

The Life of Servants in English Country Houses in Edwardian Times

In English Stately Homes or Country Houses the servants lived downstairs and would rarely be seen by the upstairs owners.

The most important of the downstairs people was the Butler. He kept the servants away from the noble owners (the aristocracy or gentry) and liaised between the two groups. He was responsible for the servants and answerable to the members of the noble family. The butler - in charge of the house, coachmen and footmen. He looked after the family and the wine cellar.

There were many other servants required to run a to run a large property. Without the servants the house could not function:

- the housekeeper - responsible for the housemaids and carried the keys to the china and linen cupboards.
- the ladies maid - the mistress of the house's personal attendant, helping her to dress and do her hair.
- the valet - the master's manservant, attending to his requests and preparing his clothes and shaving tools.
- the cook - ran the kitchen and larder, overseeing the kitchen, dairy and scullery maids.
- the governess - educated and cared for the children with the head and under nurse.
- the hallboy - worked 16-hour days, lighting all the lamps and candles and polishing the staff boots before they woke up.
- the between maid or tweeny - earned £13 a year, worked seven days a week from 5am-10pm and looked after slop duty.

The Servants' Rules

- Never let your voice be heard by the ladies and gentlemen of the house
- Always 'give room' if you meet one of your employers or betters on the stairs.
- Always stand still when being spoken to by a lady and look at the person speaking to you.
- Never begin to talk to ladies and gentlemen
- Servants should never offer any opinion to their employers, nor even to say good night.
- Never talk to another servant in the presence of your mistress.
- Never call from one room to another.
- Always answer when you have received an order.
- Always keep outer doors fastened. Only the Butler may answer the bell.
- Every servant must be punctual at meal times.
- No servant is to take any knives or forks or other article, nor on any account to remove any provisions, nor ale or beer out of the Hall.
- No Gambling, or Oaths, or abusive language are allowed.
- The female staff are forbidden from smoking.
- No servant is to receive any Visitor, Friend or Relative into the house.
- Any maid found fraternising with a member of the opposite sex will be dismissed without a hearing.
- The Hall door is to be finally closed at Half-past Ten o'clock every night.
- The servants' hall is to be cleared and closed at Half-past Ten o'clock.
- Any breakages or damage to the house will be deducted from wages

How to Treat Your Servants

Master and Servant Relationship

All Family members should maintain appropriate relationships with the Staff. As Upper Servants will work directly to the Family, a trusting and respectful relationship should be established.

Your Footmen are a proclamation of your wealth and prestige. They are representatives of your Household and Family and as such it is advantageous that you develop a good relationship. However, as Lower Servants, they do not expect to be addressed outside the receipt of instructions.

While the Housemaids will clean the House during the day, they should make every care and attention never to be observed by you doing their duties. If by chance you do meet, you should expect them to "give way" to you by standing still and averting their gaze, whilst you walk past, leaving them un-noticed. By not acknowledging them, you will spare them the shame of explaining their presence.

How to Address your Servants

- The Butler should be addressed courteously by his Surname.
- The Housekeeper should be given the title of "Missus ~".
- The Chef de Cuisine should be addressed as such, or by the title "Monsieur~".
- It is customary for your Lady's Maid to be given the title of "Miss ~", regardless of whether she is single or married. It is however acceptable for the Mistress to address her by her Christian name.
- A Tutor should be addressed by the title of "Mister ~".
- It is very much the custom in the old houses that, when entering into new Service, Lower Servants adopt new names given to them by their Masters. You may follow this tradition and rename certain members of your Staff. Common names for matching Footmen are James and John. Emma is popular for Housemaids.
- It is not expected that you take the trouble to remember the names of all your Staff. Indeed, in order to avoid obliging you to converse with them, Lower Servants will endeavour to make themselves invisible to you. As such they should not be acknowledged.

(Adapted from Channel 4 series 'Manor House', Edwardian Life, 2003)