

Mothering Sunday

Cordelia Moyse: A History of Mothers' Union; 2009

Mothering Sunday has evolved over the years; from the time when people would return to their "Mother Church" during Lent to when those in service and apprenticeships went home to their mothers with gifts such as hand-picked flowers.

By the early 20th century celebrating Mothering Sunday had waned in many places, but the institution of Mother's Day in the United States brought about renewed interest. This was a cause championed by Mothers' Union, amongst others.

By 1938 it was claimed that Mothering Sunday was celebrated in every parish in Britain and in every country of the Empire.

Now a staple in the church calendar and celebrated on the fourth Sunday in Lent. Mothering Sunday is a time for us all to recognize the importance of those who have cared for and mothered us throughout our lives.

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Here are some of the traditions that have shaped Mothering Sunday into the celebration recognised today:

The Journey to the Mother Church

In the 16th century, Mothering Sunday was less about mothers and more about church. Back then, people would make a journey to their 'mother' church once a year. This might have been their home church, their nearest cathedral or a major parish church in a bigger town. The service which took place at the 'mother' church symbolised the coming together of families. This would have represented a significant journey for many.

A Day Off to Visit Mother

Another tradition was to allow those working in the fields on wealthy farms and estates in England to have the day off on the fourth Sunday of Lent to visit their mothers and possibly go to church too. This was a variation on the theme of visiting the 'mother' church and was a move towards a more family focussed occasion. Before the days of cars and roads, family get-togethers were far more rare, (and facetime was still a long way off). In some ways this tradition is still alive today as grown up children often visit their parents on mothering Sunday.

Traditions Today

This Sunday, churches around the country will be sharing their own traditions, celebrating and giving thanks to the huge impact mothers have on each of our lives. The main service on Mothering Sunday in churches across the country is central to the life of the church.

The church recognises that the day may be difficult for some people and so it is common place for services to include prayers for those who don't find the day particularly easy.

Families across the country will be preparing little presents and cards and in some churches flowers are blessed and handed out during the main service. Families come together to have lunch, or children make breakfast in bed for their mothers, leaving all the mess to be cleared up later! It's all about showing appreciation and many make a huge effort to make their mother feel special.