



Household staff

Big houses and estates needed an army of people to look after them and keep them running. This is a brief outline of the staff that would have been at Belvoir and their various roles.

Stewards looked after the whole estate especially when the family was not in residence.

The Nanny ran the nursery, a suite of rooms where the children spent most of their time. The nanny would have had at least one assistant. Because of their role in child care, nannies would have been quite close to the family and high up the social scale within the servants.

Governesses were the women who gave the daughters of their house their education. They were usually middle-aged unmarried women from the same social class as the family. Governesses were technically staff but were closer to the family.

Gentleman's Valets were male servants who served as personal attendants to their employer. Their duties included looking after their masters' clothes, running their baths and perhaps shaving his employer. He was also responsible for making travel arrangements, dealing with any bills and

handling all money matters concerning his master or his master's household. In a great house, the master of the house had his own valet, and in the very grandest great houses, other adult members of the employing family (e.g. master's sons) would also have their own valets.

Footmen originally were staff who ran beside or behind the carriages of the gentry to make sure they were not overturned by things like ditches or tree roots. They would also run ahead to prepare a destination place for his lord's arrival. They were a luxury so the fact that the family at Belvoir had them meant that they were very wealthy and "important". The traditional footman's dress was stockings worn below knee breeches. The footmen would perform a range of duties within the household.

The Butler was in charge of all the domestic staff which would have included the cook, the servants and the scullery maids. In the great houses the household was sometimes divided into departments with the butler in charge of the dining room, wine cellar and pantries. Some also having charge of the entire parlour floor, and housekeepers caring for the entire house and its appearance. Butlers had their own special uniform.

The Housekeeper took her orders from the lady of the house and was very high within the servant hierarchy. The housekeeper would have overseen all the female domestic servants, the kitchen and cleaning of the house.

Lady's Maid was a personal attendant for the lady of the house. They are the equivalent of a gentleman's valet. A lady's maid specific duties included helping her mistress with her appearance, make-up, hair, clothing, jewellery, shoes, wardrobe care, and all related shopping. They could expect room and board, travel and higher social status; the lady's maid was addressed as Miss by junior servants or when visiting in another servants' hall. In the servant's hall, a lady's maid took precedence like her mistress. Anne Symons from Cornwall was lady's maid to Lady Deramore in the late 1800s.

The Cook answered to the lady of the house, the housekeeper and the butler. She was in charge of all the staff "downstairs" in the kitchen. The cook was responsible for the preparation of daily meals and menus, as well as menus for parties and other special occasions. The cook is also responsible for the ordering of food, the maintenance of the kitchen and for keeping accounts with local merchants.

Housemaids; their job consisted of dusting, polishing, cleaning, and carrying coal and water upstairs to the main rooms.

Stillroom maid was a servant who worked in the stillroom, the functional room in which drinks and jams were made. The still room maid was a junior servant and had to report to both the housekeeper and the cook.

Scullery maids were the lowest-ranking of the female servants and acted as assistant to a kitchen maid. The scullery maid reported (through the kitchen maid) to the cook. Duties included the most physical and demanding tasks in the kitchen, such as cleaning of the floor, stoves, sinks, pots and dishes. Before the advent of central heating systems, scullery maids were required to light the fires and supply hot water.

There was a strict hierarchy within the house. Servants would never refer to someone of a higher position by their first name (Mr, Mrs, Ms or Miss the norm) and would show their superiors the same level of reverence as they would the family.

Senior servants would not only have great respect within the house of their employment but also in the wider community. A butler or governess would have great social standing among the working classes and these jobs were greatly coveted often with individuals remaining in position until their retirement or sometimes even death.

Life for the junior servants was often a strict and harsh experience. Many of them would be going into 'service' for the first time and would be apart from their families. There was a tradition in young men and women in Ireland of travelling great distances to look for work.

Many towns would hold trade fairs, where those looking for service would be chosen by employers and taken to their place of work. Often the servants would have no idea where they were going and their families would often not find out until they were sent word by letter or the family member returned.

Northern Ireland Curriculum: Areas of Learning

Language and Literature; World Around Us; Arts and Drama: with the main emphasis on World Around Us.

Thinking and Personal Capabilities Framework

Being Creative; Working with Others: with the main emphasis on Being Creative.

Cross Curricular Skills

Communication.

World Around Us

Change Over Time.