

## Linguistic anachronisms

The following words and phrases were used in the first season (2010) of the ITV television series *Downton Abbey*; page numbers refer to the published script. The series is set in 1912. Dates of the first recorded usage in the *OED* are noted. Items first written down in the 1920s may of course have been used in speech a decade or so earlier, so whether the usage is a genuine anachronism then becomes a question of interpretation: would the characters in an aristocratic establishment have been likely to use such new forms (such as the Americanisms noted below)?

### *cheerio*

Episode 1, p. 19: Thomas relates how Bates's predecessor left: 'Came down one morning, said cheerio, and that was it.' *OED*: *cheero* 1910, *cheeryo* in naval usage 1914; *cheero* recorded until 1918, and then overlaps with *cheerio*, which takes off in the 1920s.

### *fiddly*

Episode 2, p. 130: Matthew describes a pair of cufflinks as 'a bit fiddly', a usage not recorded until 1926.

### *deb*

Episode 3, p. 149: Evelyn describes his horse as being 'as jumpy as a deb at her first ball', an abbreviation not recorded until 1920.

### *done and dusted*

Episode 4, p. 219: O'Brien says: 'that's Her Greatness done and dusted for the night' – a colloquial idiom not recorded until 1953.

### *to flannel*

Episode 4, p. 235. William has paid Mrs Hughes a compliment, who responds by saying: 'Stop flannelling and get on.' This slang use, meaning 'flatter', is not recorded until 1941.

### *banging on*

Episode 4, p. 238: Mary says Sybil was 'banging on about her new frock' – a usage not recorded until 1979.

### *cover*

Episode 5, p. 263: Gwen asks Anna if she hid her absence from the others: 'Did you cover for me?' This sense (covering up for an employee) is not recorded until 1968.

### *grouch*

Episode 5, p. 285: Thomas tells O'Brien: 'Don't be such a grouch.' This word was first recorded in the US in 1900, but there is no record of it in the UK until 1957. Would such an Americanism be known in these circles?

### *see red*

Episode 6, p. 314: Marty tells Matthew that Sybil has discovered politics, 'which of course makes Papa see red.' This American usage is recorded from 1900, but would it have been used by English aristocrats?

*get*

Episode 6, p. 317: Gwen tells Sybil: 'Forgive me, m'lady, but you don't get it.' This usage, to mean 'understand', is recorded in the US in 1907, but would it have travelled?

*hit the roof*

Episode 6, p. 329: Mary says that 'Lord Grantham will hit the roof' – an American usage first recorded there in 1921.

*picky*

Episode 6, p. 340: Violet suggests a foreign husband for Mary: 'you can normally find an Italian who isn't too picky.' This word, in its sense of 'fastidious', is very colloquial, and not recorded until 1957. Would Violet ever have used such a word? This is a woman (p. 95) who looks down on such words as 'weekend' and 'jobs'.