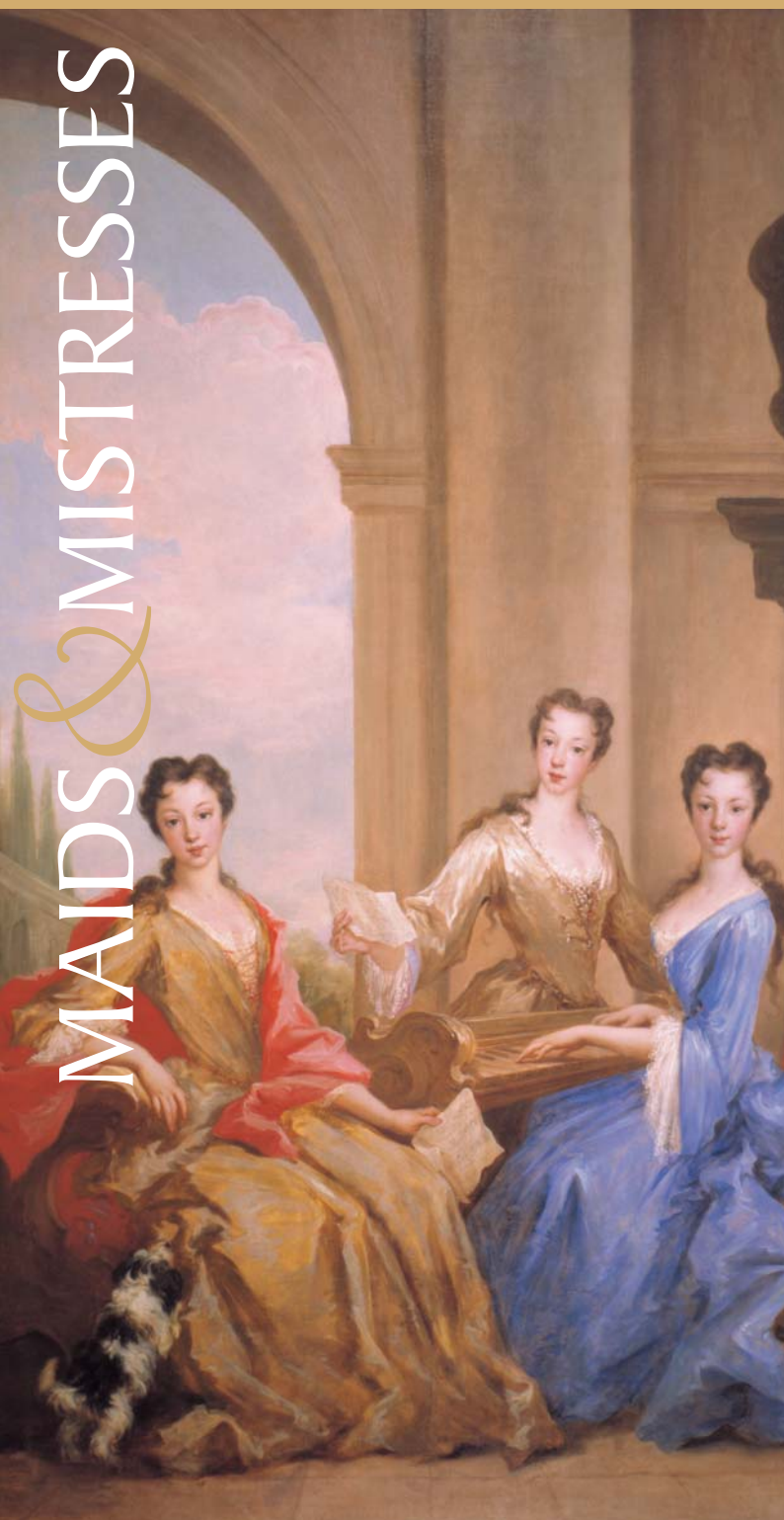


# CASTLE HOWARD

## Exhibition Guide

2 April - 31 October 2004

# MAIDS & MISTRESSES



Celebrating 300 years of Women  
and the Yorkshire Country House

Welcome to *Maids & Mistresses*, an exhibition celebrating the lives and accomplishments of the women of Castle Howard.

This exhibition – the result of new research undertaken in the Castle Howard archives – enriches our understanding of the vital roles women have played in the history of the house and the estate.

The story of the women of Castle Howard is told in a number of ways. During the tour of the house visitors are invited to focus on specific portraits and objects that articulate this new feminine perspective. At the same time costumed characters from a variety of periods, both mistresses of the house and serving women, are present to explain how the house was lived in and used, as well as talk about their personal histories; and representations of servants are to be found in some of the rooms.

The heart of the exhibition is to be found in the South-East Wing, where a series of panels recount the lives and achievements of key female figures, from the Invisible 3rd Countess to the Radical 9th Countess, to Mrs Flynn the disgraced Housekeeper.

There is also an education programme for schools, constructed around many of these personalities and themes, as well as daily tours and excursions with a female emphasis.

We hope that *Maids & Mistresses* will re-present Castle Howard as both a man's and a woman's domain, a home where work, duty, affection and family life were genuinely shared experiences.



It is often assumed that Castle Howard was managed exclusively by men, but during the 18th and 19th centuries five generations of Howard women were instrumental in shaping the identity of this great house, either as wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters.

Their responsibilities extended far beyond household management and the raising of families, although these were demanding and onerous undertakings in themselves. Many of them were committed to political, philanthropic or artistic causes, which they balanced with the needs of the family.

Nor were these mistresses of the house alone in organising the daily routine of Castle Howard. Below stairs, an array of serving women supported the domestic regime: cooks, governesses, housekeepers, and maids, as well as other staff, ensured that the house was cleaned, children were looked after, supplies were purchased, and meals were served.

The country house was like a machine, full of complex, interdependent parts. The hierarchy of family and staff was finely structured, as were the roles and duties people were expected to perform; and the organisation of space into public and private areas often marked a division between work and leisure.

The image of the machine may be a masculine one, but in 1789, Isabella, 4th Countess of Carlisle, was in no doubt as to who was responsible for the successful working of such a machine when she wrote that it was the women of Castle Howard who were *'the secret springs which move, regulate and perfect the arrangement of your household.'*



## The Women of Castle Howard: Wives and Mothers

**The Invisible Countess:** Anne Capel (c.1674-1752), daughter of Arthur, 1st Earl of

Essex of Cassiobury Park, Hertfordshire. When she married Charles Howard, 3rd Earl of Carlisle, in 1683 the couple were barely in their teens, and did not live together until some years later. She gave birth to two sons, one of whom was the future 4th Earl, and three daughters. The couple separated after 1705, and she probably never saw the finished splendour of Castle Howard.



**Anne, 3rd Countess of Carlisle, c.1693, by Michael Dahl, Naworth Castle, Cumbria.**

**The Roaming Countess:** Isabella Byron (1721-1795), daughter of William, 4th Lord Byron of Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire.

In 1743 she married the widowed 4th Earl of Carlisle, a man more than twice her age, and gave birth to four daughters and one son, Frederick the future 5th Earl. Widowed in 1758 Isabella's second marriage was to a man fourteen years her junior; after separating from him she settled in Europe. She was the author of a remarkable recipe book, and an instructional manual for young ladies, as they entered society.



**Isabella, 4th Countess of Carlisle, c.1760, by Thomas Gainsborough, Turquoise Drawing Room.**

**The Silent Countess:** Caroline Leveson Gower (1753-1824), daughter of Granville, 1st Marquess of

Stafford of Trentham, Staffordshire. She married the 5th Earl in 1770, and gave birth to six daughters (three of whom died in infancy), and four sons, including George the future 6th



**Caroline, 5th Countess of Carlisle, 1770, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Turquoise Drawing Room.**

Earl. On his diplomatic mission to America in 1778 her husband wrote to her continuously, and implored her by return to 'fill all your letters with yourself and the children. Love me as I do you'.

**The Mother of the Family:** Georgiana Cavendish (1783-1858), daughter of William, 5th Duke of Devonshire. Her marriage to the 6th Earl in 1801 united the two great houses of Chatsworth and Castle Howard. A devoted mother who produced twelve children in twenty-one years, she was fiercely ambitious for her children, eight of whom married into the peerage, three of whom became MPs, and one of whom was confidante to Queen Victoria. These unions with other elite families produced an extraordinary network of family connections that stretched across the whole of the British Isles.



**Georgiana, 6th Countess of Carlisle, 1853, by Robert Thorburn, Lady Georgiana's Bedroom.**

**The Radical Countess:** Rosalind Stanley (1845-1921), daughter of Edward, 2nd Baron Stanley of Alderley Park, Cheshire. She married the 9th Earl in 1864 and raised five daughters and six sons. Her correspondence with her artist husband charts a tender love affair but also records a decline in their affection. She took over the running of the Howard estates, concerning herself with everything from tenants' housing to tree-felling. She was also married to politics: a passionate crusader against alcohol; a supporter of the Liberal party, and of Home Rule for Ireland; and a tireless activist in the movement for the vote for women. She remains one of the most impressive figures in 19th century women's history.



**Rosalind, 9th Countess of Carlisle, 1865, by Frederic Leighton, Turquoise Drawing Room.**



## The Women of Castle Howard: Some Daughters and Sisters

**Ladies Mary, Anne and Elizabeth Howard**, the three daughters of the 3rd Earl of Carlisle. This portrait makes no attempt to identify the sisters, it was commissioned to celebrate their elegance, wealth, and equal suitability as wives.



**The Three Howard Daughters, c.1712, by Antonio Pellegrini, Grand Staircase.**

**Mary** (1695-1786) spent her life taking the waters at Bath where she once had the misfortune to be chased by a bull through the streets.

**Anne** (c.1696-1764) married 5th Viscount Irwin of Temple Newsam in 1718, but was widowed three years later. He left great debts incurred from his disastrous South Sea Company speculations. As a widow Lady Irwin toured northern Europe, and was the author of the anonymous poem *Castle Howard* (1732).

**Elizabeth** (1701-1739) was the reckless daughter, who lost enormous sums gambling and then tried to take her own life by swallowing laudanum.

**Isabella Caroline Howard** (1771-1848), eldest daughter of the 5th Countess. In 1789 she married John, 1st Lord Cawdor, and between 1814-15 made a tour of the Continent, which she recorded in a journal filled with sharp and witty observations.



**Caroline, Lady Cawdor, miniature by Henry Bone, after a portrait by John Hoppner, 1800, the Castle Howard Collection.**

**Harriet Howard** (1806-1868), third daughter of the 6th Countess who, in 1823, married the 2nd Duke of Sutherland, one of the richest men in England. She was

**Harriet, 2nd Duchess of Sutherland, posthumous portrait bust by Matthew Noble, 1869, Long Gallery.**



mother of eleven children, as well as Mistress of the Robes to Queen Victoria. Her London home, Stafford House, St James's Place, became an important centre for society, where in 1853 she launched the campaign against American slavery.



**Lady Mary Howard, 1829, by John Jackson, Turquoise Drawing Room.**

**Mary Howard** (1823-1892), youngest daughter of the 6th Countess. This image of an angelic child shows how deceptive appearances can be. In the same year her mother became alarmed at her bad behaviour and kept a journal recording her faults, which included being disobedient, quarrelsome, and peevish.



**Mary Howard, posthumous portrait by Frank Stone, c.1843, Naworth Castle, Cumbria.**

**Mary Parke** (1822-1843) became daughter-in-law to the 6th Earl and Countess, when she married their fifth son Charles Howard. A talented painter in watercolour, she had been taught by the famous landscape painter Peter De Wint. She died two weeks after giving birth to the future 9th Earl.

**Mary Murray** (1865-1956), eldest daughter of Rosalind, 9th Countess, with whom she shared many political causes. After a troubled courtship she married the Greek scholar Gilbert Murray in 1889; although Murray had once become so despondent at her rejection of him that he had attempted to shoot himself.

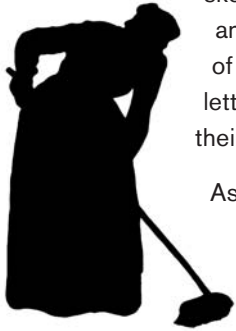


**Mary Murray, photograph, c.1895.**



## The Women of Castle Howard: Below Stairs

The history of servants is rather like the study of black holes: both are known to have existed but it is not easy to identify either. This is because no historical images of servants survive (no portraits in oil, sketches or even early photographs), and there is a corresponding dearth of documentation (no personal letters, journals, or accounts of their working day).



As an essential service, responsible for the daily running of the household, servants, and especially female servants, have been present in large numbers throughout the history of Castle Howard.

Without a cadre of servants to perform daily, weekly and seasonal duties the house would have been uninhabitable, and the size of the staff sometimes outnumbered the family by a ratio of as much as 10:1.

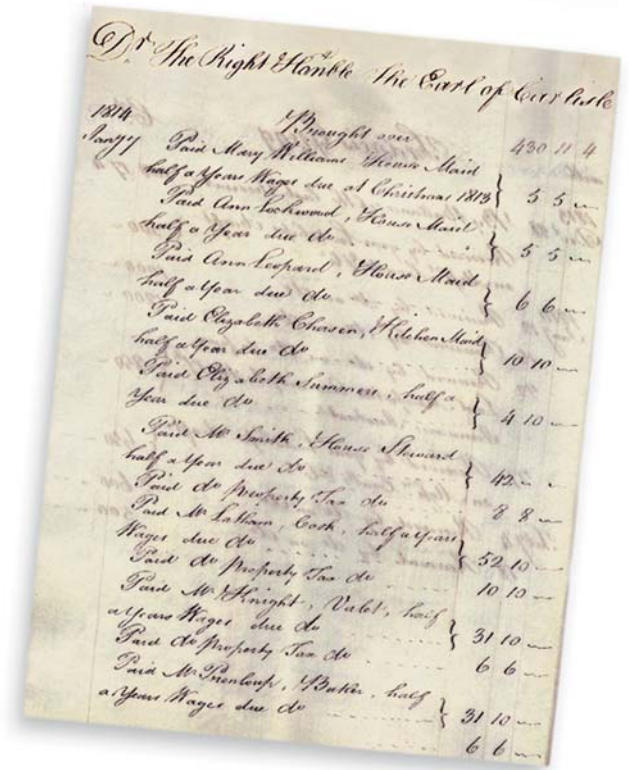
Who were these shadowy, unknown people? Servants have always been something of a paradox: visible and yet invisible; known and unknown; silent and heard; pushed to the margins of history. However it is possible to reconstruct something of their past from the archives – some names, positions, duties and wages, but little else.



The silhouettes on display represent types (parlour-maid, cleaning-maid, housekeeper etc.) rather than known individuals; they are defined by their occupations, unlike the mistresses of Castle Howard, who are more intimately known through their names, images and written records.



The number of servants employed at any one time would have varied according to certain conditions. The size and whereabouts of the family would have determined if there was a full complement of staff present. If the family was away, especially for an extended period, then the house would be put to sleep, and only a skeleton staff would be resident.



Page from an account book of 1814, detailing the names of servants at Castle Howard, together with their positions and wages.

Conversely if large numbers of guests were present then the numbers would increase, and extra hands would be hired on a short-term basis to meet the demand.

Women servants were even more invisible than their male counterparts. Liveried footmen (often engaged because of their physique), butlers, pages, grooms and coachmen were more prominent, performing duties that brought them into direct contact with their masters and mistresses. Cooks, kitchen-, scullery-, and laundry-maids rarely ventured into polite space. Even house-maids would perform such duties as laying and clearing tables out of sight of the family and guests. The housekeeper and ladies' maids would have more regular contact with the mistress of the house; as would the nurse-maid and the governess, whose status was halfway between servant and member of the family.



## Life and Work Below Stairs

To understand something of the daily routine of servants we might contemplate the range of domestic tasks we undertake in our own households: sweeping, dusting and vacuum-cleaning; purchasing supplies, storing, preparing and cooking food; doing the laundry and ironing; setting and clearing tables; laying and cleaning fires; managing the household expenses.

These are all familiar chores, but in order to grasp the workload of servants in a building on the scale of Castle Howard we should multiply these tasks by something like twenty-fold. There were more rooms to clean, more mouths to feed, greater quantities to purchase.

In addition to this servants were working in an age before the birth of modern technology; their work was labour intensive, it took longer to perform and occupied more pairs of hands.

Let us take the example of cleaning a carpet in, say, 1750 or 1850. A stiff-bristle brush might remove lightweight debris and dirt, but for the carpet to be properly cleaned it would have to be removed from the room, hung on a line outdoors, and beaten by hand; then it would have to be carried indoors and unrolled, before the furniture was re-positioned throughout the room. This might occupy as many as four people, two footmen to carry the carpet, and two maids to use the carpet-beaters, an action that required considerable exertion and stamina. The entire operation might take a whole morning, whereas today a carpet can remain in situ, and the vacuum cleaner is run across it in a matter of minutes.

If we were to take any other household chore and imagine how to perform it in the absence of modern gadgetry or chemicals, this would bring us closer to the world of work in the country house.

These domestic chores were performed in an era without electricity, with no washing machines or spin driers; running cold and hot water could not be taken for granted; modern scouring and cleaning agents were unavailable; rubber gloves, aerosol sprays, kitchen



**A wicker carpet beater, and an early vacuum cleaner with the suction obtained by manually operating a one-way bellows action.**

paper and other disposables had not been invented. And even more time would be spent *cleaning* the cleaning implements.

All sorts of devices and materials were available during the 18th and 19th centuries: in 1861 Mrs Beeton illustrated twelve different types of brush and broom for specific tasks; the Victorians pioneered such labour-saving gadgets as the knife-cleaning machine, although knives still had to be wiped free of grease before being placed inside it; and nothing was wasted if at all possible, thus used tea leaves could be rinsed and spread over carpets to help absorb dust when sweeping.

But none of these made any substantial difference to the time taken in working through the schedule of duties. Maids would rise as early as 5.00 a.m. and not finish until late in the evening. Although the day was defined by different rhythms of activity, the concept of extended free-time was virtually non-existent by today's standards. Breaks in the long daily routine, i.e. time spent not working and without any schedules or commands to follow, would have constituted leisure of a sort, especially if coupled with the chance to talk openly with colleagues, and relax one's dress code below stairs for a short while.



## Life and Work Above Stairs

Traditionally the mistress of the house has been seen as an ornamental figure; when not giving birth to heirs, she would concern herself with frivolous issues at the periphery of life on the estate. It is clear that this was not the case, many of the ladies of Castle Howard were hard-working and committed to responsibilities beyond the house.



**Lady Anne Irwin, engraving, c.1730.**

On the death of her husband **Lady Irwin** was forced to wrestle with legal matters as she tried to settle his debts. She detested lawyers, who she felt were incapable of talking plainly, and she once complained, *I did not think it possible to hear English for three hours and understand so little of what was said.*

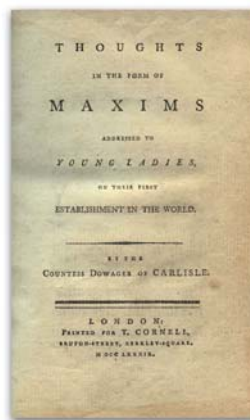
As a widow she enjoyed her independence, or being 'mistress of myself' as she termed it, spending most of her time in London, from where she sent her father regular reports on events at court. In 1732 her poem *Castle Howard* was published anonymously, and she confided to her father, *I am pleased to remain an unsuspected person, 'tis thought a masculine performance, nobody believing I have any other concern in it than my fondness for the place.*

With her appointment as Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales in 1736, she became in effect a royal servant, and although her duties were not exactly onerous they occupied a great deal of time.

The story of the **4th Countess** might seem to suggest a fickle and fruitless life, as she launched into an unhappy second marriage, exiled herself on the Continent, and experienced financial embarrassment.

But her accomplishments on paper are impressive. Whilst chatelaine at Castle Howard Isabella supervised the domestic expenditure, and the household accounts

**Pages from Isabella's recipe book and her household accounts.**



for 1744-55 record her meticulous grasp of affairs; alongside the summaries of outgoings she inserted marginal notes on the prices of everything from veal to lemons.

She also compiled her *Book of Receipts*, devising culinary recipes, medicinal remedies and household tips. She was a mistress fully in command of domestic affairs, and her

knowledge of housekeeping, accounting, botany, horticulture, medicine and cooking, were real and practised, not simply idle pastimes. She was also an accomplished amateur artist. Towards the end of her life, she distilled her wisdom and experience into her *Thoughts in the Form of Maxims Addressed to Young Ladies*, published in 1789.

**Georgiana, 6th Countess of Carlisle**, was afflicted by depression for much of her life. Although she composed prayers, undertook various exercise and dietary regimes, and wrote a series of memoranda on her own health as attempts to cure herself, she found greatest solace in her duties as mistress of Castle Howard, which were defined wholly in terms of devotion to her husband and children. In particular she adored her eldest son, the future 7th Earl, and followed his career in politics closely. Such was her ambition for him that she urged him to exert himself more strongly in public life. But she was a creative mistress of Castle Howard, decorating the interiors with chintz in the 1840s, and she was a tireless compiler of inventories and picture catalogues. As Dowager Countess she welcomed Queen Victoria to Castle Howard in 1850.



**Georgiana, 6th Countess with her daughters Caroline and Harriet, c.1810, by John Jackson, Turquoise Drawing Room.**



**Rosalind, 9th Countess**, was a passionate believer in liberty for women, but she also believed that her privileged life conferred a moral responsibility on her to work and serve in the public sphere; and so not content with her role as wife and mother, she involved herself with a wide range of other activities.

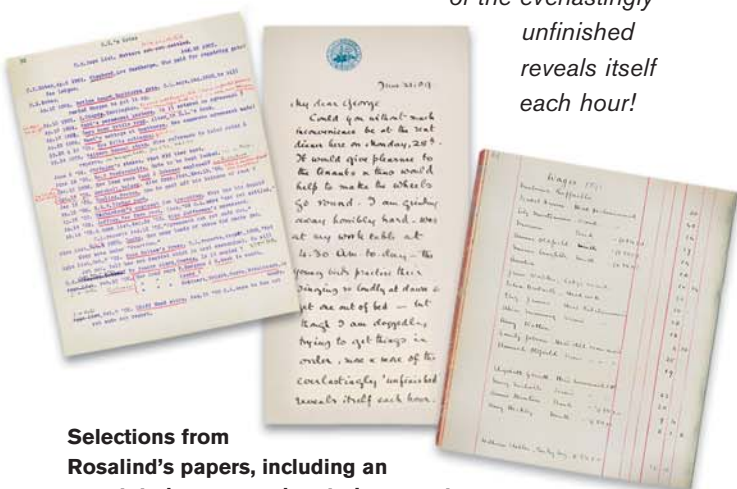


**Rosalind Howard, photograph, c.1900.**

She enthusiastically took on the management of the Howard estates, leaving her husband free to pursue his artistic life. Working closely with her agents she would involve herself with rents, forestry, farming, cottage improvements, tax and finances, and philanthropic causes such as village schools and temperance houses. In addition to this she was active in local and national politics on behalf of the Liberal party, and she urged Gladstone to embrace the cause of women's suffrage. She objected to the militant suffragettes, believing that quiet, behind-the-scenes, constitutional work would secure the vote for women, and not the lawless action of 'scolding women with hate in their hearts' as she called them.

As she found herself more and more at odds with her husband and most of her children, she threw herself relentlessly into her tasks, often working hours every bit as long as, or longer than, those of her servants; at one point she wrote, *I am grinding away horribly hard, I was at my work table at 4.30am today ... I am doggedly trying to get things in order, more and more of the everlastingly*

*unfinished reveals itself each hour!*



**Selections from Rosalind's papers, including an annotated memorandum to her agent, a letter to her husband lamenting her heavy workload, and a page from her accounts.**

## Conclusion

Mistresses, chatelaines, countesses, ladies, cooks, house-keepers maids, governesses, wives, mothers, daughters, sisters – all have played a part in the history of Castle Howard. The stories of many of these women are told in more detail in the exhibition in the South-East Wing.

The opportunities for achievement varied from generation to generation. Lady Irwin wrote intelligent letters to her father, and a poem celebrating Castle Howard; the 4th Countess was an accomplished practical woman; the 5th and 6th Countesses focused their lives around their children; and the 9th Countess was perhaps the closest to the idea of a modern woman, juggling an exhaustive range of public commitments alongside her family life.

In many cases these women had a greater say in running the house and estate than their husbands. It was they who chose the decorative schemes, monitored the finances, refashioned the gardens, or kept a watchful eye on the welfare of tenants and neighbours. They were hard-working, independent figures, who balanced the demands of a large family and a complicated household with more public concerns. Their letters and journals, now closely investigated for the first time, reveal a real desire on their part to make their mark on Castle Howard and on the wider world.

In 1888 the 9th Countess declared to her husband, *I too want a sphere, a definite one of my own which shall make my life have some definite persistent effort about it, some incentive to learn and achieve, not to flit merely.*

None of these women wanted to 'flit merely' through life. Although the calm aristocratic pose of their portraits might suggest a life of effortless comfort and privilege, their inner lives were more complex, and their daily activities more strenuous. Anxieties over their children, concerns about their health, the sorrow of bereavement (four of the countesses outlived their husbands), financial worry, household management, political and personal quarrels, fatigue and estrangement, these were all common experiences.

But it would be a mistake to view their lives as predominantly unhappy. These women also took enormous pleasure in their families, they experienced deep and affectionate love with their husbands, they helped fashion Castle Howard indoors and outdoors, and they were fiercely devoted to advancing the Howard dynasty, socially and politically, through marriage and other alliances. Fortunately for us most of them also left an enduring legacy in the body of their writings.

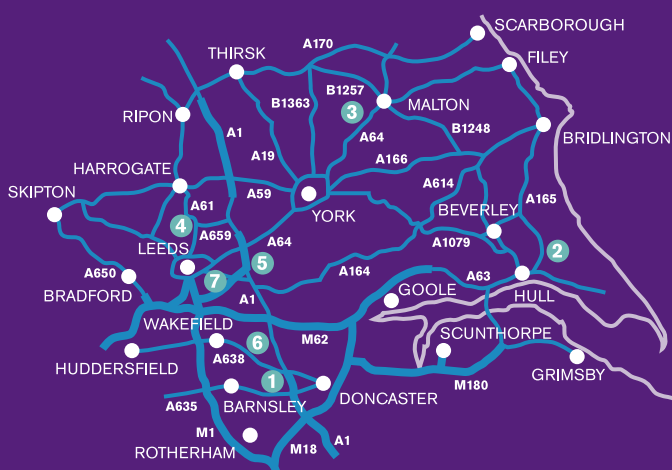


# MAIDS & MISTRESSES

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



Pioneered through **The Yorkshire Country House Partnership**, a collaborative research venture between the country houses of Yorkshire and the University of York, and generously supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, through the 'Your Heritage' scheme.

