

MUSEUM OF THE HOME

Museum of the Home FAQs

This document contains questions and answers about Museum of the Home, particularly on decolonisation and the statue of Robert Geffrye, the development of the new Rooms Through Time: 1878-2049, and our work with communities.

Contents

Statue of Robert Geffrye	2
Who was Robert Geffrye?.....	2
What is the Museum’s position on the statue?.....	2
What is happening with the statue of Robert Geffrye? When will it be moved?	2
Who is involved in the decision-making process?	3
How is Museum of the Home addressing decolonisation across its work?.....	4
How can visitors find out more and be part of the conversation?	4
Rooms Through Time FAQs	5
Glossary	5
What are the Rooms Through Time?.....	5
Why is the reinterpretation of the Rooms Through Time taking place now?.....	6
How were the Rooms from 1878-2049 developed with the community?.....	6
What did the community consultation identify?	7
How did you decide on each story and character in each room?.....	7
What does co-curation and participatory practice mean?	8
Enquiries	10

Statue of Robert Geffrye

Who was Robert Geffrye?

The Museum of the Home is housed in almshouses built in 1714. The money to build the almshouses came from Sir Robert Geffrye (1613–1704).

There is a replica statue of Robert Geffrye on the Museum's buildings to acknowledge his donation to build the almshouses. The statue reflects the historic connection of the Museum buildings to Robert Geffrye, an English merchant who made part of his money from his investment in transatlantic slavery.

Robert Geffrye is not connected to the founding of the Museum or its collections.

What is the Museum's position on the statue?

Museum of the Home strives to be a welcoming place for all.

There is a profound need for people and institutions to educate themselves about the legacy of structural racism and colonialism. We have a responsibility to act against injustice, and this includes confronting the legacy of colonialism and transatlantic slavery within our own history.

We acknowledge the pain caused by the connections between the Museum buildings and the forced labour and trading of enslaved Africans. We feel that the statue of Robert Geffrye on the front of the Museum's buildings does not promote the sense of belonging that is so important for our visitors and is fundamental to the Museum's values.

There is still much debate within the Museum's wider communities about what the statue of Geffrye symbolises today. Whilst the Museum executive team and Trustees agree that the Statue should be moved, we continue to work through exactly how this is done.

One of the possibilities in order to better tell the full history of the buildings and Robert Geffrye's life, including his involvement in transatlantic slavery, is if the statue is relocated on site in an alternative and less prominent space. Currently, the space we are considering is the Ironmongers' Graveyard.

More information on the statue, monument and tomb can be found on our website [here](#).

What is happening with the statue of Robert Geffrye? When will it be moved?

We have been listening to many views and considering all options concerning the display of the Geffrye statue. As a Grade I-listed building, there is legislation that the Museum must consider in making any decision.

In October 2023, the government published [Guidance for custodians on how to deal with commemorative heritage assets that have become contested](#). To date, government policy has been that "commemorative heritage assets should remain in situ. We should not hide

from aspects of our history that we may deem unacceptable today." The Museum has been working with this guidance to formulate a plan for further consultation on the possible relocation of the statue.

To move the statue, a planning application will need to be submitted to the local planning authority (Hackney) and there will be a process of statutory consultation, with Historic England, for example. As a Grade-I listed building, any planning application is subject to the highest levels of scrutiny.

In order to prepare a planning application there are many considerations that the Museum must take into account, such as how to move the statue safely and where the statue will be moved to – this latter consideration is taking time, as the Museum works through many ideas, including the possibility of moving the statue to the Museum’s graveyard.

We currently aim to publish details of the consultation methodology and a timeline for consultation in 2024/25.

Who is involved in the decision-making process?

Current thinking on the possible redisplay of the statue in an alternative location focuses on a nature-positive approach in the Museum’s graveyard using planting and natural materials.

This approach originates from designs produced through extensive workshops by Voyage Youth - a social justice charity tackling racial imbalance in London - and POoR Collective - a design practice working with young people to create tangible outputs in their local environments - with the narrative further developed by the Museum’s Heritage and Communities Committee (HCC).

In June 2023, the Museum’s Heritage and Communities Committee was formed as a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees. The HCC meets regularly to support the Board of Trustees in its commitment to consider all options concerning the display of the Geffrye statue.

The HCC also ensures that the Museum works with and for its audiences, listening to communities and key stakeholders to represent heritage and the history of the home. It is chaired by a Trustee and includes representatives from Voyage Youth, ensuring young people have an impact in a significant decision-making process at the Museum.

We hope this work will inform our exploration of colonial legacies in our collections and buildings in a collaborative process with our local communities.

Further public and stakeholder consultation is needed before any plans are finalised and we currently aim to publish details of the consultation methodology and a timeline for consultation in 2024/25.

More information on the partnership between the Museum and Voyage Youth can be found on the [website](#).

How is Museum of the Home addressing decolonisation across its work?

The Museum acknowledges that, in addition to considering the move of the statue, the whole of the site and our working practices need to be reviewed through the lens of decolonisation and anti-racism.

Our decision-making processes and governance have also undergone significant changes in the past 4 years, including the formation of the Heritage and Communities Committee.

Our period room sets offer a framework for histories of home that have been previously underrepresented at the Museum and strive to better reflect the diversity of modern London. Our newest Rooms Through Time (opening 23 July 2024) have introduced seven new spaces to our permanent galleries, spanning homes and lived experience from 1878 to the present, as well as future-facing exploration of how we might live in 2049.

These 'lived-in' homes take inspiration from the experiences of the people and communities represented within them. As we continue to reimagine our displays, we prioritise equity and inclusion, ensuring that both individual and community voices are central to the narrative. This is achieved by co-curating with community members, incorporating diverse perspectives, and acknowledging the contributions and resilience of partners.

To assist us with this collaborative research we have embarked upon a project, *Hidden Histories of Home*, which will challenge current ideas of home and how stories of home can be collected, catalogued, displayed, experienced and evaluated. We are partnering with universities across the UK on nine fully funded studentships from October 2024.

Active programmes, such as the Home Truths series and the Campaign for Change, further explore and highlight social justice issues and the intersectionality of inequity.

We are overhauling our training and recruitment processes to diversify the workforce and ensure that everyone, regardless of background, has a positive experience of working at Museum of the Home.

There is much to do. We are actively using the Museum Association's guidance on Decolonising Museums which can be read [here](#).

How can visitors find out more and be part of the conversation?

We are a fast-changing organisation that welcomes constructive feedback towards vital progress.

There are many ways for visitors to get involved and make your voice heard:

- Check our Jobs Page for opportunities to join the Museum team
- Attend an event and join the conversation - for more information see the Events page on our website [here](#)
- Fill in a feedback card available at the Museum's information desk
- Sign-up to our newsletter

Our current next steps, actions to date, information on initial consultation with stakeholders and the community, and information on contextualising and reinterpreting the statue can be found on our website, [here](#).

Rooms Through Time FAQs

Glossary

Home Galleries - galleries launched in Summer 2021 in newly created spaces in the basement of the historic almshouse building. These galleries are thematic, rather than time-based and aim to ask visitors, 'What does home mean to you?'

Rooms Through Time - this is how the period room sets are referred to and signposted for our visitors. There are two suites of Rooms Through Time: 1630 to 1830, located on the ground floor of the almshouse building, and 1878 to 2049, located on the ground floor of the Branson Coates Wing

Real Rooms Project - this is the name of the project to rethink the Rooms Through Time. This project began in 2021 and will be live until we complete the redisplay of the 1630-1830 rooms.

Room to Rethink - a temporary feedback/consultation space that ran from September 2021 to February 2022, for visitors to reflect on the Rooms Through Time and tell us what they would like to see happen to the displays.

What are the Rooms Through Time?

These displays aim to create/recreate a domestic space from a moment in the past, present or future and imagine what life might have been like for the inhabitants.

There are two suites of Rooms Through Time:

- Rooms Through Time 1630-1830, located on the ground floor of the almshouse building.
- Rooms Through Time 1878-2049, located on the ground floor of the Branson Coates Wing.

There is a long history of using period rooms sets in museums and heritage settings. Creating a period room offers both opportunities and challenges: it can increase visitor engagement with stories and collections; it can also raise questions around what is 'real' and 'authentic' in more complex ways than an object in a case.

Museum of the Home, previously the Geffrye Museum, has been using period room sets as an interpretation method since the 1930s. The last major development to our Rooms Through Time was in 1998, with the creation of original period rooms from 1910 to 1998, housed in a new building extension known as the Branson Coates Wing.

Why is the reinterpretation of the Rooms Through Time taking place now?

After 3 years of closure, the Museum reopened as Museum of the Home in 2021 – a place to reveal and rethink the ways we live, in order to live better together. The Museum’s interpretation focuses on diverse personal stories that aim to create a relatable visitor experience for all.

The Home Galleries embody this new approach with thematic displays that are representative of many of our local communities and explore some of the ways in which we ‘make home’.

Between 2018-2021, while we were closed, the Rooms Through Time period room sets received new interpretation to help bring the rooms to life for visitors. However, the curatorial team were restricted in the stories they could tell by both the architecture of the sets and the make-up of the collections, which predominantly represented white middle class households.

These period room sets jarred with the more diverse Home Galleries, and no longer fulfilled our aims to represent the complex histories of migration and identity that have shaped the British home for hundreds of years.

The Real Rooms Project tackles this imbalance by introducing a far more diverse array of narratives using co-creative and co-curatorial methods to let the communities we are representing tell us how they think their histories should be told and to work with a wide range of artists and academics.

The Real Rooms Project has begun with a complete redisplay of the room sets from 1878 to 2049 (opening July 2024). Following this, the Museum will begin to plan for the redisplay of the room sets from 1630 to 1830. The schedule for the redisplay of the earlier rooms has not yet been decided but research has begun, exploring a wide range of possibilities, and will take into consideration evaluation from the 1878 to 2049 rooms.

How were the Rooms from 1878-2049 developed with the community?

Communities and partners were involved in generating early ideas for each space, conducting original research, guiding plans, feeding back on designs and gallery interpretation text. Some community authors led on these consultations with respective community groups.

The curators also worked with the Common Cause foundation to develop a consultation and feedback framework to ensure participants were involved in research and collecting as it progressed throughout the project.

In 2021 we launched ‘Room to Rethink’, a feedback/consultation space for visitors to reflect on the Rooms Through Time and tell us what they would like to see happen to the displays. Much of the visitor feedback reflected the Museum’s concerns about the lack of representation in the period rooms, and there was also a huge amount of feedback as to which communities and what stories people would like to see represented.

This prompted the Museum to recruit the Community Authors, a group of eight people with a diverse array of professions and backgrounds, to both advise and play an active role in re-shaping the Rooms Through Time. More on the Real Rooms Project and Community Authors can be found on our website [here](#).

The Community Authors met monthly with research tasks set between each meeting; the team addressed the following research questions:

- Whose stories are missing in the galleries?
- Which rooms should be represented?
- What does historical mean and look like?
- How should the rooms feel? Do we want an immersive, sensory experience?
- How 'permanent' or ever changing should the displays be?
- What is working in the existing rooms? What shall we keep?
- What is missing from our collections?

What did the community consultation identify?

The resulting Real Rooms Project comes from extensive work with the Community Authors, as well as continual outreach and engagement with visitors, our local communities and other key stakeholders, such as Queen Mary, University of London, with whom we jointly run the Centre for Studies of Home.

This consultation identified the following needs:

- Rooms that better reflect the diversity of modern London
- Greater interactivity and immersion
- Wider representation of rooms in the home - i.e. more bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens
- Greater acknowledgement of the relationship between home, city and street
- More background on the types of homes and wider histories which have impacted homes
- A view of the future

This feedback prompted us to rethink the period room set and expand the storytelling techniques and display methods on offer. As a result, the seven new rooms aim to:

- Re-negotiate the traditional visitor barrier – to allow visitors to get further into the rooms and view them from different angles
- Include more sound and texture
- Address local, national and international issues relating to home, such as migration
- Provide more context about the building and the neighbourhood in which the room is located
- Acknowledge that memories and impressions of home can be fragmentary and not 'complete'
- Be a visually engaging experience that explores both spatial and emotional relationships.

How did you decide on each story and character in each room?

Some topics came up repeatedly in the Room to Rethink visitor feedback. Most common was the need for more varied socio-economic backgrounds and more representation of working-class homes. A desire to see future homes was also a popular request along with representation of migrant diasporas - particularly Indian, Jewish, and Irish homes. Visitors also wanted to see more representation of food and play in the home.

The vision for the new Rooms were also influenced by the popularity of West Indian Front Room, curated by Michael McMillan, based on McMillan's experiences growing up in a British-Caribbean family of the era. This installation was added permanently to the Museum's Rooms Through Time in 2021 and has been re-worked again for the new galleries.

The Community Authors worked with curators to analyse the visitor feedback to suggest the time periods and communities which could be represented in the new displays. Using this and their own areas of interest and expertise, the Community Authors presented their suggestions for the new rooms and, with the Museum team, identified the following focus areas:

- Indian ayah's homes in London
- Tenement housing in the early 1900s
- Toilets, bathrooms and hygiene
- Jewish communities
- Working class Irish communities in the mid-20th century
- LGBTQIA+ migration across the UK
- A Vietnamese community kitchen

As partners and collaborators were identified, some ideas shifted and evolved. Some Community Authors took on additional roles as Community Researchers and conducted additional research, oral history interviews, and ran workshops with participants.

Initial ideas were presented to participants at workshops and they were able to voice which ideas best represented their experiences. Details were developed through creative sessions where participants would share their memories of home and donate objects and oral histories.

The Museum held performances, talks, film clubs, cooking workshops, and archiving sessions to build relationships with the various communities represented in the galleries, enabling them to trust the Museum with their objects and stories.

As the project developed, community partners would review designs, text, and object acquisitions. They continue to be involved in the events programme to take place after opening, redisplaying the rooms for festivals and exhibitions.

What does co-curation and participatory practice mean?

There are many different ways that co-curation and participatory practice have been defined across the museum sector, from a critical friend relationship to a full handing over of curatorial direction to an individual, group, or organisation outside the Museum.

The Rooms Through Time: 1878-2049 represent this range of approaches. Each room has been curated in collaboration with an individual, group or organisation. In each case the

working methodology has been shaped by the uniqueness of that relationship and has embraced a working practice that is mutually respectful.

For example, the 1978 room has been fully curated by Michael McMillan, based on his experience of home; the 1878 Room has been curated with advice from Dr Arunima Datta, based on her research into the role of the ayah; the 2024 Room has been created based on personal stories and objects collected directly from the British-Vietnamese community; the 1956 Room has been curated with the London Irish Centre, taking into account a range of voices and lived experiences.

This approach informs our practice beyond the Rooms Through Time. The Community Authors shared ideas, producing and suggesting creative programming to challenge the ways we work and ensure that Museum of the Home is representative and inclusive. Through this collaborative process, a diverse range of experiences of home were shared and have helped to develop rich learning resources for Museum audiences of all ages. The process has been foundational to sparking future ambitions of activating our collections through Creative Programming.

Who curated, funded and consulted on the gallery?

The project as a whole was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, DCMS/Wolfson Galleries Improvement Fund and the Garfield Weston Foundation.

Area	Partners/Co-curators/Consultants	Funding
Video installation	Research supported by Centre for Studies of Home, a dynamic partnership between Museum of the Home and Queen Mary, University of London.	QMUL Impact Fund
A Townhouse in 1878	Curated with Dr Arunima Datta	-
A Tenement Flat in 1913	Curated with the help of participants from Jewish community groups and synagogues across east London.	Funded by the Shores Trust
A Room Upstairs in 1956	Curated with the London Irish Centre	Supported by David P. Kelly
A Terraced House in 1978	Curated with Michael McMillan	-
A High-rise Flat in 2005	Curated with the help of participants from LGBTQI+ communities.	Funded through Art Happens, Art Fund's crowd-funding platform, John Shakeshaft and Andrew Hochhauser KC
A Terraced House in 2024	Curated with the help of participants from the Vietnamese community. Including: artist and community archivist Cuong Pham, Dan Vo, and community researchers Julia Thanh and Hannah Vu.	Funded by Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association

A Converted Flat in 2049: The Innovo Room of the Future	The Room of the Future is an evolving design by the Interaction Research Studio of Northumbria University.	Supported by Innovo
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Museum of the Home

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Enquiries

Contact the Communication team at press@museumofthehome.org.uk