

Secrets
of the
**MANOR
HOUSE**

1 X 55 HD



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One hundred years ago, the British manor house was in its heyday, sheltering families of enormous wealth and privilege within its stately walls. But what was really going on behind closed doors, where these wealthy families and their poor servants coexisted?

Secrets of the Manor House goes inside two of Britain's most legendary manor houses, Manderston in Berwickshire and Dunham Massey, former home of the Earl of Stamford. During the Edwardian era, behind the facades of these great houses, a hidden army of up to 300 servants tended to every need of an aristocratic family. In 1901, there were more than 1.5 million servants in Britain and grand estates occupied half the land. The tradition of primogeniture ensured that they were handed down to the first-born son. Land was power and wealth, and not only did the first-born son inherit the land, he inherited the title of earl, marquess, or duke, and the political power that accompanied it. And like their masters, the serving classes in the great manor houses also adhered to a well-defined ranking system.

This film features some of the premiere historians of the Edwardian era, including Lawrence James. As he and others explain, by Edwardian times the agricultural revenues of the great country estates were dwindling. With the Industrial Revolution, wealth began moving away from agriculture and into manufacturing and banking. While the easiest solution would have been to sell some of their land, the practice of entailment demanded that estates be passed on intact. Many aristocrats, finding themselves in need of cash, married rich American heiresses in a trend that was quietly called "cash for titles." As historian Dr. Elisabeth Kehoe recounts, among the many American heiresses who married into the aristocracy was Jennie Jerome, who wed the second son of the Duke of Marlborough and was mother to Winston Churchill.

Rumblings of change were also coming from below stairs. Those who served the lords and ladies led backbreaking lives of non-stop work for little pay and less freedom. Thousands of working-class Edwardians left these country estates to make their way across the sea to America, hoping for a better life and more freedom in the land of opportunity. When hundreds of these would-be immigrants, traveling in second and third class, perished in the sinking of the *Titanic*, the inequity of the British class system was shown to the world in all its ugliness.

In 1914, the outbreak of the First World War caused complete upheaval in British society. It was the men of the aristocracy who, as officers, led the soldiers into battle. A brutal, terrible war, it sent millions of young men to their deaths, most of whom did not even have the right to vote.

By 1918 when the war had ended, an old world had passed away and the modern era had begun. For the British aristocracy, it was the end of life as they had known it. But it is a world that lives on in the continued popularity of authors from Jane Austen to Evelyn Waugh, and beloved television costume dramas.

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CREDITS

Producer, Director: Susannah Ward

Executive Producers: Stuart Carter and Robert Strange

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