

Demonstration, 12 September 2023: 'What the Housekeeper Saw!'

1) Ellen Penketh- cook-housekeeper at Erddig

(Arrangements in red/orange/yellow)

Ellen, who was a loyal housekeeper to Louisa and Philip Yorke at Erddig manor for 5 years (1902-1907), sadly left their employment under a cloud and became known as the 'thief cook'. She had worked closely with Louisa, rising to the challenge of cooking the increasingly more elaborate meals which her mistress devised for their varied social gatherings.

Unlike many of the Erddig servants, Ellen does not have her photograph on display and, despite being cleared in court of her charges, only a veiled reference is made of her in one of the poems created by Philip Yorke. In the demonstration, we think about her seeing the elaborate dining table full of good food and flowers and then, very soon afterwards, looking at the cold, damp interior of the prison cell.

The arrangement is based upon Louisa's notes in her diary and the visitor notebook about the table arrangements she created for a special dinner party in 1905. She lists chrysanthemums, 'Gloire du Reine' roses and Virginia Creeper.

2) Grace Higgens- cook-housekeeper at Charleston House and Bloomsbury

(Arrangements in three heart shaped boxes- in pinks, yellows and blues)

Grace entered the employment of the artist, Vanessa Bell, as a maid in June 1920. She was 16 and was to work for the family for another 50 years, even living and working with them after her marriage in 1934! Over the years, she moved from maid to nursemaid and, finally, in 1920, she became the housekeeper at Charleston, a 10 bedroomed cottage in the South Downs.

Grace kept a diary over the whole of the time she was employed and she remained a loyal and discreet servant despite the irregularities of the lifestyle of Vanessa and Clive Bell and their many friends and colleagues of the Bloomsbury Group.

In the demonstration, I imagine Grace, who had recently become a mother, being greeted by Vanessa, Virginia Woolf (Vanessa's sister) and Duncan Grant (her former bisexual lover) after their time in Rome and Paris. They are bearing beautiful gifts for Grace and some of the other servants. The colour theme is inspired by a painting by Vanessa Bell of the library at Charleston.

3) Jasmin- fictional cook-housekeeper at Snowhill manor, near Broadway

(Arrangement in green/white/black)

Jasmin is the imaginary 17 year old, brought by Charles Paget Wade and his wife from one of their many visits to the West Indies. Charles was a lifelong collector of items, first inspired by seeing his grandmother's 18th century lacquered cabinet, in which she stored many special items. Jasmin is in awe of her strange surroundings, where more than 20, 000 various collectables are stored, including

26 sets of Samurai armour, which she finds quite threatening. Her master is also becoming increasingly eccentric and she often sees him dressed in some of the costumes.

One day, while dusting the oriental figure she hears a faint noise of footsteps and swishing skirts. She turns to see a girl in an old-fashioned green dress. The girl is greatly agitated and paces around the room. Jasmin picks up the figurine to throw it at the girl but, when she turns, the girl is nowhere to be seen! There are, in fact, many ghost stories connected to Snowhill manor.

In the demonstration, I imagine Jasmin coming before the ghostly girl and I use green and white to represent her presence. Black base and dish represent the darkness of many of the rooms at Snowhill and the teasels represent the samurai spears!!