

An interesting article from tvlife (October 1974) concerning salaries and the cost of living during the Upstairs, Downstairs time period. – Steve

---

## A HOUSE DIVIDED BY WEALTH

### When a six-course meal cost 30p

IN EDWARDIAN society, those who lived on inherited wealth like Lady Marjorie Bellamy were considered the *crème de la crème*.

Outwardly, Richard Bellamy achieved equal social status with his wife, but it was well known that she had “married beneath her”; he had been the son of a country’ parson and therefore a member of the professional middle-classes. Naturally, he made good use of his wife’s wealth and position, but to his credit he worked hard – in the Foreign Office, as a Member of Parliament, biographer and latterly as an Under-Secretary at the Admiralty – to prove his own worth.

As an M.P. he would have earned, at pre-war estimates, £400 per year. As an Admiralty official (he became Civil Lord of the Admiralty at the outbreak of war) about £1,000.

His son James, after leaving the Life Guards and joining Jardine Mathesons in Lombard Street as a “clerk in the tea department”, would have probably not done much better than £3 or £4 a week. However, measure this against the cost of a six-course meal at a fashionable restaurant (six shillings or less) and you will see that £3 a week was quite a handsome sum.

To give an idea of how far money went, here are some items listed in the Army and Navy Stores catalogue of 1910:

Made-to-measure wardrobe:

Gentleman’s tweed morning-coat.....	£4 4s. to £5 (£4.20 to £5)
Lounge-suit.....	£3 19s. to £5 5s. (£3.95 to £5.25)
Cashmere waistcoat .....	£1 7s. 6d. to £1 11s. 6d. (£1.37½ to £1.57½)
Tweed trousers.....	19s. to £1 8s. 6d. (95p to £1.42½)
Spun silk shirt .....	19s. 6d. (97½p)
Lady’s Japanese silk tea-gown with guipure lace inserts.....	£5 19s. 6d. (£5.97½)
Black silk hose (pair).....	5s 11d. to 14s. 3d. (29½p to 71½p)
Diamond tiara, which could double as necklace .....	£123 16s. (£123.80)
Box of Havana cigars.....	£5 9s. About 5s. each (£5.45 – 25p)
12 bottles of best vintage port.....	£3

Perishable foods, like fowl and fish, were often supplied free by “huntin’, shootin’ and fishin’” friends, but chicken breast was available in large jars for 1s. 2d. A fresh salmon would cost about 3s. Beer was about one old penny a pint.

### Plenty of hard work and all the left-overs you could eat

**The Butler** would have earned between £50 and £60 a year. Like the other servants, he

would get Sunday mornings off for church, and one other afternoon and evening a week. However, being the senior servant, he could expect occasional “perks”, such as being allowed to take the staff on a Bank Holiday outing or, as Hudson once did, to have an extra evening off to treat visiting relatives to a meal in town.

His job was to see that everything was run with military precision from the beginning of the working day at 6 a.m. to its close around 8 p.m., when the junior servants went to bed or, more often, midnight if Upstairs friends had come to dinner. He presided over the serving of meals (but did not normally serve himself), announced the guests, paid the bills, disciplined the staff (and often hired and fired the junior ones) and, of course, was master of the wine cellar.

**The Cook/Housekeeper** – sometimes two separate jobs, but in the Bellamy household one and the same – earned about £40 a year. Like the butler, she, too, as a senior member of staff, had special privileges at her mistress’s discretion.

It was rare for a Downstairs member ever to go hungry. Indeed, the leavings from the Upstairs table alone would make a fairly sumptuous meal for anybody today.

Cook (Mrs. Bridges) was in sole charge of buying and preparing all food – smoking the salmon, curing the pheasant and, naturally, plucking and stuffing the fowl, as well as all cooking – from the meaty breakfasts prompt at 8 a.m. to the evening-meal which could be as early as 6.30 or as late as 11 p.m. She was also consulted on the hiring and firing of staff and was expected to keep a maternal eye on the affairs of junior female servants.

**Head House-Parlourmaid** (who could double as Lady’s Maid, like Rose) earned about £24 a year. Her duties included the complete care of her mistress’s wardrobe, from putting the clothes away at night (sometimes picking them up off the floor) to placing the new day’s clothes and helping her mistress to dress... usually three times a day with at least one change of corsets!

She cleaned, pressed, mended, lit the fire in the dressing-room, trained the Under House-Parlourmaid and stood by for any summons on any internal bell to run a bath, brush her Ladyship’s hair or bring her afternoon tea.

**Under House-Parlourmaid**, a girl like Daisy, worked hard for between £12 and £15 a year. She lit the fires throughout the house, often hauling buckets of coal up the long narrow staircases to do so. (Large town houses like the Bellamys’ burned three-quarters of a ton of coal a day – at 19s. 6d. or 97½p a ton). She dusted and cleaned the rest of the house (much-helped by a new-fangled invention called a suction or vacuum-cleaner), waited at breakfast and ran the women’s errands.

**Footman** – was paid between £18 and £20 a year to understudy the butler. One of his special jobs was polishing the family silver, and he was also expected to shift the coal up from the cellar, so that the maids could carry it to the rooms upstairs.

A footman also polished all the boots, kept the men’s clothing spotless, helped the butler answer the door and assisted at table.

**Kitchen or Scullery Maid** could expect to earn £12 a year, and was often illiterate and

illegitimate into the bargain, so her chances of promotion were not promising. Perhaps her most pleasant job was washing and peeling fruit and vegetables for Cook – certainly her nastiest job was scrubbing the kitchen floors and stove and tackling the mountains of dirty dinner-plates sent down from Upstairs... an area as remote to her as Heaven. She dared not show her face there.

A typical maid's wardrobe (and the maids had to supplied their own), bought from the Army and Navy Stores or the cheaper stores in Oxford Street, London:

Lisle stockings, black, two pairs.....	5s. 5 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> d. (27 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> p)
Ribbed vests (two at 3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d. each).....	7d. (2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> p)
1 pair stockinet knickers .....	1s. 6 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d. (7 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> p)
1 pair black boots.....	3s. 11p (19p)
Aprons (two at 5d. each).....	10d. (4p)
Caps (two at 3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d. each) .....	7d. (2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> p)
Stays (one pair).....	2s. 11d. (15p)
Stiff cuffs and collars (two sets at 10d. each).....	1s. 8d. (8p)
Two morning dresses (pale lilac).....	8s. 2d. (40p)
Two black cotton afternoon dresses .....	9s. 6d. (47 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> p)
Two nighties (2s. 1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> d. each).....	4s. 3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d. (21p)
TOTAL .....	£1. 19s. 5 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> d. (£1.96 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> p)