

Constance Penruddocke

Constance Henrietta Lowther Penruddocke was born 29th April, 1856 in the district of St. George, Hanover Square, London. Constance was born to parents Charles and Flora Henrietta Penruddocke (nee Long). She was baptised on 22nd June, 1856 at Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire.

Constance was the third of six children born between 1854-1862 – Agnes Flora born 1854, Laetitia Blanche born 1855, Constance born 1856, Amy Elizabeth A'Court born 1857, Charles born 1858 & Sybil Katherine Long born 1862.

The 1861 English census recorded Constance H. L. Penruddocke as a 4 year old living at Compton House, Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire with her parents & 4 siblings – Agnes, Letitia, Amy & Charles. Compton House had been the ancestral home of the Penruddocke family since the late 16th century. Charles Penruddocke, Constance's father, was recorded as a Gentleman & they had 11 servants.



Compton House – Wikimedia – Trish Steel

The 1871 English census recorded Constance H. Penruddocke as a 14 year old living with her parents & 4 siblings – Letitia, Amy, Charles & Sybil at Compton House, Compton Chamberlayne with a governess & 11 servants. Charles Penruddocke, Constance's father, was recorded as a Landowner (Magistrate).

The 1881 English census recorded Constance H. L. Penruddocke as a 24 year old living at Compton Park, with her parents, younger sister Sybil & 9 servants. Charles Penruddocke was recorded as a Justice of the Peace (Barrister at Law -Out of Practice).

The 1891 census recorded Constance H. L. Penruddocke as a 34 year old born Middlesex/London, St. Georges Square, living at Compton House, Compton Chamberlayne, South Wiltshire with her parents, younger sister Sybil & 8 servants.

Charles Penruddocke, father of Constance, died on 30th October, 1899, aged 71 years.

The 1901 Census recorded Constance H. Penruddocke as a 44 year old, living by own means with her 73 year old widowed mother & 38 year old younger sister Sybil. They had 4 servants at the house & were living at Teffont Street, Teffont Evias, Wiltshire. The neighbouring property was The Manor House.

Flora Henrietta Penruddocke (nee Long), Constance's mother, died on 7th November, 1902, aged 75 years at Teffont Evias. The National Probate Calendar for England and Wales lists that Flora's Will was proven on 15th April, 1903 with Constance Henrietta Lowther Penruddocke and Sybil Katherine Long Penruddocke, spinsters and her daughters and Reginald Gambier Long, son-in-law, the executors. Effects around £2,622.

The Kelly's Directory of Wiltshire for the years 1903, 1907 and 1911 listed Miss Penruddocke of Cottrells, Dinton as a Private Resident.

The University of Nottingham has 2 items in its archives relating to the Penruddocke family. One of the items – Reference number La H 48 (Manuscripts and Special Collections) is a picture postcard of Compton Park, from an unsigned writer from Cottrells, Dinton, Salisbury. The postcard "describes Compton Park as "my old house where I was brought up" which has now been sold as "my nephew could not afford to keep it up his Trustees said" it also mentions the old deer park on the estate in 1300 with deer still there when the writer's father died". This was almost certainly written by Constance Penruddocke.

The 1911 Census records Constance H. L. Penruddocke, aged 54 years, having been born at Mayfair, London. She was living by Private Means at Cottrells, Dinton, Salisbury. Cottrells was an 8 room dwelling and Edith Brown, a 37 year old domestic servant, was also listed on the schedule.

During the First World War, the villages of Fovant, Compton Chamberlayne and Sutton Mandeville – all close to Dinton, were the main camp sites for Commonwealth troops heading into and coming back from the front lines of northern France. The camps were also used as training camps. Dinton provided the mainline railway station link with a spur line that had been built to transport troops to the large Army camp at Fovant. The spur line from Dinton was also used to transport supplies, equipment & wounded men. Among those housed at the Army camp were large numbers of Australian Servicemen who were befriended by Miss Constance Penruddocke, who became known as "the mother of the Aussies". She kept up regular correspondence with her ex-soldier friends in all parts of the world and would send several hundred letters and cards at Christmas time.



Full length portrait of Miss Constance Penruddocke (known as The Aussie Mother) of Dinton, Salisbury, England, who cared for Australian troops on leave. *Australian War Memorial (copyright expired)*



Salisbury, England. Miss Constance Penruddocke seated in company with three Australian soldiers in front of her home at Dinton. *Australian War Memorial (copyright expired).*



Miss Constance Penruddocke seated with AIF soldiers in the Dug Out at Wilton. *Australian War Memorial (copyright expired)*

The other item held by the University of Nottingham in its archives relating to the Penruddocke family- Document reference La H 47 is a sepia photograph of a thatched cottage with a person standing in the doorway. Endorsed on the rear "Penruddocke – Taken by H.H. Baker, Woodville S.A. Cottrells Dinton, Salisbury. Upon researching, H. H. Baker could relate to Harold Holme Baker (Service number 18492) who was part of the Australian Army Medical Corp - July 1917 Reinforcement and who lived at Woodville, South Australia. The photo would be similar to the photo below showing Constance Penruddocke standing in the doorway of her home – Cottrells at Dinton.



Australian War Memorial (copyright expired)

The Australian War Memorial has 4 items in its archives relating to Miss Constance Penruddocke (described as “Voluntary worker, Civilian”) – address books containing “addresses of Australia soldiers who stayed at “The Little Grey Home” Dinton, run by Miss Penruddocke” and letters from soldiers who stayed at “The Little Grey Home” Dinton.

The Kelly’s Directory of Wiltshire for the years 1915, 1920 and 1927 lists Miss Penruddocke of Cottrells, Dinton as a Private Resident.

Miss Constance Penruddocke died 4th July, 1936, at the age of 80 years, at Cottrells, Dinton. Probate was granted on 29th August, 1936 to Katharine Stratford Long Earle, spinster and Thomas Robert Gear Lawrence, auctioneer and estate agent. Effects around £1,142.



Cottrells, Dinton. Photo taken in 2006 by [Andrew Stacey](#) (used with his kind permission)

AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPER EXTRACTS RELATING TO

MISS CONSTANCE PENRUDDOCKE

Social column

Mrs Constance H.L. Penruddocke, of the Little Grey Home, Dinton, Salisbury, England, has sent a useful little calendar to many of the Australian soldiers whom she met during the two and a half years they were in the Fovant and Hurdcott camps. The calendar is accompanied by a cheerful and inspiring letter that should remind the "diggers" of the many kindnesses received by them in the Old Land.

(*The Brisbane Courier* (Qld 1864 – 1933) Wednesday 5th January, 1921)

"Aussie Mother" Dead

Many returned soldiers will regret to learn of the death of Miss Constance Penruddocke at her home at Cottrells, Dinton, England. She was 80 years of age, and a member of one of the oldest English families, and a quiet sense of humour and a sympathetic nature made her a welcome guest wherever she went.

In recording her death the "Western Gazette" of Yeovil, Wiltshire, said "when Australian troops were encamped in Fovant during the war, Miss Penruddocke did much social and religious work among them, and followed this up by regular correspondence with many of her "boys", as she called them, up to the time of her death. This work earned for her the affectionate name of "Aussie Mother".

(*The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane, Qld 1933 – 1954) Friday 21st August, 1936)

A Friend of Diggers

The death has occurred at her home in Wiltshire of Mrs Constance Penruddocke, of the Little Grey Home, Dinton, who was known to hundreds of Australian soldiers during the war as "The Aussie Mother".

A letter has been received by the secretary of the R.S. and S.I.L.A. (Mr E. E. Von Bibra) from Mrs Dorothy Jackson, of Wembley Hill, Middlesex, announcing Mrs Penruddocke's death, and enclosing a number of photographs of her. The letter states that shortly before her death Mrs Penruddocke expressed a wish that one of her photographs be sent to every digger she had known during the war. Any digger that knew her may obtain a copy of the photograph by applying to the R.S and S.I.L.A.

(*Examiner* (Launceston, Tasmania 1900 – 1954) Tuesday 24th November, 1936)

Well Known To Diggers

A request was received yesterday by the secretary of the R.S. and S.I.L.A. (Mr E. E. Von Bibra) for one of the photographs sent to him recently of Miss Constance Penruddocke, of Dinton, Wiltshire, who during the war made friends with many Australian soldiers. The digger who made the request told Mr von Bibra that he had corresponded regularly with Miss Penruddocke up to the time of her death a few months ago, and it had been her custom every Christmas to send a gift to each of the men she had known during the war. Her home at

Dinton was within a few miles of the Hurdcote training camp, where many Australian Battalions went through their training, and she furnished a recreation hall at her home for the use of the men, providing books, writing materials, and facilities for indoor and outdoor games. This hall rapidly became known as the Little Grey Home, and Miss Penruddocke made friends with very many Australian soldiers.

(*Examiner* (Launceston, Tasmania 1900 – 1954) Thursday 26th November, 1936)

The Aussie Mother

In the war days on Salisbury Plain, there lived at Dinton, Wilts, a little old lady known to Diggers as “The Aussie Mother”. Her name was Constance Penruddocke and she lived in a little house with a thatched roof, called the “Little Grey Home”. In that little house, countless Diggers were entertained as they came from Australia and went over to France; and it was the welcome and homeliness that they enjoyed there that gave them the feeling very near to being in their own homes in Australia.

Recently the “Aussie Mother”, who is now 81 years, sent a number of portraits of herself standing in front of the “Little Grey Home”, one of which is reproduced in the January number of “The Queensland Digger”.

(*Cairns Post* (Qld 1909-1954) Wednesday 20th Jan 1937)

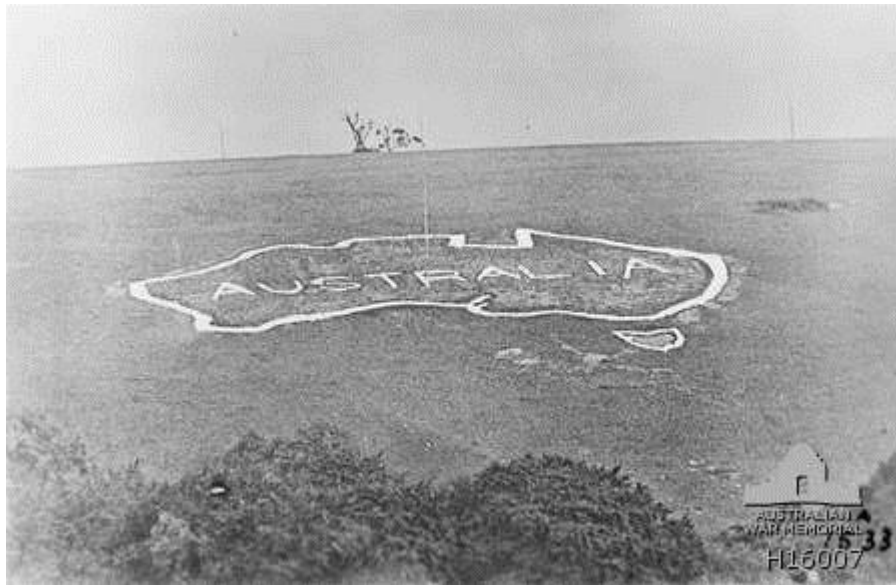
A Memory of Fovant

Dear “Non-Com” – Many diggers will heave a sigh of regret to learn – which I have done during the week – that Miss Constance Penruddocke has “gone West” from her home at Cottrells, Dinton (Eng). She was 80 years of age and a member of one of the oldest families in England.

When Australian troops were camped at Fovant during the war she did much social and religious work among the diggers. Her sense of humour and a sympathetic nature made her always a welcome guest. She followed up that work by regular correspondence with many of her “boys” as she called them, up to the very end. This work earned her the endearing name of “Aussie Mother” Vale !

SKIPPER (11th) Wiluna

(*Western Mail* (Perth, WA: 1885 – 1954) Thursday 26th August, 1937)



Salisbury Plains, England. A map of Australia cut in the chalk of the hillside at Hurdcott Camp near Fovant. (Donor H.I. Taylor) *Australian War Memorial – Copyright expired*



Regimental Badges cut out of the chalk on the hillside at Fovant in Wiltshire by soldiers who were camped there during the First World War. The Australian Rising Sun is about 150 feet in diameter and to the left is the YMCA symbol and the initials 6 CLR shown is an abbreviation for the 6th City of London Rifles. *Australian War Memorial – Copyright expired*
