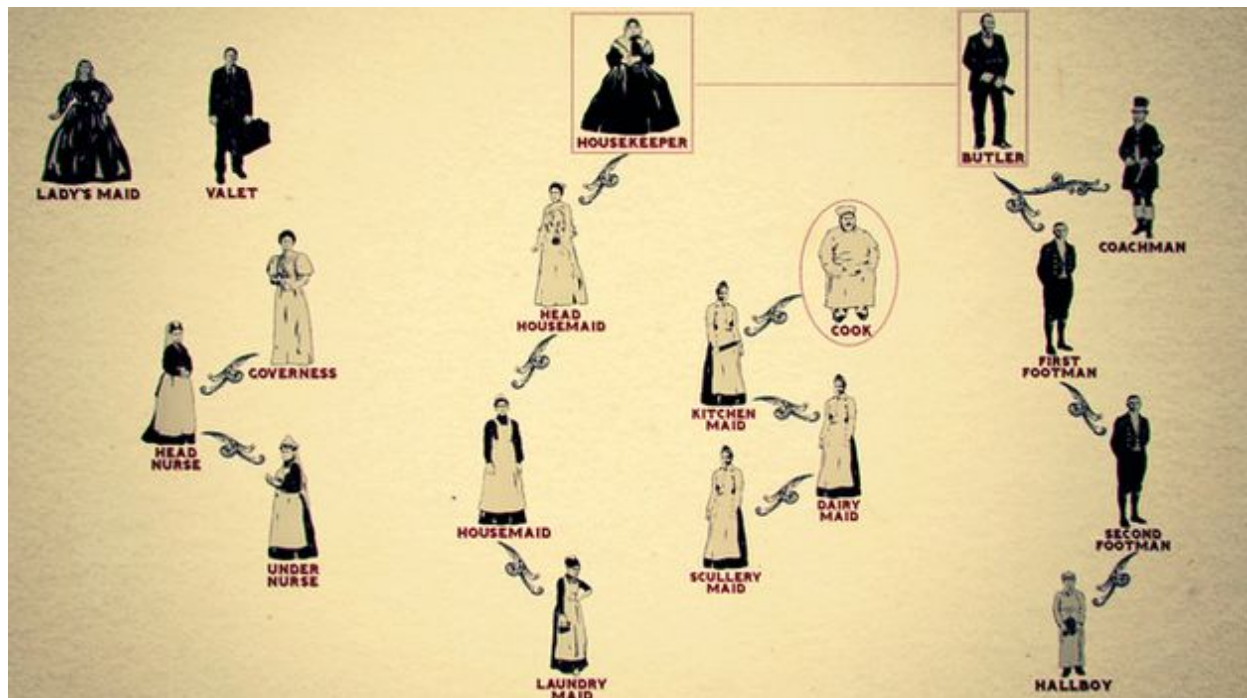


DOMESTIC LIFE & SERVICE

Upton Abbey: An Improvised Comedy of English Manors



<https://countryhousereader.wordpress.com/2013/12/19/the-servant-hierarchy/>

Researched by,
Grace Zottig

INTRODUCTION

“As no relations in society are so numerous and universal as those of Masters and Servants - as those of Household Duties and the performers of them - so it is proportionally important that they should be well defined and understood”
- Edgeware Road 1825 (Adams)

In the nineteenth century, a country house with about 6-8 family members would employ about 150-200 domestic servants (Musson 6). Not only would each servant have multiple, distinct tasks to accomplish throughout their 17-hour day, they would also be responsible for whatever additional tasks the family required depending on the events that occurred upstairs. Service life was the best route that young lower class people can get into in order to start a better life for themselves.

STATS

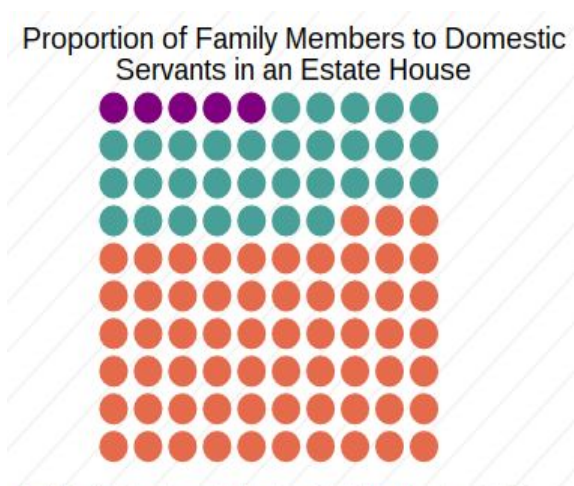


Figure I: *Proportion of Family Members to Domestic Servants in an Estate House.* In this graph, family members of the estate and their staff are represented in a proportion of 100. With 6 members in a household, it could staff from 150 to 200 servants. From 30-40 indoor staff (housemaids, scullery maids, footmen, valets, etc.) and 100-120 outdoor staff (gardeners, upkeepers, game staff, etc.). (Musson 6-7)

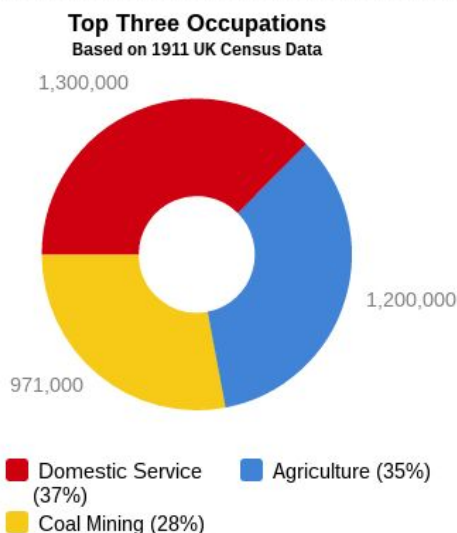


Figure II: *Top Three Occupations Based on 1911 UK Census Data.* We can assume that for our time period in 1918, the number of workers in domestic service went down due to the war. But because of the 100-year-rule, the 1921 UK Census data is not available for public use.

WAGES

It is really simple to understand the hierarchy of the downstairs by examining the wage earnings of the servants. Below is the average wage earnings estimated by Warwick in *Upstairs & Downstairs*.

Average Yearly Wages of Domestic Staff in £, Early 20th Century (Warwick, 16-17)

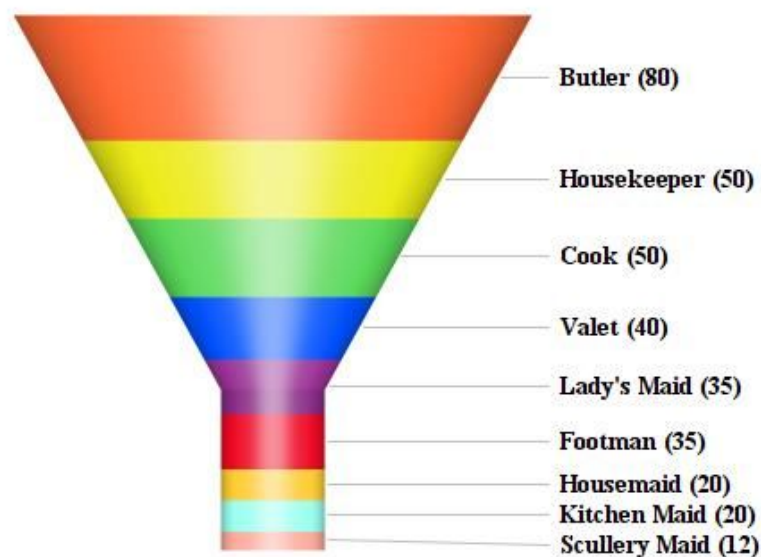


FIGURE III.
Average Yearly Wages of Domestic Staff in Euros, Early 20th Century (Warwick 16-17).

HOURS / SCHEDULE

Lower servants:

- 6:00 AM to 9 or 10 PM
- One afternoon off
- Every other Sunday off

Higher servants:

- 7-8 AM to 9 PM
- One afternoon off
- Every other Sunday off
- Male servants: Much more flexible schedule, especially if valet (serving to a Lord of the house)

Daily Schedule:

The following daily schedule was found on the pbs site that describes the daily life of Manor House. It has been slightly adapted in order to pertain to our characters. The link is provided here: http://www.pbs.org/manorhouse/edwardianlife/typical_day.html

“6:00 am - First up is Poppy, the scullery maid - who gets the kitchen range hot enough to boil the water for tea.

6:30 am - The alarm rings in the housemaids' rooms (Jane and Charlotte). Their early tasks include struggling into corsets and putting on their bloomers. The housemaids are then expected downstairs in the basement kitchen where Jane, the first housemaid, makes tea and toast for the lady's maid, Miss Lyon, and housekeeper, Mrs. Barrett. After trudging up 89 stairs to deliver tea and toast, Jane is back down again to clean the main rooms on the ground floor. Meanwhile, the second housemaid, Charlotte, has to get the fires going all round the house. The scullery maid, Poppy, should already be in the scullery, making sure all the washing-up from the night before has been done and the floor is swept. She's joined by Heather, the kitchen maid, who puts breakfast together for the servants. And soon Lily (Assistant Cook) and Mrs. Ogmores (Cook) appear and make breakfast for the family.

8:15 am - The bell for the servants' breakfast sounds and upper and lower servants all make their way to the servants' hall in the basement where Heather serves bowls of porridge, cups of tea and bread and butter. Mr. Bernsby, the butler, presides over breakfast. As soon as breakfast is finished, Miss Lyon, who has already taken tea and toast to Lady Wiltshire in her bedroom, must hurry upstairs to run a bath for her mistress, help her dress and do her hair. Jane, Charlotte, and Miss Clayden slip upstairs too to do the same for Lady Abigail, Lady Agnes, and Lady Alice while Mr. Barnes (Patriarch's Valet) knocks on Lord Wiltshire's door to prepare him for the day. Footmen Benedict and Charlie bring up the food and lay the table in the dining room for the family's breakfast.

9:15 am - The bell rings for family prayers. This is the one time of the day that some of the lower servants will see their masters. The downstairs staff gather in the main hall, and wait for the family to read prayers. This is also a time when Lord Wiltshire will be able to announce congratulations or punishments to his staff. As soon as prayers are over, the family go in and sit down to a full breakfast prepared by the cook, consisting of fruit, eggs, sausages, perhaps a pair of kippers, some kedgeree or perhaps devilled kidneys. They are served by Benedict and Charlie, the footmen, in full livery.

10:00 am – Mrs. Ogmores and Lily have been preparing the family's lunch for some time now, and Mrs. Barrett the housekeeper goes up to the morning room for her daily

meeting with Lady Wiltshire to discuss the day's business - what's for lunch, when m'lady will go riding, and who's coming for dinner.

10:30 am - Each of the servants now settles into their regular chores – Miss Lyon, the lady's maid, works on a dress for Lady Wiltshire; Jane cleans the bedrooms; Charlotte sorts out the laundry; Charlie, the second footman, is on front door duty, ushering in guests while Benedict, the first footman, is down in the butler's pantry polishing silver. Mrs. Barrett has phoned her food orders to the suppliers and deliveries have been made into the cool, tiled larders. The scullery maid (Poppy) is, as usual, washing up pots and pans and trying to keep up with Mrs. Ogmores as she both cooks lunch and plans dinner as Lily assists her. At the same time Heather, the kitchen maid, is cooking the servants' main meal of the day to be served at twelve o'clock (known as dinner).

11:00 am - The servants gather in the servants' hall for morning tea. Mr. Bernsby and Mrs. Barrett, loaded with instructions from their masters, use the opportunity to issue their own orders to the lower staff, before sending them off to continue their morning duties. The footmen now turn towards laying the table for the family's lunch.

12:00 pm - The servants sit down for their well-deserved dinner.

1:00 pm - The family are served lunch by Benedict and Charlie - always a three-course meal.

2:00 pm - After lunch, the meal has to be cleared and the washing-up done in the butler's pantry while Poppy, the scullery maid, washes the servants' crockery, then everything has to be put away again. Charlotte checks on her fires, Miss Lyon obeys her third or fourth summons of the day upstairs, this time to help Lady Wiltshire change into her tea gown. Jane and Charlotte are summoned for Lady Abigail and Lady Agnes.

3:00 pm - The lower servants are supposed to have a couple of hours to themselves, if their tasks are finished. But that is unlikely to happen too often in a house the size of Upton.

5:00 pm - The family take tea in the drawing room, often with their guests.

6:00 pm - The basement is buzzing again: the servants eat supper at 6 pm - a smaller meal than at midday. A five-course dinner is to be served upstairs at 8 pm, so everyone is hard at work.

7:00 pm - As first footman, Benedict sounds the gong at 7pm to alert the family and their guests that it is time to go up to dress for dinner.

7:30 pm - Guests would arrive for a dinner party and the first course (hors d'oeuvres) would be served in the sitting room before the true dinner would be served.

8:00 pm - Dinner is served upstairs. Five courses, with wine, and a footman or two and a butler in attendance. If there are guests, those servants will be expected to stay

upstairs to wait on the family during the rest of the evening as well. During family dinner, Jane will be hard at work once again clearing up the bedrooms after the family and any guests have spent an hour getting changed in them. She picks up clothes, draws the curtains, and lays out the night wear.

9:00 pm - The footmen clear from dinner while the maids start on the crockery, once this is finished the footmen can start on the glass, silvers and cutlery, ensuring that male and female servants work separately at all times. Miss Lyon, Jane, and Charlotte will stay up until the ladies are ready to retire, and when the bell rings, they will go to help the ladies prepare for bed.

10:00 pm - Curfew for the Women servants.

10:30 pm - The last task of a long day is for Mr. Bernsby to check that all the lights are off, secure the shutters and lock all the outside doors.” (“Edwardian Life: A Typical Day in the House.”)

SOME FACTS...

- Allowed one bath per week (Warwick 15)
- General cleaning days fall on Tuesdays and Saturdays (Adams, 280).
- The family of the house often treated their servants as surrogate children, *Maternalism* (Hegstrom 24)
 - The lady of the house often gave gifts to downstairs
 - Called “one-way gifting” (Hegstrom 26)
 - Usually done around Christmas time
 - The servants would be gifted dresses, aprons, or dress and apron material for new uniforms
 - When receiving the gifts, younger downstairs servants would probably like these gifts and be grateful for them
 - Others, such as Mrs Ogmores (Cook), Mrs Clayden (Governess) would probably be over it by then.
- Average age of 14 to enter service
- The work was seen as service for the country (Hegstrom 20)
- Wealthy families believed that the qualities of a good female domestic servant were “humility, lowliness, meekness and gentleness, respectfulness, loyalty, and good temper” (Davidoff 425)
- “I never know why they called it a servants’ hall. It didn’t resemble a hall, it was just a room. But everywhere I went the room the servants sat in was called a servants’ hall.” (Powell 43)
- Servants are never to give a lady or lord of the house anything with their bare

hands. They must use a silver salver.

- Being a “flighty” (Powell 77) servant was sure to get you fired, since employers never wanted that trait in their workers.
- “Be ever active - let your whole mind be in your business” (Adams 21)

DOWNSTAIRS EVERY-DAY LIFE

To be quite candid, there was very little to everyday life for an indoor domestic servant. Servants worked about 14-17 hour days and their lives revolved around their masters upstairs. Before the war, they had the pleasure of being a part of parties in Upton Abbey, thrown mainly by Marian Astor-Cranworth, and before Almina Cranworth, for the servants of the town all around. Now, such events have been put on pause, and the only event to look forward to was the end of the war.

VIDEO RESOURCE

- The three-part documentary video series [“The Real Downton Abbey: Servants: The True Story of Life Below Stairs.”](#)
 - This documentary series, although a tad long, is actually really helpful! Commit to this instead of three episodes of a show.
 - There is also some great imagery and interviews with servants that can help brainstorm ideas for physical traits and general physicality of servants.

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