

Keeping Safe in Victorian Homes

Dangers for Victorian Servants

Daily chores in wealthy Victorian homes (including all dangerous tasks) were carried out by servants. For example, a housemaid's duties could include:

- lighting fires in each room and keeping them going
- cleaning all rooms – scrubbing floors, sweeping, polishing, dusting and beating rugs
- cleaning and filling oil lamps
- carrying hot water around the house, for baths
- making beds, and emptying and cleaning out chamber pots (pots in which people went to the toilet)
- washing clothes and linen (which needed to be soaked, scrubbed, rinsed, dried and ironed)
- fetching and carrying food and goods.

Servants had separate smaller staircases to go up and down between the floors of the houses so they did not disturb the family or their guests. These were usually winding, uncarpeted and dangerous, and servants often had to carry things like boiling water! Most of the servants' work (like cooking, washing and ironing) was carried out in the basement of the buildings. That's why it became known as servants being 'below stairs'.

Challenge

Read through the information about servant life and the fact sheet [Keeping Safe in Victorian Homes](#) about Victorian homes. Imagine you are a servant in a Victorian home (e.g. a cook, maid, butler, gardener). Write a diary describing your daily life, including at least three things you had to do to keep safe (e.g. you might have to take extra care when standing on a ladder to clean a window or when using sharp tools). You could also think about what you could do to make the home safer for the people who live there.

