FASHION, HYGIENE & GROOMING

Upton Abbey: An Improvised Comedy of English Manors


Researched by,
Clara Correa

INTRODUCTION
“What makes a brilliant party? Clothes. Good clothes. A frumpy party is nothing more nor less than a collection of badly dressed persons. People with all the brains, even all the beauty imaginable, make an assemblage of dowds, unless they are well dressed.” (Post)

Presentation and appearance were of utmost importance for both upstairs and downstairs characters alike. In early 20th century English society, one’s ensemble was a direct reflection of their status. As an extension of this, servants mirrored the elegance and esteem of their Lord or Lady, meaning their attire also had to be impeccable. Additionally, valets and lady’s maids would spend virtually every waking moment in the footsteps of their Lord or Lady, running errands and helping them change in and out of outfits (generally, family members would change around 5-7 times per day).

A LITTLE ABOUT FASHION IN 1918

The early 20th century marked an important time in both fashion and its distribution: the large-scale department store was popularized, as well as the availability of catalogues and magazines displaying the latest styles.

WOMEN

- By 1918, dresses were eight inches from the ground (Warwick 140).
- Women generally wore dresses (either one or two-piece) or skirts and blouses.
- The popular S-shaped curve (the most desired shape for a woman’s body at the time) was still in use, though corsets were becoming less structured and rigid by 1918.
- Every woman wore a corset - from the Lady of the house to the scullery maid. Corsets required another person to help tie them to their desired fit. They were tight and uncomfortable.
- Makeup, if worn at all, was very minimal. Servants could even be lightly reprimanded for wearing makeup (Harrison 46).
- As the war progressed, evening gowns became scarcer and the tea gown vanished altogether (Mansfield 65).
- Cloth was scarcer by 1918 and skirts became skimpier (Mansfield 57).
- As a general rule, being over-dressed is always in bad taste, and when choosing two dresses, it’s always better to pick the simpler one (Post).
- Popular department store: Department store: Pontings, in London’s Kensington High Street (Post).
MEN

- Men’s clothes were not greatly affected by the War.
- Clean-shavenness underwent a particularly rapid rise between 1915 and 1922 (Robinson).
- “It is absolutely imperative for a man nowadays to study his appearance. As a business, a professional or a social asset it is a very potent factor, and it is the privilege only of the millionaire and the pauper to be able to dress badly” (Robinson).
- Rue de la Paix in Paris is the fountainhead of fashions for women and Bond Street in London is the home of irreproachable clothes for men (Post).
- Men wore frock coats (if more elderly) and morning coats during the daytime and for special occasions.
- For dinner, men would wear a tail coat, a white waistcoat, matching pants and a white bow tie. This attire was very strict and important - men would sometimes be turned away from parties for not wearing the proper dinner attire.
- Collars at this time were very starched and tall, to the point of discomfort, since they kept poking one’s neck.
- In general, goods were scarcer and prices were higher. British cloth was scarcer by 1918 and foreign materials had to be imported.
- Popular name for the moustaches of war-time officers was “toothbrush”.
- Before the War, a walking stick was essential for the well-dressed man, though after the War, though many men still carried one, it declined in favor.
PERSONAL/DOMESTIC HYGIENE

- ‘Cleanliness’ was a key component within the English national identity as imagined by middle and upper class men and women.
- Plumbing at Highclere was installed in 1897, and before this, freestanding bathtubs were filled by servants in front of the fireplace in the rooms. Even after plumbing was installed, some visitors could still ask for hot jugs of water to be brought up (since old habits die hard).
- The valet and lady’s maid would prepare a bath for the Lord and Lady of the house, ensuring they had everything they needed (though it is important to note, lords and ladies never appeared nude in front of their servants).
- It was the valet’s duty to clean tooth and hair brushes, as well as stropping the razors used by his Lordship. It was up to the Lord’s preference whether he would shave himself or have his valet shave him.
- The first “armpit disinfectant” was invented in 1888 in America, called Mum, and by 1918, there were other antiperspirant products marketed specifically for women in the market.
- As far as washing clothes, in the Astor household during this time period, all personal laundry was done at one of the country houses, sent and delivered weekly.
GROOMING

- By 1918, many upper class households had a Marcel wave machine, an exciting tool that used hot irons to curl hair.
- The lady’s maid (or head housemaid, if caring for a daughter) would arrange her Lady’s hair, and therefore had to be proficient in hairstyling.
- A potential wash to prevent impending baldness in men: a quarter of an ounce of tobacco leaves, two ounces of rosemary, two ounces of box leaves and boil together in a quart of water for twenty minutes. Strain and use this wash cold occasionally during the summer months.
- Pomatum for dry hair: mix together 8oz olive oil, 1oz spermaceti, drops of essential oil, and drops of essence of lemon and store in a jar ready for use.
- Lotion for hair growth: equal quantities olive oil and spirit of rosemary with a few drops of oil of nutmeg.

ETIQUETTE

- A man takes off his hat when being introduced or saying goodbye, as a salutation when passing in the street, while conversing with an older man or someone who deserves respect, when he is with someone who recognizes a woman passing nearby (known or unknown to him).
- The deeper the bow, the greater the respect shown.
- A man should be the first to get out of a car and the last to get in.
- The ideal attitude of a woman: “kindness, gentleness, good will, sensitive understanding, self-respect and, when it is appropriate, deference”.
- Women rise when an older woman enters the room and stand when talking to an older woman.
- Women and men alike should not smoke while dancing, nor while walking on the street. However, they may smoke while sitting in an automobile.
- Rules for man-woman interactions:
  1. Never dine alone with a married man.
  2. Never accept an invitation through a man to the house of someone else.
  3. Do not accept an invitation to a party from a man if he is with his wife; wait for his wife to invite you.
  4. Never drink anything alcoholic except sherry or wine at dinner.
- Table manners:
  - Napkins belong on the lap.
  - Backs should be straight, posture should be what is described as “easy seat” in riding. Food should be brought up to the mouth, not mouth to
food.
○ Food should be kept within the center part of the plate, away from the flat rim.
○ Two bites should never be taken from the same forkful, or two sips from the same spoonful.
○ Bread, rolls and muffins should always be broken in half.
○ Fingers should never be used to push food onto the fork.
● If an engagement has already been announced in the newspapers and must be broken, another announcement must be sent to the same newspapers in very similar format to announce the cancellation.
● For serving food: all food is offered to each guest at his left hand at a conveniently low level. The platter should rest on a folded napkin on the flat of the server’s left hand; it should never be grasped by the rim.
● Classic order of service: the women at the right of the host, the woman at his left, and so on clockwise around the table. The mistress of the house is never served first at the table unless she is alone with her husband and children.
● Serving should be synchronized so that each platter is offered at one end of the table at the same time that its twin is offered at the other end.

REFERENCES
