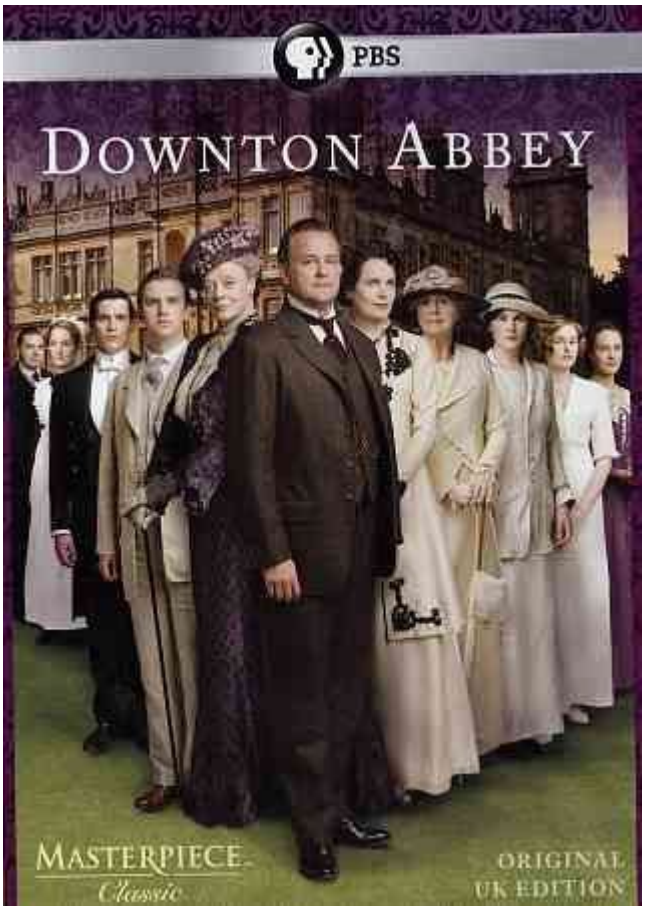
Published on *Monroe County Public Library, Indiana - mcpl.info* (http://mcpl.info)
Home > Blogs > dlynch's blog > Printer-friendly PDF

The World of Downton Abbey



view in catalog [1]

ISBN:
9781608833894

My husband, who seldom brings books home from the library, surprised me recently with this one. I laughed and said, "I'm not that desperate" but after dinner I found myself browsing through the pictures. But soon I was drawn into the writing. If you're a Downton Abbey [2]fan, you'll love this book and if not, you'll probably at least sample the series after reading it.

The World of Downton Abbey [3]is a social history of the times--Edwardian England to shortly after World War 1. In eight essays, Fellowes describes life then. She also gives an idea of how many people worked in service in those years--more than in farming or mining. Families would rejoice when a child got hired by a wealthy landowner, especially one as highly regarded as an earl. Not only would the person have a secure job, but the family would no longer have to provide housing, clothing or food as they would have needed to if the person worked as a clerk.

This book is full of interesting facts about working in service at the beginning of the last century. There was a network of downstairs folk who spread news of job openings from place to place and also kept a black-list of rich people who mistreated their help.

Also, covered are corsets--just know you are very lucky to be spared the agony of wearing

one. Even Daisy the kitchen maid had to don this straitjacket under her uniform. A woman in those days could not take hers off by herself. Imagine needing someone to help you undress. Only Cora the Countess (remember the American heiress who was married for her inheritance?) was spared this ignominy, and then only between the hours of 5-7 when she, as a married woman, could go without one. Interestingly, this was also the time of day famous for affairs among the rich because matrons did not need a lady's maid to help with undressing then. (Around this time a court convicted a male suitor who could not close the stays properly; this was discovered later by--of course--the maid!) But good-hearted Cora never engaged in such antics.

Fellowes shows how the telephone, modern train service, and especially the war reinvented the Edwardian world and began to dismantle long-standing traditions. Women began to have jobs outside the home in greater numbers, as Lady Sybil does in the show--she became a nurse. They also wore shorter skirts--not dragging hems along the ground for once, and--more shockingly-- pants. You might recall the hubbub on the TV show when Lady Sybil appeared at dinner in light blue pantaloons! Edith, who took up driving during the war, discreetly started wearing jodhpurs, receiving much less consternation from the older generations.

And speaking of driving, Laura Carmichael, the actress who plays Lady Edith, possesses no driver's license so she felt very edgy driving an expensive antique. As did the videographers standing in front of her.

Nick Bragg's excellent photos illustrate the book. For those of you interested in fashion, they go into some detail about the beautiful dresses worn by the daughters, especially Mary. Also, included are many shots of the actors and of the magnificent Highclere Castle where the upstairs scenes were filmed. Downstairs scenes were filmed in London at a reconstructed kitchen and servants' quarters. That means those wonderful dishes did not actually make it upstairs until two weeks later. And the filming of dinner scenes sometimes lasted twelve hours so the actors had to learn not to imbibe--but with two-week old food, why bother? This book is fun for Downton Abbey groupies. For other views of the upstairs/ downstairs dichotomy at the beginning of the twentieth century try Snobs [4] by Julian Fellowes, the writer of the series, and Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day [5], also made into an excellent film [6] by James Ivory.

that was directed by James Ivory.

For the Love of Reading[7]Information, Answers & Reviews [8]History [9]Miniseries [10]The world of Downton Abbey [11]

Posted by Dory L. on Apr 4, 2012

- [12]
- [13]
- [14]

Links:
[1] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?type=Boolean&term=isbn=9781608833894%20or%20upc=97
[2] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=downton%
[3] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=downton%
[4] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=snobs%20t
[5] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=remains%2
[6] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=remains%2
[7] http://mcpl.info/bookblog
[8] http://mcpl.info/category/blogs/information-answers-reviews
[9] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/history
[10] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/miniseries
[11] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-titles/world-downton-abbey
[12] http://mcpl.info/print/printpdf/blogs/love-reading/world-downton-abbey
[13] http://mcpl.info/printmail/printpdf/blogs/love-reading/world-downton-abbey
[14] http://mcpl.info/printpdf/printpdf/blogs/love-reading/world-downton-abbey