



# Aprons and Silver Spoons: The Heartwarming Memoirs of a 1930s Scullery Maid

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When young Mollie became a 'skivvy' in a stately London townhouse aged just 14, she quickly learned that a large amount of elbow grease and a sense of humour would be tantamount to surviving there. Through Mollie's eyes we are offered a fascinating glimpse into London's invisible 'downstairs', a world that has long-since vanished.

## **Aprons and Silver Spoons: The Heartwarming Memoirs of a 1930s Scullery Maid** **Details**

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## From Reader Review Aprons and Silver Spoons: The Heartwarming Memoirs of a 1930s Scullery Maid for online ebook

### Sarah says

It's hard not to think back on this author with a slightly bemused smile, even though I didn't love this book. I find her style irritating, always cheery in a cheeky "ain't I a stinker" sort of way. But I will say that this book gave me new insight into the life of a skivvy-cum-cook between the wars. Not great writing but light and interesting. Impressed by her life and her feistiness at this age. Enjoyed the details she remembers.

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### Theresa says

*"Everyone that knew me knew that I couldn't resist a dare."* Mollie seems to be constantly accident-prone, getting herself into scrapes climbing trees, stealing strawberries and evading the local village bobby. Suddenly Mollie turns fourteen and it's time to find a job.

Learning early on that higher education for her impoverished family is out of reach, she rejects the offer as seamstress in a 'dark, closed' shop and finds work in London as a scullery maid. Right from the start Mrs. Jones, the cook, instructs Mollie about the fifteen-hour work days, the tasks awaiting, and the behavior expected of her.

*"At the end of my first week I was filthy, not to mention so dizzy and exhausted, my head seemed to fall through the pillow. It was Friday night. If I'd been at home I would have helped Mother shop in the market, scoffed sweets, and been licking my salty lips from the fresh kippers we'd have eaten for tea. My brother would be splashing about in the tin bath in front of the fire now."*

*I pictured Mother's face, sitting down for the first time all week in front of the crackling fire in our cosy cottage. I missed it so much I could almost hear their laughter, taste the smoky, warm kitchen."*

Mollie's spirit remains unbroken although her brief bout of homesickness diminishes when a new housemaid comes along to share a room and companionship. Flo quickly enters Mollie's world and a long friendship begins that will last eighty years.

Mollie Moran is feisty, fun-loving, and cheerful. Her memoir is full of interesting anecdotes of what it meant to live and work as a servant for the upper class in pre-World War 2 England. She writes quite openly about the class system and the changes the war ushers in to English society. Although sometimes her humor is a little bawdy and she tells it like it is, occasionally exposing the seamy side of her experiences, this is a fast, interesting read and her courage in perseverance and hard work is admirable.

*"Everything had to be done in a particular order too. You couldn't just get to it when you fancied. Each hour of each day was strictly accounted for and the routines of kitchens in the old days wouldn't be out of place in Her Majesty's army. I certainly worked like a soldier, that's for sure. And if I was the soldier, Mrs. Jones (the cook) was the culinary equivalent of a drill sergeant."*

Not just sheer drudgery though, Mollie finds plenty of opportunities to go dancing (although not always sanctioned by the cook and butler). Mollie's adventurous spirit is undimmed by convention and she and Flo resort to climbing down the fire escape in order to attend a dance on a cold foggy night.

*"We weren't really rebellious, just high-spirited and desperate to get out and see and experience life. Working fifteen hours a day in the kitchens under the stern and exacting eye of an all-controlling butler and cook made life a bit claustrophobic at times. All we wanted was a little harmless fun. I doubted very much they'd see it that way, mind. We had deliberately defied Mrs. Jones's orders and in 1931 that was a crime punishable by instant dismissal."*

There are long rides through the English countryside on her bicycle, and shopping expeditions in London with Flo, and as time progresses Mollie finds romance and her dreams for a husband and family are fulfilled.

"Minding the Manor" includes photos from Mollie's album and also contains a recipe at the end of each chapter along with a household hint, shared along with several cooking 'secrets'. I was so intrigued by Mollie's story that I decided to read her friend Flo Wadlow's "Over a Hot Stove" just as soon as I can obtain it!

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### **Fiona MacDonald says**

What a wonderful memoir. And not just a memoir about working downstairs as a kitchen maid which the author Mollie Moran did, but also as a social document, recording and detailing political events happening at the same time. What I discovered when reading was that the author was close friends with Flo Wadlow who's memoir I have also read which gave the account even more poignancy. Just adorable and heartwarming.

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### **Ro says**

An absolutely super read. Being a Norfolk girl myself, some of the dialogue in the book and the way that it is written is easily recognisable in that special Norfolk dialect. I loved the stories and how neatly it all flowed. I would of loved Mollie as a friend if I had lived back then. Her sense of adventure and spirit is just amazing. Highly recommended.

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### **Leah says**

I felt like I was watching a documentary on PBS while I was reading this book. I think anyone who enjoys Downton Abbey will love this real life story of Mollie Brown, a woman who worked in service during the era when Lords and Ladies still ruled the manors and estates of England. She started out as a scullery maid and eventually worked her way up to cook, all while having some crazy adventures along the way. She is a spitfire who wrote this in her 90s and I can't help but wish I could sit down to a spot of tea with her and listen to stories all day long. She talks about her romances, the political happenings of the day, and everything that went on "downstairs." Life was simpler during that time, but harder, sandwiched between two world wars with all kinds of awakenings and rumblings taking place. The story is enjoyable, informative, and witty!

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### **Shari Larsen says**

After leaving school at the age of 14 in 1930, Mollie Browne takes a job in a London as a scullery maid; she

works in domestic service for 10 years, working her way up to cook. In this chatty memoir, the author gives a rare and fascinating insight into a bygone era, the golden years of the early 1930's before the outbreak of World War II.

Even though Mollie put in long 15 hour days and worked hard, she also enjoyed some freedom and lived a rich life. She fell in love with boys and went to dances, and had some pretty interesting and often humorous adventures during her time off.

I really enjoyed this book, and I was amazed that Mrs. Moran was 97 years old when she wrote it; her style of writing is bright and witty, and it's like she sitting right next you talking about her adventures. Even while describing the endless tasks that made up her day, you never got the feeling that she was complaining about her life. I really admired her work ethic; it shames me to think that when I was 14, I use to think it was unfair that I was made to clean my room on a Saturday (after sleeping in most of the morning) before I could have any fun. I think anyone that is a fan of Downton Abbey would enjoy this book too.

I also enjoyed the recipes at the end of each of chapter, it was interesting to learn of the different dishes popular back then and how they were made; everything was made entirely by scratch in those days. There are also photographs of the author and also of some of the people she worked with and places where she worked.

The author's note at the end of the book told a bit of what she did with her life after she got married and left the work of domestic service; it sounds to me that the rest of her life was equally interesting, and enough material for another book.

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### **Sarah Brown says**

An absolutely delightful and heart warming tale of a girl who starts out as a scullery maid in a grand house in the 1930s and the friendship and love she finds there. I enjoyed this book because it has such warmth. Mollie Moran spins a yarn every inch as good as Catherine Cookson in my view, except that her story is a true, and based on her years in service before she got married. I also really enjoyed this book for its historical detail as it gives a brilliant insight into the painstaking work of servants in the 1930s. There were complicated dinner sauces - hours in the preparation - and daily house cleaning that I think would make even the most house proud wince. A great read.

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### **Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says**

This book is also published under the title Aprons and Silver Spoons: The Heartwarming Memoirs of a 1930s Scullery Maid. Neither one really does it justice. I really enjoyed it.

Many years ago I read Margaret Powell's scullery-maid-to-cook memoirs; she and Moran are chalk and cheese. Powell resented "them upstairs" having money and nice things; a city girl to the bone, she cared nothing for the countryside, saying "If you've seen one tree you've seen them all, haven't you?" She left a reasonably good position in the provinces for poorly-paid jobs as a plain cook in London, and then

complained about them, as well. She lied about being a kitchen maid to the men she met because she felt it was beneath her. After her marriage, she complained that her husband wanted plain working-man's fare. Basically she was a moaner.

Moran, on the other hand, accepted that she was born working class; more than anything, she was thrilled to be able to make a wage and send some of it home to her parents, and she loved her time in the country as much or more as the time spent in London during "the season" (always excepting having to gut those pheasants!). There's no resentment or anger here; she was a bubbly young girl who liked excitement, whether that meant shinning down a drain pipe of the stately home she worked in to go to a forbidden dance, or taking a dip in the Serpentine on a freezing-cold day. Written when she was 96, her memoir is full of her excitement at seeing the King and Queen, wandering London with her best pal Flo, or just learning and practicing her trade. She admits that she was attracted to "bad boys" but learned her lesson eventually, though it took a run-in with the Blackshirts to do it. Unlike Powell, she managed to get along with her employers and the cooks that stood in authority over her by smiling, listening and being pleasant instead of resentful--and doing what she was told instead of trying to skyve off. (I got the impression that at some point she may have read *Below Stairs* and been unimpressed.) Moran's remarks on Jamie Oliver and other TV chefs made me laugh.

Moran's ungrammatical language is faithfully reproduced as she speaks of "them days", but on more than one occasion her ghost writer got away from her. On p. 158 we read that "It was all I could do not to punch the air." Certainly not in 1933; punching the air (with or without the accompanying "Yes!") did not become a common expression of joy until the late 1980s. At another point the process of making homemade mayonnaise by beating oil into eggs is called "hollandaise" instead, which is actually composed of egg yolk and lemon juice beaten together and slowly heated as butter is added. But still, a positive, upbeat read; as Moran herself says, she and Flo could have told the writers of *Downton Abbey* a thing or two!

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### **Jacquelyn says**

I loved this look into life "downstairs," but what I loved even more was the author's positive outlook on life. When she wrote the book she was in her 90s and still hosting dinner parties for 25-30 Scrabble friends. Her attitude is very inspiring. The look into life as a scullery maid was enlightening and made me miss "Downton Abbey" even more.

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### **Jeanette says**

This was a pure joy to read. Mollie's spirit of exuberance and energy! Not to mention her positive and practical sense and lack of any class envy or self-pity. And this also holds the core base quality of what a memoir should always hold. Absolute detail of practice and minutia of that time, coupled with emotional memory. All told in the language of a Norfolk girl. Loved the recipes! But where do I now get cracked suet? And yet, I will actually try that trifle and the sausage roll.

4.5 star rounded to a 5 for the CLEAR, CLEAR language and exact intense detail of the downstairs life she lived. 97 and still going strong. I'd LOVE to see a continuing memoir of the 1950's at the other end of the staircase after WWII.

Fantastic photographs and lovely architectural information was also enjoyed. Just think about the cooking alone! Three meals a day for 8 people being the easy schedule, and then weeks of 25 to 30 people for 3 meals

every single day for the hunts and the visiting seasons. Only 2 people (father and son in her first job) having 14 to 16 people running their two households at any one time. 14 to 16 jobs of "inside" help which also included a good/safe lodging with high quality multiple meals as part of the position.

But what will stay with me the longest is why they scrubbed all those stairs and railings and tables and floors EVERY SINGLE DAY. And how so many things were mashed and then piped out into rose shapes or something. NOTHING done any easy way.

The changes this woman has seen in her lifetime. And what work ethic was!

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### **Deborah Carr says**

I really enjoyed reading about Mollie's time in domestic service. Being a Downton Abbey fan, I liked hearing the stories from a person who actually lived the downstairs life. This was an easy and enjoyable read and Mollie seems like she would be a hoot to be around.

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### **Nadine says**

Heartwarming, funny, very enjoyable and a look into a long gone era! It made me think of my maternal grandma who was a maid in Paris of all places a decade earlier.

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### **Babs says**

I really enjoyed this book....the writing had a very personal narrative to it; I enjoyed Mollie's journey from childhood, to young adult, to adulthood. Always enjoy the history in this type of book since I was not interested in history growing up but love soaking it in as an adult.

Mollie (was/is) truly an amazing woman we could all learn from. She was an inspiration.

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### **Patrice Sartor says**

DISCLAIMER: I received this book for free from a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

4.5 stars!

What a joy this was to read! I feel like I came to know Mollie, similar to if she was my grandmother (or a

friend) and sat me down to tell me the story of her youth. Mollie's tone is comforting and familiar, making for a lovely book. Her personality shines through on every page.

All of it captivated me, from getting to know what Mollie was like as a child, to her many adventures (and hard work!) as a teenager to a young adult in service, to the Afterword, where she beautifully wraps everything up and catches up the reader to her current life, at age 97. I am a fan of Downton Abbey, and while that probably increased my enjoyment, I think the appeal of a well-written memoir by a very cheeky and sharp lady can be appreciated by many.

As a bonus, many photographs are included, which helped to deepen my involvement in the story. Each chapter also ends with a recipe from the times, and while I didn't try any, I liked reading them, as well as the household tips. What a blast from the past!

Thank you, Mollie, for telling your tale, and doing it in such a wonderful way.

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## Caroline says

Born in 1916, Mollie Moran gives us a wonderful insight into her childhood in the Norfolk countryside. When she is fourteen she goes on to get a job as a scullery maid on a large Norfolk estate, (part of that involved travelling up to London for 'the season'.) Later, in her early twenties she got a job as a cook, on another big estate - Wallington Hall . The book winds down when she meets her husband, Timothy, who was a corporal in the RAF. We get a satisfying synopsis of the life that followed for them (and life was kind to her and her family), but the bulk of the book covers her early working days. She wrote the book when she was ninety-six.

Moran has a big personality and a big voice - which really comes across. She's full of life and laughter, incredibly athletic, and will do anything for a dare. Her first job required extraordinary levels of hard graft and stoicism, and the second required a huge wallop of intelligence and organisational abilities as well. She was one of the youngest cooks in the country, and it was a fantastically demanding job. For instance she would always have to cook in triplicate.... A) For her employers and their guests (which might involve a lot of people if there was a shooting party), B) for the nursery - the governess and the children, and C) for all the staff who worked below stairs. The descriptions of the meals she cooked were amazing. Everything was made from scratch, with few of the gadgets that we take for granted today, and the end results were often impressive.

I picked up this book as a casual bedtime read from the library, and was very pleasantly surprised. Often I would find myself going to bed a bit early, for extra reading time...

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## Haley says

Manor houses, dinner parties, the London season - it all sounds so glamorous and exciting, for the blue bloods anyway. But what about the "other half"? You know, the butler, the footmen, the lady'd maids, the chauffeur, the cook, the kitchen maids, and finally, at the very bottom of the latter, the scullery maids. What about them?

It's a common misconception to assume that domestic servitude began to die out after the end of World War One. Well into the late 1930s, it was not unusually to find twelve or thirteen people employed for the benefit of just one man! Such was the case of this story's main protagonist.

The story of Mollie Brown gives us a rare glimpse of what life was like "below stairs," and as I was pleased to discover, the hit t.v. series *Downton Abbey* got many of the details correct. After an idyllic childhood spent amidst the lush Norfolk countryside, Mollie was employed at just fourteen by a certain Mr. Stocks, an elderly member of the gentry with both a country estate and a London residence. As she was soon to discover, the work was hard. Back-breaking in fact. Every day at six thirty A.M., Molly would rise to commence her morning duties, including, but not limited to, waxing the kitchen floor, polishing the pots and pans, wrestling with the wood-burning stove until her hands were black, starting the morning tea and, perhaps most grueling of all, scrubbing the front door steps until they shone. And all of this before 8 A.M.! Then the real work began, aiding the cook in the kitchen, mincing, dicing, pouring, stirring. Three meals a day, every day, for near to twenty five people. It was not unusual that she wasn't finished until near ten o'clock at night.

But it wasn't all work, work, work. During the London season, Mollie took advantage of her two hour break after lunch to explore the city, taking a sojourn to say Harrods or the famous Selfridges. London in the 30's was an exciting place. Walking down the street, Molly searched for and gawked at the society ladies, with their sleek, black dresses and their tanned skin (sun tans were becoming popular at this time). She witnessed future King Edward VIII chasing after his beloved Wallace Simpson while out for spices, was struck by the normalcy of the seven year old future Queen Elizabeth while seeing her at a bus stop, and was caught up in one of Mosley's famous Black Shirt speeches at Speaker's Corner, all the while blissfully unaware of the tensions mounting throughout Europe.

One of the prominent themes throughout the book is the irony behind the system that pinned anywhere from ten to twenty people all living under the same roof and yet, as it were, the master of the house might not even know some of them existed. Some, like the every obsequious butler, believed it was their God-granted duty to serve the gentry. Others simply accepted it as a constant; it was the way things things had been and would continue to be. Members of the landed class were the very models of etiquette and style. Much unlike today, where celebrities have to earn the public's respect, the gentry were respected on account of their family titles. To use Mollie's words, "How could they've known better? They didn't know any better. They'd been born to a life of privileged."

So while it was indeed a strange system, it was also one that brought very different kinds of people within close proximity of one another, leading to budding romances and friendships that would last a lifetime. It was also the system that, whether you'd think so or not, opened doors for people. Just two years before the start of World War Two and the end of servitude as it was then known, Mollie, Mollie became cook at just twenty years old. Now isn't that just the "bees-knees"!

I have to envy Mollie. I don't envy her job as a scullery maid. The work was exhaustive, no doubt. But I envy her work ethic and the possibilities she created for herself. "People just don't work that hard anymore," she says. I can believe that. But on the rare account that someone does, it's harder for that person to accomplish the same noticeable results that she did, or so I find.

There's a delusion of butlers or housemaids, even scullery maids, as subservient, bitter people with no alternative. But the truth is that, below stairs, they lived and dreamed of a fulfilling life for themselves in a manner similar to those of us today.

I'm sorry to make a *Downton Abbey* reference, I really am. But I keep thinking back to what Lord Grantham said in season one: "We all have a part to play." I think that sums up domestic servitude quite nicely.

## Maggie Duval says

I adored this book and its author. In fact, I wish she was a friend/relation because I would love to hear more of her stories.

The book fell into my hands this week at the library and complements another book I'm reading on the 30s in England, a time of major transition from the old hierarchal order to the new, what would become known as, a more distributed networked order. Moran expertly and entertainingly captures that pivotal point in history.

Equally intriguing is her detailing of the devastating loss still felt due to the first World War both thanks to catastrophic body counts as well as the walking wounded like her father, serving in the trenches, who came home with destroyed lungs thanks to German mustard gas attacks.

When WWII begins, you feel that weariness of, "here we go again."

Throughout the book, her humor, can do attitude and indomitable spirit shines through. She highlights the strength of the womenfolk in her family as well, which I loved.

Couldn't put it down and enjoyed every page of it. Bonus was her descriptions of the dishes made as well as recipes she provides - inspired me to start cooking up a storm!

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## Louise Culmer says

Delightful memoir of life in domestic service in the 1930s. Mollie Moran started as a scullery maid in 1931, at the age of fourteen. Going from life in a cottage in Norfolk to a big London house was a dramatic change for her. She worked a fifteen hour day with one half day off a week and every other Sunday. Her workload seems incredibly heavy, but despite that she enjoyed her time in service, learning to cook, experiencing London life, and life in a great country house, and making a lifelong friend in fellow servant Flo Wadlow (who wrote her own memoir of service *Over a Hot Stove*). Despite the long hours there was the occasional outing to the pictures, to shops, even now and again a dance (and of course the opportunity to meet boys). There were escapades like the time she and Flo climbed out of a window to go to a forbidden dance. Then there was the time she went to swim in the Serpentine and was photographed in a bathing suit, the picture subsequently appeared in the *News of the World*, causing quite a stir below stairs. And the occasion when she got a good close up look at Wallis Simpson. Above all though there was the opportunity to learn to cook, preparing luscious meals from fresh ingredients, and learning so well that she was able to become a cook herself at the very early age of twenty. The book sparkles with Mollie Moran's great zest for life as nothing daunts her, not even cooking for a shooting party of thirty.

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## Lori says

I just have to say. Wow! What a terrific read. Every since *Downton Abbey*, I have been interested in reading about people who actually experienced being a "below stairs" staff. I found it very impressive that the author Mollie Moran just wrote this book last year at 97 years old. Mrs. Moran started out as a scullery maid at 14 years old. She worked for a kindly elderly man and his son. A scullery maid is the lowest position and often

the longest hours. the first place she worked for lasted five years. she worked herself up to a kitchen maid. learned how to be a terrific cook.I liked the parts where she talked about her friend Flo, a co worker and roommate at her first place of employment. They remained best friends for 80 years until Flo's death at 100 years old.

Mollie Moran offered a good look at what it was like to be working Below stairs during that period of life in the 1930s. a time era that no longer exists where staff lives with the family. Mollie Moran eventually worked up to the position of Cook for another family at age 20 a very young age to be a cook for a "big House". I loved reading about this time in history and Mollie Moran wrote a very helpful well written book about this period of time.at 97 She still likes to cook for friends and family. Quite an impressive woman.

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### **Staci Bishop says**

They could have literally scripted Downton Abbey from this book. Not only the events but the characters too. They were all there. I didn't realize at first that this was a true life memoir but her life was fascinating. It made me appreciate the DA series even more because they addressed so much that was true to life, even in the case of Mollie Brown. This book gave additional insights into current events of the day and an in-depth look at the life and responsibilities of the house servants. My how different times were back then. Her story was well written and full of exciting adventures. The audiobook was also a treat.

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