



The Servants' Story: Fortune and Misfortune in a Great Country House, Trentham 1830-1850

Pamela Sambrook

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Country-house service is well travelled by historians, less so the detailed personal lives of servants.

Trentham was the Staffordshire home of the Leveson-Gower family, the Dukes of Sutherland, in the mid-nineteenth century said to be the richest non-royal family in the UK. They owned many other country houses and estates, bound to each other by a complex management system. The resulting family archive is huge. Combining these records with family history sources, it is possible to unravel some of the personal triumphs and tragedies of their servants: who they were, what they did and what happened to them after their service at Trentham ended.

With its strict social structure and its sometimes bizarre regulations, the world of Trentham in the 1830s can seem alien to us now, but families are always families, responsibilities can always be burdensome and sorrow is always around the corner. The stories of Trentham's servants are not just family histories; they reveal experiences and unravel relationships to which we can all relate, and demonstrate how people coped in the face of the immense change brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Several years ago, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and thousands of private local donors, raised over £2 million to buy the Sutherland Papers, an extensive archive kept by the Leveson-Gower family. This book began as a celebration of that achievement. Using part of the collection to rediscover the fortunes and misfortunes of the servants of Trentham, its completion will bear testament to some of the amazing documents that have survived to tell their forgotten stories.

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