

A celebration of the life of  
**Constance Isabel Beattie**

23 July 1929 – 21 October 2023

16 November 2023, Dalbury Lees Village Hall  
Celebrant: Alison Woodhead



*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*



Welcome everyone.

We are here today to commemorate the death and celebrate the life of Constance Beattie, also known as Con and Connie, who died on the 21st October 2023 at the age of 94.

My name is Alison Woodhead and I am a celebrant accredited to conduct funerals and memorials by Humanists UK. Despite being a daughter of The Manse, Connie did not have any fixed views on what her funeral should look like. She had attended a Humanist funeral in the past and liked the personal aspect of it but also wanted lots of hymns.

Connie's religious views have been honoured by her family. She was blessed by a minister while at the Chapel of Rest and Michael read Psalm 121 at Connie's cremation. Connie's ashes are also going to be blessed before being scattered far and wide in places and with people who meant a great deal to Connie. This memorial is only a step on the way, to recognise the impact Connie's life had on the people she encountered and those who loved her. Due to her long life, a lot of people who Connie cared for have already gone but her memories of them were very precious.

Connie would have liked this event to have been held outdoors but being November in Derbyshire, that wasn't a sensible option, so her friends and family have brought as much outdoors as possible into this lovely hall close to where Connie spent many happy years.

Connie said that she didn't want somebody at the front talking about her and luckily Fiona made recordings so that Connie can tell you herself about her parents and other times in her life. Connie's father, Archibald, was a Congregational Minister and here is Connie to tell you about the forming of the Thomson family. Connie and her older brothers and sister spent their childhood moving from church to church and attending boarding schools. Between moves there was often time for some memorable holidays and access to a car, which was unusual for the time.



The rituals and music associated with religion were part of Connie's life. Although this is not a religious memorial, we are using music that was meaningful to Connie to mark her passing and reflect her own personal philosophy of life. Connie had a long life and faced many difficulties along the way. She had a strong interest in nature.

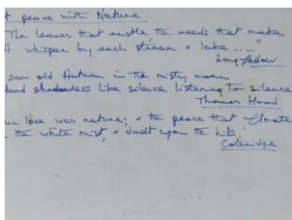
Spending time in natural surroundings can help us all appreciate that human lives have a natural rhythm in their growth and decline. The hymn Lord of all Hopefulness, as well as being a great tune, describes the comfort needed to get us through the day and difficult times in our lives.

Connie was born on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1929. The family already consisted of Win, Angus, and Don, Con's only surviving sibling. Times were hard and childhood illnesses very common. All four children had measles and this affected Connie's eyes which caused her frustration but didn't stop her talent for observation. She was able to identify constellations in the night sky and spent many hours teaching Fiona flower identification, specifically the Latin names.



A significant life event was when Connie contracted TB in her hip and spine at the age of seven. On her 8<sup>th</sup> birthday, when she was in Treloar hospital, Connie was given a copy of *The House above the Trees* by Ethel Cook Elliot. Fiona still has it. Connie identified with the fantasy forest world and the curly haired littlest forest child. It transported her beyond the four walls of the hospital and the confines of her bed. Fiona and Con read the book when Fiona was the same age.

A love of spending time outside was nurtured at her boarding school which had a fantastic camelia walk and when Connie's boarding school was evacuated to Devon, she took herself off on walks, being unable to take part in games. One of her favourite places was the Valley of Rocks near Lynton which she visited with Fiona later in life and where some of her ashes will be scattered.



Connie would copy out passages about nature that especially caught her imagination. A piece by Coleridge says "Our love was nature, and the peace that floated on the white mist, and dwelt upon the hills" Collective walks were encouraged in Lynton too. The girls were allowed to forage for wild whortleberries that grew around the area. They were made into jam, a real treat in the time of rationing. Walks happened in all

weathers, including rain and snow. Fiona recalls Connie talking about girls walking in an orderly fashion with galoshes, gaberdine coats and hats with freezing hands and feet. As well as a love of the countryside Connie had a love of animals. She was anti fox hunting and badger culling. She particularly loved swallows and otters. She had many art works depicting otters and enjoyed reading Ring of Bright Water by Gavin Maxwell. She had a collection of Beswick china garden bird ornaments which were added to by Quinton and Fiona on special occasions. Her love of birds meant she was vehemently anti cat and would shoo any cats exploring the garden, until one day Quinton brought home two abandoned kittens. Victoria and Albert who won Connie's heart.

Like many people of her generation, Connie's education was severely disrupted by the war and by another bout of TB at 14. She initially went to art school and, although talented, did not have the confidence to continue. She maintained an interest in art and was part of the arts scene in Derby with Tom Early, who worked at The Pastures and Marion Adnams, who is included in Derby Museum's celebration of Derbyshire women.

Connie then tried nursing but her underlying heart condition made it unsuitable, so she found her way into chiropody. This led to her meeting Quinton, over a foot in the morgue in Edinburgh. Quinton was also a chiropodist and they were married in September 1951.

Connie and Quinton had lots in common. They both valued their Scottish heritage and this pride continues in Fiona and her family. Connie often said she couldn't feel "right" without a trip to Scotland and the family made many trips to see relations on both sides. They also belonged to The Burns Club in Derby and enjoyed dinners and dances. Connie and Quinton loved their Bantam motorbike and enjoyed barrelling along the country lanes from their practice in Wilson Street, Derby to Oakamoor to see Connie's parents. Susie, the black poodle, was in their knapsack. Connie carried on riding pillion whilst pregnant but once Fiona arrived, they bought a car. Connie could not drive due to her eye condition but had a part in naming all their cars, the first one was called Prudence.



Connie and Quinton were involved in the setting up of Derby Samaritans which took its first call in 1961. They remained friends with people in the group for decades. Connie shared Quinton's interest in antiques, a passion he had inherited from his father. Connie and Quinton collected antiques and spend time scouring antique fairs with their long-time friends the Chettles. They also enjoyed going to National Trust properties, historic sites and gardens.

After spending a long time looking for the perfect country home, Connie and Quinton finally found Whitehouse Cottage in Dalbury. Originally a coachman's cottage, in disrepair, and confusingly not white. They employed an architect, Edward Saunders, to help with converting the outbuildings.

Connie was very engaged in the process and in the couple of years it took, Edward became a family friend. In the meantime, Quinton created a garden from a field. After so much moving in her early life it must have been bliss for Connie to put down roots and feel settled.



The crowning glory of retirement was to have the time to spend as they wished, no longer summoned by the telephone or the doorbell they could listen to the World at One and proceed to The Archers and nap in their summer house. The summer house gave them great pleasure and was roomy enough to have a dining table and chairs along with comfortable sitting chairs. Many meals were taken there, with visiting grandchildren, friends and family among birdsong, the bellowing of cows and the rumble of tractors.

Work for Connie was replaced by spending time helping in the community at Dalbury. Connie and Quinton were well aware of the role a church plays in the parish and wider community and offered their support. Quinton looked forward to providing home grown produce for the harvest festival and Connie and Win enjoyed cleaning the church and arranging flowers.

Music was another one of Connie's passions and one she shared with Fiona's husband, Michael. He says "We both spent hours together listening to Classic FM. It was our thing we shared together. And in those listening's we enjoyed both secular and sacred music, the latter not for its religious meanings, but for its beauty and artistry parallel to the secular." Connie never missed The Last Night of the Proms and had a special interest in the Young Musician of the Year Competition. She loved opera and attended Glyndebourne with Fiona. We are going to listen to one of her favourite artists, Aled Jones, with his recording of A Gaelic Blessing, written by John Rutter.



Connie and Quinton set up their own practice as chiropodists. Connie worked mainly in Wilson Street, Derby with occasional home visits and Quinton took on the hospital work. Fiona always remembers her parents looking very smart. They both had immaculate starched white coats expertly laundered by Connie.

Although Connie loved spending time in the countryside, she had to pace herself and couldn't walk much. It was no excuse to dress casually though. Fiona would often walk for miles but Con and Win wore kitten heels or pumps and took dainty strolls along the lanes. Fiona says "They were so well turned out, very well dressed, twin set and pearls or a pendant or a brooch." Carole Dennall also remembers Connie's sense of style. She says "Always dressed immaculately in Pringle, Pearls and Plaid,"



Carole's mother Josephine, known as Jo, and Connie were friends. Carole and Fiona spent time playing together too. Speaking of Connie, Carole said "I could rely on her for gentle rebuke at mine and Fie's high jinks. Always the guffawing and rolling of eyes at Quinton's rollicking and close to the bone jokes. "O Fifi" she would say upon hearing we had stranded Jess the Yorkie on Mr Pegg's haystack.

Connie and Jo were always chatting, especially on the phone. Carole remembers. "One day my father, Ted, was in the front garden. He spied the telephone lines vibrating and said "your mother is talking to Connie again"

Connie, due to her heart condition, managed her energy wisely. Afternoon naps were a regular part of Connie's routine. Everything had its place, and this became more important when Connie's sight deteriorated.

Connie always had a well ordered, but friendly, home. Carol Cooke remembers being welcomed into Whitehouse Cottage and memories of the house and garden have stayed with her. She also remembers Fiona doing her utmost to provide Con with good experiences to look back on, visiting places that were special to her parents and involving Con in family events, such as Alice's wedding in Scotland.



Kay Martin, another friend of Fiona's remembers the warm welcome from Connie. She said "Con always made me feel so welcome at her home wherever she was living or whatever health issue she was facing. I brought my mum over and they got on like a house on fire because of Con's natural generosity of spirit and kindness. We sat in her little garden as we often did and this is where I will remember her best, sipping tea on her wooden bench." Connie missed Fiona and her grandchildren, Angus, Duncan and Alice when they moved to America, but Connie and Quinton took trips to visit them and Con went over a few times on her own. Fiona and her family travelled back to the UK many times, spending weeks together in the summer and several Christmas'.



Debbie Young from Kansas City remembers meeting Con for the first time when invited to a family dinner. Debbie was quite taken aback when Con said she hadn't been there to meet Debbie because she "took a whizz". Fiona was able to explain to Debbie that Con had been out with Angus in his new car and to great laughter explained to Con what "took a whizz" means in the US. Two countries divided by a common language.

Connie was a strong and determined person and having had a life of adapting to challenging circumstances and health conditions this strength continued into later life. She lost Quinton in 2014. It must have been devastating after so many years together.

Connie always had a sweet tooth and relished "pud" as she called it. Connie loved chocolate too but showed great self-discipline by rationing herself to just a few a day. "I mustn't be a piglet, hoglet with the chocolate" she would say. One of Connie's friends, Betty, was an accomplished and adventurous cook and Connie and Quinton dined regularly with Betty and her husband Roger. At that time the cookery writers Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson had burst upon the cooking scene and they were treated to delights such as chocolate and orange mousse, meringue pies, summer pudding, ginger cream, gooseberry fool and trifles made with everlasting syllabub. Betty lost Roger some years ago, far too young and Betty passed away, recently, just a few weeks before Connie.

Towards the end of Connie's life, Fiona sat by her mum's bedside recollecting the marvellous meals Betty made using fresh produce from the garden. Fiona says "Our memories flitted from the raspberry canes, blackcurrant and strawberry beds to the kitchen, the Aga and the glorious dinners sat in the formality of the dining room of their farmhouse and we both smiled as we recalled the hilarity, mirth and laughter that was so infectious along with spoonerisms and recitations from Roger of Stanley Holloway's, Sam, Sam pick up thy musket man. So much laughter and wit and mirth."

In her 90's during the few months she was at Brookfields Nursing Home, Connie's love of dessert and ice cream was well known by the staff and she often asked for an extra dollop of ice cream on her trifle or cake.

After losing Quinton, it was impractical for Connie to remain at Whitehouse Cottage and so she moved to The Dovedales at Mickleover, where some of you will have met her. She maintained her independence as long as she possibly could but finally moved to Brookfields Nursing Home, where she received excellent care and passed away peacefully.



We are now going to take some time to reflect on what Connie meant to you and how you are going to keep her memory alive. For those of you with a religious faith, you may want to say a silent prayer. The words of our next piece of music, Be Still My Soul, are full of comfort and reassurance and must have helped Connie in her difficult times.

Connie meant a lot to so many people. Everyone she and Quinton spent time with, personally or professionally, became friends and were made welcome. Rosie Bhogal bought the chiropody business from Con and Quinton. She says "I will be forever indebted to Quinton and Con for the help and support they gave me when I first bought the surgery. I hope I was able to make them proud. I always enjoyed being invited to Dalbury and enjoyed Con's specially prepared meals with all the trimmings. They knew the surgery, and Derby itself, was new to me and they did their utmost to help me settle in."



Connie watched the younger generation grow too. Sophie Donoghue had many happy times with Con and Quinton. Her father, John, says "She was a real Lady without a hurtful bone in her body. She always seemed satisfied with whatever situation she was in. I still have a special place in my heart for her and am glad of the love that they showed Sophie" Her mother Barbara says "Con was a lovely lady to me. Once every year we visited your parents over Christmas before Twelfth Night. Every year Sophie threw orange peel into the open fire following Quinton's very clear instructions. She loved doing it."

Sue Ellis wanted a poetic tribute to be shared as her memory of Connie.



*So We'll Go No More a Roving by Lord Byron*

*So, we'll go no more a roving  
So late into the night,  
Though the heart be still as loving,  
And the moon be still as bright.*

*For the sword outwears its sheath,  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And love itself have rest.*

*Though the night was made for loving,  
And the day returns too soon,  
Yet we'll go no more a roving  
By the light of the moon.*

Connie's love of nature, and trees in particular, was recognised by many who knew her. This love of nature never left Connie and provided great comfort. Even when her sight faded, she could see enough to recognise cloudscapes and enjoyed outings to get a feel of the great outdoors. During Fiona's many long walks she would record bird song and the sounds of the countryside so that she could share the experience with Connie afterwards, either directly during her frequent visits to Derbyshire, or by phone from her home in the US.

Connie began listening to audio books and a particular favourite was John Lewis-Stempel's "Meadowland" ...the private life of an English field. She became immersed in it and would relive the trips down country lanes in middle England, drinking in the sights and sounds. Connie agreed with the authors sentiment that "To stand alone in a field in England and listen to the morning chorus of the birds is to remember why life is precious."

Our final poem by Lurana Brown will help you to remember Connie whenever you are in nature.

*Come to the Forest to Visit Me by Lurana Brown*

*Come to the forest to visit me  
Down by the roots of a tree  
Waste not your tears on cold stone graves  
Water a flower for me  
Give me to the earth when my winter comes Bury me deep in the ground  
Mark not my place with statues or caves  
Find me where life can be found  
Come to the woods when autumn leaves turn  
Golden and copper and red  
Rustle up memories, seeds of joy stored  
Kick up the leaves in my stead  
Visit a garden on warm, summer days  
Keep company with blossoms and bees  
Remember my heart blooms forever in yours  
Take comfort from shushing shade trees  
Let springtime surround you with life and the living  
Birdsong and budding green leaves  
Look up at the sky, give thanks for sun and rain  
When you think of me, smile more than grieve  
Come to the forest to visit me  
Down by the roots of a tree  
Live every day that is given to you  
Water a new flower for me*



Now we have a particular favourite of Connie's, the iconic David Attenborough reminding us What a Wonderful World we live in, followed by our final piece of music The Lark Ascending by Ralph Vaughan Williams evoking nature in all its glory and sending you back into the world feeling uplifted.