

News from the Museum of the Home

It has been a tumultuous year for the museum sector, but while COVID-19 has caused a large delay to our redevelopment works, we count ourselves very fortunate – and are truly excited – to be able to re-open to the public in the first half of 2021.

Since the last time we appeared in this *Newsletter* we have undergone a rather radical transformation. We have changed our name from the Geffrye Museum to the Museum of the Home. With the new name comes a wider vision for what the Museum seeks to examine and uncover, looking at the personal and emotional side of home as well as the history of home as a physical space filled with objects.

Our new Home Galleries explore what home has meant to different people at different times over the past 400 years. Running the length of the period rooms above, the Home Galleries will offer a thematic approach to the history of home: from faith and worship, to housework, to home entertainment. It is an opportunity for us to mix-up objects from our collection in new ways that we hope will be unexpected and thought-provoking for visitors. In *Bought, Found, Given*, which looks at the many ways objects enter into our possession, a grand seventeenth-century ebony veneer cabinet that was a gift to the diarist John Evelyn from his wife, will sit alongside a similar gift of a bright orange 1970s plastic cassette tape holder, and an Apple Macintosh that was taken as payment-in-kind from a neighbour in return for some home decorating.



Oak chest of drawers, Thomas Reynolds, 1728, © Museum of the Home



A Mendlesham Windsor chair from the Cotton Collection in one of our new collections stores, © Museum of the Home

Also in this gallery will be a small eighteenth-century chest of drawers, which, as well as being hugely significant as the earliest firmly dated English chest of drawers with bracket feet as original fittings, also retains a wonderful pencil inscription that brings the object to life: 'May the 21st, 1728 made for Mary Reynolds by Thos Reynolds in Bell Lane, Spittle fealds.'

The period rooms, which I am sure many of you are familiar with, will be returning as the Rooms Through Time, with updated interpretation and a brand new 1870s room, set during a séance. They will be complimented by a new introductory gallery called Domestic Game Changers, which presents a collection of household objects that have had profound and surprising effects on domestic life and the shape of our homes since the 1600s.

Another major part of the redevelopment project has been the construction of new collection stores. Previously our stores had been in the cramped almshouse basements, which, as you might imagine, were not ideal for storing vulnerable historic objects. The Cotton Collection of English regional chairs was completely inaccessible, hidden away on mezzanines above the period rooms due to a lack of space. Now we

have a range of purpose-built stores, including one dedicated to the Cotton Collection, which will be highlighted by the display of a Mendlesham Windsor chair.

Our aim is for no object to be off-limits to visitors and researchers. The new Collections Library will be a crucial component of this, with members of the public able to request objects for study or browse the library at their leisure. We also want to make the objects in storage play just as big a part as those on display by using additional interpretation, guided store tours, and conservation workshops. In addition, we will soon be launching Collections Online, which will make almost our entire collections database available online, enabling anyone to find information and images for our 30,000+ objects.

We hope that we will be welcoming all of you from the RFS when our doors finally open again this year. In the meantime, do visit our website, where you can keep up-to-date with everything that's happening in the run-up to our re-opening, and find out ways you can support us in the final stages of the redevelopment project:
<https://www.museumofthehome.org.uk/>.

Louis Platman

Museum of the Home

lplatman@museumofthehome.org.uk