

## **At Home in London, 1600 – 1800: New 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> galleries to open on 14 November 2006**

This autumn, a major programme of refurbishment will reach completion and over half of the Geffrye's galleries will re-open to the public, completely re-thought and re-presented. The *At Home* project includes four brand new period rooms, dated 1630, 1695, 1745 and 1790, a series of new interpretive galleries, two new audio guides and a specially devised education and events programme.

This is a significant development, as the old displays had been largely unchanged for nearly 50 years and museum practice, scholarship and society have moved on considerably. "Opportunities to completely overhaul our permanent displays are relatively rare", says the museum's director, David Dewing. "In 1998, as part of our Branson Coates-designed extension, we had the good fortune to be able to create new 20<sup>th</sup> century period rooms, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century period rooms were refreshed in 1995. But a serious re-think of the early displays has not been possible until now", says Dewing.

Dewing highlights both the importance and the sensitivity of the project: "The Geffrye's challenge is to ensure that these displays are not simply evocative and, occasionally, nostalgic; they must accurately represent the changing homes of London's middle classes. This can only be achieved after years of intensive research. We recognise that history changes as evidence is discovered, knowledge is enhanced and fresh interpretations are reached; the new displays have been conceived for an audience which is diverse, demanding, engaged and questioning."

Several important objects have been acquired for the *At Home* project, including a set of six oak 'joint' stools from about 1620, the only set of its type in a publicly accessible collection. Another exciting addition to the collection is a pair of walnut chairs dating from around 1725. These are the only known chairs to bear a label from one of the workshops in the St Paul's Churchyard area, which was the main centre for the furniture trades in the late-17<sup>th</sup> and early-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Old and Ody label makes them very significant in terms of furniture history and considerably enhances the standing of the museum's collection. Several key acquisitions of domestic technology, ephemera and books have also been made, including *The New London Family Cook*, a recipe book from 1807 with information on household management which was directed at the London market. It includes listings of London trades people and markets as well as domestic cleaning advice.

The Geffrye is well known for its chronological series of period rooms, which span from 1600 to 2000. This contextual approach is both compelling and accessible; it enables visitors of all ages and interests to engage with the museum's collections in an intimate and direct way. Visitors often remark that the period rooms enable them to "walk through time", glimpsing the changing homes of Londoners over 400 years, and that they "bring history to life".

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The interiors and domestic lives of the urban middle classes have had comparatively little scholarly attention but the Geffrye has made this its primary focus; the refurbished galleries will reflect recent ideas and observations on this area of our cultural history. As Dewing observes “there is much to discover about the urban middle classes, how they lived, how their tastes and aspirations were formed, how they expressed their identity through the rooms they furnished. They rose from being a relatively tiny group in society in the seventeenth century to the dominant group today. They have been an increasingly powerful and influential force and in many ways they are closer to what we mean by ‘English’ than the royalty and aristocracy.”



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## Detailed Information

### Background to the research

Our approach in creating these new displays has been to start with the evidence. We have combed through original material in the form of inventories, contemporary accounts and diaries, and we have studied recently published historical research of relevance. This work coincided with our special exhibition in 2003 and '04, *Home and Garden*, in which we examined representations of the middle classes in paintings and drawings from 1675 to 1914 (see Notes to Editors, below). We have worked with a number of specialist historians advising on, for example, domestic architecture, paint finishes, textiles and plasterwork. Using all of this information we gradually arrived at decisions on the key dates for our new period rooms, the architectural ‘shells’ for which will be based on existing examples wherever possible. The dates we have chosen for the new period rooms (1630, 1695, 1745 and 1790) allow us to demonstrate significant shifts in middle-class domestic conditions and behaviours, in notions of propriety and good taste, and in the choices of materials, decorative finishes and styles which were available and affordable to the middle classes.

### Room I, 1630

#### A hall in a timber-framed house in the City of London

Inventories indicate that the hall was the main living space at this time, used for daily household activities such as dining, leisure (gaming, reading and music-making), receiving guests and probably some aspects of work. The walls will be panelled from floor to ceiling in new oak, lightly stained and polished. The brick-lined fireplace will have andirons and a fireback suitable for a log fire. The ceiling will be plastered, with a lime-wash finish. The room will include two leaded casement windows.

The choice of furniture, all original to the period, will be based on information from inventories and other accounts. Replica curtains will be made from green ‘say’, a twill-weave wool. Floorboards will be covered with a woven rush mat. The main furnishings, all of oak, will include a court cupboard; a rare set of joined (or ‘joint’) stools; a draw-leaf table; an armchair (or ‘great chair’) and a small oak chest. Examples of this type of house are now rare; Staple’s Inn in Holborn provides a good reference as does the Merchant’s House in Marlborough.

## **Room 2, 1695**

### A parlour in a post-Fire-of-London house

The parlour at this time was often the front room on the first floor, usually occupying the full width of the house, with three sash windows looking onto the street. Rooms were generally panelled from floor to ceiling and often painted in a single colour, in this case, a stone colour. The Geffrye's layout will include a fireplace with a marble surround and hearth, furnished with a basket grate suitable for a coal fire. The floor will be plain boards with no covering.

The parlour was used for receiving visitors, which often involved serving food and drink, but was also an important space for daily household activity. The Geffrye's room will reflect these different functions. Inventories of this period mark the introduction of the caned chair and writing desks also appear in middle-class households of the time, in line with the rise of literacy. Other new types of furniture and decorative arts become increasingly common in domestic interiors: mirrors, clocks (a reflection of the increasing importance of time-keeping), drinking glasses, china and delftware. The main furnishings in the Geffrye's period room will include: a walnut-veneered fall-front desk on chest, by John Guilbaud, a London maker, c1700; a gate-leg table; a set of seven caned chairs; a walnut mirror; replica curtains of green 'camlet' and a selection of paintings and prints. Examples of this type of house survive in Denmark Street, Soho.

## **Room 3, 1745**

### A parlour in a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century house

The parlour continued to be the main living space, the focus for daily activities. This room will show the evidence of the influence of 'politeness' as an appropriate mode of behaviour for the middle classes. This advocated restraint over opulent display. The acquisition of necessary 'social accomplishments' became increasingly important. Being able to take tea correctly, sustain polite conversation, play card games competently and enjoy music were seen as valuable, indeed necessary, social skills.

Key stylistic shifts will be evidenced in the furniture and decoration of the room. These include the taste for flatter panelling, here painted a sage green colour. The fireplace will have a marble surround and hearth, with a built-in grate. The room will include the following furnishings: a matching set of four walnut, India-back side chairs; a mahogany dining table; a mahogany tripod table; a sconce; an ebonised bracket clock; replica curtains of crimson moiré (wool with watered patterning, called 'marine' at the time) and paintings and prints. Examples of this type of house survive in Spitalfields and Soho.

## **Room 4, 1790**

### A parlour at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

Although the same basic architectural shell as the preceding room, the treatment of the walls in this space has changed. A taste for 'neater', cleaner and lighter effects will be evident. Instead of panelling, the walls will be plastered above the dado, in a pearly grey ground with floral pattern and a neo-classical border. A replica cut-pile carpet with a pale cream ground and a sprigs and stripes design of the 1790s will cover most of the floor; replica curtains will be blue damask. The room will include a fireplace with wooden surround with a cast-iron fitted hob grate and a plaster frieze cornice.

As well as being the setting for the usual daily activities, the parlour would also be used for informal evening entertaining such as card parties, at which punch or other light refreshments would be served. Furniture, now often with flatter decorative surfaces, will include a bureau bookcase; card table; Pembroke table; a set of mahogany carved back chairs with horsehair seats; a pier glass and a selection of paintings and prints. Examples of this type of house survive in Goodge Street and Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1) For further information and images please contact Nancy Loader, Press Officer, on 020 7739 9893 or [nloader@geffrye-museum.org.uk](mailto:nloader@geffrye-museum.org.uk)
- 2) The Geffrye Museum presents the quintessential style of English urban middle-class interiors from 1600 to the present day through a chronological sequence of period rooms. The museum is set in the former almshouses of the Ironmongers' Company, elegant 18th century buildings surrounded by tranquil gardens, including an award-winning walled herb garden and a series of period gardens in Shoreditch, East London.
- 3) The museum's guidebook will be re-written to reflect the new displays; publication is scheduled for early 2007.
- 4) **Forthcoming Special Exhibition**

### HOME AND GARDEN

**PART 3 (1914-1960): 20 February – 24 June 2007**

**PART 4 (1960-present): 16 October 2007 – 4 February 2008**

This major exhibition will explore the representation of urban domestic interiors and gardens in paintings during the twentieth century. It will pick up where the Geffrye's acclaimed exhibitions of the same name, which covered the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, left off. Again, the focus will be on the homes of the middle classes rather than those of Royalty or the aristocracy. It will bring together pieces from collections across the UK to be shown not simply as works of art, but interpreted as historical documents with detailed evidence for understanding the nature of middle-class domestic interiors and gardens. Works by both famous artists, including Walter Sickert, Carel Weight, Paul Nash and Patrick Caulfield, and those who are less well-known, such as John Pearce and Stuart Pearson Wright, will be displayed in two groups of about 40 paintings and drawings. Accompanied by a full-colour catalogue.

- 5) The Geffrye Museum is an independent charitable trust, grant-aided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Trust actively seeks to attract donations and corporate sponsorship to support the museum's services and development plans.
- 6) Admission: FREE  
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Web Address: [www.geffrye-museum.org.uk](http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk)  
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Opening Hours: Tues - Sat 10am - 5pm, Sun and Bank Holiday Mons 12 - 5pm  
Travel: Buses: 149, 242, 243, 67, 394  
Tube: Liverpool St, then bus 149 or 242/Old St (exit 2), then bus 243