

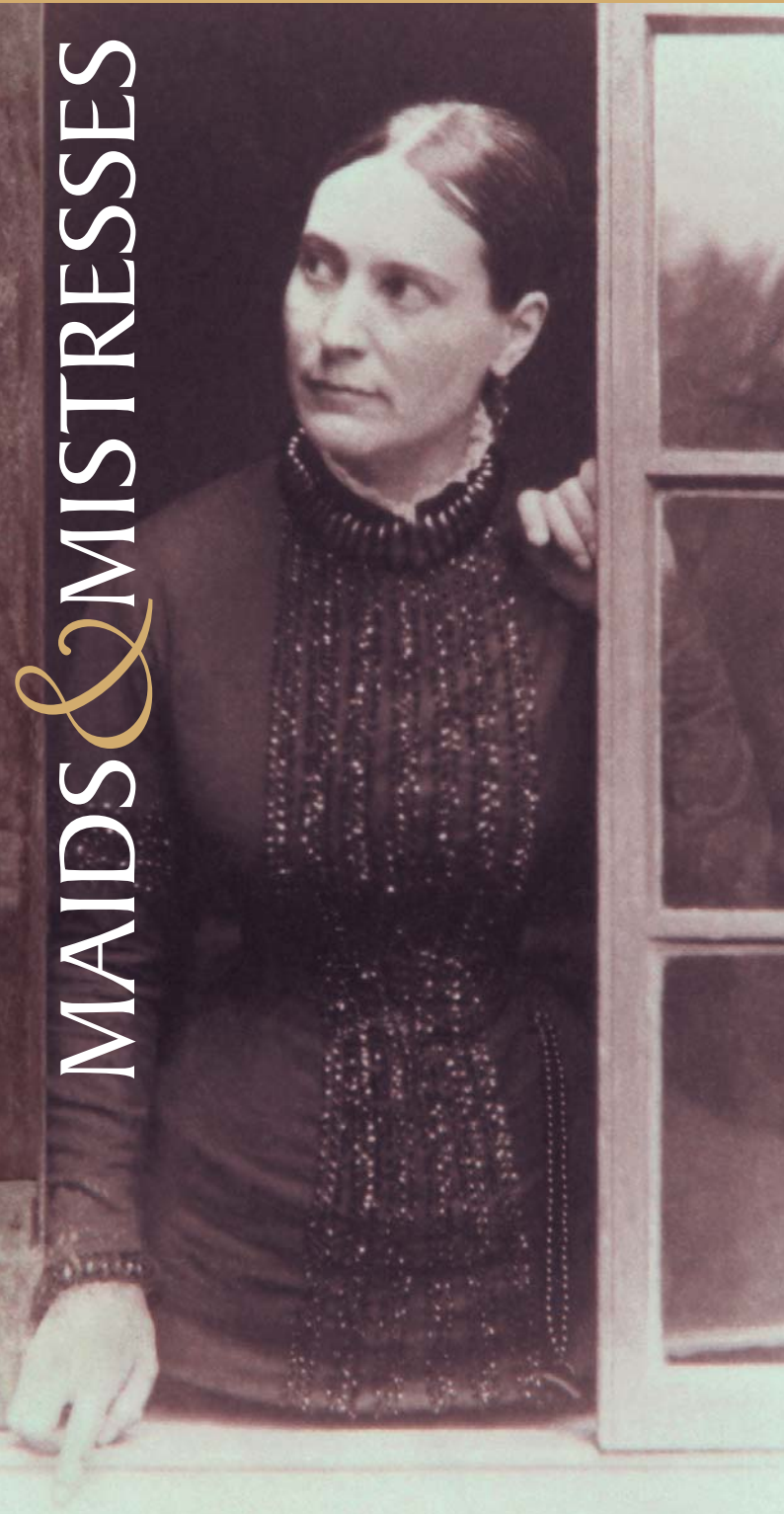


ENGLISH HERITAGE

# BRODSWORTH HALL

## Exhibition Guide

3 April-30 September 2004



Celebrating 300 years of Women  
and the Yorkshire Country House



**M**aids & Mistresses is a collaborative exhibition project looking at the lives of women in country houses from 1680-1960.

Brodsworth Hall is one of seven country houses across Yorkshire looking at this theme during 2004.

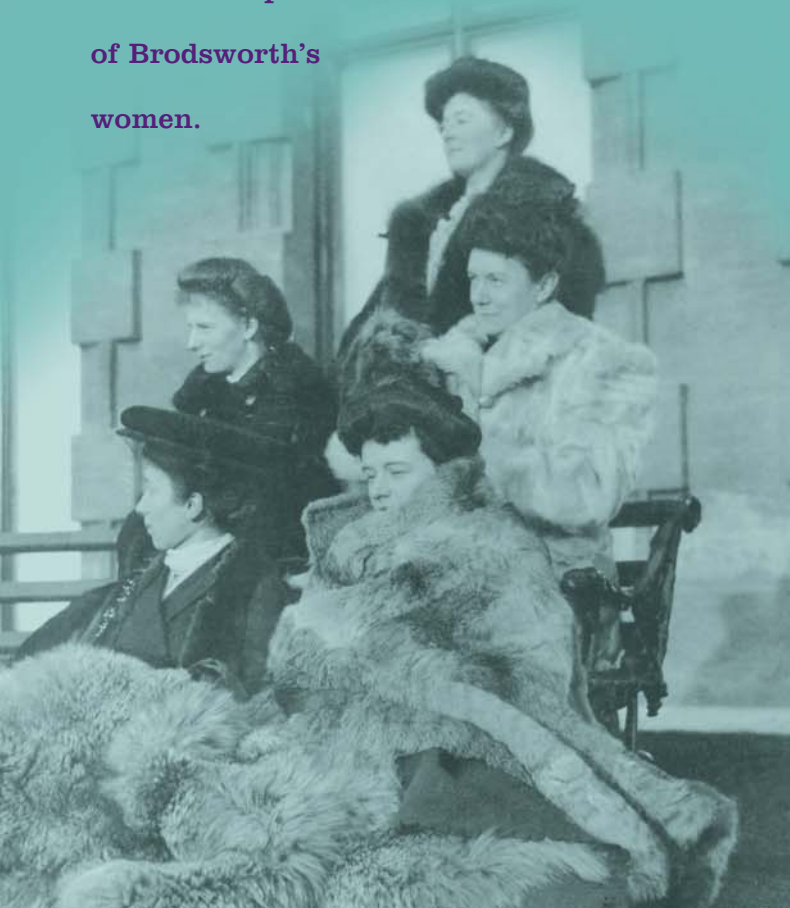
The Maids & Mistresses exhibition is in three parts in the first floor bedrooms.

A trail runs through the house, looking at objects and spaces which reveal the

lives and experiences

of Brodsworth's

women.



**M**any women have lived and worked at Brodsworth Hall in the 140 years since it was built. The lives and experiences of these women depended on their social class. Women born into wealthy families like the Thellussons and Grant-Daltons enjoyed leisure pursuits, together with many social duties and sought to make a good marriage.

By contrast, the lives of female domestic staff were filled with monotonous daily chores and hard physical labour. The contrast between their lives narrowed due to a number of changes over time. Despite these major differences, Brodsworth's women shared some common experiences: the joys and trials of birth, marriage and death were experienced by women irrespective of their wealth or status. The *Maids & Mistresses* project looks for the first time at lives of real women across the social spectrum, through their possessions, portraits, photographs and stories.

## The Drive

On the way to the front door are three of the Italian marble statues of women, which are a striking feature of Brodsworth's gardens and interiors. Charles Sabine Thellusson bought them in 1865-6 for his new country house.

Adeline Thellusson, his great-niece, was photographed in front of the second one in about 1907. It is a copy of a **Venus (1)** by the famous sculptor Canova. The contrast between the real woman in her thick outdoor



clothes and the ideal nude goddess suggest contradictions between the reality of women's lives and the expectations and representations of them.

## Entrance and Inner Halls

Brodsworth was built as a family home and its impressive series of interconnecting halls show that it was also intended for entertaining. Women of the family and staff both played important roles in ensuring that the household ran smoothly. The mistress oversaw the domestic arrangements and acted as hostess, while the maids worked behind the scenes.

The Inner Hall is dominated by the large sculpture of **Education (2)** (also known as *The Lord's Prayer*)

by Giuseppe Lazzarini, showing woman in a nurturing role providing moral and religious guidance within the family. However just to the side **The Swinging**

**Girl (3)** by Pietro Magni, reflects women as decorative and frivolous. The statues reveal much about mid Victorian taste and attitudes; while feminine virtues were idealised in art and symbolised through the purity of white marble, women were also objects of display and desire.



For the staff, the statues were objects to clean and care for as part of the housekeeping routine of a large house. This was the task of a team of four or five housemaids responsible to the housekeeper. It was her duty to ensure the efficient running of the household, and uphold the high moral and spiritual conduct of the staff. The physical cleanliness of the hall was seen as reflection of these values. Former housemaids recall how Jane Langton, housekeeper from 1916 to 1936, had her own secret recipe for cleaning these statues.



Many tasks like this were done while the family were away on yachting trips during the summer months.

## Morning Room

This small room, used for quiet activities such as letter writing, reveals the family's fondness for dogs. Elizabeth Thellusson specifically mentions in her will the **four paintings of her dogs** by W H Trood. The one of **Prairie Prince (4)** includes a letter addressed to 'Thellusson, Brodsworth Hall'. Painting and drawing were leisure activities especially enjoyed by women. Aline, whose father built Brodsworth, painted the large **black spaniel (5)** and several other pictures throughout the house.

## Dining Room

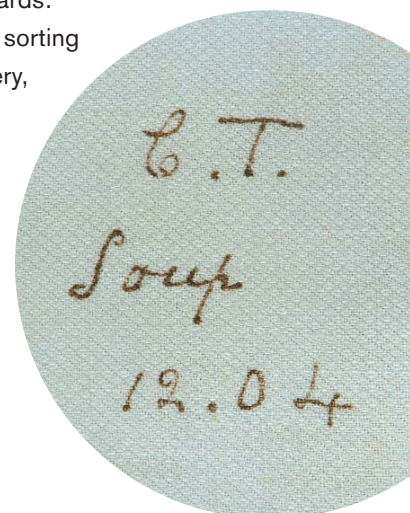
The contents of the Dining Room and the hospitality provided reflected the family's wealth and social standing. The large **portrait of Sabine Thellusson (6)** by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1804) reminds us of women's role in securing the future of the family through the provision of an heir: she supports her son standing on her lap. Women like **Georgiana Theobald**, could also bring wealth to a family through marriage. In 1850, the year she married Charles Thellusson, her **portrait (7)** was painted by Margaret Carpenter, unusual in being a successful female artist. Georgiana was the first mistress of the present hall, and had six children. **Her sister (8)**, also painted by Carpenter, remains a shadowy figure.



The provision and consumption of meals was a central part of country house life. The mistress of the house and the cook agreed menus daily, which could include up to seven courses when entertaining. Many formalities survived well into the 20th century; the Grant-Daltons always dressed for dinner, and Pamela was not allowed 'down' for dinner with her parents until she was 17. Sylvia used this room until the end of her life.

The routines of the domestic staff were dictated by the activities of the family and their guests. An enormous amount of preparation and co-ordination was required by the cook and kitchen maids to produce meals for the Dining Room, Servants' Hall and any children. For large dinner parties work often began days beforehand and continued long afterwards:

the washing, cleaning and sorting of huge amounts of crockery, silver and linen involved many staff in the house, laundry and kitchen gardens. A whole **range of linens (9)** was required for dining including correctly sized napkins for different courses, table cloths, tray cloths, and crumb cloths.



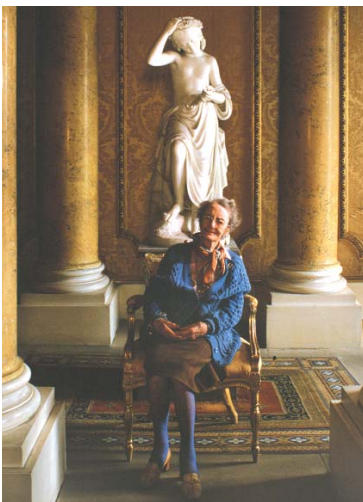


Few of the kitchen staff would have ever gone into the Dining Room. Waiting at table was until the early 20th century the preserve of footmen. In their absence during the First World War however, parlourmaids took on this task. Women often kept such new responsibilities permanently.

The skilful planning of Brodsworth Hall is demonstrated by the positioning of the Kitchen very close to the Dining Room. It is out of sight and smell but connected by a hatch and corridor. This ensured the quick passage of hot food and dirty plates between the two. The mahogany door through to the kitchen corridor is in the panelling opposite the Dining Room door. While this clever arrangement is unusual for a country house, since servants had to cross the main hall, the great red portière curtains could have been closed to form a cross passage.

## South Hall

The South Hall was one of many areas used for leisure by both women and men of the family. It had an American organ and a gramophone in the early 20th century, a time when Charles and Constance Mary Thellusson often had young guests like Adeline



and her sister Molly to stay.

The attitude of most of the women at Brodsworth to the statues was not recorded. Sylvia, photographed in front of **Vanity (10)** by Lazzarini, disliked their sentimentality, calling them 'poor cold ladies' –

while also complaining of the cold! Draughts could have been reduced by closing the portière curtains, thus making this a separate room.

## Billiard Room

It is not known how much this traditionally male room was used by women. Most of the large equestrian paintings came to the Thellusson family through Georgiana's marriage. The small late 19th century porcelain **figurine (11)** on the scoreboard contrasts with the marble sculptures with her realistic hair and colouring.

## West Hall

The elaborate painted decoration and close grouping of sculptures is further emphasised by the multiple reflections in the mirrors. The sculptures, including **Fidelity (12)** by Pietro Franchi, represent a number of feminine ideals of beauty, love, motherhood and innocence, and are placed just outside the female domain of the Drawing Room.

## Drawing Room

The scale, splendour and feminine character of this room reflect the importance of entertaining and the mistress' role as hostess in country house life. How much Georgiana contributed to its decoration is uncertain since all the bills were paid by her husband. Ladies were brought up to have certain



accomplishments, including music, needlework and painting, all of which were undertaken at Brodsworth Hall. The Broadwood **grand piano (13)** was bought in 1855 for Georgiana's first married home in Brighton, and some of the **sheet music (14)** bears her name, as well as those of Elizabeth and Sarah Thellusson. Ladies made decorative objects such as these **mats, footstools** and **fire screens (15)**. **Workbaskets**, like the one made out of an armadillo **(16)**, were used to carry needlework from room to room. The **scrap screen (17)** is another example of female creativity. Many of the images chosen for it are of women. Its pair is in the exhibition upstairs.



The grandeur of this room and comfort of its occupants required much hard work by the housemaids on a daily basis. This was a difficult task with **coal fires (18)** and gas lighting. The fire had to be cleared out and lit, the grate black-leaded until it shone, and the furniture dusted and polished. One of the

most perilous jobs was the annual cleaning of the chandeliers. Many former housemaids recall this event, supervised in the 1930s by Charles Grant-Dalton and later by Sylvia. Adele Higginbottom remembered how Sylvia would always announce when it was time to clean the glass crystals 'when they'd lost their glitter'.

## Library

Most of the books date from the 18th century and belonged to Peter Thellusson. The **portrait** of his mother, **Madame Sarah Thellusson (19)** by Largillière, of 1725, dominates the room, an expression of the ambitions and status of this family of financiers.

The room was used by Sylvia as a sitting room in her later years. She used the **desk (20)** here for correspondence, much of which related to her social responsibilities. Like her predecessors, she continued the tradition of personal involvement in the estate and charitable 'good works'. Unlike them however, she struggled to maintain the house and keep warm with fewer staff and reduced finances, using this room mainly because it was easier to heat. The experiences of working women were also changing.

The wood for the fire was brought up to the Hall by female

estate workers like Gertie Leggett who worked as a wood lady in the 1940s. Coal was also readily available, being delivered annually from the Brodsworth Main colliery.



## Water Closet

Les Trott, estate foreman from the 1970s to the present, fondly recalls the repeated requests by Sylvia to come and unblock this sink. Invariably it was full of stems and leaves from her flower-arranging! Unlike some of the women who worked in the gardens in all weathers to earn a living, Sylvia as mistress, enjoyed the gardens and flower arranging as a hobby.

## Lathe Room

This room also contains evidence of flower-arranging and gardening, as well as the family's outdoor pursuits.

The Grant-Daltons enjoyed skiing holidays abroad and occasionally made use of the **skis and toboggans (21)** at Brodsworth too. Sylvia is said to have hated all the Victorian stuffed birds throughout the house when she arrived in 1931, and brought them all in here.



## North Hall

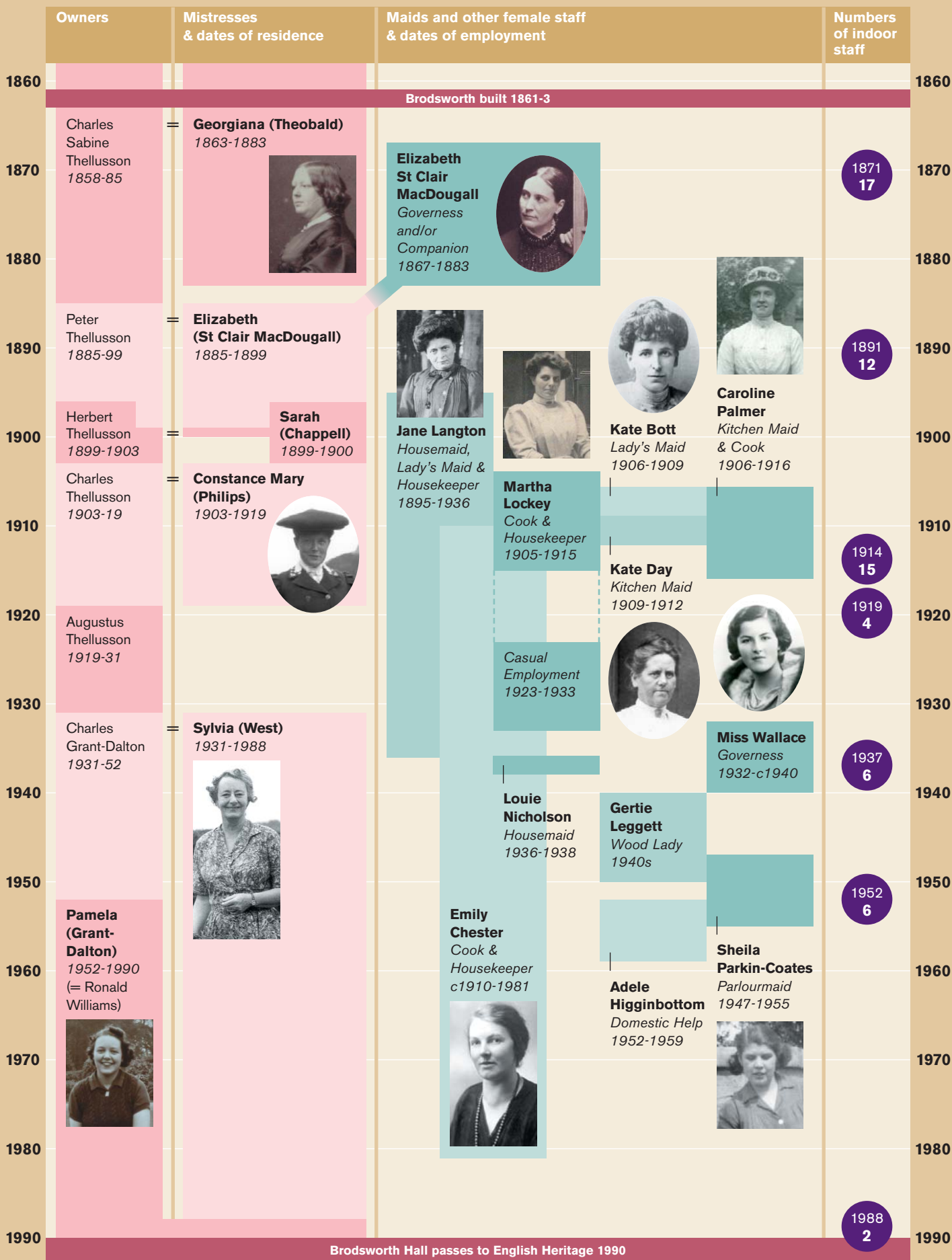
**The Bird's Nest (22)** is one of three large paintings by William Perry dating from the early 1860s. It depicts girls engaged in rural working class pursuits in an idealistic romantic manner, which would have appealed to Charles Sabine Thellusson as a new country estate owner. Two of the idealised sculptures nearby also



depict women in rural activities; sowing corn and holding a kid. Most representations of women in art were by men as few women were able to establish professional careers as artists.

**If you require the lift to the first floor, it is situated opposite the Lathe Room.**

## Maids & Mistresses at Brodsworth Hall



## First Floor

The ***Maids & Mistresses*** exhibition is in three parts in the bedrooms facing you at the top of the stairs and lift. The first of these on the right, ***Emerging from the Shadows*** focuses

on the lives and experiences of women of the family, from education to marriage and widowhood. Through first hand accounts ***The Invisible Army*** looks at the contrasts and parallels in the lives of the female staff through the same themes.

Lastly, ***Girls and Goddesses*** looks at some of the different representations of women at Brodsworth, and includes one of the Victorian scrap screens.



## Bedroom Corridor

The **linen cupboard (23)** was the domain of both maids and mistresses. During its working life it contained the best quality sets of family and guest linen. In later years however, it served a more general function, reflecting the changed needs and lifestyle of Sylvia Grant-Dalton. A selection of the family linens has been displayed to illustrate the story of the cupboard's use over more than a century.

Additional cupboards located around the house **(42, 51)** contained items for use by staff, children and the household. The strict hierarchies of status, gender, and age are clearly reflected in the graded quality of the linens. Best linen was reserved for the family and their guests, and often included items from the mistress' trousseau. By contrast, lower grade



cottons used by the staff saw many years' service. So important were these distinctions, that linens were individually monogrammed and marked to prevent confusion when being washed, ironed and returned for use. Such tasks were the shared responsibility of laundry maids, housemaids and parlourmaids who also had to count and check sets, darn and repair lower status items, and ensure that the appropriate linen was available for use when required.

As the number of occupants, guests and staff diminished, and new technology became available, the old-fashioned laundry was closed down. From 1932, most of the washing was sent out to a commercial laundry, although fine linens were still washed by hand. Unlike her predecessors, Sylvia took charge of the linen cupboard, a task that would once have been delegated to her housekeeper. The purchase of large sets became a thing of the past, and items where replaced, were of lesser quality. Many of the fine Victorian linens kept for 'best' and sets of monogrammed yacht linen were never used again, much to the disappointment of the housemaids, who mused over their future use. This assortment of items was stored for the last years of its life in this cupboard.

## Lift

The installation of the lift in the 1950s reduced a bedroom to a storeroom. Adele Higginbottom, domestic help and maid in the 1950s recalled the large wardrobes in this room full of discarded dresses from the past, which sadly do not survive. Maids like Adele would sometimes amuse themselves while the family were absent, dressing up in the finery of past mistresses!



The ***Family Life*** exhibition introduces men and women of the family through photographs from the archives.

Amongst the **oil paintings (24)** are two landscapes with cattle and sheep painted by Aline Thellusson. The small **painting (25)** of Can-Can dancer was perhaps a memento of a holiday. Female performers from the morally dubious world of the theatre held a certain fascination, as can be seen from the scrap screens.

## Bedroom 8

This room was abandoned as a guest bedroom by the Grant-Daltons, gathering unused possessions. Maids recall the trays in the large clothes press being full of **baby clothes (26)**, some of which may have belonged to Georgiana's children. The **parasol (27)** belonged to Constance Mary, and the **lace dress (28)** to Sylvia. When the bedroom was in use, the **commode (29)** would have been used at night time for convenience. One of the more unpleasant tasks of housemaids would be the emptying of chamber pots each morning.

## Bedroom 7

Although last used as a bedroom by the young Pamela Grant-Dalton, this room was originally a dressing room for the mistress of the house who would be assisted by her own personal maid. The position of lady's maid required skill in hair-dressing, dress-making and millinery, as well as diplomacy. Kate Bott came to Brodsworth as lady's maid to Constance Thellusson in 1906. They built up a close relationship, and after Kate left service in 1909, remained in contact for the rest of their lives.



## Bedroom 6

This was Sylvia's bedroom. In the 1930s the Grant-Daltons had six indoor staff, and dressed formally for dinner. Housemaid Louie Nicholson proudly recalled assisting Sylvia in her choice of **evening wear (30)**. As her circumstances changed, Sylvia increasingly 'made do'; using chintz curtains originally from the Drawing Room for the windows (now reproductions). In the 1960s **washbasins (31)** were plumbed in reducing the workload for the remaining staff.

Amongst the discarded objects in the next bedroom are a number of **toys (32)** including building bricks and puzzles, which may have belonged to Georgiana's children.

The final room of this suite was once the Master's Dressing Room. The **bell pull (33)** dates from 1860s and would have been used to request assistance from the staff (**see also 43**).



The **knitting wool and garments (34)** shown here survive from the knitting sessions Sylvia held in the adjacent Boudoir during the Second World War. Many local women took part, and Sylvia forwarded their products to all the armed services.

## Education Room (Day Nursery)

The Education Room was originally the Day Nursery, with access to family on one side and nursery staff on the other. After the children grew up, this spacious room was used by women of the family, preferring a more private space to the grand rooms downstairs. It became known as 'Mrs Thellusson's Sitting Room' and later 'The Boudoir'.

## Between the baize doors

The area between the family bedrooms and the servants' wing was occupied by children and the staff who looked after them. There were day and night nurseries, the preserve of the nanny and nursemaid, and a bedroom for the governess. The social position of these women, like their rooms, was slightly ambiguous. They had direct responsibility for the health, upbringing and education of the children, giving them a close relationship with the family and a higher status, which set them apart from the rest of the domestic staff. The last child to use this area was Pamela Grant-Dalton. When the family came to Brodsworth in 1932 her governess Miss Wallace came with them, retiring to the village after her services were no longer required.



The former Governess' bedroom contains an exhibition **Serving the House** which looks at the changes in domestic service for both men and women at Brodsworth. The **lead lined sink (35)** was still used by maids in the 1950s to fill hot water cans for the wash bowls each morning, before sinks were plumbed into the bedrooms.

## A short flight of stairs leads down to the Servants Wing

The large painted **box (36)** on your left, was used to store logs. It would be filled up by staff, including several women known as 'wood ladies'. Parlourmaids then took the logs up to the bedroom fireplaces, regularly used in the days before central heating.



## Servants' wing

When Brodsworth was built in the 1860s, the servants' wing was designed for up to twenty-five servants.

Male staff slept on the ground floor and female staff on the first floor to ensure no improper conduct.

Most of the rooms were designed to accommodate two people, although the cook and housekeeper

enjoyed single rooms as a privilege of their

position. Staff had their own bathroom on the corridor, and comparatively comfortable living conditions, which by the mid 20th century however, seemed outdated.

Less extravagant lifestyles for the family and new opportunities for working women contributed to a decline in staff numbers after the two world wars. Many domestic tasks were now done by 'dailies' from the surrounding villages, whose work was aided by technological advances. Staff at Brodsworth were provided with a heavy electric Hoover for the first time in the 1930s. Mr Hindle, the estate foreman who managed the generator used to tell Louie Nicholson to 'Go easy with that Hoover' for fear of using up too much power! Several later vacuum cleaners can be seen abandoned in these rooms, which became used for storage.

## Housemaids' Sitting Room

The smaller but laborious tasks of hand-washing, and repairing were done in the Housemaids' Sitting Room, later known as the Ironing Room. A selection of **darned and patched linens (37)** is displayed on the clothes horses that would once have been used for drying sheets. In the 1950s parlourmaid Sheila Parkin-

Coates ironed damp sheets here after they were returned from the commercial laundry's 'bag wash', often on her afternoon off. The **pull-down bed (38)** in the corner of the room would have been used by servants of visiting family and guests and could be folded away when not in use.



## Servants' Bedroom 2

The **tin trunks (39)** by the window would have been used by girls who came into service here. Domestic service was often their first experience of living away from home, and could provide opportunities for travel with the family. Several staff including lady's maids, housemaids and cooks accompanied both the Thellussons and Grant-Daltons on their yachting trips. On the bed are **towels and sheets (40)** marked for use by maids and dated 1907-13.

## Servants' Bedroom 8, Sheila's room

This room belonged to Sheila Parkin-Coates who was in service here from 1947 to 1955. Sheila was one of six live-in staff, who had rooms on this corridor, which she remembers as being cold and draughty. The **electric heater (41)** next to the hearth was one of several provided by Sylvia Grant-Dalton for the remaining staff in the cold and damp weather.

Returning along the corridor, the large **linen cupboard (42)** on your right stored the lower quality linen for use by servants, children and possibly invalids. The labels on the cupboard drawers, like the linen itself, reveal the practice of separating linen according to rank and sex. Look up to your left as you walk back along the corridor towards the stairs. The original 1860s bells would have been fixed on this **board (43)** to alert staff when their services were required. Above the arch, is part of the **electric bell system (44)** introduced by Charles and Constance Thellusson around 1914, when the first electric generator was installed on the estate.

## Housekeeper's Bedroom

This room was strategically placed where the housekeeper could keep a watchful eye over her staff. She had her own set of **linens (45)**; the examples on display here date from around 1900. In later years, butlers occupied this room.

**As you go down the servants' stairs, the Larder is ahead of you**

## Larder

This room was originally for storing food and keeping it cool. There was also a Still Room where preserves and confectionery were made and a dry larder, both of which were the



responsibility of the housekeeper. One of her most skilled tasks was the creation

of elaborate desserts and table displays. Caroline Palmer, cook from 1915 to 1916, recalled the amazing creations of

the Still Room staff including a magnificent sugar swan set on a blue lake. Elaborate ices would also have been made, using the **Marshall's Patent Freezer (46)**. Some of the many **linens (47)** required in both the Still Room and Larder are displayed here. They are all marked or stamped with the location, date and number of items in the set.

Outside the Larder is an **early lead-lined refrigerator (48)**, bought at the turn of the century. Ice blocks would be placed in the upper compartments and drain into a section at the bottom, which could be emptied by tap. Such devices dramatically improved the preservation of food. Originally ice would have been stored in the ice house underneath the summer house in the gardens, with further cool storage available for meat and game, as well as wine and beer, in the cellars.



## Kitchen

The Kitchen was a hive of industry. The cook was supported by a team of kitchen and scullery maids in order to produce the large quantities of food required for the family and staff. This rare photograph of women at work around 1910 records the kitchen prior to being modernised during the time of Constance Mary Thellusson. Caroline Palmer, (far right) came as kitchen maid, and rose up the ranks to become cook in 1915. She met her future husband Alfred Edwards, the valet



here and an amateur photographer, when he came to the Kitchen to dry his photographic negatives above the range. She left service to get married in 1916.

The roles of the cook and housekeeper were combined by Emily Chester from 1936 to 1983 although many of the earlier routines continued.

Sylvia Grant-Dalton, still came down to agree menus daily up to the 1980s.

The **cookbook All About Cookery (49)** was given to Emily by the previous housekeeper, Jane Langton.



The passage running alongside the Butler's Pantry was used to carry dirty dishes back to the Scullery, where food was prepared and the washing up done by the most junior maid. Down this corridor could be heard the voice of Charles Thellusson roaring out from the dining table that his meat was not sufficiently cooked! While still a kitchen maid, Caroline Palmer would always put the joint back in the oven for fraction longer while the cook Martha Lockey, had her afternoon nap.

## Butler's Pantry

While this was originally a male domain, by the mid 20th century the post of butler was seen as less attractive, and was often vacant. Women like Sheila Parkin-Coates took on many of the former butlers' tasks such as polishing glass and silver and answering the front door. Outdoor activities required additional equipment and work for the staff. This fine set of **damask table cloths (50)** was bought by Charles Thellusson in 1915 for shooting parties.

After visiting the Butler's Pantry exit via the shop. This was once the **Servants' Hall**, where staff took their meals, timed carefully around those to be cooked and served for the family. It became redundant in later years, staff preferring the more informal **Housekeeper's Sitting Room** across the corridor. This was originally used by senior staff, who retired here after meals. The **large cupboard (51)** would have been used to store sets of household linen.

*Images courtesy of:*

Lucinda Lambton, the Penley family, the Edwards family, Jeanne Brewin, Muriel Bramwell, Sheila Shaw, Sheila Hopkinson, Edna Tagg and Molly Nicholls

# MAIDS & MISTRESSES

A series of interlinked exhibitions in seven of Yorkshire's greatest country houses during 2004, highlighting the lives and achievements of their female occupants over the last 300 years.

## Participating Houses

- 1 Brodsworth Hall & Gardens**  
Brodsworth Hall, Doncaster DN5 7XJ  
Tel 01302 722598
- 2 Burton Constable Hall**  
Burton Constable, Skirlaugh  
Nr. Hull, East Yorks HU11 4LN  
Tel 01964 562400
- 3 Castle Howard**  
Castle Howard, York YO60 7DA  
Tel 01653 648333
- 4 Harewood House**  
Harewood House, Harewood, Leeds LS17 9LQ  
Tel 0113 218 1010
- 5 Lotherton Hall**  
Lotherton Lane, Aberford, Leeds LS25 3EB  
Tel 0113 281 3259
- 6 Nostell Priory**  
Doncaster Road, Nostell, Wakefield  
West Yorkshire WF4 1QE  
Tel 01924 863892
- 7 Temple Newsam**  
Temple Newsam Road, Leeds LS15 0AE  
Tel 0113 264 7321



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