

IF YOU LIKE DOWNTON ABBEY...

BY LYNN METZGER



Sumptuous British period drama *Downton Abbey*, which made its American debut on PBS in early 2011, launched a love affair that, as of the end of the show's third season, has involved an estimated 120 million viewers worldwide. Set on the fictional Yorkshire estate of Downton Abbey, the beloved series follows the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants as their traditional way of life collides with the changes brought by the tumultuous years of the early 20th century. *Downton Abbey* fans will be pleased to hear that the fourth season, currently in production, is scheduled to air on PBS in early 2014. For those who can't wait, we have compiled a list of books that cover some of the same terrain as the series, focusing on the British upper classes and their underlings (preferably on a large country estate) in the early 1900s. We know our list not the series, but this sampling of titles—some old and some new, some well-known and some less so—may help to tide readers over until they can visit with the Crawleys (and their servants) once again.

THE COMPANION PIECE

The World of Downton Abbey

By Jessica Fellowes (2011)

Lavishly illustrated with preproduction sketches and on-set photographs from the first two seasons, this charming companion book focuses on both the celebrated series and the era in which it takes place. Anecdotes of the filming and mini-interviews with the cast and crew are interspersed with an outline of the history, culture, and politics that drive the

show's story lines. Jessica Fellowes, a journalist and former deputy editor of the British magazine *Country Life*, gained access to the show through her uncle, series creator Julian Fellowes, whose chatty foreword reveals that *Downton Abbey* was inspired by his lifelong fascination with British history and stately homes. A second companion book, *The Chronicles of Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2012), examines season three.



LIFE IN AN ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE, UPSTAIRS ...

Lady Almina and the Real Downton Abbey (2011)

The Lost Legacy of Highclere Castle

By the Countess of Carnarvon

The grand manor glimpsed during the show's opening credits is Highclere Castle, the 1,000-acre Hampshire estate owned by the Earls of Carnarvon since the late 18th century. In 1895, the 5th Earl of Carnarvon (made famous by his role in the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb) married American heiress Almina Wombwell, whose sizable dowry saved her husband from financial ruin and salvaged his ancestral home. Drawing on diaries, letters, and other documents from the family archives, *Lady Almina*, written in a breezy, personal tone by Fiona Herbert, the 8th Countess of Carnarvon, re-creates the life of Highclere Castle during Lady Almina's reign—from its opulent Edwardian weekend parties (before the installation of electricity and indoor plumbing) to its service as an officer's hospital during World War I.

To Marry an English Lord

Tales of Wealth and Marriage, Sex and Snobbery

By Gail MacColl and Carol McD. Wallace (1989)

Recently back in print, this amusing, readable social history chronicles the mass migration of nouveau riche American heiresses to England to marry insolvent noblemen with pedigrees and palaces but little cash. Systematically snubbed by New York's Gilded Age elite, young women like Consuelo Vanderbilt and Jennie Jerome Churchill became duchesses, countesses, and ladies, providing their families back home with increased social distinction—often at the cost of homesickness and heartache. MacColl and Wallace serve up colorful personalities, gossipy anecdotes, and fascinating period detail, from the fussy strictures of Edwardian etiquette to the era's prevailing fashions and trends, and take readers on a captivating gambol through a little-known moment in American and British history.

The Perfect Summer

England, 1911, Just Before the Storm

By Juliet Nicolson (2007)

Another entertaining and gossipy slice of social history, *The Perfect Summer*, written by the granddaughter of award-winning author Vita Sackville-West, recounts the scorching, sun-drenched summer of 1911. While dangerous social and political tensions threatened to boil over and bring the nation to a standstill, the upper classes fled the heat and grime of London for idylls in the country and the seashore. Drawing on the personal papers of such prominent society members as Winston Churchill, the Bloomsbury Group, and King George V, Nicolson creates a vivid, if anecdotal, image of that sweltering season and the inexorable cultural shifts that would bring their privileged way of life to an end.

tributor to the *Evening Standard*, has amassed a compelling collection of interesting stories that touch on every aspect of life in domestic service: its duties, manners, ethics, standards, styles, social expectations, pastimes, problems, and even salaries. Light and entertaining, *The Real Life Downton Abbey* will acquaint readers with the men and women who were the heart and soul of the great country estates.



Up and Down Stairs

The History of the Country House Servant

By Jeremy Musson (2009)

For centuries, the stately country homes of England have relied on a complex hierarchy of servants, each with a vital skill or set of duties. From a variety of sources, including diaries, unpublished memoirs, letters, household accounts and record books, newspaper articles, and contemporaneous servant manuals, Musson reconstructs the daily lives of those in the serving class from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century, when World War I propelled more than 400,000 servants into trenches and munitions factories, changing the inner workings of the English country house forever. A historian and an editor of *Country Life*, Musson argues that the history of domestic service is inextricably tied to the history of the aristocracy and its wealth, power, and vast country estates.

Below Stairs

The Classic Kitchen Maid's Memoir That Inspired *Upstairs, Downstairs* and *Downton Abbey*

By Margaret Powell (2012)

Originally published in Great Britain in 1968, Powell's classic memoir of her years in service—first as a kitchen maid,

... AND DOWNSTAIRS

The Real Life Downton Abbey

How Life Was Really Lived in Stately Homes a Century Ago

By Jacky Hyams (2012)

While this conversational narrative uses characters from *Downton Abbey* as a reference point for readers, it is only cursorily connected to the series. It surveys the armies of butlers, valets, footmen, grooms, chauffeurs, gardeners, groundskeepers, maids, cooks, and housekeepers that kept extensive country estates running smoothly in the early 1900s. Hyams, a freelance journalist and regular con-



then in the higher position of cook—in some of London’s most well-to-do homes is an eye-opening trek through a servant’s life and work in the early 20th century. Powell took her first post at the age of 14 in 1921, and with sharp-edged humor, a keen eye for detail, and an informal tone, she describes the drudgery of grueling tasks, 14-hour days, rigid class lines, and eccentric employers. Her story, written after she married a milkman and left service, inspired the 1971 television series *Upstairs, Downstairs*, as well as *Downton Abbey*. “I certainly owe her a great debt,” acknowledges Julian Fellowes.

FURTHER READING

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE BRITISH ARISTOCRACY

| DAVID CANNADINE (1990)

THE LONG WEEK-END: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN 1918–1939 | ROBERT GRAVES (1940)

WHAT THE BUTLER WINKED AT: BEING THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF ERIC HORNE, BUTLER | ERIC HORNE (2011)

THE GREAT SILENCE: BRITAIN FROM THE SHADOW OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR TO THE DAWN OF THE JAZZ AGE | JULIET NICOLSON (2010)

NOVELS OF THE DOWNTON ABBEY ERA

I. THE EDWARDIAN ERA

The Shooting Party

By Isabel Colegate (1981)

In October 1913, a legion of servants prepares Sir Randolph Nettleby’s vast Oxfordshire estate, Nettleby Park, for the largest shooting party of the season. As the richest, most powerful men and women in England observe age-old customs, gossip, eat and drink to excess, embark on illicit affairs, arrange marriages for their children, and exhibit their hunting skills, the social and political upheaval that has taken hold of the nation plays itself out on a much smaller—but no less disquieting—scale. In sparkling prose, English novelist and short story writer Isabel Colegate deftly guides her large cast of characters through the last days of the Edwardian era, bringing to vivid life those at both ends of the social spectrum, while revealing the fatal rift between them.

Long Summer Day

By R. F. Delderfield (1966)

Discharged from the Imperial Yeomanry for injuries he sustained during the Boer War, Paul Craddock comes across the grand but neglected estate of Shallowford in an isolated

corner of Devon. He buys it, but his attempts to repair the manor house, restore its grounds, and found a great family are disrupted by the unrelenting events of the 20th century. Delderfield, a British journalist, novelist, and playwright celebrated for his rich and vibrant slice-of-life descriptions, turns his considerable talent to the turmoil of the years leading up to the First World War and its effects on the residents of a rural estate in southwestern England. The first in a trilogy, *Long Summer Day* is followed by *Post of Honor* and *The Green Gauntlet*.

Howards End

By E. M. Forster (1910)

Staid Victorian values collide with progressive ideology as the lives and fortunes of the bohemian, kindhearted Schlegel sisters become entwined with those of the arrogant and pragmatic Wilcoxes in early 20th-century England. After secretly defying his late wife’s wishes and destroying the letter she’d written endowing her friend Margaret Schlegel with her ancestral country home, Howards End, Henry Wilcox unexpectedly falls in love with the much-younger woman and marries her. The resulting confusion and resentment within both families lead to a reckless act and tragic consequences. In clear, elegant prose, Forster’s masterpiece showcases the author’s shrewd observations and sharp wit as it explores the personal, social, intellectual, and economic upheaval that swept through Edwardian England.

The Visits of Elizabeth

By Elinor Glyn (1900)

Prolific novelist Elinor Glyn scandalized Great Britain with her racy romantic fiction, worked as a Hollywood scriptwriter and style consultant in the 1920s, and famously coined the term *It*—as in, an “it girl” who’s got “it”—meaning “absolute attraction.” *The Visits of Elizabeth*, her debut novel, tells the epistolary story of a sheltered but spunky 17-year-old debutante as she travels through England and France visiting the majestic homes of friends and family. Dutifully writing to her ailing mother back home, Elizabeth guilelessly describes the people she meets and the fun—parties, entertainments, and outings—she has, never fully comprehending the outrageous behavior and scandalous events she is reporting. Light, witty, and elegantly written, *The Visits of Elizabeth* takes a droll view of the manners, fashions, and practices of the era.



The American Heiress

By Daisy Goodwin (2011)

After the parents of beautiful, bubbly Cora Cash decide to drag their daughter off to England to land a cash-strapped nobleman as a son-in-law, Cora obediently leaves her nouveau riche family's Newport mansion behind, knowing that matrimony is the only acceptable means of escaping her scheming mother. She soon finds herself drawn to Ivo, a handsome but brooding duke, and she happily accepts his marriage proposal. But life as the Duchess of Wareham isn't at all what she expected. Ivo is increasingly withdrawn and secretive, and her new aristocratic friends seem intent on seeing her fail socially. Filled with atmosphere and delicate period detail, this stunning debut novel by acclaimed British poet and television producer Daisy Goodwin was a best seller on both sides of the Atlantic.

Habits of the House

By Fay Weldon (2013)

Lord Robert, the Earl of Dilberne, has squandered the family fortune. To save his honor and his mansion at Belgrave Square, he must procure a wealthy wife for his only son Arthur, just as he had exchanged his title for the dowry of a wealthy coal baron's daughter many years before. When Minnie, a beautiful Chicago heiress, arrives in London, she seems to be the answer to his prayers, but all is not as it seems. In this first novel in a planned trilogy, English novelist Fay Weldon, who wrote the pilot episode for the television series *Upstairs, Downstairs*, unites breezy storytelling, humor, and a keen eye for the social conventions of the day in this revealing account of life above and below the stairs.

II. WORLD WAR I

In Pale Battalions

By Robert Goddard (1988)

While vacationing in France, Leonora Galloway and her adult daughter Penelope visit the Thiépval Memorial to the Missing at the Battle of the Somme, where Leonora's father lost his life. When Leonora points out her father's name and date of death—April 30, 1916—carved in stone, Penelope realizes that Captain John Hallows couldn't possibly be her grandfather because her mother wasn't born until March 14, 1917. The tale that Leonora is finally ready to relate, after decades of shunning all mention of her aristocratic family, is a harrowing account of love, betrayal, mistaken identity, murder, and family honor. English novelist Robert Goddard's graceful prose and startling plot twists will keep book lovers reading—and guessing—to the very end.

The Passing Bells

By Phillip Rock (1979)

The Great War has not yet intruded into the lives of the Greville family and their staff as they prepare for the house parties, balls, and entertainments during the summer of 1914. While Alexandra Greville embarks on her first London season and her brother Charles, hopelessly in love with an unsuitable girl, tries to convince his father, the Earl of Stanmore, to permit the match, new maid Ivy Thaxton learns the time-honored ways of Abingdon Pryory. But the heavy doors of this grand estate can't keep out the turmoil beyond its manicured lawns much longer. This sweeping family saga and gritty portrait of World War I continues with *Circles of Time* (1981) and *A Future Arrived* (1985).

Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man

The Memoirs of George Sherston

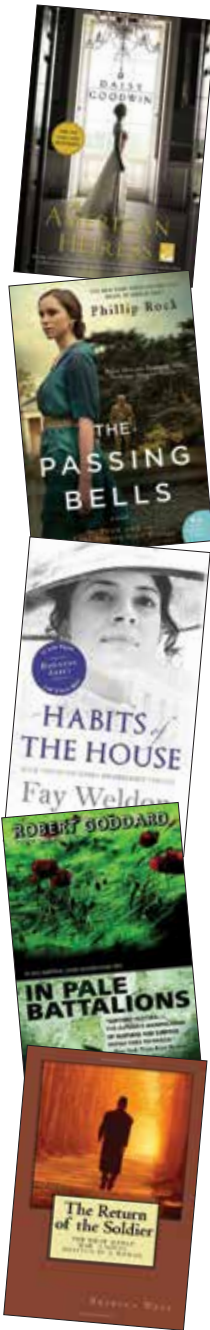
By Siegfried Sassoon (1928)

Decorated World War I veteran and acclaimed poet Siegfried Sassoon won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for this classic, semiautobiographical account of an idyllic youth cut short by the horrors of war. A privileged young boy, George Sherston is sent to live with a spinster aunt in rural Kent after his parents' deaths. As he grows to maturity, his days are filled with typical country amusements—cricket, golf, horse racing, and fox hunting—until war is declared. In a burst of patriotism, George enlists in the army. Cruel officers, mindless nationalism, and the horrors of life in the trenches of France change him forever. Sassoon continues his award-winning story with *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930) and *Sherston's Progress* (1936).

The Return of the Soldier

By Rebecca West (1918)

When Kitty Baldry learns that her husband is returning from France to convalesce, she isn't sure what to expect, but she could hardly have anticipated the man who arrives at their isolated country estate, Baldry Court. Shell-shocked, Captain Chris Baldry believes that he is 20 years old instead of 35. He rejects his wife (whom he doesn't recognize) and pines for Margaret Grey, the working-class girl who broke his heart long before he met Kitty. As Chris struggles to make sense of his surroundings, Kitty, Margaret, and Chris's devoted cousin Jenny hatch a plan to restore the man they have all loved. This affecting but ultimately hopeful novella, written by "the world's number one woman writer" (*Time*), is a timeless depiction of the trauma inflicted by war.



III. THE POSTWAR YEARS

Queen Lucia

By E. F. Benson (1920)

Queen Lucia is a slight departure from our list's criteria, but it is well worth the brief detour for its hilarious take on upper-class pretensions and foibles. In rural Riseholme, Mrs. Emmeline Lucas, a housewife who insists that her friends call her "Lucia" with an Italian intonation, reigns supreme as the village's arbiter of culture and social graces. When a newcomer, opera singer Olga Bracely, threatens to unseat her, Lucia embarks on a hilarious campaign to vanquish her would-be rival. Elaborate plots are hatched, allegiances are formed, and casualties are contemplated over tea, all in the very best taste. Novelist, biographer, and short story writer Benson wrote six novels parodying these scheming, social-climbing ladies; every one is a gem.

The Remains of the Day

By Kazuo Ishiguro (1989)

◆ BOOKER PRIZE

Driving through the countryside in a borrowed car to visit a former colleague, Stevens, an aloof, dignified butler, contemplates his 30 years of service, marked by selfless devotion to duty and decorum, at Darlington Hall. Above all, he remembers Miss Kenton, the spirited housekeeper with whom he had "an excellent professional relationship"—and who is the purpose of his country drive. His memories, however, reveal the self-deception and missed opportunities of a life shackled by rigidly observed customs and the uncompromising suppression of sentiment. This captivating, incisive, and beautifully written character study brilliantly evokes the changing face of England between the wars.

The Pursuit of Love

By Nancy Mitford (1946)

The eldest of the six daughters of Lord and Lady Redesdale, Nancy Mitford modeled the fictional Radletts—dodgy, blustering Matthew, his dotting wife Sadie, and their seven rambunctious children—on her own eccentric family. In *The Pursuit of Love*, young cousin Fanny, a newcomer to the family's Gloucestershire estate, Alconleigh, recounts the romantic misadventures of the Radletts' beautiful, rebellious daughter Linda, whose quest for love leads her into the arms of three men: a stuffy, conservative politician; a Communist; and, finally, a French nobleman. Mitford's razor-sharp wit, exquisitely drawn characters, and

gorgeous writing style evoke the glamour and absurdity of a lost age. For the further adventures of the Radletts and their neighbors, see *Love in a Cold Climate* and *Don't Tell Alfred*.

The House at Riverton

By Kate Morton (2008)

At a glittering society party during the summer of 1924, Grace Bradley, a maid for the Hartford family at Riverton House, witnesses the suicide of a promising poet. For the family's sake, she keeps the truth about his tragic death a secret until 1999, when a young director hoping to make a movie based on the events of that fateful summer visits Grace in her nursing home. He persuades her to return to Riverton House with him, and while the trip reawakens pleasant memories of her youth, it also rouses darker recollections. Australian author Kate Morton creates a potent mixture of mystery, history, and romance during England's postwar years in this finely crafted debut novel, a best seller in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

Wild Strawberries

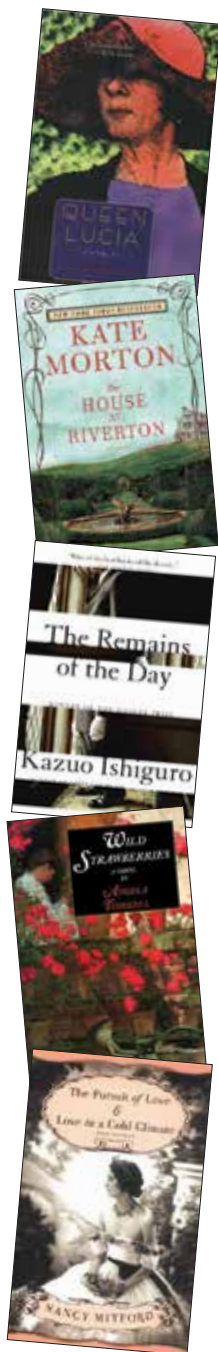
By Angela Thirkell (1934)

Life at Rushwater House in West Barsetshire is somewhat frenetic at the best of times. Absent-minded matriarch Lady Emily Leslie and her daughter, Lady Agnes, are continually meddling, rarely for the better, in the lives of their house guests and hapless clergymen. But now plans for Lady Agnes's son's birthday are underway, a family of French royalists has moved into the vicarage, and both of Lady Emily's sons seem to be partial to the same woman. The second novel in Thirkell's beloved Barsetshire series, *Wild Strawberries* takes readers on a delightfully absurd romp through a summer at an English country estate while gently skewering the quirks and follies of the upper classes.

Brideshead Revisited

By Evelyn Waugh (1946)

Drained by the relentless brutality of World War II, Captain Charles Ryder unexpectedly finds himself posted to Brideshead Castle, a formerly grand estate currently occupied by the military. Captain Ryder once knew the family that lived there, Alexander and Teresa Flyte (the Lord and Lady Marchmain) and their four children, and he spends his free time wandering the grounds and reminiscing about happier days before the war, when Sebastian Flyte, a handsome and charming aristocrat he'd met at Oxford, invited him to this palatial home for a visit. Ryder became enthralled by the



Flytes, falling completely under the spell first of Sebastian and then his sister Julia. This poetic and thoughtful novel, penned by celebrated comic novelist Evelyn Waugh, examines the aristocracy's postwar struggle with the loss of its social, economic, and political power.

FURTHER READING

THE LAST SEPTEMBER | ELIZABETH BOWEN (1929)
REBECCA | DAPHNE DU MAURIER (1938)
PARADE'S END | FORD MADDOX FORD (1950)
THE EDWARDIANS | VITA SACKVILLE-WEST (1930)
BLANDINGS CASTLE | P. G. WODEHOUSE (1935)

ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE MYSTERIES

Rounding out our exploration of aristocratic lifestyles on ancestral estates, we offer a selection of classic English Country House mysteries. A subset of the tidy mystery novels popularized during Britain's Golden Age of Detective Fiction between the two world wars, English Country House Mysteries invariably feature an atmospheric manor house, a surfeit of house guests-cum-suspects, a slew of servants ready to vouch for (or contradict) their employers' stories, and a brilliant detective who relies on brainpower rather than forensics. These entertaining, if somewhat methodical, novels offer a last glimpse of a world that no longer exists.

Police at the Funeral

By Margery Allingham (1932)

Caroline Faraday, a Victorian grand dame with no use for the 20th century's revolutions in manners or technology, rules over Socrates Close with an iron fist. Her middle-aged children chafe at the obedience she requires, but without fortunes or homes of their own, they have no choice but to follow her rules. When her son Andrew disappears on the way home from church, his niece contacts the enigmatic gentleman sleuth Albert Campion to make some inquiries. But the seemingly straightforward missing-persons case becomes a murder investigation when Andrew's body is found in a nearby creek, and his sister Julia dies suddenly in her bed. Recently reissued by Random House, Allingham's polished and lighthearted whodunit will keep readers guessing until the final pages.

The Unfinished Clue

By Georgette Heyer (1934)

Infuriated when his son brings a Mexican nightclub dancer home for a weekend house party in the country, boorish, abusive Sir Anthony Billington-Smith vents his anger at his house guests and long-suffering wife. When he is later

found stabbed to death in his study, no one seems to mourn him—and, worse yet, no one has an alibi. It is up to Inspector Harding of Scotland Yard to untangle the snarl of motives and catch a cunning murderer. Georgette Heyer, better known for her Regency romances and historical novels, also wrote sharp-edged detective fiction in the classic vein of the Golden Age, and *The Unfinished Clue* has red herrings, crisp dialogue, and droll wit to spare.

Death in the Garden

By Elizabeth Ironside (1995)

"Today at half-past two in the afternoon, I was acquitted of the murder of my husband," writes beautiful, bohemian Diana Pollexfen, whose 30th birthday party came to an abrupt end when her husband was found dead from a cocktail laced with chemicals from her photography lab. Sixty years later, Diana's grandniece, London attorney Helena Fox, inherits Diana's country estate, discovers her forebear's personal papers, and becomes obsessed with solving the 1925 crime. A modern take on the English Country House Mystery, *Death in the Garden* was nominated for the Crime Writers' Association's Gold Dagger Award for Best Mystery, and its vivid characters, richly detailed settings, and graceful writing seamlessly coalesce into an atmospheric and thoughtful mystery.

A Man Lay Dead

By Ngaio Marsh (1934)

Sir Hubert Handesley is hosting a get-together on his grand estate, and he has invented an exciting new parlor game for his guests' entertainment, the Murder Game. When the lights go back on, however, one of his visitors, Charles Rankin, is truly dead, stabbed in the back with a priceless Mongolian dagger. Detective Inspector Roderick Alleyn has his work cut out for him since everyone seems to have an ironclad alibi. During her writing career, Ngaio Marsh, a native of New Zealand, published 32 detective novels, joining Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers as one of the reigning queens of England's Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

FURTHER READING

SNOBBERY WITH VIOLENCE | MARION CHESNEY (2003)
THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES | AGATHA CHRISTIE (1920)
AND THEN THERE WERE NONE | AGATHA CHRISTIE (1940)
CLOUDS OF WITNESS | DOROTHY L. SAYERS (1926)
A BITTER TRUTH | CHARLES TODD (2011) ■

