



Country House Society: The Private Lives of England's Upper Class After the First World War

Pamela Horn

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When the cataclysm of the First World War impacted on British society, it particularly affected the landed classes, with their long military tradition. Country houses, as in a variety of popular TV dramas, were turned into military hospitals and convalescent homes, while many of the menfolk were killed or badly injured in the hostilities.

When the war ended efforts were made to return to the pre-war world. Pleasure seeking in night clubs, sporting events and country house weekends became the order of the day. Many of the old former rituals such as presentation at Court for debutantes and royal garden parties were revived. Yet, overshadowing all were the economic pressures of the decade as increased taxation, death duties and declining farm rentals reduced landed incomes. Some owners sold their mansions or some land to newly enriched businessmen who had prospered as a result of the war. Others turned to city directorships to make ends meet or, in the case of the women, ran dress shops and other small businesses.

The 1920s proved a decade of flux for High Society, with the light-hearted dances, treasure hunts and sexual permissiveness of the 'Bright Young People' contrasting with the financial anxieties and problems faced by their parents' generation. Pamela Horn draws on the letters and diaries of iconic figures of the period, such as Nancy Mitford and Barbara Cartland, to give an insight into this new post-war era.

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