

# Secret Cottage – History of the traditional cream tea

So, where did the history of traditional English afternoon tea begin?

There is no more quintessential British ritual than the ceremony and serving of Afternoon tea. It is believed that credit for the custom goes to Anna, the 7th Duchess of Bedford in the early 19th century. The usual habit of serving dinner between 8 and 9 pm left the Duchess hungry and with a 'sinking feeling' by late afternoon. To stave off the hunger, she would order tea, bread and butter and cakes to be served in her room. Later on she would invite friends to join her at her home and the light tea was such a success the habit caught on.

The Duchess continued the custom on returning to London and soon the 'At Home' tea evolved which quickly spread throughout England. Announcements about tea were sent to relatives and friends stating at what hour the tea would be served. Sometimes entertainment was provided but more often it was simply conversation and a little idle gossip over tea and cakes. If 'At Home' notices were received the guest was expected to attend, unless of course, regrets were sent. There was at least one person holding an at home each day and social ties were quickly established with women seeing each other so regularly.

The taking of tea gradually spread from the home and out into society in general. Tea Parties became the norm and Tea Rooms, and Tea Gardens quickly sprang up everywhere.

During the Edwardian period, the 'At Home' faded as the desire to travel increased. Tea was now served at four o'clock in the new tea lounges of luxury hotels, the Ritz being one of

the most famous, and high-end stores such as Fortnum and Mason and was often accompanied by light music and sometimes even a little dancing. Tea dances became something of a phenomenon and lasted until well after the Second World War, but then gradually disappeared. Like Afternoon Tea itself, there is now a huge revival of the tea dance throughout the UK and Ireland and being enjoyed by all ages.

Today, at Cotswold Tourism Tours, Secret Cottage serves a traditional cream tea when locals and tourists take a tour of the Cotswolds. We pick you up from Moreton-in-Marsh railway station at 10.15 for your day tour lasting six hours, during the trip you'll see lots of beautiful hidden villages and during the day you'll visit Secret Cottage for morning coffee with pastries, lunch and a traditional cream tea served in the afternoon. This unique experience has never been offered before in the Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire counties of England.