

## **The Butler, the Coachman and the Governess**

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By 1901 the biggest single occupational grouping in England was that of domestic servants, as the number of families who could afford living-in servants had increased substantially. It is suggested that professional classes would employ at least three servants, these being cook, housemaid and parlourmaid or nurserymaid. But the very wealthy could afford more servants and could house some of them in adjacent cottages on their 'mini-estates'.

The 1891 Census Enumerators' Books for Roundhay list 962 inhabitants in 191 households. Though arguably middle class in character, Roundhay was not a single class suburb. Wherever the middle class spread they employed servants (often from out of the district) to keep them in the style in which it was necessary to live. The middle class has been described as consisting of many layers of subclasses, the top one of which employed a range of staff, often with several indoor domestic servants. An outdoor staff maintained the gardens and grounds, and of course there were coachmen and grooms, for the earlier wealthy Roundhay suburbanites were of necessity 'carriage folk' (houses in North Lane, then Chapel Lane, were built on land sold after Samuel Elam's death in 1810). There was not a frequent and reliable tram service until July 1897 when Sir James Kitson opened the Kirkstall-Roundhay tramway.

Servant holding has been taken as one of the indicators of middle class status, even if a family had just a single servant or 'maid of all work'. Whilst 35% of Roundhay households employed living-in servants in 1891, another 31 % did not contain servants nor were they headed by servants; the remaining 34% were households whose heads were living out servants. This article looks at three 'higher status' servant categories, each of which can be seen as reflecting such status in a different way.

### **The Butler**

The Butler's duties included supervising arrangements for meals and waiting beside the table whilst grace was said and the meals were served. He might also look after his master's wardrobe and wine cellar.

Another important duty was to light the lamps and ensure that all fires and lamps were safe before retiring at night, and all doors and windows locked. During the day he would also answer the door to callers and ensure that fires were lit and maintained in all the rooms.

Five households in Roundhay had a butler, carrying out the sort of duties described above and in charge of other domestic servants, the reason why, along with the fact that they actually communicated with the family, I have called this a position of 'higher status'. At Elmete Lodge and Gledhow Hill Cottage, George Clark and Walter Cooper respectively headed their own households as living out servants. Elsewhere, at Bedford House, Grove Cottage and Roundhay Mount, butlers lived in and were responsible for between one and four other domestic servants, whereas Sydney Lupton's household at Grove Cottage was a bachelor one, with only a housekeeper as well as the butler. The holders of these positions had migrated from other parts of Yorkshire (Maltby and Brandsburton), and from as far afield as Hampshire, Suffolk and Oakhampton (via Teignmouth, Middlesborough and Saltburn, the birthplaces of their children).

Servants in larger households probably had a very different life to those sole servants in smaller households, of which Roundhay had 24 in 1891. Besides the companionship of others 'below stairs' there was the possibility of a weekly half-day off.

## **The Coachman**

The Coachman had to ensure the proper feeding and grooming of the horses, doing this himself or supervising the groom if one was kept. The carriages and harnesses had to be maintained in a state of readiness to go out at any time, and the stables kept clean. A historian of Victorian servants has pointed out that the carriage had to be ready in twenty minutes, with the coach the right way round to set out on the journey, 'for it was a sign of a badly managed household if the carriage had to be turned in the street'.

Male servants were generally more expensive than female ones and thus of higher status, but they also reflected the status of their employers, for it has been said that not only was horse and carriage necessary for getting about, but also an opportunity to display one's wealth, in the ability to afford not

just the horses and carriage but the added expense of groom and coachman. A general servant may have earned about £20 p.a., whereas for a coachman the figure would more likely have been 21/- to 23/- a week, more than twice as much. Whereas in 1891 Roundhay had 34 coachmen/grooms, Leeds had 1433. This meant that in Roundhay 1 in 9 of all males aged 10 and over was a coachman or groom, with an equivalent figure of 1 in 93 for Leeds, whose figures also included cabmen and horsebreakers. Coachmen were also prepared to be mobile; the Elmete Hall coachman's children had been born in other parts of Leeds and one in Keswick. And of course joiners and wheelwrights were needed to service all these coaches.

## **The Governess**

Employing a governess to educate the younger children and older daughters of a family has been seen as another indicator of middle class status. Although this could not have been typical, as there would not have been enough governesses to go round; a figure of 55,000 has been estimated for those women so employed throughout the country in 1871. With an average wage of between £20 - £45 p.a. a governess would have been within the reach only of upper middle class families.

In Roundhay in 1891 there were governesses in five households. This was the only job considered respectable for a middle class woman, for these were women being paid to work for their own class and it is for this reason that I count them as 'higher status' servants. Although they may have considered themselves superior to the other servants, they were still nevertheless in service themselves, being unfortunate enough to have come upon hard times perhaps through the financial failure of their own families. The governess may well have felt part of neither the world of the servants nor that of the family in whose home she lived, and for whose children she was responsible.

The surgeon Thomas Jessop did not fill in the 'relationship to the head of the household' column on the census form for his governess, though elsewhere this is filled in as 'servant' in the case of governesses; this perhaps indicates the delicate relationship the family felt with its governess. Frances Baker, aged 31, born in Bradford, was governess to the daughters of the Jessop family who ranged in age from six to eighteen years. Isabella Jessop was fortunate to be recorded as 'scholar' at the age of 18, for elsewhere in

Roundhay children as young as 13 were working as servants. It was more and more considered important to provide a liberal education for daughters as well as sons, for the daughters would hope to make good marriages, as did the Jessop's eldest daughter, Helen Mary.

The Roundhay governesses ranged in age from 22 - 31, and in the numbers of children in their care from two to six. Whilst one had been born in Leeds, the others had come from Bradford, Halifax, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire.

For all these 'higher status' positions it was obviously seen as worthwhile to travel from outside the immediate area, indeed for the governess this may have saved some social embarrassment. In 1891, 173 people employed as servants made up 18% of the population of Roundhay. The butlers, coachmen and governesses constituted 44 individuals, about 1 in 4 of the total servant population of this growing Leeds suburb.

Horn P. (1955) 'The rise and fall of the Victorian Servant'. Stroud, Alan Sutton, p14, p22, p102.0

Best G. (1979) 'Mid-Victorian Britain 1851 -75'. London, Fontana Press, p116.

Branca P. (1975) 'Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home' London, Croom Helm, p46.

Census Enumerators' Books: Roundhay 1891; PRO: RG 12/3174, ff. 132-46App.1-32.



Photograph of Elmete Hall Servants, c. 1893.

The Governess had apparently left by this date. A Lady's Maid had joined the staff:-

Isabella J. Harrison, aged about 25yrs. (seated: 3<sup>rd</sup> from left)

Photo courtesy of Joan Kemp, descendant of both Annie Cullingworth and Isabella Harrison.

## 'ELMETE HALL INDOOR SERVANTS, 1891 CENSUS'

Owner John Hawthorne Kitson, aged 47yrs.

Indoor Servants.

Cook. Catherine Joyce aged 43 yrs.

2 Housemaids. Anne F. Campy aged 27yrs.

Annie Cullingworth aged 19yrs.  
(standing : 2<sup>nd</sup> from left)

Kitchen maid Sarah R. Sectney aged 24yrs.

Scullery Maid. Fanny Barzelt aged 17yrs.

Governess. Gradys J. Parry aged 23yrs.

Butler. George Clark aged -

Footman William J. Mason aged -