

Throwback Thursday: Through the Keyhole

Thursday 21 May 2020

Welcome to Throwback Thursday: Through the Keyhole – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

We are all getting quite used to seeing inside people's homes at the moment during lockdown. We see the backgrounds of people's homes and rooms when watching the news or television 'made at home' or, for some, having meet-ups, online quizzes or meetings via Zoom or Teams. Sometimes it becomes the point of discussion in a TV interview or a conversation starter (what's that on your bookshelf?). In his ever-popular morning exercise workout show, Joe Wicks keeps our attention by rearranging his shelves each day with different items from his house (admitting they are fast running out of objects not used before). Other presenters in different shows in lockdown also do the same. We even get the impromptu arrivals of cats walking into shot, stealing the attention.

We have all spent more time in our homes than usual during lockdown. It is no wonder then that [Art UK](#) in today's #OnlineArt is focussing on looking at 'homes' in art. [Grayson Perry's Art Club](#) on Channel 4 this week looked at creating art being inspired by 'view from my windows' (we were ahead of the game with that, with our [post back in April](#)). So let us look at some paintings and photographs from our collections of the interiors of our homes.

We will begin with this exquisitely painted watercolour of the beautiful interior of the 17th century [Priory in Church Lane](#) in Tottenham. The scene shows the dining room with a young girl quietly writing or reading at the table, in front of a warming fire. The only light source it would appear comes through the windows and from the fire, with all the shadows and details picked out on the highly ornate plaster ceiling in different shades of blue.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

This is the home of Reverend Denton Jones, the Vicar of [All Hallows' Church](#), Tottenham. In 1905 [The Priory](#) became the vicarage for the church next door (and it still is today). From a letter written in 1978 from Bert Hawkes (of [Edmonton Hundred Historical Society](#)) to Mr Ashmore the Director of Libraries & Museum, we learn that the young girl is a relative of Rev'd Denton Jones. From the 1911 census, we can establish that his niece, Ruth Mary Jones aged 14, was living at The Priory at the time. From the look of the furnishings and the age and the dress of the young girl, it would seem likely that the painting dates to this period. We also learn from Bert that the artist was probably Alice Cohen. Clearly a very accomplished artist, we know from another image in our collection that John T. Cohen, the headmaster of Tottenham Grammar School, had his portrait painted by his artist daughter, A. Dorothy Cohen RA (1887-1960). Her first name was Alice, but was known professionally by her middle name. So it is very probable this is by the same artist.

A view of another dining room is the subject of the following painting (below), undertaken by local artist [Edmund Palao](#) in 1993. It shows his family home in Crouch End. Normally, Ed paints outside, with his paintings very much of an

urban theme of street views and buildings around London. His paintings are also usually small and portable as this suits his preference to paint in the open air from life – and then (in the past) he would jump on the bus back home afterwards, carrying all his paints and artwork very easily. Some of you will remember [Ed's exhibition](#) at Bruce Castle back in 2012 - *Haringey Impressions: Street views and landscapes* – some may have even bought a local view or two.



© The artist: Edmund Palao

Looking at our photograph collection alongside other paintings from Bruce Castle, we can see a theme of family portraits - with family members coming together to be photographed or painted in a room at home.

In the photograph below, we see Clasford Stirling with his then partner Zadie and their young son Jude. This photograph was taken by Nigel Norie in 1986 for an

exhibition originally at the Camera Work Gallery in Roman Road, before it toured the country. His collection of photographs are all about glimpses of daily life and ordinary people who lived and worked on the estate at Broadwater Farm in Tottenham. This is the family home and family life of Clasford and Zadie in their flat on the estate.

Ordinary and everyday lives they might be in these photographs. But for many, [Clasford Stirling MBE](#) is an extraordinary community mentor and leader, who needs no introduction. Clasford has worked for decades at Broadwater Farm with his team of dedicated volunteer coaches and has developed one of the most successful football academies in London.



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This beautiful family portrait (below) of mother and daughter at home shows Alison Nunes and her little girl. Alison says – ‘This was taken in the late 1960s and shows the front room, the room where we might have spent some special

family time but was usually kept spic and span as a space to entertain visitors in particular.’ (note the [Antimacassar covers](#) on the back of the sofa - or settee?)



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The painting (above) jumps further back in time to Victorian Bruce Castle and shows the young children of [George Birkbeck Hill](#) playing together at home. Birkbeck Hill was friends with the leading artists of the time, including William Morris. The Hill family knew Pre-Raphaelite artist [Arthur Hughes](#) too - he painted this scene in 1868, as well as other family members in their homes.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

These two photographs (above and below) are an unusual survival. They form part of a family collection of images which were almost thrown away but for a timely intervention and subsequent donation of the photographs to Bruce Castle. Fortunately, the images were all referenced as to who they were. So, we can tell you that these show Jessie A. Kemp (above) and her husband Edward Kemp (below), both sitting in different rooms in their house at 12 Elgin Road, Wood Green in 1916. Edward is described as a clerk. The family looks as though they are well-off, judging by the nice furniture and great number of ornaments, pictures and other decorative features. It was the family home for some decades with one of their children, Olive, living with them into adulthood, presumably looking after the couple as they got older.



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From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The view above is one of a series of photographs taken of Brook House, Tottenham High Road in 1954. No people in this photo - but we know it was the home of the Klemantaski family from 1898 – 1956 (their family story and the history of the house can be found in *'Lost Houses of Haringey'* (Haringey Community Information & Hornsey Historical Society, 1986). The Klemantaskis were a wealthy Jewish family and ran the Boundary Wool & Hair Mills on the High Road (next door to their large house and near to the Edmonton boundary). Their daughter Alida married the poet [Harold Monro](#) in 1920 and ran his Poetry Bookshop in Bloomsbury.

This snapshot perhaps shows that they were perhaps not quite so familiar with the idea of watching the television, given the position of the chair right on top of the box. In 1954 they would have been amongst the first of the growing number of people getting their first television sets. Of course, TV wasn't on all day as it is now, so maybe it was only used on the odd occasion. The house itself was demolished in 1956, making way for the Cannon Rubber factory.

By sharp contrast, the photograph below from the 1950s shows an older lady sitting in her home, not far from Brook House. This lady lived in Love Lane. It is quite likely this was her living room and bedroom combined, given the presence of what looks like a bed by her chair.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Although we might not always have pictures of the inside of people's homes, we do have some descriptions. Here is Flo Lammas (b.1926) talking about her first married home:

"First two years we lived with Mum. Brimsdown Avenue, from '49-'51. Then his sister's big Georgian house in Northumberland Park, with six flats, and we went there, took the tenancy over. Paid about £120 for the contents of her home, she died the following year. We took over her flat. 'Utility' furniture. Big front room, black marble fireplace, and we had a coke fire, took a whole bag of coke, it was so big.

Small kitchen, door at the side as a coal cupboard, with boards up. Hot water geyser, big 'butler' sink, gas cooker, table and some chairs.

Quite large bedroom, white marble fireplace, we could change everything because we didn't have any children till 1959 so we had time. Bedroom suite I've still got. Gave my niece the Utility stuff. Got our furniture in Enfield Highway, big wardrobes, double wardrobes, dressing-table, bed, all matching. Lino floor, rug at the side of the bed, we bought those I think. Overhead light, no lamps. One bedroom, large.

Front room fireplace was magnificent, black marble. Big settee and armchairs, we could do this, no kids. Bought them in Tottenham, furniture shop in front of the Spurs ground. I was working in the laundry at first, and then the factories, he was working at the Gas company in Willoughby Lane.

Kitchen cabinet in the kitchen, drop-down shelf. I had that right up til' 2003, cream, kept the food there. Little space on the side in the passage for the saucepans.

Original bathroom, blue-and-white flowered toilet, big bath. Next-door's toilet was on the landing. Beautiful bathroom.

We were there til' 1963. Compulsory purchase. We had the boy in his cot with us for three years. Then we got moved to the tower block near Earlsmead school. Luckily they moved all of us together from the house so we knew the people."



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Above and below are two photographs of the interiors of Nissan-style prefabs in Tottenham seen in c.1950. We don't know exactly in which prefabs these views were taken, but similar curved-shape prefabs were in different parts of the area, including White Hart Lane. Many of the residents of prefabs had been rehoused after the bombings in the Second World War. It was their home. For some it was a hard wrench to leave their homes when the time came to move to more permanent housing.



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Below, we hear more about a first married home in Tottenham, this time from Queenie Rawle (b.1924) and Les Rawle (b.1925):

“We lived with Mum for only three months because her landlord lived in the upstairs flat and wouldn’t allow us to stay longer. Luckily my aunt heard of one room with use of bathroom for 2/6d per week! We were lucky at that time to find any accommodation at all.

When we went to Rowley Road we just had the one room at first because there was an old lady there, in the top flat, but she was in hospital so she wasn’t actually there, and then her son came and moved all her things and we were able to take over the whole of the top. It wasn’t a purpose-built flat, it was just one house, but the top was sub-let to us.

As you went up the stairs the door was right in front of you, bathroom on the right, and it made a very short passage, and the gas stove was just inside the door. Then the fireplace came forward. One window at the back, we looked over the garden and Ritchies Road.

It was unfurnished. We bought our bedroom suite a year before we were married. Les’ mum had it in her front room. It was new, we got it from ‘Ideal Home’ in Wood Green, opposite Noel Park Station. About £75, not Utility, walnut veneer. Bed, wardrobe, tallboy, and a dressing-table with a triple mirror. We’ve still got it. This is what we had in our one room. There was old lino on the floor, I think brown parquet type.

We decorated when we took over the whole flat. My father helped, it was his trade.

In the 1950s we bought a dining-room suite, sideboard, refectory table and four chairs, all walnut, from 'Ideal Home' again. We had two easy-chairs, very 1930s style so I bought springs and I made cushions, and a cushion to go over the back of the wooden frame.

I had made a rug in 1940-something for my bedroom at mum's, so we used that and we made a smaller one with the oddments left over. I drew a design. Otherwise it was lino on the floor.

For the front room we bought a lino square from Burgess's I think. I think it was beige and green colours, autumn colours were popular at the time. Beige/green/orange lino, the walls were a strong cream, not emulsion, distemper. Les did it. We had a border along the top of the wall, below the ceiling, we didn't have a picture-rail. You had to cut them, flowers or leaves, for the borders, they came in small rolls.

I think we had an ordinary light shade with a fringe as the centre light. Before that they were glass shades with a gas mantle. I think the electricity was installed about 1950. I gave up work in December 1950 when I was expecting Philip. He was born in 1951."

And finally, we come to our last two photographs. They show the front room of 22 Ranelagh Road in Tottenham, the home of Jim Clark (b.1925). Sadly, we don't have any written views written by Jim about his home, just a few memories of what he said to us. He was quite exacting in his high standards in maintaining his home. He was also a great photographer. We also know that the view of his front room (below) did not change much over time! Jim's beloved radio sits in the corner (he was even able to get radios going again if broken or even if he found one in a skip, such was his ability). Jim told us he took this self-portrait of him drinking his cup of tea in his front room on 6 January 1980.



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Spot the difference!

This second view was taken on 24 January 1981. There are differences (Jim is not in the second photograph of course). But can you spot them?



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And so ends today's post. Maybe you would like to tune in to Monday's edition of *Grayson Perry's Art Club* next week – the topic is 'homes'!

Take care, stay well, and love your home
Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

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Curator

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