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THE SERVANTS OF WILLIAM GOSSIP¹

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This is a case study of the domestic life of a Yorkshire family. It will try to place the family into its context, and address a number of related questions. How many servants were there? What were their duties? For how long did they serve? What was the nature of the relationship between servant and master/mistress? How far do the findings coincide with the results of existing research? How representative was the family's experience?

The employer of the title was William Gossip. Born in York in 1705 and dying in 1772, his life spanned the reigns of the first two Georges into that of George III.² He was well educated, shrewd and ambitious. He was also the sort of character derided by the eminent Earl of Chesterfield in one of his famous letters to his son in 1750:

Keep an account, in a book, of all that you receive, and all that you pay; for no man, who knows what he receives, and what he pays, ever runs out. I do not mean that you should keep an account of shillings and half-crowns which you may spend in chair-hire, operas, etc they are unworthy of the time, and of the ink that they would consume; leave such minuties to dull, pennywise fellows; but remember, in oeconomy, as well as in every other part of life, to have the proper attention to proper objects, and the proper contempt for little ones.³

Of course, it was easy for the wealthy nobleman to make fun of poorer men who practised close control of their finances. It is clear that gentlemen of lower status like the contemporary Henry Purefoy of Shalstone, Buckinghamshire, took care in recording the detail of their accounts down to sixpences passing between himself and his mother.⁴ William Gossip recorded his receipts and expenditure as carefully. The entry for 29 September 1737 in his cash book reveals just how 'dull and pennywise' he was — 'Lost through a nick in the floor 1 [shilling]'. In this book he recorded most of his receipts and payments.⁵ He also kept ledgers to detail his receipts and payments under specific headings like 'Housekeeping account', 'Stable account' and 'Building account'. He kept day books which detailed the payments he made to his servants, labourers and tenants. He kept all vouchers by year and all the letters he received in annual bundles, with letter books of most of the letters he wrote. Noblemen like Chesterfield could delegate such work but Gossip was not prepared to delegate work he enjoyed and which ensured he was in full control of his own business. Gossip had graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge,⁶ but unlike the sons of the nobility at this time, had not undertaken the Grand Tour, although he had travelled across Europe to Norway, where he had a relation.⁷ His social position restricted possible careers to the church, a partnership in business or a supplier of credit. His father, William, (c 1657 -1733), had become a gentleman of considerable wealth from trading as a mercer, first in Beverley and later in York.⁸ The son had acted as bookkeeper for his father, recording loans and rental payments, so that he continued in this practice, making loans to members of the gentry at the standard 4% and investing any profits in land.

His father had made his fortune in trade and fitfully invested in land but it was his son's ambition to raise himself to a position of influence as a landed proprietor. For the purposes of this article Gossip's servant experience can be divided into two periods. The first runs from 1734, when he was 29 years old, purchased a town house of his own in York, and became a Justice of the Peace, to 1742, when he left the city for the country. The second period dates from 1749, when Gossip purchased a discrete estate of his own and built a country house, to 1766, when he

passed the age of sixty and had begun to slow down. Of course, these periods were significant in many other ways for his life. Initially the most important was marriage to Anne Wilmer in York Minster in 1731 and setting up home nearby in a rented house in Petergate.⁹ As their family grew they purchased a house in 1733 on the other side of the Minster Yard in Ogleforth.¹⁰

It is notable in research on this subject that studies have concentrated on the experiences of long-standing landed households where there was more stability and continuity, and where fluctuations in the size of the servant body has not been remarked upon. The account book entries from 1734-1766 show that the servant requirements of this family were not a constant; both the number and nature of the servants varied as the family grew and household expectations changed over the thirty years of married life. More research is required to determine how far this is true of the more established landed gentry.

One of the most important tasks was caring for the children. A nursery maid was essential to assist Anne with her family. She seems to have been particularly well served by Mary Thornely, who stayed with her from 1733 to 1737, receiving a yearly wage of £2 and what was called a gods penny of 2s 6d.¹¹ This was a customary payment made at the time the servant entered on his or her period of service. As each contract expired, at the traditional hiring days in May and November, a gods penny was paid on renewal. Once Mary left future contracts did not last very long. A succession of four nurses came and went over the next two years, lasting at the most eight months. The family had a similar experience with cooks over the whole period. They were paid from £3 to 3 guineas a year. None of them lasted much more than a full year, and between 1732 and 1740, that is eight years, the household had 14 cooks. This sort of turnover, apparently not unusual, demonstrates the difficulty a household would experience in a city the size of York where there were opportunities for self improvement. It is not easy to find the reasons for these short periods of employment from the bald entries in the accounts. In one case, however, it is clear that the cook, Jane Shackelton, fell ill in December 1736 after serving only a month.¹² Furthermore, the comments of friends in Wakefield reveal that some cooks might be less than competent; Christopher Atkinson observed that his wife 'has had some Girls offer themselves who pretend to be Cooks, but none that she c[oul]d recom[men]d as such.'¹³

In addition there was also a chambermaid and a housemaid. In the latter case there were eight in three years from 1737 to 1740. Two upper servants, a valet, Thomas Braithwaite, who looked after his master, and a ladies' maid for Anne, completed the household. The greater respectability and importance of the valet, with plenty of opportunity to receive 'vails' or tips as his master's representative, ensured that Thomas continued in service for some years. He was hired on 22 November 1731 and seems to have continued in Gossip's service until he left York in 1742.¹⁴ At first Thomas was paid £4 a year but this was raised to £5 in 1739. There is no sign of a regular gods penny, suggesting that the basis of the hiring agreement was a term of years rather than from year to year. One unusual entry reveals the responsibility accepted by an employer for his servant as a member of his 'family'; 'July 19 1740 'Bleeding Thomas when he fell 1/- Given people that helped him home 1/1'. An accident in the street to a servant in livery could be exploited by passers-by. If they all received 1d each this would make a total of thirteen helpers. The total number of servants at this stage in Gossip's life was therefore six, although a seventh, an indentured servant boy, appeared in 1740. This number was quite respectable for a man of Gossip's social class but by no means extravagant.¹⁵

When enquiring about the character of a potential servant the main traits that concerned Gossip were the 'honesty, sobriety and capacity' of the individual. There is no evidence that Gossip suffered as badly as his York neighbour, Sir William Lowther, in 1734, from the dishonesty of his servants, but Lowther's case was clearly a sobering experience for him, although it also offered him the opportunity to be of assistance to someone of higher social standing. Lowther was a leading Whig Member of Parliament and a major Yorkshire landowner who had taken a

house in York for the season.¹⁶ While Lowther was away in London over the winter, Gossip learned that someone had broken into the house. Lowther's doctor had discovered an intruder on a chance visit and she was turned over to the authorities. It emerged that the girl, Mary Orman, was a servant employed by Lowther. Gossip went over the house, from room to room, drawing up a detailed inventory of what he found and comparing it with a list supplied by Lady Lowther. He was good at this sort of meticulous recording and clearly enjoyed the task. What became clear from the correspondence was that Mary had been attracted by the rich clothing that Lady Lowther had left behind. She was unable to resist some of the dresses, having them altered to fit her. Lady Lowther was desperate about the fate of her fashionable gold embroidered apron that had been imported from France but it was found safe. The girl had clearly been working with others, who had emptied the cellar of drink, but none was found in her lodging, only clothing. It was a commonplace that servants dressed almost as well as their mistresses in the eighteenth century. They were constantly in the presence of the most fashionable clothing, were able to keep up with the fashions and often benefited from the generosity of their employers in receiving their cast off clothing.¹⁷ Mary Orman was pregnant and was likely to lose her place when this was discovered. In the event she had clearly decided to take her reward in advance. She was sentenced to death; the sentence was commuted to transportation to America for fourteen years; yet she died in prison.¹⁸

This early period of the Gossip's married life must have suffered from more problems with servants than this single case may suggest, but the records are not very revealing. York was the northern capital of the country, rivalling Bath as a place of resort for the gentry. Nationally renowned races were held there, together with dancing and card parties at the Assembly Rooms. The new building for assemblies was the celebrated demonstration of the architectural and archaeological talents of Lord Burlington and provided an impressive environment for the display of the wealthy Yorkshire aristocracy.¹⁹ Gossip was one of the twelve modernising directors of the Assembly Rooms and a treasurer at the time Burlington was commissioned to design the building in 1730.

Gossip did not write descriptive letters about his life at this time since his close relations lived with him. With his parents dead he wrote very few letters that were not concerned with business matters and even fewer that mentioned servants. There is, however, a richer seam of evidence to mine once his children have left home. Seven children were born while the family lived at York, three dying in infancy.²⁰ William's eldest son and heir, also called William, had been born in 1732. His portrait was painted by Mercier in 1740.²¹ He left home in 1748 to study medicine at Edinburgh and it is letters to him and, after his death in 1754, to his brothers George and Wilmer that are most helpful in the information they provide about the Gossips' social life. More children were born when the family had settled in the country outside York at the village of Skelton. Three boys, Wilmer, Randall, and Thomas were born between 1742 and 1744, but the last child, a girl named Anne, did not survive her first year. This was an active period, during which Gossip was a tenant farmer. Despite trying to sell his York house he was unsuccessful and had to let it.²² He was keen to acquire a country seat and establish himself among the ranks of the landed gentry. At this stage in his life he did not have sufficient uncommitted money to purchase one outright. His circumstances changed in 1747 when he sold an estate in Essex that his wife and sister-in-law had inherited.²³ The money enabled him to buy an estate between York and Leeds which brought with it the lordship of the manor, some 1100 acres of land and some thirty or so tenants. The village was Thorp Arch, situated on the river Wharfe, with water mills and farms and cottage properties.²⁴

In 1748 it was run down, the properties were poor and thatched, and the tenant farmers, in this period of agricultural depression, were not making enough to pay their low rents on time. As a result Gossip was able to pick up the estate at a knock down price and set about building a

proper country house for his family.²⁵ The investment contributed considerably to the economy of Thorp Arch, providing much needed employment and supplementary incomes for the inhabitants. Over the years Gossip rebuilt the church, the water mills and built a bridge to replace the often uncrossable ford over the river Wharfe.²⁶ Constructing the house lasted seven years, from drawing up the plans to completing the interior decoration. Consequently there was no settled regime of servants until 1756. Gossip employed his tenants to work the lime kilns for the mortar, and to carry equipment and supplies around the site. He employed specialist craftsmen to build the house. The payment of these outside workers became his main concern during these years and, as a result, he appears to have devolved much of the responsibility for the indoor servants upon his wife. Naturally her concerns were mainly domestic, although the close partnership between husband and wife is evident from the care she took of his financial affairs when he was away from home.

It is, therefore, difficult to get a clear picture of the domestic servants from the accounts. But he gave his wife money periodically for her domestic expenses, which included the servants' wages. There were clearly more than he employed when the family was in York, at least ten, but possibly even more. Identification of their individual roles also becomes more difficult, however, because Gossip does not as regularly provide a title or designation to a servant in the accounts. It may well be that the servant role was less clearly defined in some respects. For instance, the gardener, although described as such, had wider duties. As early as 3 February 1750 Gossip wrote to his son, William, at Edinburgh:

...Your Scotch Gardiners are in pretty good Repute & I am told may be hired for very reasonable Wages, but my Garden you know is not yet formed, nor have I now any proper business for a Gardiner. Yet if I could meet with one that for the present w[oul]d act as a Husbandman & take care of my horses, & lead my stone & materials & do any thing I want to forward the building I w[oul]d hire him...one that is well recommended for honesty and carefulness: for as I must leave him to himself the next winter at least, those Qualifications are requisite not only with regard to his own work but to the Labourers under him. ...My Garden Walls don't enclose quite an acre, so that a Gardiner must always be supposed to have some other work to keep him employed.. P S I sh[oul]d be glad if the man knew a little of writing & acc[oun]ts.²⁷

But it was customary to expect more than basic gardening skills from such a servant. In 1745, Henry Purefoy also wanted a gardener 'upon occasion to wait at table'.²⁸ Even when the garden and woodland were more established Gossip continued to expect more from his gardener. In 1755 he wrote to George Mitchell, a Scot and former occupant of the position:

I have been obliged at last to part with my old Gardiner, so am in present want...You know I must have one that understands forest work as well as kitchin garden & pruning wall trees & be sober and tractable & to wait at table on Sundays & when I have company. I would willingly have one that is likely to continue with me & for that purpose will give £8 wages the first year £9 the second & £10 the third & there stop. He to wash his own clothes.²⁹

Gossip wanted to have a large kitchen garden, an orchard, and woodland walks along the river bank. He employed labourers to clear paths in the wilderness in 1760. Before this he had had six gardeners in five years, despite paying an increasing amount in wages each year. The gardener whom he employed in 1755, John Hairs, was recommended by John Telford, the York market gardener and seedsman, was paid 9 guineas a year and stayed for three years, but the apparent steadiness is belied by the 'character' Gossip supplied after a second period of employment in 1762

John Hairs lived with me 3 years sometime agoe, but was so troublesome with frequent notices of leaving my service, that I was at last resolved to take him at his word & let him

go when he did not expect it. He was sometime out of place & then hired himself for much less wages than he had with me, which were nine guineas a year, a thorough Livery frock, hat & stockings: ab[ou]t 2 years after my Gardiner had the misfortune of being drowned: Upon which I had several L[ette]rs, from him, begging leave to return to his old place...In less than 5 months, he was at his old trade of giving me warning: which I refused to accept. I went in a few days after to stay...at Leicester: whilst I was there he engaged himself to a Lady in that neighbourhood & within a week after I got home, marched himself off in despite of me, tho' I absolutely refused to discharge him & left me quite destitute of a servant in his place, the Lady not expecting him so soon, enquired how he left me, & upon hearing his own story turn'd him adrift...From this plain history of his conduct, I doubt not but you will be very able to form his character I wondered at his assurance in appealing to me for one. As to his knowledge of Exotics or understanding the management of Greenhouse plants I am quite a stranger. He has nothing of that kind under his care with me nor do I impeach his sobriety or honesty, this enquiry S[i]r needs no apology. It is a debt due from one Gentleman to another & if they would be more exact in discharging it faithfully. it might be one means of putting a stop to the misconduct of servants so much complained of..³⁰

This long story is significant in that it demonstrates that the gardener was also working as valet to Gossip, since he accompanied him to Leicester. He wore livery, which would have been quite unnecessary for a gardener. He was certainly paid more highly than any earlier servant in that position. The problem centred around the servant's desire for a better position. He occupied one of the highest paid jobs in the household, but nevertheless such servants were always on the lookout for a better place. Gossip here also demonstrates by example that a proper reference could protect potential employers. There was much complaint at this period that gentlemen gave false references to ensure that they could get rid of unsatisfactory servants.³¹ Of course in this case Gossip did not currently employ Hairs so that he was able to exercise a freedom he otherwise might not have had. Interestingly there is little mention of Hairs' skills as a gardener and since he says he was satisfied on the issues of honesty and sobriety, it would appear that he is talking of honesty in purely monetary terms.

The most essential position in the household and one that appears to have been filled from an early stage in the building of the house, even when the family was in temporary accommodation, was that of housekeeper. A valuable insight into what was required is provided by the following letter from Gossip in 1748, on behalf of his wife, to a lady, who had supplied a character:

... if you think she is such a one as w[oul]d suit, Mrs Gossip w[oul]d be glad to treat with her. She must not be too fine a Lady, but yet such a one as knows how to keep the rest of the servants in order & will not scruple upon occasion to put her hand to anything, understands a Kitchin, can wash and get up the small Linnen of the family with one to help her at the other washing & see that the rest is done as it sh[oul]d be, is not wasteful & can rise in a morning, for we are early stirrers. Mrs Gossip has heard she asks £5 wages which she w[ou]ld not scruple to give, provided she has the qualifications above required, & will exert them with good nature and affability.³²

Identifying this paragon when appointed was not so easy. The way in which the housekeeper was described in the accounts differed from all other servants in that her surname was used exclusively. There was a Williamson in the 1750s but she never seemed to receive her wages in full.³³ Not until 1755 is there an identifiable entry on 25 June 'Agar wages.... £8.5.0.'³⁴ Agar appears to have been unsatisfactory, as a relation of the Gossips, Mrs Mayer, heard that they wished to part with Agar, and thought she had found a suitable replacement, a forty year old with considerable experience:

...the soberist creature & might be entrusted with [the] key of the store room which she has always had, & tho she is what they call a methodist she tells me if she is so situated that there is not an opportunity of going to their meetings she can be very well contented with going to the parish Church...she has the offer of a place now where the lady never gave more than 4 pd year & has offered her 7 pd but she will not accept it she has the offer of 30 pd a year if she will go to South Carolina, she is plain in her person & dress and such a one as...would make everything go to the farthest & would see that y[ou]r other servants did their parts & what was right, she expects 10 pd a year & stays in town till thursday...I told her you lived in a plentiful Gentel way...³⁵

Mrs Meyer was obviously used to finding servants for her friends and relations and recognised that the Gossip lifestyle was wealthy. Despite such a glowing testimony the Gossips were not persuaded, as William acknowledged:

...Mrs G is obliged to you...her only objection to the person you mention is her being a methodist. We have so many of them in the towns about us & so frequent meetings, that she w[oul]d never want opportunity of attending them, & consequently we sh[oul]d never keep her at home. Nor indeed sh[oul]d I care to restrain any serv[an]t from doing what they think is their religious duty to observe. We have none of that way yet in our Town, & I am afraid I sh[oul]d not improve Mr Atkinsons [Vicar of Thorp Arch] opinion of me by introducing one.³⁶

So Agar was succeeded by Wilson, who was clearly a treasure, was certainly paid a lot less, and may well have been the 'verry sollid sedate woman' recommended by a local tradesman, who '...Behaves Exceding well in the family'.³⁷ On 20 August she was given 'more on account of her good service...£1.1.0.' over and above her annual wage of £3.19.0³⁸. By 1758 she was receiving £6 a year³⁹ and by the time she left Gossip's service in 1761 her wage had risen to £8.⁴⁰ She was succeeded by Miss Wildblood, who lasted until February 1763.⁴¹ Wilson appears to have returned to service with the Gossips in 1765 at £9 a year⁴², which would seem to indicate that they were not unreasonable employers, or indeed mean when they found a servant they could be satisfied with.

Gossip's status as a Justice of the Peace and lord of the manor was greatly enhanced by his construction of a country house, even if a small one. As a consequence he was made a Deputy Lieutenant of the County in 1757.⁴³ Such a rise in status required that Gossip put on a little more of a show in public. He bought a post chaise and began to employ a postilion/groom.⁴⁴ In Gossip's household Thomas Thorwell occupied this post during the five years from 1757-1762 at £4 a year, with additional payments for good service.⁴⁵

In addition Gossip employed a butler. His new house had a vaulted brick wine cellar. There were clearly butlers employed before 1760 but the first identified reference to one is to the unfortunate Thomas Barker who was hired on 1 November 1760 at £6 a year. The following letter explains just how unfortunate he was. Gossip wrote to his son, Wilmer:

I hired a very promising young man for Butler last Saturday:...monday ab[ou]t 6 a clock in the evening the Gardiner & Groom unknown to me took the boat and went to meet him...the poor young man was just coming out for Thorp Arch the Gardiner persuaded him back to drink: it was ab[ou]t 10 when they got back to the boat, which was fast[e]ned a great way above the usual landing place, almost over against my house end, yet the wind being high, tho the water was not greatly so, & the Gardiner who sh[oul]d have managed the boat being...much in liquor, they were driven over the Dam & the Gardiner & the new Servt never been seen since, but the Groom was saved by holding fast by one of the seats of the boat, which grounded upon the sand bed & from thence he was taken half dead. He is still very ill...so that I have not one man serv[an]t in the family to go with me to York tomorrow...⁴⁶

The next clear entry does not appear until September 1766 when Gossip hired Timothy

Vertue as Butler at a relatively high £14 a year. This seems to indicate it was not easy to come by such a man-servant and that they could command top wages. It possibly also reflects the success of the contemporary campaign to remove 'vails' or tips which had been seen as an inducement to masters to keep wages down.⁴⁷ Jonas Hanway, a leading campaigner, described them as a tax that servants levied on their masters.⁴⁸ Certainly by 1762 Gossip was complaining about the expectations of servants and asking his son, Wilmer, to try to find a valet for him in Leicester:

..indeed servants here are grown to such a head there is no guiding them. The Article of shaving is not so absolutely necessary & a handy fellow may soon learn to dress a wig...If you should succeed, I must be at the expense of his journey down. (The first year he must wear out my present livery which is very good)...⁴⁹:

He quickly cancelled this arrangement having found a replacement nearer to hand.⁵⁰ But his major problem was finding a servant he could trust. Even the lesser men servants, like husbandmen, had to be reliable, and long standing employees too could reveal an unsuspected weakness. The story of Tom Lee, however, as recounted by Gossip, reveals as much about his master as about the servant. In a letter to George in 1756 he described the man's fate as he then understood it:

Poor Tom Lee in returning from York was killed by a fall from the waggon. Something wanted fastning and he ordered Old Andrew to drive on whilst he stood upon the shafts to fasten the Rope: Unhappily either by the violence of the wind or the sudden yeilding of the rope he fell from his hold and the waggon...ran over him: tho' as...Andrew could not say that he saw the wheels go over him the coroners jury judged favourably that he might be so bruised by the fall, as to occasion his Death:..... I have lost an excellent serv[an]t, & already find I am quite lame without him....⁵¹

Here we have the details essentially as recounted to the coroner's jury, but a few days later Gossip revealed in a letter to George a somewhat different version of the story :

I sent you in my last the acc[oun]t of poor Toms death, as it was then represented to me: but the truth is that he had got a Little liquor & wd ride upon the shafts behind the Sill horse: a strange infatuation for (as I heard only the other day) he fell twice the last summer from the cart by the same imprudent action: once he dropt betwixt the shafts, & the wheels bestrid him without touching him: the other time, he fell across a deep Rut & one of the wheels went over him, but happily the cart was empty and he rec[eive]d no considerable damage, so it was kept a secret. I have got Richard Farrer in his place. His little boy of 4 years old, I intend to take care of: for literally speaking neither himself nor wife had one penny in the world when he was killed...⁵²

Thus a faithful and dutiful servant of long standing emerged as an occasional drunkard. Gossip was, nevertheless, free of condemnation and generously prepared to look after the man's family. Drunkenness was the root cause of many problems with servants. A contemporary writer ascribed to drink the cause of all the faults in servant's characters '..for nothing more exalts a Servant into a master before his time than this...it gives Boldness & Rashness and such a contempt of their superiors as amounts to Phrenzy & even madness...'⁵³

Whether or not drink was a factor in what appears to have been the most serious confrontation that Gossip had with a servant is not clear. His own words, however, underline his fear in what was a most unusual situation:

My uneasiness & disturbances from servts must I think never have an end. John Smith I turn'd away still skulks & hovers about here, nor can I get quit of him. tho I believe his leadin motive is Lust, yet his amours are conducted in such a manner as may reasonably give me apprehensions of another sort. Tho' I have discharged him the house, yet I have reason to believe he is generally about it as soon as dark last night ab[ou]t 10 I surprized him & his Paramour very lovingly together in one of my Out

Stables, & imprudently in my first heat gave him a stroke with a stick that supported me. I say imprudently because I was at some distance from the house & nobody near etc. He immediately seized me & endeavoured to wrest the stick out of my hands which I held fast. He then perceived how much I was in his power with my lame foot. However he never struck me tho' he once collar'd me & was all the while very sassey & provoking with his Tonge. Told me that he came there to speak to one of my servts & wd come in spite of me. [That there was a high road thro my orchard & he wd come when he pleased] & particularly that he would return about the same time & in the same manner as tonight. Now betwixt you & I...There is a footway that has been long used that lies near my orchard. When I first began to do anything here I enquired of the Ten[an]t who told me that it was only a way of sufferance: however... I took care to leave the old Post on the outside of my hedge...The first step I have taken is to pack of [sic] his Madam this morning which was highly necessary: for she had been tampering with the housekeeper to connive at his being introduced into the house at nights after we were in bed. I cannot get to York to make an information properly before a magistrate...Possibly he will move of [sic] with his Madam today if he does for my own case, I w[oul]d let the blow I gave him pass for his punishm[en]t. But should he return at night as he threat[e]ned, what must I do?..⁵⁴

This is a remarkable scene. The customary deference accorded by the man to his superior vanished after the unexpected blow from the master's stick. The man does not physically retaliate perhaps because he recognises this relationship and Gossip's temporary disability, but still feels sufficiently justified to harangue his former master. Gossip's reaction to this treatment is to rush off a letter to his lawyer, not to go for help to chase the man off. By removing the real cause of the problem, sending the maid away, he had in fact solved the matter, but he still needed reassurance about his legal position. He clearly felt guilty that he had let his feelings get the better of him and broken his own standards of behaviour towards his inferiors. The root cause of the difficulty here relates to the fact that servants were not usually employed if married, as they would inevitably have divided loyalties.⁵⁵ As a result they tended to be young and unmarried with the consequent problems associated with courtship. Therefore a mature, widowed housekeeper was a key requirement in maintaining sufficient discipline to run the household. Yet in Thorp Arch Hall the female servants slept in the garret or attic rooms immediately above the Gossip family bedchambers so that it would have been very difficult for them to get away with secret assignations. Smith does not appear in the surviving sources, so that his occupation cannot be verified, underlining the problem that not all servants are recorded.

The number of domestic servants certainly increased over the years, reflecting the increasing wealth, status and changing family composition of the Gossips, rising from seven in 1740 to around 11 in 1766, but this number was augmented by tenant labourers from Thorp Arch. There was no obvious distinction between domestic and other servants. It is clear that some servants lived in, but others, often married, lived in the village. Identifying the nature and duties of named servants is not straightforward. The apparent detail of the records is, as often happens, misleading. It is tempting to concentrate on William Gossip to the exclusion of his wife, who certainly played a crucial role in ensuring that the household ran smoothly and working with the housekeeper to that end. She was obviously not at home with a servant that put on airs and was 'too fine a lady'. Servants were expected to turn their hands to anything, be adaptable and be prepared to rise early. The high turnover of cooks in the York house and at Thorp Arch may have had as much to do with her expectations as with other factors. Jane Holmes shows that four out of the 104 servants at Burton Constable, a large East Yorkshire estate, had served for over 20 years; but by far the majority, that is 64, served between one to five years in the mid eighteenth century.⁵⁶ Mitchell describes the turnover of servants in the Purefoy household as very rapid, and suggests

that employer/servant relations were infinitely troublesome and embarrassing.⁵⁷ Stone describes the attitude of master and servants in another nearby Yorkshire family as ‘casually exploitative’, and notes that ‘in 1791 not one of the domestic staff had been at Stockeld, near Wetherby, longer than five years’.⁵⁸ The Gossips’ experience was not unusual, therefore. Gossip inevitably had more direct dealings with the male servants, valets, butlers, grooms and postilions, gardeners and husbandmen. He expected a high degree of service and was prepared to pay to keep a valued servant, as with the valet, Thomas Braithwaite and the housekeeper, Wilson. To a certain extent he was an indulgent employer, since he took John Hairs back after having described him as troublesome in his first period of service, did not pursue John Smith through the courts and looked after the children of Tom Lee. He was unfortunate in losing three members of staff by accidental death due to drunkenness. In the last analysis he recognised that where servants were inadequate the only solution was to pay them off. Several staff including a housekeeper, a cook and a chambermaid were dismissed in this way. Considering the span of years, hundreds of servants came and went in the Gossip’s service with relatively few tales of disaster. Such as there were are due to drunkenness, and none, apparently, to dishonesty.

NOTES

1. This article has been developed from a lecture given as part of the History Department Colloquium series, West Georgia College, Carrollton, GA, USA on 18 October 1994.
2. C.W.Foster and J. J. Green, *History of the Wilmer Family*, Leeds, 1883, 128.
3. Letters written by ..*Earl of Chesterfield to his Son, Philip Stanhope...*, II, 5th edn., London, 1774, 129-130.
4. L.G.Mitchell (Ed), *The Purefoy Letters 1735-1753*, New York, 1973, 5.
5. Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Thorp Arch estate papers [henceforward TA], 7/7, cash book , 1749-1771.
6. J. and M.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, Cambridge, 1922, Part I, Vol. 2, 242.
7. TA 22/1, letters received 1729-1731, letter, from Su. Gossip at York, 16 June 1730, to William Gossip at Fredrikshald, Norway, and, 30 September 1730, to WG at London.
8. TA 15/11/1-7, William Gossip’s draft wills, 1694 and 1698, and probate copy, 11 December 1725.
9. Foster and Green, *op.cit.*, 128. Anne was one of two daughters of George Wilmer, Lord of the Manor of Bloys and Grassalls, Essex.
10. York Minster Library, Acc. 1987/53, ref. 02/69, title deeds to 10, 12 & 14 Ogleforth, lease and release, 12 & 13 April 1733.
11. TA 21/3, ledger 1731-1741, entries for 10 January 1733 and 5 November 1737.
12. *Ibid.*, 1 December 1736.
13. TA 13/3, letters received 1763, letter, 23 October 1764, from Christ. Atkinson at Wakefield to WG at Thorp Arch.
14. TA 21/3, *op.cit.*
15. J.J.Hecht, *The Domestic Servant in Eighteenth Century England*, London, 1956, repr 1980, 6; William Vavasour kept ‘around twelve servants’ a generation later [M.Creaser, ‘William Vavasour: the Squire of Weston, 1798-1833’, *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, LVI, 1981, pt 3, 168].
16. H.Owen, *The Lowther Family*, Chichester, 1990, 352.
17. P.Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798*, Oxford, 1991, 504; Hecht, *op cit.*, 210.
18. TA 3/2, letter book 1731-1747, copy letters, nd [between 19 & 30 Jan], 1 and 8 February, 31 March 1734/5; TA 19/10, letters 1704 -1735, letter, 25 January 1734/5 to Mrs A. Gossip at York from Lady D. Lowther at London and, 1 February 1734/5 to WG at York from W.Lowther.
19. John Harris, *The Palladian Revival, Lord Burlington, His Villa and Garden at Chiswick*, London, 1994, 26-28; Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, Oxford, 1989, 193.
20. TA 3/2, *op.cit.*, many memoranda; Foster and Green, *op.cit.*, 128-132.
21. TA 21/3, *op.cit.*, ‘[1740] 31 Dec Pd Mr Mercier for Billy’s Picture £10.0.0.’.
22. TA 3/2, *op.cit.*, copy letter, 22 May 1742, WG at Skelton to Coz [Thorp?]. ‘...tho’ I have advertized my house at York, yet it is not for want of money that I did so.’
23. TA 3/2, *op.cit.*, copy letter, 3 December 1746 from WG at Skelton to Th[e]o[philu]s Salway at Woodford.
24. TA 22/9, letters 1748, letter, 27 February 1748, from Lady Ann Hastings at Ashby Place, Leicestershire, to WG at Skelton.
25. B.L.Harrison, ‘Thorp Arch Hall, 1749-1756: ‘Dabbling a little in Mortar...’’, *Publications of the Thoresby Society, 2nd Series*, IV, 1994, 1-39.

26. TA 7/6, *op.cit*, copy letter, 16 July 1754, from WG at Thorp Arch to George at Leicester; TA 7/7, *op.cit*, 26 December 1765, 4-30 January & 4 February 1766, payments for repairs to 'the Oil Mills'; TA 7/7, *op.cit*, 13 February to 12 August 1768, payments for the Bridge.
27. TA 19/4, letter book 1747-1753, copy letter, 3 February 1750 from WG at York, to Willy at Edinburgh.
28. Mitchell, *op.cit*, 149-50.
29. TA 7/6, letter book 1753-1757, copy letter, 1 March 1755, from WG at Thorp Arch to George Mitchell, gardener at Mrs Curren's at Kildwick in Craven.
30. TA 21/5, letter book 1762, copy letter, 27 February from WG at Thorp Arch to ?
31. Hecht, *op.cit*, 84.
32. TA 19/4, *op.cit*, copy letter, 2 August 1748, WG at Thorp Arch to Mrs Salkeld at Beverley.
33. TA 7/7, *op.cit*.
34. *Idem*.
35. TA 23/3, letters received 1755, letter, n.d.[1755] from Mrs M. Meyer [at York] to WG at Thorp Arch.
36. TA 7/6, *op.cit*, copy letter, 27 February 1755, from WG at Thorp Arch to Mrs Meyer at York.
37. TA 23/3, *op.cit*, letter, 6 July 1755, from Abrm. Yewdall at Pontefract to WG at Thorp Arch.
38. TA 7/7, *op.cit*, 20 August 1756.
39. *Ibid*, 19 August 1758.
40. *Ibid*, 15 August 1761.
41. *Ibid*, hired 6 November 1761, left 4 February 1763.
42. *Ibid*; she received 'a year's wages due 19th' on 26 May 1766.
43. *Ibid*, 14 August 1757, 'Pd Mr Fenton that brought my Commission of Deputy Lieutenant of the West Riding.....£1.1.0'.
44. *Ibid*, 23 August 1757, 'Pd Excise for Postchaise....£4.0.0.'
45. *Ibid*, 4 January 1757 and 20 November 1762.
46. TA 3/3, letter book 1760-1762, copy letter, 4 November 1760, from WG at Thorp Arch to Wilmer Gossip at Leicester.
47. Hecht, *op.cit*, 164-168 .
48. James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway Founder of the Marine Society*, London, 1985, 80-81.
49. TA 21/5, *op.cit*, copy letter, 15 February 1762, from WG at Thorp Arch to Wilmer Gossip at Leicester.
50. *Ibid*, copy letter, 26 February 1762, from WG at Thorp Arch to Wilmer Gossip at Leicester.
51. TA 7/6, *op.cit*, copy letter, 17 February 1756, from WG at Thorp Arch to George Gossip at Leicester.
52. *Ibid*, letter, 7 March 1756, from WG at Thorp Arch to George Gossip at Leicester.
53. Zinzano, *The Servant's Calling*, London, 1725, 19-20, quoted in J.Holmes, 'Domestic Service in Yorkshire 1650-1780', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York), 1989, 100, n. 163.
54. TA 7/6 , *op.cit*, copy letter stuck in letter book, nd [May 1754?] from WG at Thorp Arch to J. Wilmer, York [his lawyer]. It has not proved possible to identify the role occupied by John Smith in the house as there are no surviving account or day books for the period 1754-6.
55. R.Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, New York 1978, 146.
56. Holmes, *op.cit*, 104.
57. Mitchell, *op.cit*, 136.
58. L.Stone, *Broken Lives, Separation and Divorce 1660-1857 in England*, Oxford, 1993, 238.