



Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England

By Judith Flanders

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"Almost criminal in its housebreaking, burglarizing, second-story genius."?James Kincaid, University of Southern California

The Victorian age is much closer to us in time than we might believe. Yet at that time, in the most technologically advanced nation in the world, people buried meat in fresh earth to prevent mold forming and wrung sheets out in boiling water with their bare hands. Such household drudgery was routinely performed by the grandparents of people still living, but the knowledge of it has passed as if it had never been.

Judith Flanders's book is laid out like a Victorian house, taking you through the story of daily life from room to room. In each space she depicts the home's furnishings and decoration: from childbirth in the master bedroom, through the scullery and kitchen, the separate male and female domains of the drawing room and the parlor, and ending in the sickroom. A rich selection from diaries, letters, advice books, magazines, and paintings fills the rooms with the people and personalities of the age. 100 illustrations, 3 8-page color inserts. 100 illustrations, 3 8-page color inserts

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Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England By Judith Flanders **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This room-by-room guide brims with delightful description and discussion of the Victorians and their domestic environments. Flanders (*A Circle of Sisters*, which was shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award) evokes the period's intimate preoccupations by drawing on a variety of sources: extracts from Dickens, Gissing, Jane Carlyle, Gaskell, Trollope and Beatrix Potter, among many other authors; line drawings, period paintings and advertisements; and snippets by the numerous magazine advice writers of the era, including the influential household experts Mrs. Panton and Mrs. Beeton. Flanders makes particularly clever use of commentaries by alienated overseas visitors to Britain, highlighting national customs of the period. She weaves these materials into an absorbing cradle-to-grave story of life in the urban upper-middle-class household. Although working-class life is overlooked, the work of the servants who tended the bourgeois home is rendered in vivid, often harrowing detail and with great attention to class boundaries and tensions. Particularly informative are the journal entries of domestic servant Hannah Cullwick, encouraged to record her days' work by naughty gentleman Arthur Munby (who later became her clandestine husband). Flanders is unflinching on the realities of dirt, childbirth, women's bodies and serious illness. Her intelligent, and unromanticized scrutiny of Victorian domestic custom, etiquette and style will greatly enhance readers' understanding of the period's social history, its literature, and visual and decorative arts. Aware of the power of family life to determine attitudes toward gender, childhood, education and health, Flanders is sensitive to the otherness of the period, translating its strangeness without resorting to anachronism. 24 pages of color illus. and b&w illus. throughout.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review London journalist-author (*A Circle of Sisters*, 2001, among others) Flanders provides a book so fascinating that it yields at least one surprise--and often many more than that--on each page. Ignore the title; it is no more a static treatise on different Victorian rooms than Sir Terence Conran's books comprise an ordinary approach to home decor. Instead, we find a real sense of Victoriana, its "occupants'" lives, struggles, habits, and styles, portrayed through the eyes of contemporary novelists (Dickens, Trollope, and other less-recognized names) and nonfiction writings. Consider, for example, the evolution of the woman as "the ministering angel to domestic bliss." In the parlor, she was transformed into a bride, ready for all the exigencies of marriage, beginning with a trousseau that might have cost 20 pounds. The morning room, exclusively female, was dedicated to the business of organizing and running a household. And the nursery symbolized a child-centered universe, with mothers responsible for teaching and nurturing their young offspring, and fathers for supporting the family. More than a window into the past. *Barbara Jacobs*
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Review

"Flanders is such a good writer and so acute a social analyst that her journey from the cradle to the grave is as racy, as compelling, and sometimes as scary as a good Victorian novel. I found particularly enthralling Flanders' sense of threats the Victorian home vainly tried to keep out: dirt, disease, unregulated desire, and above all decline in class status."

"What makes Flanders's book compelling is not only her keen eye for telling detail, her strong awareness of the importance of family context (already apparent in her first book, *A Circle of Sisters*) and her insights, but also her skill in handling literary sources that illuminate her subject....By slicing the front facade of the house

and guiding the reader through a succession of rooms that convey the often frightening complexity of lives passed in them, Flanders brings the Victorian family into deft and vivid focus.”

“This book is filled with details that bring the Victorian London home so vividly alive that you can smell it and feel it. Relying on canny use of diaries, memoirs, novels, and a thousand other revelatory sources, it moves and amuses and astonishes. I found myself insisting on reading extraordinary passages out loud to family and friends. Ms. Flanders is a shrewd, reliable historian with a keen domestic eye, a sharp wit and a clear and appealing style.” (Cheryl Mendelson, author of *Home Comforts*)

“Open this book anywhere, and you find yourself totally absorbed. It's entertaining yet authoritative, accessible yet fascinatingly detailed and thorough. It picks apart, in the most elegant way, a great deal of our received wisdom about how the Victorians lived. The descriptions of the demands of Victorian housekeeping are exhausting just to read?I had to lie on the chaise for half an hour after taking in the account of how to wash a floor. On the other hand, as a member of a household who receives one post a day, rarely before 2 pm, I long for the 'six to twelve' deliveries enjoyed by our ancestors?almost as good as e-mail. A very wide readership will enjoy this book, and I hope it brings Judith Flanders all the success it merits.” (Hilary Mantel)

“Judith Flanders's new book is almost criminal in its housebreaking, burglarizing, second-story genius. This massively entertaining and just as informative book allows us to see the Victorian house as never before, from the inside, room by room. We tour (or sneak) around, missing nothing and thereby find ourselves soaking up not only details about sleeping habits, chamber pots, and cooking, but about the vision of a world ruled by the home that is still so important. With wonderful dexterity and the quiet assurance that only comes with deep and sophisticated scholarship, Flanders invites us into a fully realized world. We'd be idiots to refuse.” (James Kincaid, author of *Annoying the Victorians*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anthony Anderson:

Information is provisions for those to get better life, information these days can get by anyone at everywhere. The information can be a information or any news even restricted. What people must be consider if those information which is from the former life are difficult to be find than now could be taking seriously which one is acceptable to believe or which one the actual resource are convinced. If you obtain the unstable resource then you understand it as your main information we will see huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* as the daily resource information.

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Suzanne Palmer:

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