



Upstairs: Living in a big house and a Suffragette adventure

Rose works in an office in Bedford Square in central London. The buildings weren't always offices she says. They used to be big family houses with lots of people living in them.

An old lady came to visit us one day, and told us that when she was a little girl she lived in this house. The old lady must have been nearly 100 when she came, but she swept into one of the offices full of desks and computers and then stopped. She didn't say anything, just looked intently round, remembering what the room had looked like then. She said it had been her mother's bedroom, and that she thought she had been born in this room.

Then the old lady told us what her life was like when she lived here. This is what the old lady said.

My name is Frances and I was born in 1900. Queen Victoria died a year later but I didn't notice this. It's a big house but there were a lot of people living here because my parents had a lot of servants like rich people did in those days. The person I saw most was my nanny - we called her Nurse. I had five older brothers and sisters so she must have been quite busy! Our bedrooms were called the nursery and they were right at the top of the house. If you've seen a film called Mary Poppins you'll know what my family was like. Well maybe not quite like that! Nurse didn't drop from the sky with an umbrella parachute like you see in the film. She came from Hindhead in Surrey where my father had another house. My father was an architect but when he was younger he played in the tennis finals at Wimbledon. My mother came from Ireland and she was very busy campaigning for votes for women - only men could vote in those days. I'll tell you more about that later.

There are lots of big houses in the squares round here. The front door looked much the same as it does now. But in those days the housemaid used to scrub the steps leading up to the door every day; and every evening the gas-lighter came round to light the lamps in the square. He carried a ladder - he leaned it against the lamp-pole and climbed up to reach the lamp and light it. People complain about

pollution in the streets nowadays but they seem very clean to me. It was much worse then. Cars were only just coming in, and most people had horses. Imagine how much horse dung there was in the road. It was impossible to stop people walking it onto the pavement and on the steps up to the houses. Every house had a boot-scraper outside.

Daily life

One day I was out with Nurse visiting my friend Kathleen who lived in Woburn Square, just a few minutes' walk away. She was older than me, but we were still good friends. We had to walk carefully to get to Woburn Square. The crossing-sweeper cleared the dung off Gower Street for us when we wanted to cross it. Nurse gave him a little coin and prodded me. Then I remembered to say: 'Thank you Mr Jones'. I liked the fancy boot-scrappers outside some of the houses in Woburn Square and wanted to see if they cleaned my shoes better than the ones in Bedford Square. But Nurse said I couldn't. After we had collected Kathleen and her Nurse we walked on to Gordon Square. When we got there I made Nurse stop so I could watch two men pouring coal neatly down a hole in the pavement. Where was it going to? The horse that pulled the coal-cart stood patiently waiting. It saw coal disappearing every day. More horse dung on the road! My friend Kathleen wasn't interested in the coal (or the horse dung) but she did like the pretty patterns on the coal-hole covers.

Kathleen's nurse and my nurse seemed to have a lot to talk about. They talked about ladies breaking windows, and one of them was held down on the pavement by a policeman they said. What was this? I wasn't even allowed to go up to someone's door to try their boot-scraper! When they noticed that I was listening they sent us off to play with a hoop in the Gordon Square garden.

Kathleen had very old-fashioned parents. She and her brother and sister only saw their parents for a few minutes each day after tea. Their father said he thought that children should be seen and not heard. But I found that Kathleen's mother wasn't that old! My mother took us on an exciting adventure, as I shall tell you.

Suffragettes

There were always nicely-dressed ladies coming to see my mother. Brown the footman would open the front door and let them in. They would go upstairs to the drawing-room and shut the door. If my father was around they would tell him to go and play tennis with my brothers in the Bedford Square garden. Sometimes he was cross and sometimes he just laughed. What were they doing? That room in the

house is still used for meetings nowadays, but these were a lot more secretive. The ladies were so excited that they forgot to ring the bell to ask Esther the maid to bring them some tea. Then they'd want it in a hurry. The maid who took in the tea told me that the big grand piano was covered with street maps of London. 'Don't you ask any questions Miss Frances,' she said.

One day my mother came home with cuts all over her hands and her frock all torn. Her maid had to find her a clean frock in a hurry, and spent a long time mending the torn one. I heard Cook talking to Binns the butler. Binns said, 'What is Mrs Marshall thinking of? Doesn't she know her place?' Cook said, 'Mrs Marshall knows her place and doesn't like it! I've heard about her and her friends. They say they want to be able to vote the same as men. No taxation without representation they say. Suffragettes they're called. Some of the men support them but some don't like it at all, and the ladies are marching about, breaking windows. Now they're refusing to pay taxes. The ladies say that they want to have a vote and be allowed to be Members of Parliament, law-makers not law-breakers they say.'

My friend Kathleen was very shocked when I told her what I heard Cook saying. 'My mother wouldn't do anything like that!' But there were further shocks in store for Kathleen - and me as well.

Life in the big house

A few weeks later my mother said, 'Frances, would you like to come on a march with us? We'll go over to Kathleen's house and meet her mother, and then we'll all go off together. Don't tell anyone.' But I was so excited that I needed to go and tell someone about it. So I ran down to the basement, past the servants' hall where the servants had their meals, to the big kitchen where Cook and the two scullery maids did the cooking. They cooked for my parents and their guests, for all of us children, and for all the different servants. On a good day Cook would let me take a carrot for the horses if I asked nicely. I got a beautiful big carrot today and ran back up the back stairs to the stables at the back of the house. I found Wells the groom there with my favourite horse, Molly. Wells was brushing Molly, saying 'Sssss, sssss, sssss' as he did it. Molly gave a little whinny when she saw me coming. I held out the carrot to her with my hand open flat, otherwise Molly might make a mistake and bite my fingers. The stable smelled of hay and horses, a clean smell. The brick floor was covered in straw which Wells swept out every day so it didn't smell of horse dung. A man used to come daily with a horse and cart to take the dung away. I don't know what he did with it. There were two

horses and our family carriage there. My father was talking of getting a motor car - my mother was very keen to have one to drive - but he said they were too unreliable. There were cars as well as horses in Tottenham Court Road and I could see that what both of them said was true. They did look fun to drive but I quite often saw a car broken down. When Wells wasn't listening I stood on tiptoes and whispered my secret into Molly's ear. Molly took the news calmly - she's heard a lot of secrets in her time.

The suffragette demonstration

The next day Mother and I walked round to Kathleen's house in Woburn Square and met up with Kathleen and her mother. Kathleen's family had got a car! The chauffeur didn't seem too pleased at being told to take us to a back street near Trafalgar Square, but he had to do what he was told. Kathleen and her mother were very nervous. We saw a crowd of well-dressed ladies and a few men, and my mother said, 'This is the place.' Some of my friends were there too, in fact there were quite a few children. We all set off across Trafalgar Square, singing and waving the banner that Kathleen's mother had helped my mother to make. Nelson looked down at us from the top of his tall column. There were large policemen on big black horses in Whitehall, but we carried on down the road and they let us pass. It seemed a long way to Parliament Square, but we marched on and I saw the clock on top of Big Ben. All the women cheered when they saw Boudicca's statue and shouted: 'Boudicca help us! Attack! Attack!' I half-expected the statue to join in.

Some of the ladies went up to the policemen and spat at them! I was very shocked. 'They are trying to get arrested,' said my mother. 'If they assault the police they will go to court and be sentenced to go to prison. Then more people will hear that we want the vote.' Just past Boudicca there were lots more policemen, and they shouted that we couldn't go any further. But all 400 of us tried to push on. Then policemen on big black horses charged at us. Everyone was shouting; Kathleen's mother didn't know what to do - she just looked scared. Two policemen grabbed her and one grabbed Kathleen and dragged them away! My mother ran and pulled Kathleen back.

My mother shouted, 'Get the children away!' and we all ran as fast as we could. We thought Kathleen's mother would follow. Suddenly I slipped on a huge pile of horse dung! Mother just dragged me up and told me to keep running. 'Cry later,' she said. I didn't know where Kathleen's mother was, in fact I didn't know which fright to cry about first.

We found John the chauffeur waiting with the car in a side-road off Victoria Street. Now we were safe, but my mother was very agitated. Where was Kathleen's mother? She had never been on one of the marches before. We waited and waited and eventually Kathleen's mother arrived, looking very bruised and dirty. She said the police had pushed her over and kicked her, but she didn't fight back and they let her go. She saw a few women get into the Parliament building but the police had gone in and hauled them away.

Mother wouldn't let us onto the car seat with dung all over my dress and said that we would have to sit in the dickey at the back. When we got home Mother handed me straight over to Nurse, who was not pleased. 'Look at the state of you! What was your mother thinking of?'

There was talk in the servants' hall that night! But Mother didn't seem to worry at all. 'We'll get the vote, you'll see,' she said.

The old lady stopped talking and looked at Rose. 'Oh dear,' she said, 'I'd quite forgotten where I was. Things have changed so much for women since I went on that march.' Then she said to Rose: 'People like my mother got you the vote. Make sure you use it'.

Note for teachers

You can tell the class all, or just a part, of Frances' story. For KS1 children you may wish to focus on the life of a wealthy child in Bloomsbury, omitting the Suffragette sections. The story raises many historical and citizenship questions to discuss with the children. For example:

- Q How many servants worked for Frances' family?
- Q What jobs did people do in the story that we don't have any more?
- Q Rose works as a receptionist in the office in Frances' old house. Other people work in the office, and different people come in to clean it. We don't call any of them servants. How are they different from the servants of 100 years ago?

Nuffield Primary History: Urban spaces cross-curricular project

Editor: Jacqui Dean

Author of this story: Sarah Codrington

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Downstairs: The housemaid's work in summer

(from Mrs. *Beeton's Household Management* – shortened)

Morning Work. She throws open the windows in the rooms that are not bedrooms, so they may receive the fresh morning air.

She prepares the breakfast room by sweeping the carpet, rubbing tables and chairs, dusting mantel-shelf and picture frames with a light brush, dusting the furniture and sweeping the rug; she cleans the grate when necessary, leaving everything clean and tidy for breakfast so that not a speck of dust can be found in the room.

After the breakfast room is finished, the housemaid should sweep down the stairs.

After this she should go into the drawing room, cover up every article of furniture with large dusting sheets and make as much room as possible, by placing all the loose furniture in the middle of the room, while she sweeps the corners and sides. The furniture can then be put back in its place, and the middle of the room swept, sweeping the dirt towards the fireplace. She should now blacken, brush and polish every part of the grate, so it is clean and bright. After the sweeping she should leave the room, shut the door, and lay the breakfast.

Laying the Cloth for Breakfast. The kettle is to be boiled on the kitchen fire, and then removed to the parlour, where it is kept hot. Having washed herself free from the dust arising from the morning's work, the housemaid collects the breakfast things on her tray, takes the breakfast cloth from the napkin press, and carries them all on the tray into the parlour; arranges them on the table, placing knives, forks and salt cellars for the family, taking care that the salt is plentiful, and soft and dry, and takes the tray back to the pantry; gets a supply of milk, cream and bread; fills the butter dish, and sees that hot plates and egg cups are ready and that the butter knife and bread knife are in their places.

And now she should give the signal for breakfast, holding herself ready to hand the kettle, and take in the rolls, toast and other eatables, which the cook supplies, when the breakfast room bell rings. She is never to enter the parlour with dirty hands or with a dirty apron, and everything is to be handed on a tray; she is to hand everything she may be required to supply on the left hand of the person she is serving, and all is done quietly and without bustle or hurry.

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