

The Parlour



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The Parlour was the family sitting room. Guests invited for afternoon tea were entertained here.

The parlour or 'back drawing room' was more informal and intimate than the front drawing room. As a place for the family to relax, how did they spend their time?

They read newspapers or the latest books and articles, wrote letters, listened to music, and studied the globes. The ladies also pursued hobbies such as needlework or paperwork. Music was provided by the barrel organ (situated between the windows), a mechanical musical instrument, dating from c.1800. There are examples of needlework – gros point embroidery on the fire screen and two embroidered pictures. Paperwork can be seen in the intricately cut paper border surrounding the picture of George III (left of the fireplace) and in the quilling work on the tea caddy (central table), the design being made up of tiny spirals of rolled-up paper.

Guests invited for afternoon tea, a very popular activity in the Georgian period, were entertained in the parlour.

Much ceremony was attached to making the perfect cup, with the hostess delighting in blending the 'right' tea for her guests. All designed, of course, to make the correct impression. The hostess also kept the keys to the tea caddies and tea table (in the drawing room). Tea was taxed in this period and therefore quite expensive – locks prevented the servants from helping themselves! However, they could re-use the spent tealeaves.

Why is the parlour also called the 'back drawing room'?

Large numbers of guests were often invited for the evening, sometimes too many for the drawing room alone. On such occasions the parlour was also used for entertaining. Thus the frieze, cornice, and colour scheme in the two rooms is identical.

Above top: View of the Parlour

Above: Guests enjoy a cup of afternoon tea (still from Georgian House film)



The carpet is Heriz and the curtains (as elsewhere in the house) are cut long, reflecting the fashion of the period. Fashionable, but also very practical for protecting against draughts.

Were children allowed in the parlour?

Yes. The nursery, where the children stayed much of the time, was on the top floor, but they also spent time with their parents in this room. Their mother probably taught them the basics of reading and writing. Young girls were also taught needlework – their samplers showing mastery of alphabet and numbers as well as embroidery.


Furniture and Fittings

The tea table (to the right of the fireplace) is mahogany veneered with satinwood cross banding. Made by Bruce and Burns of Edinburgh, c.1795, there was probably a matching card table. The breakfast table in the centre of the room is mahogany, George III, with a rectangular tilt-top. The chairs and window seats covered in red striped material are also English – one of the window seats dates from c.1800, while the other is a modern copy. The set of four, mahogany, side chairs were made by cabinet-maker Alexander Peter in Edinburgh, c.1740. The mahogany bureau bookcase, left of the fireplace, dates from the 1790s and was probably manufactured locally. The larger, late-18th century bookcase is also mahogany with a plain dentil cornice. The barrel organ has a Sheraton-style mahogany case and was sold by Gow and Shepherd of Edinburgh, c.1800. The late 18th century terrestrial and celestial globes were made by Cary and supplied by Messrs. Whyte & Co. of Edinburgh to the original purchaser. The fine mahogany veneered bracket clock is by Diego Evans of London.


Decorative China

There are two services in the bureau bookcase: the blue and white china is Spode, c.1820, while the other is a Chamberlain's Worcester tea and coffee service, c.1805. The tea service on the centre table is Minton, c.1810. The silver teapot was made in 1788 in Newcastle, while the sugar basin and cream jug bear the Edinburgh hallmark for 1813. The neo-classical hot water urn, dating from c.1790, is made from Sheffield plate. On the chimneypiece the square-based figures are Staffordshire, c.1800, and the vases are Derby c.1815. Below the tea table, there is an 18th-century Chinese blue and white vase.


Paintings – see separate sheet



Above top: View of the Parlour showing the barrel organ (still from *Georgian House* film)



Above centre: Mr Lamont and his lawyer in the Parlour (still from *Georgian House* film)



Above: Minton tea service with silver teapot