

## Inside the Victorian Home

*A Portrait of Domestic Life  
in Victorian England*

JUDITH FLANDERS

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With a wealth of details, this knowledgeable and intriguing book revisits an often overfantasized aspect of British history: the Victorian household. From modern TV programs to recent Hollywood movie extravaganzas, this imagined iconic environment is a Garden of Eden compared with the daily realities that people actually faced. Not only was this an era fueled by a heavy, dirty commodity—coal—it lacked most of the conveniences we take for granted today.

Flanders relies on period diaries, letters, and other sources to present a new and gritty reality. Teething at that time, for example, was thought to cause nearly 16 percent of all child deaths, not because it was fatal physiologically, but because of the deadly consequences of how it was treated. Another detail:

*Kitchen ranges and fires for heating throughout the house, together with London's foggy climate, ensured that the city was filthy, inside and out.*

Primarily focusing on the middle class, the book also includes a pertinent perspective on the servants who often toiled in Victorian homes and the unwelcome consequences when a woman lost a husband. Themes are roughly organized around profiles of various rooms—the kitchen, the parlor, etc.—and provide a starting point for wider exploration of activities and issues, including entertaining, cooking, and bathing. The outside world is also included, especially the culture and street life encountered while traveling within a major city at the time. Although many, if not most, of the details of daily life in this era will appear grim to us, the author presents an objective view, including other, more uplifting aspects as well. As she states:

*It is too easy for us to think of the Victorian era—or any part of the past—as “romantic.” For some it was an endless succession of cold, dirt, and dark, of black bombazine and narrow stairs. For others, though, it was fuchsine and peacock blue, as well as celadon skies*

—Kim Long ■