

# The Dining Room



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The dining room played host to dinner parties and family meals. The owner also used this room to conduct business and meet clients.

## Was this room the original dining room?

Yes, indicated by two features. The black marble chimneypiece, which has survived in situ, was a traditional feature in dining rooms of this period. Secondly, old plans of the house show a sideboard recess in the north wall, which was later removed. The Turkey carpet was also traditional in dining rooms.



The colour scheme has been reproduced as it was in 1796, the year the house was built. The original pine woodwork was stained to resemble mahogany, a fashionable treatment in the late 18th-century. Today, the wood has been grained because staining gives an inferior finish and is very costly.

## How was dinner served at this time?

The dining table is set in the traditional (French) style, with all the courses on the table at the same time: soup tureen at one end, fish at the other and covered vegetable dishes in the centre. Meat was served from the sideboard. Before dessert the tablecloth would have been removed and the table relaid. In the early 19th century, the modern (Russian) style was gradually introduced, with dinner being served one course at a time.

The dinner hour was also changing in the late 18th century, moving gradually from 2 to 5 o'clock – reflecting the altered business requirements in this period. The hob grate, which is similar to those made by the Carron Iron Company in Falkirk, highlights the industrial changes of the late 18th century.



Above top: View of the dining room with table set in the traditional French style

Above: The vestal lamps give the sideboard a theatrical feel

On most occasions the servants waited at table, with the butler in charge of the wine and the meat. The servants,

however, were not always required, and at these times the dumb waiters (at either end of the sideboard) were used diagonally at each end of the table. Gossip and scandal overheard at the dinner table was often sold to other houses by the servants!

Within its lower section the sideboard contains a pewter chamber pot. After dinner, once the ladies had withdrawn, the gentlemen were free to use the pot. How manners and

etiquette have changed! Eating manners were also a little different. It was customary to eat directly from the knife as well as the fork – hence the knives have broad, round blades.



Above top: Guests enjoy the dinner party (still from Georgian House film)

Above: Georgina, with eyes only for Captain Abercromby! (still from Georgian House film)

## Furniture and Fittings

The drop-leaf dining table is from the late 18th century, while the Edinburgh made “brander back” dining chairs date from c.1770-1790. Red leather seat covers were common as they were easily cleaned and always looked good. The sideboard is Scottish, c.1795, with a characteristic superstructure and thistles on the brass knobs. It is mahogany veneered with cross banding and satinwood stringing. The solid mahogany double-leaf breakfast table dates from c.1760, the stained mahogany dumb waiters are c.1770, while the Hepplewhite style writing desk is mahogany veneered, on square tapering legs, c.1800.

Benjamin Merriman of London made the walnut longcase clock, inlaid with seaweed marquetry. It dates from c.1685. The vestal virgin lamps give the room a theatrical feel and were designed to light a sideboard recess. One is original with an Edinburgh New Town provenance; the other is a modern copy. The black-painted and gilt-carved chimney glass dates from the Regency period.

## Decorative China, Silver and Plate

The dinner service is Wedgwood, probably made in the 1820s, although the Absalom Pillar design dates from 1812. The vases are Paris, early 19th century. Much of the ‘silver’ is Sheffield plate (copper with silver plating on top), dating from the period 1785–1805. In the houses of professional people, plate was favoured because it was considerably cheaper but still retained the appearance of solid silver. They were copying the style found in great houses at a fraction of the cost! Similarly, the green handled knives resemble malachite, but are in fact ivory stained with verdigris. The small pot resembling a coffee pot is an Argyle, invented in the mid 18th century by the 3rd Duke of Argyll, and used to keep gravy hot.

*Paintings – see separate sheet*

