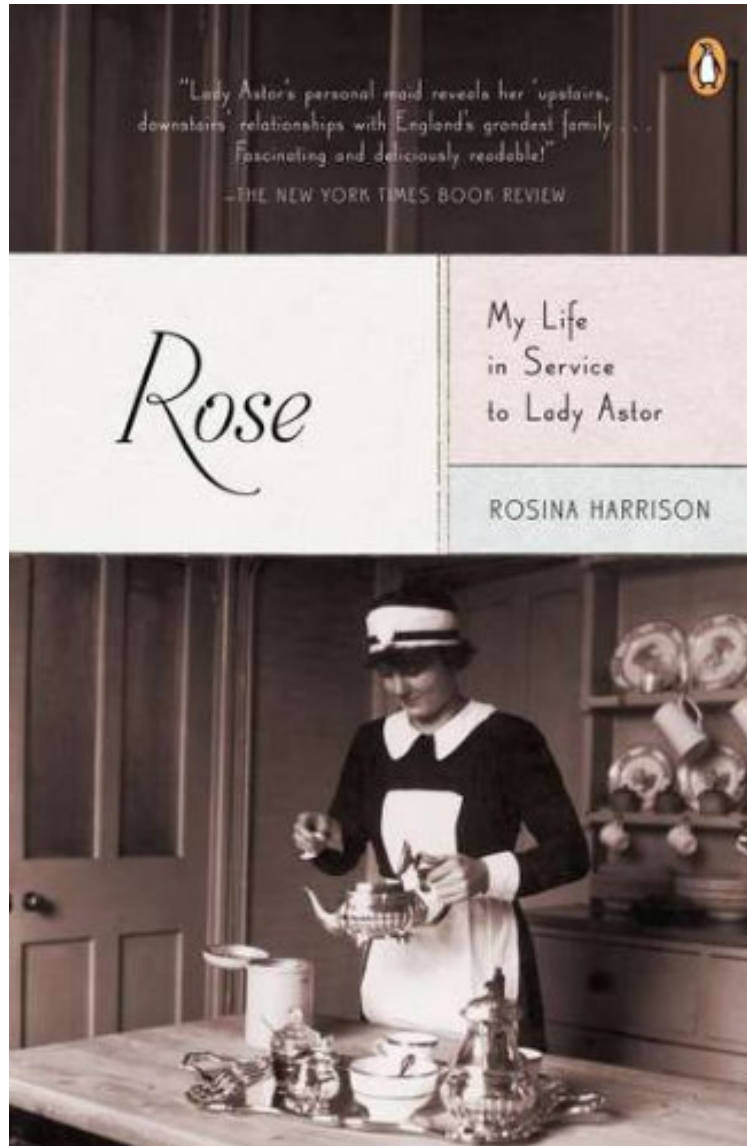


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Rose: My Life in Service to Lady Astor

Rosina Harrison

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Rosina Harrison : Rose: My Life in Service to Lady Astor before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rose: My Life in Service to Lady Astor:

239 of 245 people found the following review helpful. Reissue of Rose's Excellent 1976 Memoir By Jill This book, under a slightly different title, is a reissue of Rosina Harrison's 1976 memoir, Rose: My Life in Service Recollections of Life in One of England's Grandest Households. This is a repeat of my review for it: Rose Harrison's memoir might be of interest to fans of Downton Abbey, even though her experiences occurred a generation later. Rose's longtime

employer, Nancy, Lady Astor, was, like *Downton*'s fictional Cora, an American heiress who married into the British aristocracy. Rose, who served as Lady Astor's personal maid for 35 years, was a Yorkshire girl, born in a village near the town of Ripon. While much is left unsaid, Rose gives plenty of fascinating details of the daily working life of a lady's maid in pre-war, wartime, and postwar Britain. In the first chapters she describes her childhood, education and home life and motivation for her decision to go into service - service as a ladies maid in particular, and why, with that as a goal, it was not a good idea to start out as a housemaid or kitchenmaid. She started out as a "young ladies' maid" - serving the daughter(s) of a household in 1918, then moved up (in both status and pay) to ladies' maid. Her motivations for changing employers and how it was accomplished are also discussed (her account of taking leave of her second mistress, after 5 years, is stunning). She entered service to the Astor's in 1928 and retired with a pension in 1964, on Lady Astor's death. She describes her duties in detail for all three employers (two prior to Lady Astor). Though Rose worked upstairs, she had duties that took her below stairs, and she ate her meals there. She describes the inner-workings of the servant's halls, both at home and at other homes they visited (Particularly interesting is the description, though brief, of what it was like when most of the fighting-age male servants were away during WWI). She also gives an account of her (mostly non-existent) social life. As Rose notes, her picture of domestic service is typical as far as how servants lived and the way houses were run, and that "only the personalities and small details were different." She doesn't say a lot about class divisions, but the subject does crop up. If life at Cliveden, the Astor's country estate, their homes in London, and their handful of other residences, changed after WWI, it isn't apparent from the memoir. Rose had the responsibility of caring for Lady Astor's clothes (fashions are naturally well-described), her furs, and her jewelry collection, an awesome responsibility. She also covers fascinating details about things I had never even thought of, such as, does a maid see her lady in the bath? There's a lengthy section on houseparties and what it was like, for all the staff, preparing for them (especially Ascot). She worked with the Astor's famous butler Mr. Lee, and their almost-as-famous under butler Charles Dean, and frequently turns the story-telling reins over to them, by recounting stories they told Rose of service in those prewar days. She describes some of the duties of Mr. Lee, as well as 2nd footman Gordon Grimmett, and other male staff: "odd-men," "linkmen (who called for the carriages/cars at parties), and decorators (the gardener who had charge of the flowers inside the house). She also discusses the human machine that was the chef and kitchen staff. She is fairly mum about leisure time (such as it was) below stairs but does describe the servants' Christmas fancy dress dances at Cliveden (attended by the family, as was typical), the huge Christmas tree in the hall, and presents for all the staff. As Rose notes, the book is no Astor tell-all, which is not a bad thing. I wish at times though that she would give more detail about her own personal life, such as her 9-year engagement, and her sister Olive going into service as a housemaid, which is referred to a couple of times but no other information. A chapter called "Coming to Terms with my Job" is interesting as it's the closest we get to what Rose's feelings and emotions were about working for the often `difficult' Lady Astor, and describes what it was like in unflattering detail. She describes her relationship with each of her ladies, but of course Lady Astor in greater detail than the others since they were together, every day, for 35 years. There is a chapter about other members of the Astor family, particularly the children, seen through the eyes of their longtime nanny; a chapter on life during WWII; a chapter on travel (which is also referred to throughout the book), and "Last Years," describing life in service after WWII, Lady Astor's retirement from public life, her declining years and death. Though Lady Astor was a controversial figure in later years, Rose tells the story from her perspective, not as a political or social commentator. But I wouldn't call it a whitewash either; while Rose clearly became fond of her lady, her description of Lady Astor for the most part could hardly be called flattering. I consider the book a must-have because I'm very interested in the subject of ladies' maids and there are very few published accounts of, or by any; Rose's memoir is the only one I'm aware of. Fortunately she is an engaging and funny storyteller.

69 of 72 people found the following review helpful. Real life Downstairs at *Downton Abbey* By Customer I am in love with the PBS series *Downton Abbey* right now, which led me to choose this book for my Kindle, mainly out of curiosity. It turned out to be a very special read. I was afraid it might be dry, like a history lesson. Especially when the author says right up front that she won't be "dishing any dirt" about the several ladies she served during her life. But it was told with such warmth, humor, and general good storytelling ability, it really kept my interest. You realize that Rose was not just "a maid," she was a true career person, worthy of a great deal of respect. What an incredible peek "behind the scenes" into some of the lives of England and America's rich and famous it is too!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Mistress of her own life By I P Fascinating read! I was expecting a collection of stories about the lives of rich and famous, but in addition to that I got to look into the life of a very modern woman. Rose is a perfect example of a strong and independent person. For example, right at the start of her career Rose decides she wants to travel the world. She to apply to work only for ladies who want the maid to accompany them on the trips abroad. Rose talks about her relationship with her most famous employer Nancy Astor. The two strong-willed women had a lot of respect for each other, only each showed it in a different way. I think the most important thing I learnt from this book is that it doesn't matter who you are and what you do because you can command respect and admiration, by building the life you want for yourself.

In 1928, Rosina Harrison arrived at the illustrious household of the Astor family to take up her new position as

personal maid to the infamously temperamental Lady Nancy Astor, who sat in Parliament, entertained royalty, and traveled the world. "She's not a lady as you would understand a lady" was the butler's ominous warning. But what no one expected was that the iron-willed Lady Astor was about to meet her match in the no-nonsense, whip-smart girl from the country. For 35 years, from the parties thrown for royalty and trips across the globe, to the air raids during WWII, Rose was by Lady Astor's side and behind the scenes, keeping everything running smoothly. In charge of everything from the clothes and furs to the baggage to the priceless diamond "sparklers," Rose was closer to Lady Astor than anyone else. In her decades of service she received one 5 raise, but she traveled the world in style and retired with a lifetime's worth of stories. Like *Gosford Park* and *Downton Abbey*, *ROSE* is a captivating insight into the great wealth 'upstairs' and the endless work 'downstairs', but it is also the story of an unlikely decades-long friendship that grew between Her Ladyship and her spirited Yorkshire maid.

"An extraordinary document, realistic, candid, and a rare look from the vantage point below stairs at a nostalgically romanticized world." *Los Angeles Times* A delectable assortment of tales and details about the habits of overprivileged Britishers and the people who served them. Rosina is a feisty, keen-eyed, no-nonsense observer of caste, class, and character. And when she matches wits and wits with Lady Astor Virginia Belle by birth, a Member of Parliament, and mistress of a dazzling fortune, and of Cliveden, one of England's most stately homes the result is not only a crackling comedy of manners, but a sense of the way it was, firsthand. *Newsweek* "Lady Astor's personal maid reveals her 'upstairs, downstairs' relationships with England's grandest family...Fascinating and deliciously readable!" *The New York Times* Book About the Author Rosina Harrison (1899-1989) served as Lady Nancy Astor's personal maid for over thirty-five years and was the author of two books.