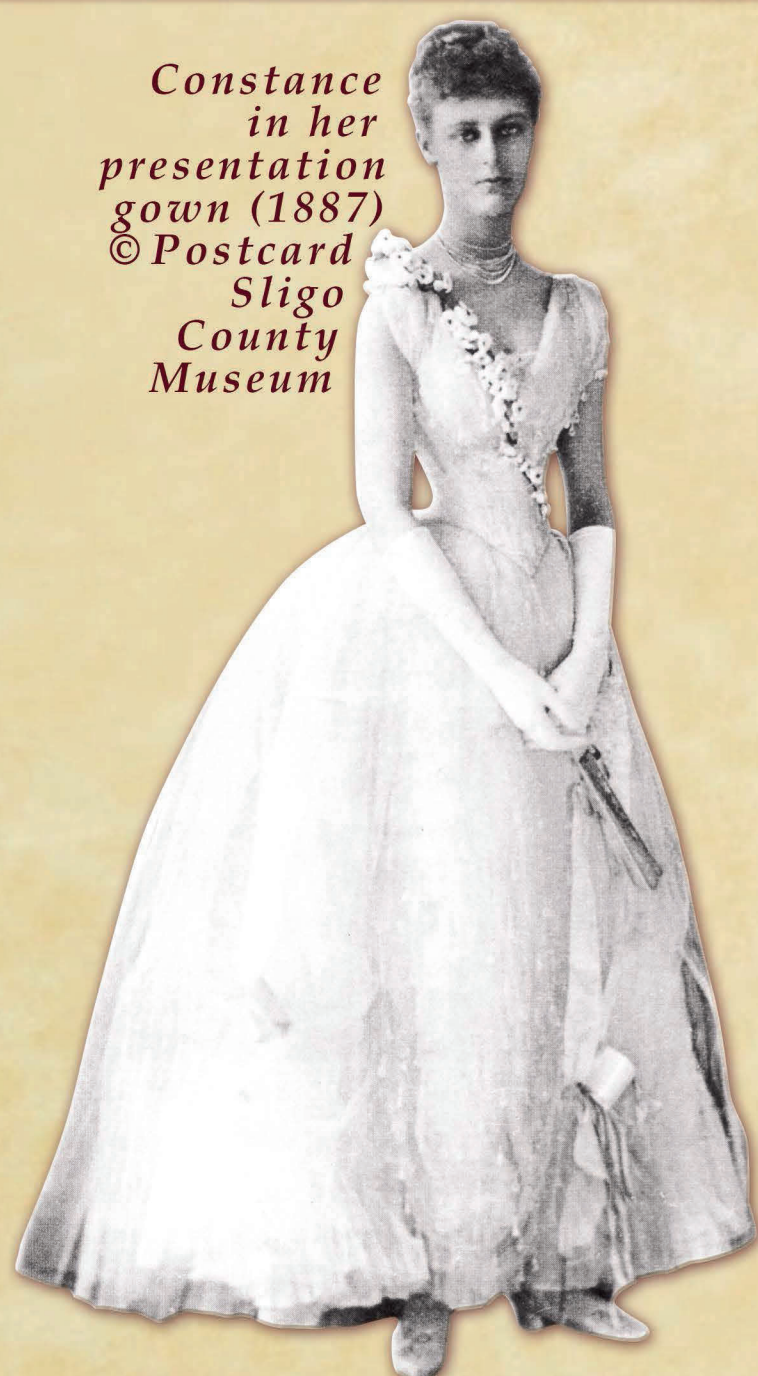


Constance Gore-Booth

I gCÚIS NA hÉIREANN

Childhood

Constance in her presentation gown (1887)
© Postcard
Sligo County Museum



Constance Gore-Booth was educated at home by a series of governesses. This education was to prepare her for the continuation of her lifestyle married to a man of her class. She learned French, German and Italian and was in middle age able to recite large sections of poetry she had memorised as a child in the original language particularly the German poetry of Schiller, Heine and Goethe. She was not academically inclined and claimed to be 'uneducated' in later life. Her spelling was erratic and idiosyncratic, she learned no science or politics and the economics learned was of the housekeeping variety. She enjoyed drawing and painting particularly horses.



Miniature portrait of Constance Gore-Booth (circa 1887/8)
© Sligo County Museum

She loved riding and the outdoors which was regarded as an advantage for a person of her class. She spent hours upon her pony riding out, unaccompanied and grew to know the impoverished lives of those who lived upon her father's acres. She won her first race at 14 and was regarded as one of the best horsewomen of the county her wins reported in the *Sligo Champion* and *Sligo Independent* (the local newspapers of the time). During this period of her life, poverty was an individual problem that could be solved by personal intervention. She was generous if moved and came from a family noted for their generous response to the national calamities, from the Famine of the 1840's to the periodic bleak harvests that seem to occur at least once every decade of the latter half of the nineteenth century and caused widespread suffering.

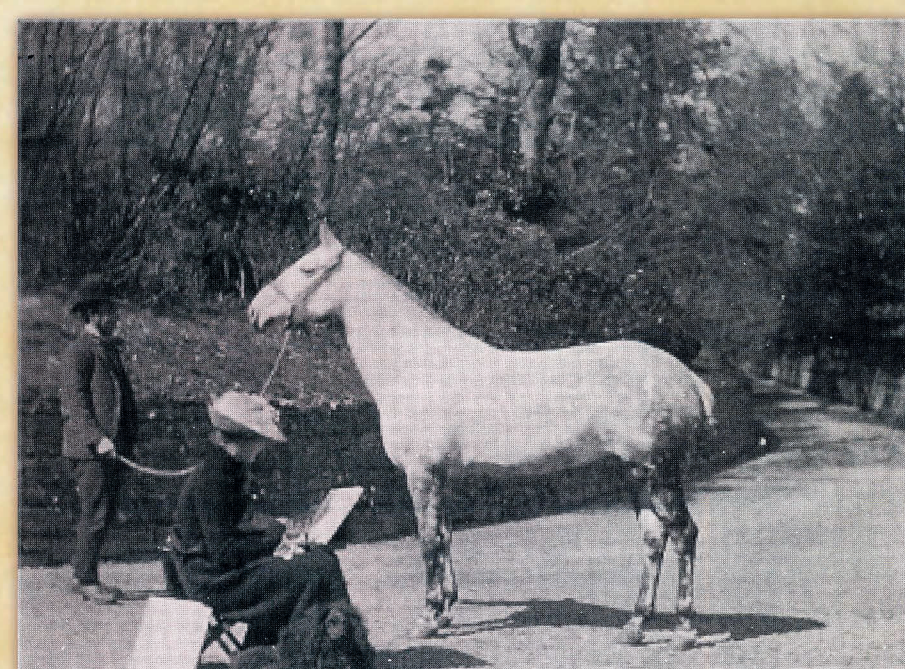
The Gore-Booths were resident landlords, their lives were spent tending their estate, organising and planting their garden and living a life of duty and pleasure. Gardening was a pleasure that stayed with Constance for her life. They entertained themselves in the evenings with recitals on the pianoforte or organ, organising home theatricals, visiting and being visited by the local gentry. As the railways extended their reach in the latter 19th century their pool of visitors increased and the end of the Victorian era ushered in the weekend country house parties that played a part in the securing of a suitable husband or wife.

Leaving the schoolroom at eighteen Constance spent almost six months in Europe staying for a period in Florence, with her last governess Miss Noel, learning Italian, visiting galleries and moving about a society as an adult.

In March 1887 Constance prepared for her presentation at Court to Queen Victoria which signalled that a girl had come out i.e. left the schoolroom and moved out into society at large. She was presented by the Countess of Errol, a cousin of Lady Gore-Booth and a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria. For her mother this was the start of a series of years when the family attended the Dublin Season (a six week period from early February to March 17th) where eligible ladies and gentlemen met each other at balls, soirees, dinners and the theatre. The family rented a house in Harcourt Terrace from relatives. The Season ended in a ball given by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in Dublin Castle on the evening of St Patrick's Day. There was then a short respite and the London season opened and did not formally close until August with the exodus to family estates on the opening of the shooting season. With three daughters to marry Lady Gore-Booth wanted to successfully launch them all. Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall, who periodically acted as chaperone to Constance, wrote later "*All the young men wanted to dance with her ...she was the life and soul of any party. She was much loved as well as admired*". But she remained unmarried and in 1893 after five years of attending the Season at the age of twenty five she was allowed to enrol at the Slade School of Art in London. Constance had waged a campaign to be granted permission and the funds to attend. She was deeply unsatisfied and was searching for a purpose in her life as her diaries of the period make clear.



Mabel and Constance Gore-Booth dressed as Drumcliffe Co-Operative Dairy Maids for a Fancy Dress Ball in Sligo Courthouse during Christmas
© Sligo County Museum



Constance sketching a horse at Lissadell (circa 1890)
© Gore-Booth Family Collection

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