

**clwyd theatr cymru**  
Theatre for Young People



# **The Secret**

## **Teachers' Pack**

**THE VICTORIAN  
HOUSEHOLD**

# **Female Servants**

**(in order of importance)**

## **HOUSEKEEPER**

To oversee all the work in the household and see each department is running smoothly.  
To be responsible for hiring and firing all the female staff except the lady's maid and the nurse.  
The large bunch of keys she carried was a symbol of her authority.

## **COOK**

To supervise the food preparations of kitchen maids.  
To provide the finishing touches to grand dishes.  
In smaller houses to do the cooking herself.

## **LADY'S MAID**

To be responsible for all the lady's requirements, dressing and undressing her.  
To carry hot water to the lady's bedroom.  
To mend the lady's fine clothes and hats.

## **NURSEMAID**

To be responsible for all the childrens' needs.  
To supervise their daily routine meals and clothes.  
To take the children out for their daily walk in the park.

## **HOUSEMAID**

To supervise the work of the underhousemaids.  
To serve food at table  
To light the fires in the main rooms.

## **PARLOURMAID**

To lay the tables for meals and wait at table.  
To dust and polish the ornaments and furniture.  
To clean the carpets and rugs.

## **LAUNDRY MAID**

To enter into a washing - book the articles sent down to the laundry.  
To wash, dry, mangle, starch and iron the clothes.  
To keep the laundry-rooms clean.

## **UNDER-HOUSEMAID**

To remove the ashes from the fires and keep the coal buckets well stocked.  
To polish the grates.

To clean the servants' rooms.  
To clean the front staircase and hall.

### **UNDER NURSERY MAID**

To keep the nursery clean and tidy.  
To clean up after the children.  
To collect the childrens' meals from the kitchen and return the dishes.

### **SCULLERY MAID**

To clean the kitchen range, kitchen and scullery before the cook comes down in the morning.  
To wash up after meals.  
To help to prepare light meals.  
To clean the kitchen and scullery equipment.

### **MAID OF ALL WORK**

To blacklead the fireplaces, scrub the kitchen floors and tables.  
To fetch the dirty water from the rooms and empty the slops.  
To scrub the flagstones and steps.  
To clean the copper scuttles.

# Male Servants

(in order of importance)

## HOUSE STEWARD

To make sure that everything in the dining-room was running smoothly.

To discipline the staff and check the supplies, to oversee the accounts.

To supervise the movement of staff from one house to another.

To control the packing and transit of valuables from one house to another.

## BUTLER

To be responsible for the household plate and to give out each morning the pieces which were required that day.

When dinner was ready to enter the drawing-room and announce that all was prepared.

To stand behind the master's chair while grace was said, ready to remove the dish covers.

To serve the wine and look after the wine-cellar.

## VALET

To carry up water for the gentlemen of the family.

To brush their clothes and put out the articles they were to wear that day.

To make sure the newspapers are pressed each morning.

## HEAD GARDENER

To produce vegetables and fruit for the table.

To look after the greenhouses and hot-houses and pick goods for the house.

To supervise the ordinary gardeners' work.

## MANSERVANT

To lay the breakfast for the family and carry in the food, clearing away afterwards.

To keep the front hall in order; to put coats, hats and umbrellas on their places.

To answer the drawing - room bell.

## COACHMAN

To drive the coach smoothly and not too quickly.

To wash and clean the carriages and harnesses.

## FOOTMAN

To assist the butler waiting on tables.

To clean the boots and plate.

To look after the lamp and candle-holders.

To ring the dressing-bell half an hour before dinner was served and again directly before dinner.

**HALLBOY**

To clean the knives and forks, chop firewood, carry in coal.

To sweep the yard daily, clean the windows and household brass ware.

**STABLE BOY**

To feed and exercise the horses.

To clean the stables and yard.

## Daily Life in the Victorian Household

The husband is the head of the house and his word is law.

The wife oversees the servants, planning meals, paying calls on ladies, shopping for clothes, seeing the dressmaker and sewing. She also does the household accounts.

Any large country house would have at least eight servants, the stately homes sometimes having forty indoor staff. Even clerks would employ one maid-of-all-work.

Domestic life was carefully structured and each department was under the control of the head servant belonging to it.

General supervision of the men was by the house steward or butler, and of the woman by the housekeeper.

The 1881 census showed that one in nine of all females were indoor servants. One in three young girls between 15 and 20 years were domestic servants.

Separate staircases were used by staff, some large houses even had separate staircases for male and female servants. There are tales of servants having to flatten themselves against the wall if they saw family or guests coming their way.

In well-run houses housemaids were not seen with their broom or duster. Except for the bedrooms all the housework had to be done before any of the family came downstairs.

Male and female servants slept in different areas. The laundry yards were often enclosed to keep the stable-hands apart from the laundry maids. One employer built a tunnel for the laundry maids to use to reach the drying ground without walking past the stables.

The cook would have the title Mrs, even if she was not married.

The lady's maid would be called Miss.

A "professed" cook is one who can make elaborate dinners and "showy" puddings as well as simple meals. She would earn more than a "plain" cook whose skills are basic.

Most servants would not have any time off work apart from to go to church, until 1890s when staff would have one day a month off. By 1900s servants were being allowed half a day off every

week.

Some employers insisted on their morning newspaper being ironed to make the pages perfectly smooth.

Servants would have to wear gloves in public so as not to show their red raw hands from the hard work.

Before breakfast the family and servants would attend prayers.

Breakfasts were big meals. Cold meat, game pie, mutton chops, rumpsteak, kidneys, kedgeree, bacon and eggs. Toast and marmalade. English muffins and tea, coffee and cocoa to drink. This would be served at 8.30 am.

Luncheon was a light meal - pies, hashed meat and fruit tarts.

Servants ate afterwards and had their main meal of the day, they called this meal dinner. It would be simple filling dishes - boiled beef, mutton, rabbit stew, boiled vegetables and lots of bread.

The Lower servants were not allowed to speak unless spoken to.

Afternoon tea would be thin slices of white bread and butter and toasted teacakes.

Dinner was never less than four courses. This would be served by the footmen. The butler would be in charge of the wine.

A full length dinner for eighteen people might produce as many as 500 separate items to be washed up afterwards.

At important dinners there could be one servant for each guest.

The Upper servants would eat supper together in the housekeeper's or the House Steward's room - the lady's maid, valet, head nurse, cook, footman and coachman would be present.

Early refrigerators or "ice-safes" were large wooden chests lined with zinc, with a big lump of ice inside to keep the food cool and fresh. They could only be opened once a day in case the ice melted. There would be a tap at the front to let out the water.

Other methods of keeping food were pickling, drying or salting. Vegetables were pickled in

vinegar. Fruits were made into jams or dried. Joints of meat were rubbed all over with salt and kept in a meat safe, a wooden box with a mesh door.

Servants' rooms were drab with grey walls, bare floor- boards, lumpy mattresses and an old basin and ewer. Furniture that was too old or scruffy for the house was put into the servants' rooms.

The children of the house would spend all their time with their nurse, only one hour a day would be spent with their parents in the drawing room and the time together for morning prayers. All their meals would be taken in the nursery. The nurse would sleep in the nursery with the children.

The dolly was used for pounding clothes as they soaked in a hot tub. The washboard was made from corrugated iron or zinc.

Irons were heated up by the fire and the handles would be very hot, often scalding the laundry - maids.

In large homes most of the food would be grown or made on the lands belonging to the house. This meant that there were only a few items needed to be bought from local tradesmen.

## Poems about Servants

### *THE SONG OF THE SHIRT*

*By Thomas Hood*

*With fingers weary and worn,  
With eyelids heavy and red  
A woman sat, in unwomanly rage,  
Plying her needle and thread –  
Stitch ! Stitch ! Stitch!  
In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
And stiff with dolorous pitch  
She sang the "Song of the Shirt"*

\*\*

*Work - work - work!  
My labour never flags;  
And what are its wages ? A bed of straw,  
A crust of bread - and rags.*

\*\*

*Unwomanly  
Plying  
Dolorous pitch  
Flags*

not showing the appearance of a woman  
using or working with.  
miserable tone.  
becomes slower

## **IN SERVICE**

**anon**

*We live behind the green baize door,  
"Below stairs" on the basement floor –  
We servant girls, who to and fro  
About our household duties go.*

*In print or black we always dress,  
Both cap and apron wear no less;  
Cuffs, collars, streamers too, maybe,  
Complete the housemaid's livery.*

*Thus duly clad our day is spent  
All on domestic service bent  
And seldom come such times as we  
Are from our various tasks set free –*

*Alas the night too quickly flies,  
And all too soon it's time to rise-  
A servant's work must be resumed.  
And we as servant girls costumed.*

*By halfpast six, if not before,  
We've started on our work once more;  
Starched dress with apron overspread,  
Cap, hair concealing, over head.*

*And like our dress, our manner too,  
Must be submissive through and through~  
Our calling is to serve and wait,  
And keep within our proper state.*

*We must not ever put on airs,  
Or idle over love affairs;  
"No followers " is the rule applied,  
And if we flout it - woe betide.*

*To church on Sundays, meek and low,  
All cloaked and bonneted we go;*

*Nor any ornament intrude  
On Sabbath garb of servitude.*

*But don't think there's no fun at all  
In kitchen or in servants' hall.  
If few our chances to be gay,  
Cheerful, at least, we try to stay.*

*In general we accept our place  
with modest and respectful grace~  
Our lot, we know, is service -yet  
Be patient if we should forget.*

*Sometimes that lot seems hard to bear;  
The work we do, the clothes we wear.  
If now and then our temper's frayed,  
Don't chide too much your servant maid.*

\*\*

<i>clad</i>	dressed
<i>livery</i>	uniform
<i>woe betide</i>	watch out
<i>garb</i>	clothes
<i>chide</i>	to tell off

## ERDDIG SERVANTS

**ALBERT GILLAM**

**Head Gardener**

*Ne'er did our borders look more gay  
Than they have done beneath his sway,  
And highly we appreciate  
The one to whom this doth relate.*

*While praising his own useful life,  
No less deserving is his wife,  
She is of healing-arts possest  
For such as are by ills distrest.  
At Orchard-Lodge these two reside  
Close to the Garden's southern side,  
Where time is profitably spent  
On Poultry-rearing craft intent*

\*\*

<i>Sway</i>	care
<i>Possest</i>	possessed
<i>Distrest</i>	distressed

**JOHN JONES**

**Carpenter**

*For him we have a great regard  
As Veteran of our Timber yard:  
For two~and-thirty years have sped  
Since first he entered at our shed,  
Yet never failed his course to pace  
'Twixt Marchwiel Village and this place,  
Save when ill health has been his share,  
Which, heavens be thank 'd, has been but rare.*

\*\*

<i>'twixt</i>	between
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**LUCY HITCHMAN**

**Nurse**

*Her city, which is Worcester named,  
Is for its old cathedral fame~  
And there a monument is seen  
To Grantham Yorke, who once was Dean.  
Of "Lea & Perrins" 'tis the town,  
Whose sauce is held in high renown,  
And over Christendom we deem  
Its porcelain held in high esteem.*

\*\*

*renown*

regard

**MARY WEBSTER**

**Housekeeper**

*Upon the portly form we look  
Of one who was our former Cook,  
No better keeper of our store  
Did ever enter at our door.  
She knew, and pandered to our taste,  
Allowed no want, and yet no waste  
And for some thirty years or more  
The cares of Office here she bore*

\*\*

*Portly*

well-built

**IDEAS FOR**

**IMPROVISATIONS**

## IMPROVISATION ONE

*The improvisation is to be within two and three minutes long, using dialogue. The content of the play has to be kept and the problem does have to be solved, after that you can add to the story.*

### CONTENT

Each day the under nursery maid has to take the young children on a pony ride accompanied by the stable boy. This is one of the only occasions she is allowed to be with the stable boy without an adult. On a particular walk the under nursery maid tells the stable boy that she has seen the head nurse beating the children. What do the two of them do about this secret ? If they tell the lady or master of the house would they be believed ? Do they tell the housekeeper ?

### GUIDELINES FOR MAKING YOUR PLAY

- \* First of all decide how many characters you need in your play. You could have a stable boy; the under nursery maid; one or two children; the head nurse and the lady / master of the house. I would prefer you pretended the ponies by using a chair turned back to front for example then everyone has a chance to have an acting part.
- \* Next decide how the play starts - is it with the head nurse beating the children ? Is the under nursery maid talking to the children asking how they are or checking over the bruises.
- \* Then decide how the play ends and how the problem is solved.
- \* Remember the status levels of the servants and keep the acting within those levels e g the stable boy is very low, so is the under nursery maid; but the head nurse holds a very important job.
- \* When speaking make sure that no one else in your group is talking at the same time. Remember that the audience needs to see and hear everything !!

## IMPROVISATION TWO

*The improvisation is to be within two and three minutes long, using dialogue. The content of the play has to be kept and the problem does have to be solved, after that you can add to the story.*

### CONTENT

One evening the housemaid was teasing the footman saying how strong she was. She claimed she was able to carry him and before he could stop her she gave him a piggy back around the kitchen in front of the other servants. This embarrassed and annoyed the footman so much that when he overheard a conversation between the housemaid and another servant about a secret relationship she is having with a man from another household, he told the butler ( or housekeeper). What happens to the housemaid ? and her friend ? and the footman ? Does the butler ( housekeeper ) believe the footman ?

### GUIDELINES FOR CREATING YOUR PLAY

- \* First of all decide how many characters you need in your play. You could have the housemaid; her friend; the footman; the butler ( housekeeper); scullery maid; cook.
- \* Next decide how the play starts - is it with the housemaid writing to her friend ? A relationship like this was not allowed unless the master of the house had given permission.
- \* Then decide how the play finishes and how the problem is solved.
- \* Remember the status levels of the servants and that the footman did not like to be shown up by a housemaid.
- \* When speaking make sure no one else in your group is talking at the same time. Remember that the audience needs to see and hear everything !!

## **IMPROVISATION THREE**

*The improvisation is to be within two and three minutes long, using dialogue. The content of the play has to be kept and the problem does have to be solved, after that you can add to the story.*

### **CONTENT**

A servant attended an interview with the housekeeper or house steward and when she / he was given the job was introduced to the other servants. One of these servants recognised the new servant from another post and knew a terrible secret about him / her. Would they tell the housekeeper or house steward or would they tell a friend first and ask for advice ? What would happen then ? If they didn't tell and the servant started work what would happen ? What was the secret ?

### **GUIDELINES FOR CREATING YOUR PLAY**

- \* First of all decide how many characters you need in your play. You could have the new servant; the housekeeper or house steward and other servants.
- \* Next decide how the play starts - is it with the servants in the first house when the secret starts and they are dismissed ? Is it with the interview ?
- \* Then decide how the play finishes and how the problem is solved.
- \* Remember the status levels of the servants and keep the acting within those levels.
- \* When speaking make sure no one else in your group is talking at the same time. Remember that the audience needs to see and hear everything !

## **IMPROVISATION FOUR**

*The improvisation is to be within two and three minutes long, using dialogue. The content of the play has to be kept and the problem does have to be solved, after that you can add to the story.*

### **CONTENT**

A servant with high status eg valet, footman, head nurse, cook ends up in a situation where their status level is very low eg stable boy, hallboy, scullery maid, under housemaid. What is the situation ? What happens next - how do they cope with the change in their position ? How do the other servants react - they might think it amusing.

### **GUIDELINES FOR CREATING YOUR PLAY**

- \* First of all decide how many characters you need in your play. You need a housekeeper or house steward then you could have any upper servant as listed above and one or two lower servants to react to the change.
- \* Decide how your play begins - maybe the upper servant is unkind to the lower servants so when their position changes the lower servants are pleased.
- \* Then decide how the play finishes and how the problem is solved.
- \* Remember the status levels of the servants and keep the acting within these levels.
- \* When speaking make sure no one else in your group is talking at the same time. Remember that the audience needs to see and hear everything !!