

Maids for Mistresses

In large households, the housekeeper took charge over a strictly regulated hierarchy of female servants. Although many servants remained unmarried for the whole of their life in service, Elizabeth, the housekeeper employed at Burton Constable during the mid-nineteenth century, married George Styche, the Coachman and Huntsman. Both had worked for the Clifford Constable family at Tixall Hall in Staffordshire before moving to Burton Constable in the 1830s. Sadly, George died during a stag hunt in 1842.

The lady's maid, usually came just below the housekeeper in order of importance. Her close relationship with the mistress of the house secured her special position. Whilst the house maids, kitchen maids, dairy maids and stillroom maid were all English, Antoine Reny, one of two lady's maids, came from Paris. Lady Clifford Constable always employed a French cook and a French lady's maid - which was considered very fashionable at the time.

Next came the nurse or nanny. Mary 'Nanny' Dowdell was a much-loved nanny to the Chichester children – Charles, Marianne and Eliza, who had grown up at Calverleigh Court in Devon. When Marianne married her cousin Thomas Aston Clifford Constable in 1827, 'Nanny' Dowdell moved with her to Burton Constable Hall, where she became nanny to Marianne's son Talbot. On her retirement, she was given a comfortable cottage nearby at Marton, and when she died in 1846 her remains were interred in the family mausoleum at Halsham.

