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Elizabeth Battey Papers

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Elizabeth Battey served as a Housekeeper for aristocratic English families during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. At the turn of the century, she was employed by Frances Evelyn Greville the Countess of Warwick, and former mistress of the Prince of Wales, to oversee the female staff at Warwick Castle, and from 1904 until at least 1914, she was Housekeeper under Richard George Penn Curzon, the 4th Earl Howe, at his estates Godshall and the Woodlands.

The letters of Elizabeth Battey offer insight into the daily life of a member of the upper staff at an aristocratic Edwardian estate,

revealing an acute class sensibility and attention to the duties of a woman of her station. The letters are filled with information about the estates on which Battey worked, her famous employers the Countess of Warwick and Earl Howe, and the social milieu she witnessed at a servant's distance.

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Background on Elizabeth Battey

A domestic servant to the English aristocracy of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, Elizabeth Battey was born in Leamington, Warwickshire, in about 1855. Although little is known of her life, she had apparently been married and perhaps widowed by the time of the census of 1901, when she was recorded as Housekeeper to the Countess of Warwick, Frances Evelyn Greville (1861-1938). Living in the resplendence of Warwick Castle, Battey sat at the apex of the hierarchy of domestics, responsible for overseeing the female staff and maintaining the house's furnishings, and she worked for one of the aristocracy's most controversial figures, a Socialist and former lover of Edward Albert, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII).

By 1904, Battey left Warwick to become Housekeeper to Richard George Penn Curzon (1861-1929) shortly after he inherited the title of 4th Earl Howe. Firmly implanted in the highest echelon of the British aristocracy, an intimate of the Royal family, Curzon married Georgiana Elizabeth Spencer-Churchill, daughter of the 7th Duke of Marlborough, and was therefore brother-in-law Randolph Churchill, and by the time he ascended to his title, he had served as Member of Parliament for Wycombe, as Lord-in-Waiting to both Queen Victoria and King Edward VII, as Lord Chamberlain to Queen Alexandra, and as Treasurer of the Royal Household (1896-1900). Fitting to his station, Curzon owned several residences, including the Woodlands in Uxbridge, Leicestershire, where he lived from his marriage in 1883 until taking his title, Gopsall, a massive mid-eighteenth century estate in Leicestershire, and Acton Place (Suffolk).

Battey managed the staff at the Curzon estates through rounds of formal visits, parties, and shoots; she took care of the family properties during her masters' absences; and she helped oversee the upgrading of facilities at Gopsall, the Woodlands, and the Curzons' London home. Enjoying a comparatively privileged position in the household, though by no means intimate with her employers, she witnessed the death of Lady Georgiana in 1906 and the subsequent remarriage of Lord Howe, the marriage of their only son, Francis Richard Henry Penn Curzon, 5th Earl Howe (1884-1964), and his installation at the Woodlands. Nearing sixty by the start of the First World War, little is known of Battey's later years. Gopsall was sold out of the family, and then to the Crown in 1927, and after severe use while occupied by the army during the Second World War, it was demolished by 1952.

Scope of collection

The letters of Elizabeth Battey offer insight into the daily life of a member of the upper staff at an aristocratic Edwardian estate, revealing an acute class sensibility and attention to the duties of a woman of her station. The letters are filled with information about the estates on which Battey worked, her famous employers the Countess of Warwick and Earl Howe, and the social milieu she witnessed at a servant's distance.

Each of Battey's letters is addressed to an American acquaintance from Albany, N.Y., Elizabeth McCulloch, and numbered sequentially, with several missing. A much younger woman, McCulloch (born July 25, 1878) was recorded in each US census from 1900 through 1930 as living with her parents Walter S. McCulloch, a printer with the Albany *Evening Journal*, and Emma. Apparently an only child, Elizabeth never married and apparently never held a position for pay. She died of an erysipelas infection on Feb. 12, 1935, and is buried at the Albany Rural Cemetery. There are some hints in the letters that McCulloch and Battey may have been related or may have known one another through relatives, and it further appears that Walter McCulloch -- though apparently not Elizabeth -- may have met Battey during a visit to Warwickshire some years prior to 1900.

Inventory

Battey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Warwick Castle)

1900 Dec. 23

4p.

Folder 1: 1

Would be glad to show McCulloch around the castle and town of Warwick to show all the changes that have taken place since McCulloch's father and Battey's cousin visited. Sorry the family will not come back to the castle for Christmas, but the workmen are still working. Enjoys her little dog.

Battey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Warwick Castle)

1901 Sept. 15

6p.

Folder 2: 1

Sends a photograph of her with her dog (not included). Sadness over the death of William McKinley; upon hearing the news, his Lordship ordered the flag to be flown at half mast at the castle. Workmen have been installing electric lights for the pictures in the state room; four workmen from London are working on the "old valuable furniture;" and an American woman is painting a copy of a Van Dyke.

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1904 Nov. 20

6p.

Folder 3: 1

Does not wish to be addressed as Mrs. Batthey as it is too formal. All is dreadfully quiet and Batthey has barely ventured out. Clarifying titles, including Lady Randolph Churchill, who remarried George Cornwallis West and prefers to drop her first husband's name: "There are many titled ladies from first marriages in England that are happy with their 2nd husbands who are only plain Mr." Afraid there may be war with Russia.

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1905 Apr. 2

8p.

Folder 4: 1

Lord and Lady Howe are on their way home from a lengthy stay in Egypt. Lady Howe is feeling better, but there will be no celebrations in May for Curzon's 21st birthday as the excitement would not be good for her. The house is very large and can accommodate more than at Warwick, though it is lonely. Description of Gopsall and villages around; houses in the villages; Leamington and Warwick. Allowed the maids to have a little party; has only four laundry maids, 3 housemaids, and the coal man now, since the others are all in London. Inclosed is an account (by Mr. Taylor) of the Howe family through the current (4th) George Richard Penn Curzon Howe.

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1905 Oct. 22

4p.

Folder 4: 2

Long account of the festivities for the coming of age of Lord Curzon. Curzon has departed with the Prince and Princess of Wales for India and will be gone six months. Lady Warwick does not seem very interested in her little daughter and is much taken up with Socialism.

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Woodlands, Uxbridge, Bucks.)

1906 Apr. 24

4p.

Folder 5: 1

Has left Gopsall and Curzon House and now at Woodlands, going through things with the new maids so they will be settled and happy before returning to Curzon House to inventory the china ornaments. Woodlands is a lovely spot, the country home of the Howes until the death of the Earl's father five years ago. The Earl is with the King and Queen on a yacht; her ladyship's death. Spent Sunday with "a dear old fellow servant" with whom she lived for ten years.

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1906 Dec. 2

4p.

Folder 5: 2

Motor vehicles are all the craze now, but Lizzie prefers horse vehicles as "the nicest." His Lordship and young Curzon are invited to spend Christmas with the King and Queen. There may be news of the engagement of the young gentleman, since he has asked Lizzie to prepare pink roses for the bedroom of his intended. Duke and Duchess of Marlborough are living a separated life.

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1907 Sept. 22

5p.

Folder 6: 1

Does not know the details of the Rhodes Scholarship, but will investigate. Congratulates McCulloch on her 29th birthday. Brother Harry (62) is lying in bed after suffering a stroke and cannot speak; lives in Lancashire. Col. Curzon (father of Mary, the intended for young Lord Curzon) died of a stroke. Will be going to the Woodlands (where the husband and bride will reside) to set it back in order after much work done there: "It means a lot of work. I sometimes think I shall have to give it up and take something not quite so worrying. It seems much worse since our poor Lady died."

Batthey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1908 Sept. 29

4p.

Folder 7: 1

Pain on tooth extraction. Francis and Mary Curzon have had a son. Wet weather has led to a poor crop and distress among the poor. Warwick Castle has more or less been turned over to Lord Brooke, the eldest son.

Battey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1910 Apr. 30

4p.

Folder 8: 1

Sorry to learn that McCulloch's mother is an invalid. Visit to Combe Abbey, which lacks the views at Gopsall. Was ill and unable to visit. Ball at Duke of Connaught's.

Battey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1911 July 15

4p.

Folder 9: 1

Discussion of which Howe is buried at Albany. Prepared Woodlands for a visit by the Queen and Princess and then left for London to furnish the empty house, which Curzon lets every year while renting a smaller place for himself: much work in upgrading the place and preparing it for residence. Coronation. "I must tell you it was not a bit of worry getting ready for Queen Alexandra... The very large parties here are no worry to me. I like them. They laugh when I tell them my greatest worry in our big parties is in case my doggie gets hurt, as he is so jealous & some of the gentlemen bring big retrievers & my little man starts on them & they won't take his impudence..."

Battey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1912 Jan. 21

4p.

Folder 10: 1

King Manuel of Portugal was a guest at a recent party. Christmas cards from fellow servants across the globe. Shooting party: 4,050 head of pheasants, partridges, hares, and woodcocks, with 2,000 in the second shoot: they want double for the next shoot, meaning important guests must be expected.

Battey, Elizabeth: Letter to Elizabeth E. McCulloch (Gopsall, Atherstone, Leicestershire)

1914 Jan. 4

2p.

Folder 11: 1

Visit from daughter and son-in-law of President Wilson; dislikes Lloyd George more than any of their statesmen: "I do not feel he is true, & his speeches have made so much class hatred, which I think is such a pity, and he talks to the poor ignorant people in such a way & encourages Socialism that I am really very disgusted with him." Encloses **letter from Lady Edith Franklin to Battey**: "I just enclose this for you to see how nicely his Lordship's sister writes me... Some of our real aristocrats are very nice to servants. I would rather serve them for half the money, than I would some of the millionaires..." His Lordship is doing poorly and cannot shake off the death of his favorite sister.

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The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of I. Eliot Wentworth, Nov. 2016.

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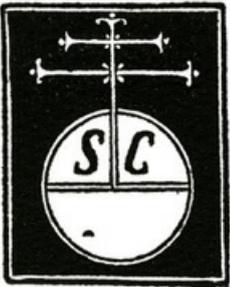
Aristocracy (Social class)--Great Britain
Gopsall Estate (England)
Housekeepers--Great Britain
Howe, Francis Richard Henry Penn Curzon, Earl, 1884-1964
Howe, Richard George Penn Curzon, Earl
Warwick (England)--Description and travel
Warwick Castle (Warwick, England)
Warwick, Frances Evelyn Maynard Greville, Countess of, 1861-1938

Contributors

Batthey, Elizabeth [main entry]
McCulloch, Elizabeth E.

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