



# **The Housekeeper's Tale - Grace Higgins's Story: The Women Who Really Ran the English Country House**

*Tessa Boase*

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This is Grace Higgens's story, one of the five stories that make up The Housekeeper's Tale.

This unique history tracks the housekeeper's fortunes during a period of relentless social change – starting shortly after the end of World War One and retiring the same year that *Upstairs, Downstairs* made its televised debut. She enters haughtily, still in the prime of her youth at 16; she exits a mature figure in a nylon housecoat and a perm, down on arthritic knees with a scrubbing brush. That figure is Grace Higgens. Her employment spanned 51 years working for Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant's family at their home Charleston.

Mrs Higgens's story maps the flux of 20th Century society and charts the demise of social mores that had been in place up until the Great War. Giving half a century of her life to service, all the while trying to forge a family for herself quartered in the attic above the renowned Bloomsbury set. This is a tale of the adventure of adolescence and growing up, but coming to terms with loss and the difficulties of love and loyalty.

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