

Handwritten shorthand symbols on a set of three horizontal lines.

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A series of horizontal blue lines on a white background, intended for handwriting practice.

Rooms

We have been making efforts to visit some of the museums and exhibitions in London over recent months. They are all only a train or bus ride away, so they make a good day out and a break from the computer screen and other indoor duties. I find the journey equally interesting, seeing various other districts from the top deck of the bus or zooming past in the train, all the more pleasant at this time of year because of the hot air emanating from under the train seats. This does have the disadvantage of the shock of the cold air when we get off at the terminus.

After Christmas we visited the Geffrye Museum of the Home in Shoreditch, which has been on our list for some time, which displays rooms as they were furnished during various centuries. The room exhibitions were decorated for the Christmas season, so that made us hurry up and visit before it all changed. The earliest room was from the sixteen hundreds, and then on through each century, up to the beginning of this century. The older rooms were quite sparse and my first thought was how cold and bare each one looked. It was not the norm then to have lots of soft furniture as we do today, but just wooden tables and chairs. These rooms looked cold, draughty and difficult to heat, so keeping warm was more a matter of dressing oneself appropriately, rather than following our relatively recent custom of insulating and heating the whole house, or at least as much of it as we can manage on the household budget.

With chilly rooms on my mind, I was relieved when we came to the Victorian drawing room, with its thick curtains, carpet, and heavy velvet tablecloth, and at last I felt this was somewhere that would keep the winter cold out and enable the family to enjoy Christmas in front of the fire. It was in this era that houses began to have decorated Christmas trees, popularised by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, so this was the first room to show the beginnings of this

tradition. Cleaning up the dust and the crumbs from afternoon tea would not have been so easy, without the convenience of a hand-held vac to speed things along, but it did have a cosy and friendly atmosphere and one could imagine songs being sung around the upright piano and the Noah's Ark toys on the table making their way to the floor in order to play out their stories and adventures.

The rooms from the nineteen thirties onwards were much simpler and plainer, with fewer pieces and a general absence of decoration. They were certainly tidy and easy to keep clean, with light and space as their primary aims. Moving on to the fifties and sixties, I realised that our own rooms from past years had eventually made it into a museum exhibition. All the rooms were set up alongside one long corridor, so visitors just walked past each one, not into them. I felt like a time traveller going back to visit houses I had never seen and then houses I had indeed seen, and finally ones I had lived in, with the same furniture, furnishings, Christmas decorations and wrapping paper that was so new and exciting at the time. Although the experience was interesting, I would not wish to return to the style of those eras.

Now that we have such a wide variety of styles to choose from, and considering the ease with which we can re-create past styles according to our own taste, it is difficult to know what a future museum might exhibit to typify our current possessions. I am sure they are at this very moment acquiring items for future displays, as once a style goes out of fashion, it is generally shunned for a while, resulting in loss and destruction, until it is far enough back in time to become someone's exciting retro find, a fond reminiscence or item of nostalgia. The few remaining pieces suddenly gain in desirability and value, because the majority have been disposed of as outdated and unwanted. I like to see these historical re-creations, using real pieces from the past, but I am glad to be able to return to convenient, clean, warm modernity. (721 words)