

DOMESTIC SERVICE IN ANCHORAGE ROAD

By Janet Lillywhite

The first part of this article uses evidence from the census and local newspapers to identify some of the characteristics of servants living in Anchorage Road at the start of the twentieth century. Using 1901 as the base year it is possible to look both backwards to 1891 and forwards to 1911 to identify where servants came from, the type of household they worked in, their age and the type of work they did, and whether, by 1911 they were still working as domestic servants. The second part looks at the memories of Margaret Kesterton, whose parents lived and worked as servants in Anchorage Road in the 1930's.

PART ONE: ANCHORAGE ROAD SERVANTS IN 1901

The Anchorage Road Estate was developed in the late nineteenth century for “*Suburban Residence of a Superior Class*” where “*No dwelling shall be of less cost and value, exclusive of outbuildings, than £500*”, and the people who came to live in Anchorage Road with its large detached and semi-detached houses were typical of the middle classes who were moving to Sutton Coldfield, attracted by the ease of access provided by the railway to Birmingham and Walsall and the town’s reputation as a pleasant, healthy place to live. (1)

The 1901 census shows us that the heads of households in Anchorage Road belonged to the managerial and professional classes, for example Harry Mills was a harness and bridle manufacturer from Walsall, Thomas Vaughton a gold and silversmith from Birmingham, John Matthews owned a chain of grocers’ shops, John Cant owned three houses in the road and his son Howard Cant was a solicitor. Family size varied, some people were retired, others had several children, but one characteristic they had in common was that they all employed at least one live in domestic servant. In fact just over 40% of the total number of people living in Anchorage Road were servants who came from the working class and not the middle class.

At the end of the nineteenth century domestic servants were seen as both a necessity and as a status symbol in the upwardly mobile middle classes. Rowntree, in his 1889 survey of York took “the keeping of servants” as the division between the middle and working classes. It was generally felt that as soon as income reached £150 per annum a family could employ a young teenage “maid of all work” or general servant who was usually expected to work fourteen to sixteen hours a day. As the family income increased, so did the number and status of servants. “Upper class” servants would include a butler, governess and ladies maid, while “Lower class servants” included a general cook, nursemaid or housemaid. (2)

The 1901 census shows us that there were twenty one families living in Anchorage Road, and between them they employed thirty five servants. About half the families employed only one general servant; the other half employed two servants, usually a cook and either a housemaid or general servant. One exception was George Lowe, who lived in ‘Oakhurst’, the largest house in the road with his wife Clara. They employed three domestic servants, a cook, housemaid and general servant and also a hospital nurse, Amina Hartley. In 1891 Amina had been working as a charge nurse in Salford Royal Hospital and in 1911 was working as a sick nurse for another family in Hale, Cheshire.

Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Condition as to Marriage	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION		Employer, Worker, or Own account
				Males	Females	
John H. Maddean	Son	S	18	X	Apprentice	71
Howard S. do	Son	S	16	X	Morris D. Hab.	11
Arthur H. do	Son	S	15	X	School-boy Sta	72
Edwin H. do	Son	S	11	X	do	73
James B. Walker	Serv.	S	20	X	George Kean	74
Thomas & daughter	Head M	42	X	Golds & Silversmith	Employee	
Sarah Fawley	Serv.	S	38	X	Cook. Coldfield	
Annie Corlett	Serv.	S	19	X	Housemaid	
John J. Gask	Head M.	62	X	Living on own means		
Martha do	Wife M.	--	70	X	do	
Horace Brown	Serv.	S	32	X	General servant	
Joseph Yeomans	Head M.	47	X	Golds & Silversmith	Employee	
John M. do	Son	S	10	X	Manufacturing Kneller	
Lily Turner	Serv.	M	31	X	Lady's companion	
Annie C. Morgan	Serv.	S	20	X	General Servant	

Extract from the 1901 census for Anchorage Road

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic service in private homes formed the major source of employment for women. The 1901 census shows that, nationally, 40% of all occupied females were in some form of domestic service. At this time most servants were young single women aged between fifteen and twenty five. Girls started work about the age of thirteen and would then tend to work in service in a variety of different households until they married. (3)

THE TEENAGE SERVANTS

In Anchorage Road, the youngest servant was Lily Hooper age fourteen. She was one of two servants working for Jacob Beddow a brick and tile manufacturer from Walsall who was living in 'Westlands' with his wife and two daughters aged eight and five. Lily was employed as a 'nurse girl', her duties would be to clean, dress, feed and generally care for and occupy the children. (4) She came from Bloxwich and was one of five children; her father was a coal miner. In 1911 she was working as a general servant in Wylde Green. She married Thomas Knight in Walsall in 1912 and lived there until her death in 1976.

There were two other 'teenage' servants working in Anchorage Road, Elsie Allkin age sixteen and Edith Price age fifteen, both working as housemaids which was the generic term for a cleaner. (5) They were both born in Sutton Coldfield. Elsie's father was an agricultural labourer living in Four Oaks with his wife and five children and Elsie's younger sister was also a servant. Elsie worked for Amelia Tye, who was the head mistress of Ashtree House School. Amelia Tye also employed a cook, twenty four year old Sarah Daulman. Between them the two servants looked after three adults, three boarders and presumably day pupils as well. The 1911 census shows us that by then both Elsie and Sarah were married; Elsie to William Yeomans, a farm bailiff living on Four Oaks Common Road and Sarah to John Middleton, a labourer from West Bromwich which was Sarah's home town.



“Westlands” (on the left) where Lily Hooper worked in 1901. On the right is “Hove Dene”, the home of Harry Mills a harness and bridle manufacturer from Walsall who lived here with his wife and seven year old son and employed one general servant.

Edith Price's father was a general labourer living in Farthing Lane and Edith was the youngest of five children. She was one of two servants working for William Lane, a Chartered Accountant, his wife and three teenage children. By 1911 Edith had left domestic service and was living in Erdington and working as a packer in a laundry. Working in a laundry might not seem very exciting, but it provided more attractive employment than domestic service as working conditions in factories were controlled under the 1901 Factory and Workshop Act. Factories were inspected every year and workers worked shorter and more regular hours and had Sunday off. This was very different from the domestic servant whose working conditions were not regulated, who worked eighty hours a week and who had limited time off, and whose status was associated with subservience and servility. (6)

Reports and letters in the local papers indicate that it was becoming increasingly problematic to recruit and retain servants:-

“It is perfectly easy to explain how the dearth arises. There are more people who can afford to keep a servant than was formerly the case; but at the same time there is an immense demand for female labour in manufacturing processes, while hotels and restaurants absorb a large proportion of the class of young women who would not care for employment as factory hands”. (7)

At the same time servants were beginning to air their grievances and in September 1900 there was a meeting in Hyde Park to form a Society for the Mutual Aid and Protection of Servants, who were *“kept at work sixteen and eighteen hours a day seven days in the week”* - an indication of the changing attitudes of servants to their low status and working conditions. (8)

THE OLDEST SERVANT

It was not just children who went into service. The oldest servant in Anchorage Road was fifty six year old Louisa Phillips, who was one of two servants employed by Harriet Dugard, an eighty year old

widow. Louisa came from Kings Norton and had an unusual background for a servant. In 1871 she was an assistant schoolteacher in a school run by her aunt. She and her aunt later moved to the ‘Hawthorns’ Birmingham Road, where in 1891 Louisa was described as a ‘letter of apartments’. Her aunt died in 1893 and Louisa was possibly left homeless or with very limited means. Domestic service would have provided her with a comfortable home and a small salary in return for being a “companion and assistant housekeeper.” (9) Harriet Dugard died in 1903 and in the 1911 census Louisa now aged sixty six, is working as a domestic nurse at Falcoln Lodge House, again in a home with elderly people.

THE GENERAL SERVANT

It was usually felt that the life of the general servant was the most arduous as they would have been expected to perform the duties of both the cook and the housemaid, including cleaning the grates and lighting the fire. According to the “Situation Vacant” columns in the local newspapers a general servant would have to be “*strong and willing*”, and “*must be an early riser and not object to help with washing*”. An “*experienced servant with good references*” would expect to earn about £16 to £18 a year. (10)

Possibly one of the most hardworking general servants in Anchorage Road was twenty year old Fanny Walker who in March 1901 (when the census was taken), was singlehandedly looking after the daily needs of a family of seven: John Matthews, a grocer, his wife and five teenage sons aged between eleven and nineteen. The house she worked in can be seen in the photograph (on the following page). It was a substantial three storey semi-detached house with dining room, sitting room, kitchen and scullery, and four bedrooms on the first floor and two attic bedrooms. However, it wasn’t long before Fanny left the Matthews household, for in June 1901; Mrs Matthews was advertising in the Lichfield Mercury for a “*good general servant*”. In 1911, Fanny was working in a much smaller household in Moseley, and in 1915 she married and moved back to her home town of Cannock.

THE COOK

Just under half of the families in Anchorage Road employed a cook. At this time there were two kinds of female cook, ‘plain’ and ‘professed’. The latter generally worked in wealthy households and could produce complicated and fancy dishes, the ‘plain’ cook was employed by middle class families, her salary was lower and cleaning was part of her daily duties. (11) Advertisements in the Birmingham Daily Post show that middle class families such as those living in Anchorage Road were looking for plain cooks. Mrs Martin of Hartopp Court advertised for a “*Cook (thoroughly good Plain) between the age of 25 and 35; four in family; four servants*”, while Mrs Emery of Harman House Wylde Green was looking for a “*Cook (Good Plain) and House Parlourmaid*”, and she would offer “*Good wages, to a Trustworthy woman*”. Another advertisement is quoting a wage of between £18 and £22 for a plain cook. (12)



On the left is Lyndon House owned and occupied by John Cant and his wife, both in their seventies, they had one servant. Next door are a pair of semidetached houses, Nos 46 and 44 Anchorage Road both owned by John Cant. One was occupied by John Matthews, his family and general servant Fanny Walker and the other by Thomas Vaughton, his wife and two small children and two servants, a cook, Sarah Insley and housemaid Annie Corkett.

A cook would generally start work as a general servant. Sarah Insley, who worked for Thomas Vaughton, and Lilian Robb who worked for Henry Yates, a gas stove and grate manufacturer, were typical in that they had moved to their current position from general service in another household. Both started work at fifteen and then worked their way up to become a cook. Sarah was the daughter of an agricultural labourer from Hill, she was working as a nursemaid at the age of fifteen for a local farmer, in 1891 she was working as a general servant in Lichfield Road and by 1901 had become a domestic cook. In 1911, age 45, she was still working as a cook, but in a house on the Four Oaks Estate. Lilian was one of eight children; her father was a ropemaker working in Aston. By 1911 she had moved away from the area and was working as a cook in Surrey for a retired bank manager and his wife, who also employed a house parlourmaid, so this would have made life easier for Lilian. She never married and by the 1930's the electoral registers show that she had moved back to Birmingham. She died in 1957 and left £551 12s 11d in her will. (13)

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The 1901 census shows us that the majority of servants in Anchorage Road were born locally and came from working class backgrounds. Four servants were born in Sutton Coldfield and three in Birmingham. The map on the following page shows the birth place of other servants born in the Midlands. Traditionally the main source of servants had been country girls from an agricultural background (16) but only six of the servants had fathers whose occupation



An advertisement in the 1901 'Sutton Coldfield and Erdington Directory' showing the type of ornate bedroom furniture which was popular in the middle class homes of the time. (14)

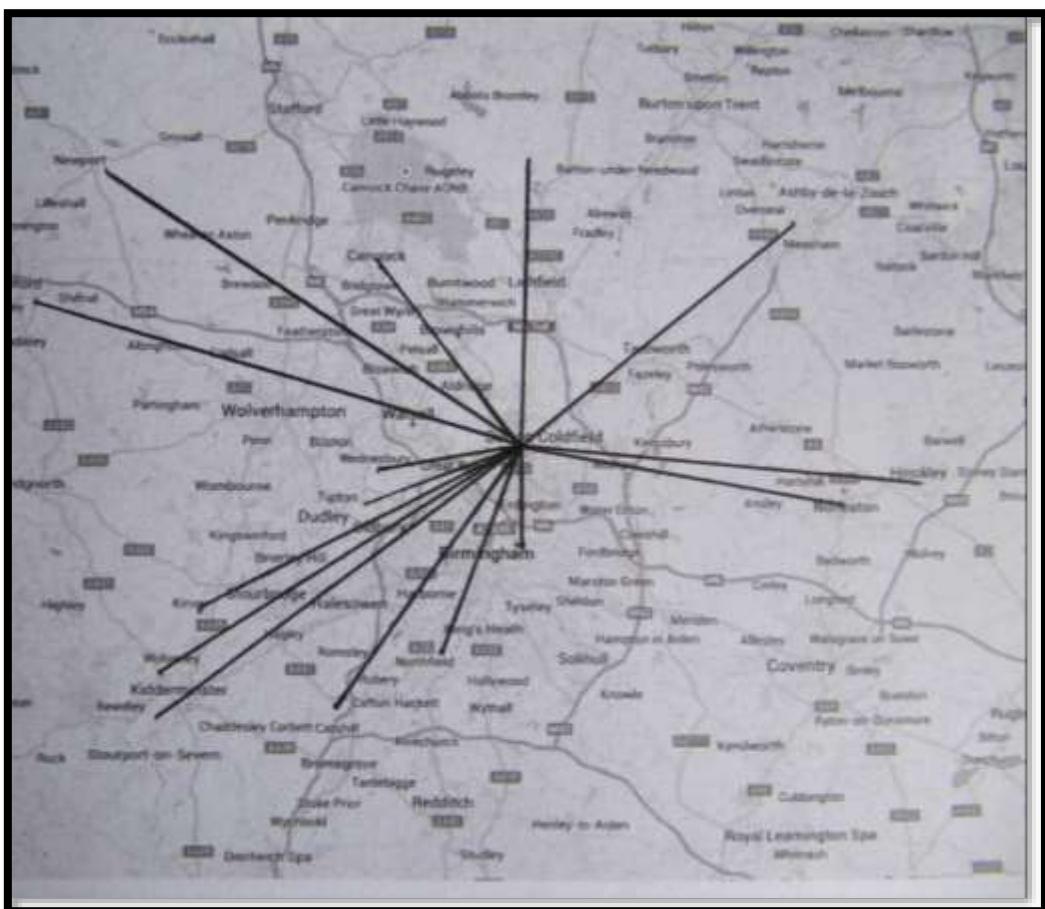


An example of the plain furniture seen as suitable for a servant's room (15)

was given as ‘agricultural labourer’. A high proportion came from the more densely populated and industrial Black Country and this is reflected in their family background. The majority of the servant’s fathers were manual workers in industries such as ironworking, nail making, brass working and coalmining

Elizabeth and Dorothy Hurst working as housemaid and cook for James Beresford, an Electro Plate Manufacturer and his wife were exceptions to the rule. They were sisters who came from Whitby in Yorkshire where their father owned a Jet jewellery manufacturing Industry. We do not know what brought them to the Midlands, but in 1902 Dorothy married Sydney Bailey a baker and confectioner from Darlaston, and in 1911 they were settled in Wednesbury with their seven year old son Sydney. Meanwhile, Elizabeth now aged forty had stayed with the Beresford family and moved with them to the coastal resort of Colwyn Bay in North Wales.

Another exception was nineteen year old Annie Corkett who worked as a housemaid for Thomas Vaughton. She was born in Winslow Buckinghamshire her father was a shoemaker but the 1901 census shows that he was living in Hill village, so Annie was, in fact quite close to her family. By 1911 the family, including Annie had moved to Bromyard. She is still described as working as a domestic servant, but it is possible that she was following the growing trend of working as a 'daily help' rather than as a live in servant and was therefore able to return home at the end of her day's work (17)



*Map to show place of birth of servants born in the Midlands
Scale 1cm to 1km (reduced)*

MALE SERVANTS

There were only two men employed as servants in Anchorage Road, they were both married and living with their families. Male servants were less common as there were more alternative forms of employment free from the constraints of life in service. (18) Walter Rowley came from Leicestershire and he and his wife Joyce were both working for Enock Wilkes, a bolt and nut manufacturer. Walter was a gardener and Joyce a housekeeper, and they had a five year old daughter, Gertrude. Alfred Eagan, who came from Ireland, was living with his wife and three children in a three roomed cottage and was employed as a coachman and so was not a ‘live in’ servant. By 1911 he had left domestic service and was living in Holt Street Aston working as a foreman horsekeeper for Ansell’s Brewery.

The era before World War One was the last ‘heyday’ of the ‘live in’ domestic servant. In 1931 there were still 1.6 million servants, but a third of these were non-residential. (18) However there were some exceptions, such as Margaret Kesterton’s parents and her memories of life as a daughter of a servant living in Anchorage Road now follow.

PART TWO: INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET KESTERTON, 2013

Margaret Kesterton was born in 1930 in Sutton Coldfield. Her father was George Maddocks, who came from Whittington, and her mother was Dora (Dolly) Johnson from Shenstone. Dora’s family were farmers. Her parents met at the Lichfield Festival. Her father had just come out of the army and was looking for a job. They were married in 1926. Initially her parents lived in rooms in a house on the site of the present Vesey Gardens, they then moved to Hill, near St. James Church. They had three children, two of whom died in infancy, Margaret was their only living child, and she had the same name as her older sister who died.

In 1937 when she was about seven, her parents went to live and work at Mr and Mrs Jones’ house, ‘Clovelly’, 17, Anchorage Road. Margaret’s father worked for the council, but looked after the garden in his spare time. Her mother was the housekeeper. She did the washing, cooking, cleaning and ironing, although sheets were sent to the laundry. Margaret’s mother was a good pastry cook and she can particularly remember her cooking ‘jugged hare’. She also did the family shopping at the Co-op store on Birmingham Road. The family lived in the attic, but it was light and airy and there was plenty of room. They ate their meals in the kitchen, separate from the family. Mrs Jones also employed a ‘live in’ companion, Miss Kington, who would make afternoon tea for Mrs Jones.

Mr Jones had owned a chemists shop on the corner of King Edward Square and Lichfield Road and Margaret’s mother had worked for Mr Jones before she was married. By the time Margaret went to live with them he was retired and he and his wife were elderly and possibly infirm. They both slept downstairs in separate rooms and they each had their own wireless. Margaret can remember her father putting Mr Jones in a wheelbarrow to take him round to next door (number 15), where Mrs Davies and her daughter lived, to see their beautiful garden!

Mrs Jones was the younger sister of Sir Edward German who composed the opera ‘Merrie England’. (*The census can tell us a little bit more about William Thomas Jones and his wife Rachel Eliza. They were married in 1895, and in 1901 William Jones had a pharmacist shop on The Parade, he employed an apprentice, Robert Witchel and a servant Nellie Parsons. They had one four year old son named German after his composer uncle. (Edward German was christened German Edward Jones, ‘German’ being the anglicised version of the Welsh ‘Garman’). By 1911 the family had moved to ‘Somerset Villa’*)

Coleshill Street and had a second son Arthur.) So by the time Margaret and her parents went to live with them in Anchorage Road they would have been in their early 70's and their two sons had left home.

Margaret and her family left Mr and Mrs Jones after her mother had a row with Mrs Jones (most likely about pay and conditions). They went to live in Victoria Road but were unable to take with them the Staffordshire bull terrier dog to which they had all become attached. Margaret's mother went to work in Bromwich's cake shop on the Parade. However, a few years later they moved back to Anchorage Road and continued working for Mr. and Mrs. Jones until about 1945 when Margaret was fifteen. (*Mr Jones died in 1943 age 76 and Mrs Jones died in 1951 age 81.*)

Margaret remembers that Anchorage Road was much quieter then than it is today and she was able to play outside on the pavement on her bicycle. Her best friend was a little girl called Audrey who lived opposite. She remembers that Audrey's maid was reprimanded because she invited Margaret, the daughter of a servant, to have tea with her. She was occasionally invited to walk round the gardens of Oakhurst where George Lowe lived. She remembers that Mrs Lowe had a 'bagpipe serenade' played for her on her birthday.

We talked about how the role of servants was changing. At the turn of the century most servants were young single women, but by the 1930's and especially after the war there were fewer 'live in' servants in houses such as those on Anchorage Road. People would employ a "daily" or someone who "did" for them. Sometimes they would become a friend of the family, in which case they would be called "aunty". First names were never used. Margaret felt that her parents were a mixture of 'servants' and 'carers'. They did all the domestic work of washing, cooking, cleaning and gardening, but she felt that Mr and Mrs Jones were not well enough to manage on their own.

Margaret married David Kesterton in 1951. He worked at Dunlops and then at Sainsbury's, Mere Green. Margaret was training to be a librarian at the old library on the corner of Newhall Street before she left to have children. There was no maternity leave at that time. Later she went to work at Gill's toyshop on the Parade. Mrs Gill had been her Guide Captain and Margaret remained active in the Girl Guide movement for many years. She later worked as a clerical assistant to the teachers at Good Hope hospital. Margaret and her husband moved into their Falcon Lodge house in 1953. The Mayor gave them the key as it was the 100th house to be built on the estate. She has been living there for sixty years.

A RECIPE FOR JUGGED HARE

Jugged hare is a classic English dish, so called because the hare was originally cooked in a tall jug set in a deep pan of water.

<u>Ingredients (serves four)</u>	<u>Method</u>
1 Hare, jointed	
Seasoned flour for coating	Lightly flour the joints of hare and place in a casserole dish. Add the herbs, bacon and onion. Cover with water, slowly bring to the boil and transfer to a slow oven for two and a half hours or until the hare is tender.
4 rashers of bacon, chopped	
2 onions, chopped	
Salt and freshly ground pepper	
Bouquet of herbs	
1oz butter	
1 Tablespoon of flour	
Blood from the hare	
Splash of Port	

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