

The Hidden History of Victorian Servants

One of the main reminders of Elmbridge's Victorian past are the houses that were built at that time. These houses are often very large, with lots of rooms and big gardens.



See how many Victorian houses you can spot on your next walk. Use the checklist to help you work out whether the buildings are Victorian or not!



Victorian House Checklist

- ◇ Brick building
- ◇ Bay windows
- ◇ Turrets and towers
- ◇ Large garden

How do we know what life was like for Victorian servants?

In Victorian times lots of people were employed as servants, but we don't know much about them. Usually we have things like letters and diaries to learn about people's lives, but many servants had never learnt how to write or were so busy working that they simply didn't have time!

To learn about this important piece of history we have had to become a bit like detectives. We must take little bits of information and fit them together to show the bigger picture.

Practice your detective skills on the next page!

Take a look at the pictures in this scrapbook. What can you tell about the lives of Victorian servants?



Servant's Staircase



Now we have some idea of what life was like for servants. Let's do some digging to find out more!

Working at Hatchford House

Life as a Victorian servant was incredibly hard. They worked long hours with very few breaks. It was normal for servants to be given only one day off a month!

Only wealthy Victorians could afford to have servants. They often lived in large houses with many rooms and huge gardens. These houses were expected to look spick and span at all times!

Here is a picture of a real life Victorian house! It was called Hatchford House and it used to be in Elmbridge.

Hatchford House had an enormous garden. You can see from the picture how neat the gardens look. Can you imagine how much work went into keeping the garden looking this way?



Explore inside Hatchford House!

This house is really special because we have photographs of what it was like inside! Here is a photograph of the sitting room at Hatchford House!



Take a close look at the picture.

How many items are in this room?

Do you think it would be easy to keep this house tidy and dust free?

Let's get cleaning!

To make life even harder for Victorian servants, a lot of the machines we have today to help us around the house hadn't been invented yet! These machines are called 'labour saving devices' because they save us so much time and effort. Jobs that take us minutes now would have taken the Victorians hours or even weeks to complete!



Here are some pieces of Victorian cleaning equipment from our collection. Can you match them with the modern versions? Take a look at the next page to see how many you got right!





Soap



Washing powder

Before washing powder we used bars of soap for everything, even cleaning your clothes. The soap would have to be grated so it would dissolve in the water.



Wash tub



Washing machine

In Victorian times there was no such thing as a washing machine. Clothes had to be washed by hand in a wash tub. The whole process took an entire week to complete!

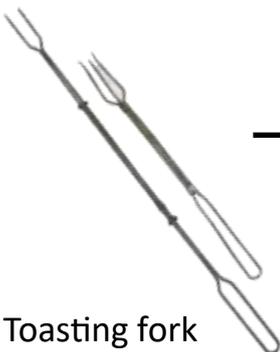


Carpet beater



Hoover

The Victorians loved their carpets but without hoovers they became very dusty. The rugs would have to be taken outside and hit with a carpet beater to get them clean.



Toasting fork



Toaster

Making toast nowadays is very easy thanks to toasters. But back in the Victorian period bread had to be toasted over an open fire using a toasting fork.



Flat iron



Electric iron

Although Victorian irons look similar to modern ones, they were much harder to use. Without electricity, the bottom of the iron soon got cold. You had to keep on heating it over a fire, taking care not to get burnt!

A Servant's Diary



We now know how hard servants had to work, but what did their day actually look like?

Sally is a housemaid at Hatchford House. Read through this description of her day and see if you can answer all the questions at the end!

At 5:30am I wake up and get straight to work! I start by cleaning the grate and laying the fire in the Dining Room, Library, Drawing Room and Morning Room. Cleaning the fire is a messy job, so I have to sweep and dust too. I need to move quickly because all this work has to be completed before the family wake up!

At 8:15am I have my breakfast. My tummy is rumbling by the time I enter the bustling Servant's Hall. It has been over two hours since I got up and I have been hard at work!

After eating I help clear away the breakfast things. At 9:15am we are called to prayers in the Main Hall. This is the only time I see my master. He looks very stern! After prayers the family go to breakfast and I get back to work.

I start by cleaning the bedrooms where the family sleep. I am not allowed to use the main staircase so I climb up the narrow servants stairs at the back of the house. I help to make the beds and empty the slops from the chamber pot. Then I fill up the coal boxes and wood baskets to make sure the fires keep going.

Sometimes I walk past her ladyship in the corridor. I always give her plenty of room and stare down at the floor. If she catches me looking at her I'll get into trouble!

At 12:00pm I eat my dinner. This is my main meal of the day, but I have to eat quickly so that the cook can get everything ready for the family's lunch at 1 o'clock. I've heard they have three courses!

At 12:30 pm I run upstairs to change into my afternoon uniform. I wear a black wool dress which is smarter than my morning uniform, in case I need to answer the door for one of the master's many guests.

At quarter to one I start my afternoon duties. I help the butler polish the silver cutlery. This job is not as messy as cleaning the fires, but just as tiring! I have to polish them really thoroughly until they gleam!

At 4pm I have time for another quick break to eat my tea. I am sometimes able to sit with my friend, Samantha, the laundry maid. But most of the time she is too busy and I eat by myself.

After tea I have some free time, but only if I have got all my jobs done. This rarely happens, as there is so much to do, so I usually go straight back to work.

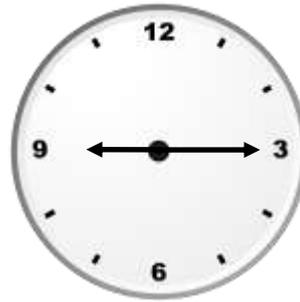
My evening duties begin at 6pm and it will be another four hours before I can finally go to bed! It is my task to light the fires in the family bedrooms and fetch wood and coal to keep them going. On cold nights I prepare hot water bottles and put them in the beds to make them nice and warm.

Before I finish I have to make up the morning trays for the Lord and Lady of the house. I do this in the evening so the trays are ready for breakfast to be served in the morning. I carefully lay the silver cutlery and fine crockery out on the trays and leave them to set in the housemaid's pantry.

When I finish it is dark outside but I don't complain. I know that I am very lucky to have a job at the big house. I don't earn much money, about £10 a year., but I do have all of my food and shelter provided as well as my uniform. The work is hard, but if I am careful and do well I could have this job my whole life!

1. What was Sally doing at each of these times?









3. How much money does Sally earn in a year

4. How many uniforms does Sally wear in one day? Why?

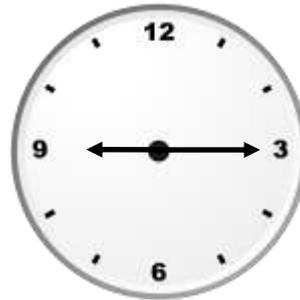
5. Does Sally have a good relationship with the master and mistress of the house? What makes you think this?

6. How do you think Sally feels about her job?

1. What was Sally doing at each of these times?



Sally wakes up



Prayers



Sally has her tea



Sally goes to bed

3. How much money does Sally earn in a year?

£10 a year

4. How many uniforms does Sally wear in one day? Why?

2 uniforms. One for the morning chores and one for the afternoon. The

afternoon one is smarter in case she needs to answer the front door.

5. Does Sally have a good relationship with the master and mistress of the house? What makes you think this?

No, Sally does not have a good relationship with them. She describes

the master as "stern" and she is not allowed to look at the mistress

when she passes by.

6. How do you think Sally feels about her job?

Sally finds the work very tiring and sometimes lonely. But she is also

grateful for the job and wants to keep working at Hatchford House.

Could children become servants?

Back in the Victorian times there were no laws against children going to work. Since children also did not have to go to school many started work at a young age to help support their family.



 This is a picture of young girls being trained to become servants at Princess Mary Village Home in Surrey. Take a close look at the picture. Some of the girls here are not much older than you!

There were lots of dangerous jobs children were expected to do in Victorian times. One of the worst was being a chimney sweep. Read the description below to find out more.



“My job is to clean all the soot out of chimneys. I climb up the chimneys with a brush to get rid of all the soot. The chimneys are tall and very narrow. I’m only

small, but even I sometimes worry that I might get stuck!

This job is dangerous for children, but I have no choice. My parents are too sick to work and I need to get food for my family.”

Although many Victorians thought it was alright for children to work, some people realised that it was very wrong and tried to do something about it.



Charles Dickens wrote his novel *Oliver Twist* to draw attention to the cruel way children in the workhouse were treated.

Dr Barnardo set up a charity to help orphaned children that is still running today!



Creative Writing



Imagine that you have been sent to become a servant at a big house. Write a letter to your parents letting them know how your job is going. Make sure you include:

- ◇ How you felt when you first arrived at the house
- ◇ What tasks you have to do as part of your new role
- ◇ How you are treated by your master and mistress
- ◇ Whether you like or dislike your new job

A large, hand-drawn rectangular frame with a brown, torn-paper-like border. Inside the frame, there are 15 horizontal black lines for writing a letter.

