

Insider



Q&A LADY CARNARVON

NI: What will your presentation cover?

Lady Carnarvon: I'm going to start by introducing Highclere and some of its history. The earliest written records are from 1,300 years ago; it is thinking about the history of Highclere and how *Downton Abbey* has made it three-dimensional, giving people engagement with all the characters. I don't speak with notes and look to see where the engagement is. The topics are enormous.

What is it like living in a house that is also a museum?

I didn't want to live in a house that was a museum. So I turned it around. I wanted to make sure that Highclere was always a home. I think the warmth and energy of people are what give it interest, rather than just dusty objects in glass cabinets. There are beautiful works of art, but I think it's more immediate and of much more interest to people when they are in a room that is used by people.

LIVING HISTORY

A legion of fans continue to be enthralled by the fictional lives of the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants on the colossal TV hit *Downton Abbey*, even after the final season aired in 2015. Neapolitans can peer into the real-world setting for the show, Highclere Castle, this month. The Right Honorable Countess of Carnarvon, wife of the Eighth Earl of Carnarvon, will speak February 4 at The Art of Giving luncheon presented by members of Trinity-by-the-Cove Church to benefit the Archangel Fund for Collier County Charities (artofgivingnaples.org). She and her husband manage the businesses and custodianship of the castle. The family also hosts 30 to 40 special events annually at Highclere for a broad range of charities. We spoke with Lady Carnarvon about the past and present inhabitants of the castle, where the Carnarvon family has resided since 1679. She has published several books on its history, with the next one, *At Home: Entertaining at the Real Downton Abbey*, scheduled for release this spring. —Kat Smith

Tell us about the upcoming book.

There have been many statesmen, royalty, literary figures, musicians who have stayed at Highclere—that's what I am touching on. I had two things rolling around in my head: One was a line from Maggie Smith on the show, "What is a weekend?" Some of the people who have stayed were rather important, and in some ways give the house the gravitas that does not perhaps come across so strongly in *Downton Abbey*. It is a family home, but it played a role in some major political episodes in the Victorian period.

Does the book include recipes?

It does! It's got about 100 menus and recipes from Victorian times. Some of the details of the dinner parties are quite fun, and the food photography is outstanding. It's a joy to share the great dishes Paul Brooke-Taylor, our chef, prepared, but also some are things that I would cook. I like cooking, and it's an important part of our family life.

Any parting thoughts?

I hope when people visit Highclere, they have a good time and come away with some reflective thoughts. That's what *Downton* does. We're lucky that people have been entertained and spurred on to read a little history. If we study history, perhaps we can better understand where we are today and how to approach the future. History matters.