the men had, wasn’t automatically given a good education, wasn’t allowed to be too intelligent, was sent away at port time at the table and probably had to fight tooth and nail to get to art college. I can appreciate all these as some I have seen in action and in terms of education, my own mother was not allowed to study beyond the age of 16, as it would have “ruined her attractiveness to have become intelligent or held interesting views”. This was thought may have interfered with her marriage of the “right sort of man”. She was not allowed to go to art college. I can see much of my mother’s own frustration and the occasional frustration of my own from the old aristocratic system. I can see that this instilled a view of the world around her as being unfair. I am sure that there were lovely people around her that she cared for that worked for Lissadell and that the experience of spending time with them must have also underlined their situations to her. The same oppressive system she had been frustrated by needed to be overthrown. She wanted to help them but how was she to help a problem that was so universal. She must have seen dreadful poverty and unfairness and felt responsible for the system, of which she was associated closely with. She also may have had strong feelings of wanting to belong somewhere. She was given no importance as a woman amongst men and had little power over her destiny. Even a suitable match would have been approved and encouraged for her. To find meaning and to achieve something in her life for many people and to be respected and loved for it must have been the compelling driver for her, enough to even neglect her own family (she must have felt that what she was achieving would help so many more families in much worse situations than her own).

LS: And that included fighting a war for independence, going to prison, risking her life literally every day.

OCS: I have never agreed with fighting or war, but I can completely appreciate why she felt that it was the only way to be heard at the time.

LS: For her ideas, for speaking her mind openly, she was a woman ahead of her time. And so was Eva. Looking at Ireland just over 100 years from the Easter Rising, what would you say is their legacy and the legacy of women who fought that war?

OCS: Curiously enough I think both their legacies are connected with being able to be heard without violence. Constance felt that at the time violence was necessary but they overthrew that system and now I believe they have cleared the way for open negotiation without violence and a voice for all. There is still some way to go but I hope fairness and balanced discussion and negotiation will always prevail.

LS: A lot has been said and written about Madame's relationship with Eva, with Maeve and Stasko, and also with Casimir. What is your opinion of her as a sister, a mother, a wife?

OCS: I think a lot of people have viewed her as irresponsible. Eva and Constance were a very solid team, in some respects, supporting and understanding each other's compelling battle to overthrow the system. Their closeness and understanding was a great strength to each other although I get the impression that perhaps Eva was more mature, philosophical and a solid support for Constance. Eva was more considerate in her actions, Constance was flighty and could not be held back, hot headed and inclined to shoot from the hip when she felt that something was wrong or unfair.

LS: We have entered the so-called decade of centenaries – 1912-1922 – and as part of it there have been and there will be a number of celebratory events, both in Ireland and in England. What will be your role, if any at all, and what in your opinion should be done, for instance at Lissadell House or in the Sligo area?

OCS: Nothing planned. I am not at the forefront of the public Gore-Booth awareness because my surname is not Gore-Booth. The name goes down the male side of the family. I wonder whether that would have annoyed Eva!

In conversation with Constance Cassidy:

LS: What is your earliest recollection of Constance Markievicz?

CC: My father, and many of his generation, revered Countess Markievicz for her work for the poor of Dublin, and for risking her life for Ireland's freedom. He named me "Constance" after Countess Markievicz. And I have given the name Constance to two of my daughters, Elanor-Constance, and Constance-Elisabeth.

LS: How did you become involved in the Gore-Booth property?

CC: As a young child, our family had holidayed in the Sligo area and had regularly visited Lissadell where we had met with the late Ms. Aideen Gore-Booth. In those years, the house was in an increasing state of decay and could be acquainted with the decaying “Satis House” in which Ms. Havesham lived in the wonderful Charles Dickens story, *Great Expectations*.

My husband had worked as a barrister on the Midland Circuit which included Sligo and thus was familiar with Lissadell. When the property came on the market, we both felt that it was an opportunity to create something special from a tourism perspective, particularly since both of us practice; and as barristers there is no good will to sell off when one ceases to practice, and both of us were mindful of the fact that we have seven children.

LS: Has your view of Constance Markievicz changed, and if so, in what terms?

CC: Initially, I would have viewed the Countess as being an Irish revolutionary and as being one of the persons who played a formative role in the establishment of the New State. However, I now realize there is much more to her life. From an early stage she was a remarkable artist and in fact exhibited at the Royal Dublin Society in the years 1903-1907 along with her husband Casimir Dunin Markievicz, and George Russell (A.E.) among others.

She also was one of the first suffragists, promoting the right of women to vote from as early as 1896 with her sister Eva Gore-Booth. Constance was also extremely conscious of workers’ rights and of the suffering of the poor. From having led a life of luxury she embraced a life of toil working for the poor and endeavouring to achieve a fairer and better society within Ireland.

LS: How did Lissadell contribute to the Easter Rising centenary celebrations?

CC: We have had a number of events endeavouring to mark the life of Constance. One of the more successful was the first lunch for all of the female Ministers in Government held in July 2016, and which was led by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, who was the first woman, after Constance Markievicz, to serve as a Minister in an Irish Government, albeit at a remove of some sixty years later.

The previous year, in July 2015, we had the Cabinet (the executive arm of Government in Ireland) hold a meeting in Lissadell, in the Dining Room. This was the first time the Cabinet met outside Dublin in nine years. It was a compliment to Countess Markievicz.



Fig. 3 – Meeting of the Cabinet in Lissadell, July 2015

In this year, we also had the Prince of Wales and his wife the Duchess of Cornwall, unveil a plaque to her memory and that of her sister, Eva Gore-Booth. The plaque contained the eulogy to the sisters by Ireland's greatest poet, W. B. Yeats.



Fig. 4 – The Royal Visit at Lissadell, May 2015

We also had a wonderful celebration for her 90th anniversary of her death (July 2017) and where there were recitations of her prison poetry, recitations of the poetry of W. B. Yeats honouring Constance Markievicz and her sister, Eva, and finally a reading of a graveside oration delivered by Eamon de Valera on the occasion of her funeral on 17 July and which was read by Eamon de Valera's grandson, Deputy O'Cuiv, in terms utterly reminiscent of his grandfather.

LS: Constance was a woman ahead of her time, in many ways. And so was Eva. Looking at Ireland 100 years from the Easter Rising, what would you say is their legacy and the legacy of women who fought that war?

CC: In the aftermath of the establishment of the Irish Free State the women who had been equals in the struggle for independence and in achieving the Irish Free State were essentially brushed aside and it was almost sixty years later before women again were allowed to play a true, prominent position. The progress of women in Ireland has been slow but is gathering pace; but true equality between the sexes remains yet to be achieved.

LS: Most biographers and people writing about Constance, both within and outside academia, tend to remember her through anecdotes. And there seems to be no end to the amount of unusual and bizarre situations involving her. What is your favourite Markievicz anecdote?

CC: In 1908, Constance, Countess Markievicz assisted her sister Eva Gore-Booth in challenging the election of Winston Churchill as a Member of Parliament in the Manchester By Election of that year. Churchill supported a licensing bill which would have banned women from working in bars after 6pm (the fear was that the bar maids were taking men's jobs). Constance drove a coach and four horses through Manchester, and made many speeches in favour of the women bar maids. In response to heckling from the audience – a man said “can ya cook a dinner?!!!”, Constance replied, “yes, but can you drive a coach and four with reins in one hand”, a feat for which she was notable.

LS: A lot has been said and written about her relationship with Eva, with Maeve, with Sasko, with Casimir. What is your opinion on her private role as a sister, a mother, a wife?

CC: As a sister, particularly with Eva Gore-Booth, she shared an extremely intense and emotional relationship and both believed they could commune telepathically. As a wife she enjoyed a remarkable lifestyle with Casimir until her interests were swayed by her increasing involvement in politics from 1908, after which, whilst they remained firm friends they diversified. From the time of the Great Lock Out in 1913, Constance's interests were primarily on serving the poor and in advancing the cause of Ireland.



Fig. 5 – Countess Markievicz (driving) and her sister, Eva, in action
(*The Daily Graphic*)



Fig. 6 – Sir Winston Churchill escorted by the police
(*The Daily Graphic*, 23 April, 1908)¹⁷

Her husband Casimir elected to return to his native Ukraine for long periods, and in 1914 he enlisted with the Russian forces and served in the army in World War I. Casimir was seriously injured and nursed back to health by a young female relation who appears to have perhaps replaced

Constance in his affections. Casimir was at Constance's death bed in 1927 and they remained firm, loyal friends, but the spark of the initial years was no more.

As a mother she had a distant and perhaps estranged relationship with her daughter, Maeve (born in Lissadell in November 1901). In one account of the life of Constance, she arranged to meet her daughter Maeve after Constance had returned from her campaign on behalf of Ireland after a tour of America in 1920. They were to meet in a hotel in London, in the drawing room for tea. But when Maeve entered the drawing room she failed to recognise her own mother. It was only when she met with an acquaintance as she was leaving the hotel that she was informed that her mother was indeed present. This shows the hardship Constance had suffered for her years with multiple periods of imprisonment, but also the lack of relationship with her daughter during Maeve's teenage years, and it was only after the establishment of the Irish Free State and the cessation of the Civil War that they became better acquainted, yet they were never close.

¹⁷ Eva and Constance were involved in a by-election campaign for the abolition of a Liberal government bill against the employment of barmaids. The "attack on the barmaid trade", Eva maintained, represented a "serious displacement of women's labour by act of Parliament". Cf. Tiernan 2003, 126. Winston Churchill, the Liberal Candidate, was defeated in the campaign. See also "In defence of barmaids: the Gore-Booth sisters take on Winston Churchill" (<www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/in-defence-of-barmaidsthe-gore-booth-sisters-take-on-winston-churchill/>, 05/2018).

LS: Lissadell House is among the most popular tourist destinations in Ireland. Who is the average visitor, and what type of questions do you get asked?

CC: We attract numerous visitors from Ireland, many of whom are familiar with Lissadell House from the poetry of William Butler Yeats, other visitors from Ireland who are aware that the place is the childhood home of Constance Markievicz, and others who simply know it as a grand old house. We also receive many foreign visitors, who want to learn about the history of Ireland; and so we have increasingly dedicated extensive exhibition halls to highlighting the role of Lissadell and the Gore-Booth family in the emergence of Ireland as a nation.

People often ask me whether I am related to Countess Markievicz. The answer is no. Just because we live in her family's house does not mean that we are related to her!

LS: Seen from the outside, your life here seems to be almost enviable, though I assume that being the owners of the Lissadell estates must be also very engaging. What is the toughest part of your "job"?

CC: As well as opening up our house at Lissadell to the public, I am also a mother of seven children, and a busy barrister. Finding the time to manage all of the various demands can be very demanding. Serving the public can be hard, particularly where my husband and I and our children try to make a visit to Lissadell a unique experience.

LS: What are Lissadell's plans and projects for the future, especially in relation to the so-called decade of centenaries?

CC: We have already established a series of historic exhibitions which we regularly renew, reorganise and endeavour to make more relevant. Over the last two years we have undertaken an extensive planting programme with 100,000 flower bulbs planted, with the addition of two new gardens, one dedicated to the memory of Canadian singer and songwriter Leonard Cohen, who played two concerts in Lissadell in 2010. Lissadell was always recognised as one of the leading horticultural estates in Europe and it is our ambition to make it a place of beauty, tranquillity and enjoyment in a magnificent seaside setting. We continue to work on improvements and this is probably a lifelong commitment.

LS: The question I did not ask?

CC: It is the question I like to keep asking: "Why?", and that is probably too complex a question to answer, but ultimately there is a magical fascination to Lissadell, and whilst it requires incredible dedication, for my husband and I to see Lissadell alive and thriving is reward in itself.

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