

Professions |

THE REAL DOWNTON ABBEY

Che funzione ha esattamente un maggiordomo (oltre ad essere il sospettato numero uno dei gialli)? Alla gestione domestica classica oggi si sono aggiunte mansioni più moderne, ma la parola d'ordine rimane sempre una: **discrezione**. La professione, lungi dall'essere obsoleta, è molto richiesta e aperta anche alle donne. Ecco dove si può imparare, e le doti che occorrono per fare carriera.

BY LOUISE JOHNSON

B2 UPPER INTERMEDIATE

Finding a job is not easy these days, but in recent years there has been a big **rise**¹ in demand for highly-trained butlers and the popularity of TV series *Downton Abbey* may have contributed.

In the 1930s, there were about 30,000 butlers in Britain, but this number had fallen to just 100 by the 1980s. However, recent estimates put the number of butlers in Britain today at more than 5,000. Many butlers also work abroad.

ASK JEEVES

Today a butler has to be versatile – a modern Jeeves will still perform traditional duties, such as looking after the wine and silver. However, he (or she) will also be expected to use a smartphone and send an email.

Butlers are no longer only found in the houses of the very rich. They may also work in five-star hotels and restaurants, as well as on board cruise ships and private yachts. And while a butler is traditionally male, more women are now joining the profession. Indeed these days a female

butler is sometimes preferred, especially with Middle and Far Eastern families.

LEARNING THE ART

Gary Williams is training director at The British Butler Institute. Williams, who names *Downton Abbey*'s Charles Carson as his favourite **fictional**² butler, says that new money in countries, such as China, has also **boosted**³ demand for butlers. British-trained butlers are particularly desirable. Williams decided to become a butler after seeing the 1993 film *The Remains of the Day*⁴, which starred Anthony Hopkins, who played Mr Stevens. Williams has worked as a butler at The Ritz and the Brazilian Embassy. **He has looked after** **royalty**⁵, top politicians and celebrities.

One of his most unusual requests was to take an internet entrepreneur's dog for a ride in a helicopter. Williams says that a butler can earn approximately £70,000 (€83,000) a year with the right qualifications and experience.

For more information
www.britishbutlerinstitute.com

GLOSSARY

- 1 **rise**: aumento
- 2 **fictional**: di fantasia
- 3 **has also boosted**: ha fatto crescere anche
- 4 **The Remains of the Day**: Quel che resta del giorno
- 5 **he has looked after royalty**: ha seguito persone della famiglia reale

INTERVIEW YOU RANG, SIR?

Gary Williams (pictured right) was born in England and grew up in South Africa, but he decided to return to the mother country in order to become a butler after seeing Anthony Hopkins play one in the film, *The Remains of the Day*. Today he is training director at the British Butler Institute. We asked him what it took to be a good butler:

Gary Williams

You need to be highly trained, but the most important thing is your attitude. It's a very **demanding**¹ job and you need to be flexible: the more you get paid, the less life you've got. If you're not flexible, you won't survive, and if you're **rude**², or communicate badly, you won't survive!

What sort of things does the British Butler Institute teach?

Gary Williams

Courses last five days or four weeks. There are 75 **subjects**³, including how to **pack a suitcase**⁴, cocktail mixology, event organisation, fine dining, care of silver, art, crystal, furniture and shoes, chauffeuring, cookery and crisis management. It's very intense!

There are a lot of women butlers these days. Why is that?

Gary Williams

Demand is growing and 50 per cent of our students are now ladies. This is because Middle Eastern families prefer them. There's also high demand for superyacht chief stewardesses and **cabin crew**⁵ on private jets.

Why is the demand for butlers growing?

Gary Williams

The Chinese are going crazy for British butlers. In my opinion there will never be enough butlers. ☹

GLOSSARY

- 1 **demanding**: impegnativo
- 2 **rude**: scortese
- 3 **subjects**: materie
- 4 **to pack a suitcase**: preparare una valigia
- 5 **cabin crew**: assistenti di volo
- 6 **device**: espediente
- 7 **fears change**: teme il cambiamento
- 8 **skills**: capacità

Famous fictional butlers

A fictional butler is a popular **device**⁶ in film, theatre and literature. For it is the butler who sees the **folly** of his richer – but often less intelligent – employer. Here are some examples of fictional butlers:

Reginald Jeeves – the most famous of all butlers from P. G. Wodehouse's stories. Jeeves works for Bertie

Wooster and is much cleverer than his rich employer. **Mr Stevens** – from writer Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*. Stevens puts duty above his own feelings.

Charles Carson – from *Downton Abbey*. Carson has worked for the Crawley family at Downton since he was a boy, and **fears change**⁷.

Do you want to be a butler?

You do not need to be British to be a British-trained butler. However, the qualities you will need include:

- Excellent **organisational skills**⁸.
- **Team** worker as well as **leadership** qualities.
- **Etiquette** knowledge, excellent **manners** and social skills.
- **Versatility** today the role demands old and new skills from cleaning silver to using apps.
- Ability to speak more than one **language** is useful.
- Being **invisible** yet available, **friendly** but not familiar.

