

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Oxford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks

H. B. Moorhouse

TOWSEY TALES

NAME: Constance Mabel Towsey

BIRTH DETAILS: 18 May 1858 Henley-upon-Thames

DEATH DETAILS: 28 Mar 1956 Clacton-on-Sea

CHART REF: Towsey Chart B1

MARRIAGE DETAILS: unmarried

Connie was the eighth child and fourth daughter of Charles Augustus and Mary Harriet Towsey. She was born less than two years after her father had been declared bankrupt, but we see that by the time she was two years old, the family were well established at their new home and business premises at Hart Street, just up the road from the Henley church.

Although almost all of Connie's siblings survived into adulthood, the two born immediately before her, died before adulthood. Her brother Alfred Morrell, born in 1854, died at 18 years of age and Gert (Gertrude), born 1856, died just three months before her tenth birthday.

At the time of the 1871 census, although the family were still living in Henley, twelve year-old Connie was on



holidays with her mother and younger sister, Mary (called May), aged seven, at a boarding house at 16 Gladstone Terrace, within sight of the beach at Brighton.

Charles Towsey retired two months later, in July 1871 and the few family members still at home moved to Deal, near Ramsgate on the Kent coast.

By the time of the 1881 census, Connie, then 22 and calling herself a school teacher, was living with the family of John Sayer, a wealthy fish monger, in Lewisham, south London, as governess to his 5 year-old triplet girls (born 3rd Qtr. 1875, Wandsworth): Gertrude, Ethel and Fanny. She was still with the Sayer family ten years later, when the girls were fifteen years old, but being shown as a 'companion'. On that occasion, the parents were not present, so probably off on holidays somewhere, leaving Connie in charge of the girls and the two servants.

Connie brought up those girls, from infancy right through their teenage years. We even see that in 1901, at 25 years of-age, all three girls were still single and still living at home. By that time, a younger woman had been employed as 'Companion', but Connie was staying with the family as a visitor.

As we have already seen many times in those days, daughters of wealthy families were often reticent about rushing into marriage, but one does wonder also, if the example of the woman who had raised them, had inclined these girls to view marriage with cautious eyes.

Cautious and independently minded perhaps, but 18 months later, Gertrude Hamer Sayer finally married, followed six months after that by Ethel Laurie Sayer, leaving Fanny Emma Sayer to hold out until 1919, when she finally tied the knot, at 43 years of-age.

In 1893, Connie's sister-in-law, Jessy, the wife of Arthur John Towsey, and their 15 year-old daughter, Mary, travelled from New Zealand to Britain and thence Germany, where Mary studied music.

One of this Mary's daughters, told me that one of her mother's memories of England was that her aunt wore strange clothing. This would of course have been either her Aunt Gus or Aunt Connie, or maybe both.

At that time, corsets were worn by every fashionable lady and, by the time of the arrival of sweet, young, innocent, conservative Mary from the colonies, tight lacing had reached its extreme manifestation. This was the practice of lacing corsets as tightly as possible, so as to produce not just a slim, hourglass figure, but also to promote a correct, upright posture. The slight drawback of this fashion, was that women could not breathe, hence the booming sales of smelling salts, to revive them when they fainted.

Despite the almost complete acceptance of this state of affairs, doctors were constantly warning of the damage this fashion was doing to women's bones and internal organs, whilst the clergy, as one might expect, railed against the immorality of such vanity.

Women of strong character, particularly those who were disinterested in the attentions of men, like Gus and Connie, formed the Rational Dress Society in 1881. The broader movement was referred to as the Dress Reform or Rational Dress Movement and concentrated on eliminating anything that distorted the figure and rendered any sort of healthy exercise impossible. The main target of this movement was of course the corset, but also included heavily weighted dresses and tied down cloaks that restricted the movement of the arms.



Constance Mabel Towsey 1880s





<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EPW039155>

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Beaumont Hall Hotel, Clacton-on-Sea



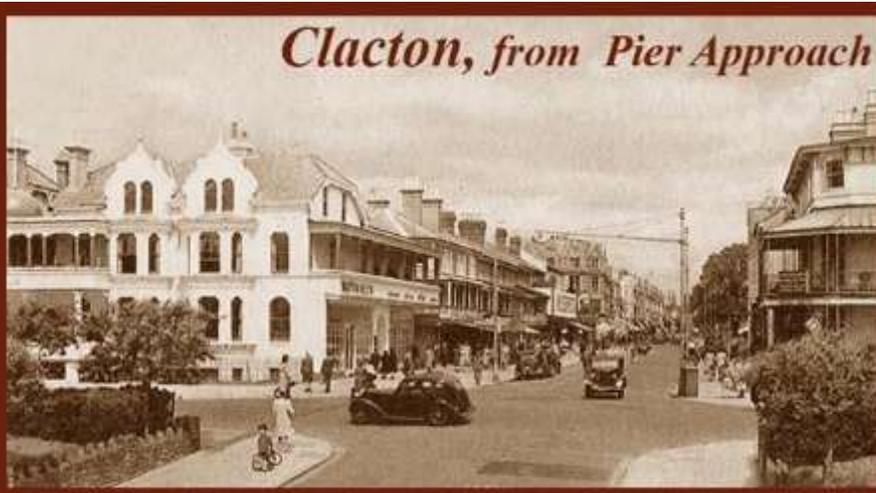
Clacton-on-Sea Circa 1905

Although Connie was visiting the Sayer family in April 1901, she would most likely have retired by then to Beaumont Hall Hotel in Essex, or possibly, but less likely have been staying with another family as a companion.

Mary Harriet Towsey was staying at Beaumont Hall Private Hotel in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, when she died on June 1st, 1900 at 77 years of-age. As mentioned, it is likely that Connie was living there with her. Certainly by 1911 Connie, then 53 years old, was living in genteel retirement at Beaumont Hall together with her sister, Gus, by then 60 years old.

No doubt the two sisters were spending their days promenading along the sea-front, taking in the invigorating salt air, whilst reminiscing about how pleasant their single lives had been, so far.

We see on the 1911 census, that the Managing Director of Beaumont Hall, was 80 year-old spinster, Elizabeth Beaumont, who was by then blind. This would not have greatly impaired her management capacity, as she was assisted by six relatives, presumably two



Clacton, from Pier Approach



Connie Towsey *circa 1910*
with unknown children

still living with Emma Beaumont in Clacton.

In fact Constance, the last of that Towsey line in England, lived to the ripe old age of 98 years. She died on March 28th, 1956 after living for 45 years as the “companion” of Emma Agnes Beaumont.

Constance left her entire estate of £1797 (which, even in 1956 would have bought several nice houses), to Emma Beaumont, who lived just a couple of years longer, dying at 88 years of age, in 1958.

By the time that Constance died, she had lost contact with her relatives in Australia and New Zealand and they, in turn, did not seem to have known of her existence.

Thus ended that branch of the Towsey family in England.

nephews and four nieces. Of these, the second eldest was 40 year-old Emma Agnes Beaumont, the housekeeper. All seven Beaumonts had been born in either Norfolk or Suffolk, but we know that some of these younger Beaumonts had been taken to Canada, where their father made a fortune, before returning to England and investing in property about the Clacton area, including the private hotel.

It would have been at about that time that three of the Beaumont sisters and their brother, built “Muskoka”: a charming Edwardian villa, at 31 Wash Lane, close to Beaumont Hall.

Through all of the time that Connie had been living at Beaumont Hall, she and Emma Beaumont had become close friends and it is likely that Connie accompanied the four Beaumont siblings when they moved into their new house in Wash Lane.

The children in the photo of Connie, taken in about 1910, are unidentified, but they might have belonged to one of the Sayer triplets.

When Gus died in 1918. She left her entire estate, of over a thousand pounds, to Constance.

Reverend John Beers died two years later, in 1920, and Edith lived on for another nineteen years. We do not know of Edith’s movements after 1920, but she died in 1939 at 87 years of age, at Bromley in Kent, leaving her entire estate, of \$456 to Constance, who was

