The Eighteenth-Century Townhouse in England: its Form and Function

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Bachelor of Arts in History with Honours
Acknowledgements

I have so much to thank for everyday but the journey and the time it took me to do this enlightening thesis on the fascinating eighteenth-century England would not have been possible without the support, guidance, help, encouragement, friendship and love of family and a wonderful person whom I cherish as an “Angelic friend.”

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Abstract

This thesis examines the interior spaces of the eighteenth-century English Town House in order to explore the relationship between wider societal shifts and the ways in which the urban houses of the upper and middling levels of society were organized and decorated. For some historians, the eighteenth century represents the beginnings of the modern age with new philosophical, economic and social understandings developing at this time. Examining the spaces where people lived provides us with insight into the effects of Enlightenment ideas and consumerism on their lifestyle.

While the development of the eighteenth-century Town House as an architectural form has interested historians for the last 70 years, the same degree of attention has not been directed at its interiors until relatively recently. This shift is possibly a consequence of a new historical interest since the 1990s in cultural history, and how and why people behaved in particular ways.

By using eighteenth-century house plans from architects and designers such as Robert and James Adam and John Wood, the work of Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Chippendale, master craftsmen from the period, as well as contemporary diaries and letters, it is possible to discern the significance of the form and function of the eighteenth-century Town House. These primary sources, while often relating to the aristocracy and gentry, also provide access to the lives of the middling sort who were becoming increasingly literate and urbanized during this period. We consequently see the responses of different classes to the wider shifts of the eighteenth century and the extent to which the middling sort were emulators of the aristocracy and gentry or innovators in their own right.

This thesis argues that consumerism had a very significant influence not only on the architecture of the Georgian Town House but also on the people who lived
in these houses, especially in the city of London. An examination of the interior of the Town House provides us with a microcosm of the eighteenth century, and we see a society where notions of taste, decorum, and social etiquette were an integral part of not only new consumer habits, but also education, gender and family relationships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Map of London and Westminster, 1797 (GL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>Derby House, Grosvenor Square, London, architectural plan of the Town House by Robert Adam in 1770.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 3</td>
<td>Pont Street, London with English urban architecture during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>Robert Adam’s design for Wynn House, London in 1772.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>Town House in Bath with John Wood’s design of heraldic emblems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 7</td>
<td>Ceiling created for No. 6 Royal Terrace, Adelphi by Robert Adam in 1771.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 8</td>
<td>Wedgwood Jasper Teapot, 1785-90, made at Josiah Wedgwood’s factory, Etruria, Staffordshire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 9</td>
<td>Wedgwood Punch Bowl, Creamware, painted in enamels, about 1795.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 10</td>
<td>Mahogany Knife Box and Silver Cutlery, ca 1775. V &amp; A Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 11</td>
<td>Georgian Drawing Room at No. 1 Royal Crescent, Bath.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Image 13  Georgian Library/Study at No. Royal Crescent, Bath.


Image 16  Image of house plan with rooms separating every floor and the servants quarters are on the top floor.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The growth of towns in eighteenth-century England was accompanied by the development in many urban centres of the Town House. These houses were often built in newly developed parts of towns and cities, such as the west end of London, to accommodate, in a relatively small geographical space, the upper and middle classes. Town Houses were often built using classical styles of architecture and were usually, but not always, joined together to create terraces.

The architectural development of the eighteenth-century town house, also sometimes called the Georgian Town House, has been a topic of interest to historians for a number of years. Few historians, however, have considered the internal design of these houses and why they were decorated in particular ways. This thesis focuses on the interior of the eighteenth-century town house and argues that consumerism played a significant role in the construction of these houses as well as in the décor and design of their different rooms. It will also consider how new Enlightenment philosophies were integral to how people lived in town houses, making them keen to improve their lifestyle not only by acquiring consumer products but also through the display of particular behaviours, especially politeness, taste and decorum.
Changes in England in the late seventeenth century were important in the development of the Town House. Housing was a particularly significant issue in London throughout the eighteenth century. London was the central hub of England attracting many migrants to its environs. It has been estimated that in the 1760s, 11% of England’s population lived in London. ¹ (Image 1 below shows the densely populated city of London). The busy movement of people from all over England to London, not only for work but also for a range of social reasons, made it a very densely populated city.

People came to the city from country towns to find work in the many trades and shops that were opening up all over London. Even though houses were built mainly for the gentry and wealthy there were those who worked in trades that were located in their homes. These were the craftsmen making clothes or mantuas, carpenters, milliners and many more others. Then there were also professionals such as merchants and bankers who lived in the city because London was the financial centre of England, and owning a town house was an important status symbol. Owning such a property was important as it showed that they belonged to the wealthy class and during this age of improvement it gave them that connection to a higher society.

The aristocracy and the gentry were the main landowners in England and though most of them lived in country palaces, mansions and manors many realized during the course of the eighteenth century that a London house was increasingly important. Although country residences were initially the ‘powerhouses’ from which the aristocrats and gentry displayed their wealth, status and grandeur, changes following the political revolution of 1688 meant that parliament was becoming increasingly important to England’s governance. ³ Consequently, many members of the aristocracy and gentry, as representatives of their electorates, now needed to come more regularly to London to attend

Unable to find good accommodation in London to suit their lifestyle, the upper classes hired architects to build Town Houses in London. Thus we see the development of areas such as Bloomsbury Square, St James Square, Golden Square, King’s Square and Leicester Square.  

Image 2: Plan of Derby House, Grosvenor Square, A Town House designed by Robert Adam in 1773 showing details of a five storey building with five bays.

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Besides population increase and political changes, the Great Fire of London of 1666 triggered the legislative forces resulting in the rebuilding of many parts of the city via The Building Acts of 1667, 1707, 1709 and 1774. These legislative Acts were the deciding and significant factors which led to the building of more Town Houses in London. Though the earlier town houses from 1700 onwards were lacking in classical design elements, they were built in neat rows, in brick and stone. Each floor had two main rooms and few decorative elements to complement the structures. (See Image 2: an architectural plan of a Town House). However as demand for these town houses grew, not only with the gentry but also with the burgeoning wealthy middle class, architects and designers included better decorative elements and features to the structures and made the Georgian Town Houses look classical. In the later eighteenth century the advent of new inventions such as steel and bronze frames for metal frameworks, clay brick products for construction, as well as new artifacts and decorating elements to style the interiors and exteriors, created better housing and planning developments in the transformation of these Town Houses. (See Images 3 & 4 of Town Houses built in a row and a typical Town House designed by Robert Adam during the eighteenth century).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of the eighteenth-century Town House has interested historians since the 1980s. However, these historians primarily consider the Town House as an architectural form, and not looked beyond its frontal

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structural build and design. These historians tend to focus on factors such as the construction and uniformity of houses in places such as Bath and London’s West End with little attention to the way different classes used these houses or to their interiors. ¹¹ Not only have many historians focused on the exteriors of the eighteenth-century Town House, many of these writers also argue that these houses are not as architecturally significant as the Country Houses built during the same period. Their critiques generally argue that the Town House was secondary in terms of both external appearance and internal design. John Summerson’s statement in his 1945 work, *Georgian London*, that the Town House was just a terrace house and the wealthy gentry, especially, who lived in them did not bother with them as much as they did with their country mansions, clearly did not give much focus to how the interiors of these houses were actually built and designed. ¹² In a similar vein, historians Dan Cruikshank and Peter Wyld also criticized the Town House as just a façade that really was not appealing when compared to the Georgian country houses of this era. ¹³ Peter Borsay whose work dealt mainly with England’s eighteenth-century urban renaissance did not even focus on the importance of the urban architecture,

which was significant especially in London’s over populated urban areas.\textsuperscript{14} Peter Earle whose work mainly dealt with the English middle class of the eighteenth century whilst examining the economic and social circumstances they experienced did not attempt to understand the spaces in which they lived and how they designed their homes, or even how consumerism affected their lifestyle.

To these critics, the eighteenth-century Town Houses may not have been of architectural significance but the focus on how they were built and outward appearance does not consider their wider social and cultural significance. It should be remembered that not only did members of the aristocracy and gentry live in these Town Houses they were accompanied by retinues consisting of relatives and retainers many of whom had a preference for living in Town House, close to the many entertainments offered in urban centres.

Similarly, the burgeoning middle classes increasingly rented or owned Town Houses. To members of this growing sector of eighteenth-century society, possessing a property such as a Town House was an important step in becoming part of the governing class; it gave them status and showed they were part of the age of improvement. As noted by the historian Rachel Stewart, Town Houses changed how people lived their lives. Its structure affected the

‘context of family relations, financial relations, financial, legal and property transactions…as well as… the construction of personal identity.’

Culturally those who owned or lived in these new houses, especially in the city of London, were able to participate in the many social and cultural functions that were part of this era. They could attend theatre performances, musicals such as operas, and be seen at the famous gardens like Vauxhall and Ranelagh. In Bath, another town where Town Houses was popular, the wealthy and the middle classes could go to the Bath spas which were all very new and trendy at that time. These cultural events were all part of the new change in social etiquettes and attitudes. To be seen in these entertainment events and venues or even to be invited to other wealthy households as guests meant that they too belonged to the upper and refined class; they too had taste and decorum. In this era having taste was defined as having the qualities focused on beauty, excellence and even propriety. These cultural values, according to Herman Bernard focused on ‘regularity, hierarchy, order and standardization [which all became] visible through architecture [as well as] social behaviours’.

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Not only do the historians Summerson, Cruikshank, Wylde, Borsay and Earle, clearly leave out the social and cultural importance that Town Houses played they also omitted crucial facts about the Town Houses. In particular they did not consider the internal design of Town Houses and how the inner sanctums and chambers were built, designed and decorated and the purposes and functions they were constructed for and how they suited the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the eighteenth century.

One of the few writers to consider the eighteenth-century Town House from multiple angles is Rachel Stewart. She argues that these town residences been architecturally underestimated for both their importance as residential property and also for their significance to the owners and residents. In her work, *The Town House in Georgian London*, she explains that though Town Houses lacked classical architectural structural qualities; they had “value” and “usage”.17 Though she cites the historians who criticized these Town Houses, she emphasizes that importance should be given to how and why these Town Houses affected the busy, industrialized and overpopulated London scene. Stewart comments that there was an exceptional level of building demand and supply for Town Houses during the period just after the 1666 Great Fire and

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then later from 1765 to 1785. While demand did make builders speed up construction we have to take note that these builders were all working for architects and some of them were well known for their excellent architectural designs and building knowledge.\textsuperscript{18} These architects’ building expertise and creative ideas made them well known and therefore they were hired by the aristocrats and wealthy middle class business owners to build their Town Houses. Therefore we see that it was the architects who built and designed some of the classical Palladian country palaces, manors and houses for the gentry who were commissioned to undertake work in urban areas. Therefore to cater for their clients, who came to live in the city of London, for political matters, parliamentary meetings, business matters and also for leisure and entertainment these creative and very astute architects built and designed their Town Houses to suit their lifestyles.\textsuperscript{19}

To make her point regarding the cross-over between architects and designers of country mansions and Town Houses, Stewart focuses very much upon the designs of Robert and James Adam and John Wood. Robert and James Adam not only built and designed country mansions, Town Houses, theatres and museums, they were also well known for creativity and unique designs. Robert

\textsuperscript{18} Rachel Stewart, \textit{The Town House in Georgian London}, (London : Yale University Press, 2006), Pp. 8,9,
\textsuperscript{19} Rachel Stewart, \textit{The Town House in Georgian London}, (London : Yale University Press, 2006), Pp
Adam had a style of his own and much of his work was uniquely called “Adam style”. He was also known for marketing his designs which were very popular and especially suitable to Town Houses. The Adam brothers were very versatile in their designs especially in the planning of rooms with the arrangement of spaces to fill the floors and also artistic inventiveness that provided creative ideas to alter space, creating curves as elements of surprise in their Town Houses. Consequently they were hired by the aristocracy, gentry and the wealthy middle class to design and build their homes. Their exceptional work included Derby House in Grosvenor Square, Wynn House in St James Square, Chandos House, Portland Place, and houses for many other prominent noblemen. Most of the Town Houses built by Robert Adam also had special features such as a temple front to suit individual town house facades. His houses had intricate shallow mouldings to enhance the frontal structures and beautiful sash windows, which was one of the most outstanding features of eighteenth-century Town Houses.

Stewart also notes that to suit the lifestyle of those who wanted to live in Town Houses the Adam brothers constructed houses with special sanctums such as

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parlours, drawing rooms, visitors’ parlours, guest rooms, galleries, libraries, music rooms, and different floors with bedrooms for the masters, rooms for children and relatives. Some rooms were also built to house and cater for the butler, housekeepers, servants and maids. Basements were included not only for kitchens, washing rooms and laundry facilities but special staircases were added features for the movement of the servants and workers who attended to several of the household’s functions and duties to make these Town Houses not only well managed but also beautiful. Staircases that were incorporated at the back of these houses were built specifically to hide the activities of the servants who had to carry out certain duties that were not to be seen by visitors and guests to the house.

Another architect who was also well known for his work was John Wood, who designed and built town houses in Bath. He also constructed Town Houses according to the client’s needs and his signature style was developing designs that paid homage to emblems and family heraldry. (See Image 5: John Wood’s design). This unique style made the Town Houses in Bath grand as well as elegant. 23

Rachel Stewart’s research suggests that not all Town Houses were uniform, and that they contained special features that made them unique. She argues that Town Houses were built with architectural vision and good taste in décor and styles. This thesis follows on from Stewart’s argument about the special qualities of the Georgian Town House to consider in more detail the role of consumerism and other eighteenth-century shifts in making sense of the form and function of the Town House.

Image 5: Town Houses in Bath showing John Wood’s emblematic motifs as well as his creative style

Along with Stewart’s work on the eighteenth-century Town House, research into the development of a consumer society is integral to the argument of this thesis. This research considers not only the objects that people bought, but also the

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clothes they wore, and their reasons for purchasing such items. The final section of this literature review outlines some of these key texts.

Eighteenth century England is touted by some historians as the first consumer society; that is the first society where a large number of people were able to enjoy material possessions. The first historians to explain this phenomenon were Neil McKendrick, John Plumb and John Brewer in their book, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*. In their work McKendrick argues that in England ‘there was a restless striving and clamber from one rank to the next and where possessions, and especially clothes, both symbolized and signaled each step in the social promotion.’ He further states that especially during this period England had an added advantage in that its capital, London, was not only the ‘biggest European city’ it was also the most populated city which was very conducive to the ‘creation of a consumer society.’ McKendrick, Plumb and Brewer not only expressed this new found concept and passion among the English public to purchase and own but also explained that it was not only the aristocrats, gentry and middling classes that bought new products but people from other classes; people who

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worked for the wealthy people, those who owned small trades and businesses, even those who lived in the country, peasants and farmers. All members of society either purchased something new or wanted to own something that they never had seen or had before. This passion to purchase and possess encouraged the owners of the Town House to decorate their interiors to look novel, elegant, magnificent and aesthetically pleasing to the residents and visitors who entered these premises. The owners of these Town Houses wanted to beautify their homes not only for their own pleasure but also to indicate and display that they had taste, refinement and ultimately they had class and gentility.  

Shopping and purchasing something became a new way of living. New scientific endeavours and industrial processes as well as an interest self knowledge and self improvement all contributed to this new movement. Historian Maxine Berg explains this phenomenon in her Work *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*. She cites William Hogarth’s definition of variety as ‘the lively feeling of wantonness’ and play’ and this also helps us to understand the aspiration and constant need for the English people to consume,

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to purchase, to own and to display their beautiful goods.\textsuperscript{31} Berg’s work focuses on items that actually promoted the invention of new products. Metals like gold, silver, iron, copper, bronze, and glass were used to manufacture different varieties of building elements, structures for enhancing the houses and its main features from the ceiling to the floors, from the doors to the windows, glass for household wares and porcelain for the novel creation of the everlasting pottery. The point here is that all these new inventions and creative elements boosted the concept of consumerism and expanded the notion that better things could be achieved by possessing them.

John Styles in his work, \textit{The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion of the Eighteen Century England}, informs us that clothes played a big part in the lives of the English people. Everyone, from the wealthy to even the plebeians according to Styles transformed the way they wore clothes. Before the eighteenth century clothes were generally considered by ordinary people as garments for utility and for warmth, but with the importation of other fabrics like silk, cotton and calico, fashion and style took over from utility. The idea of being able to wear different types of fabrics in a variety of styles propelled fashion consciousness. For the lower classes clothes like muslin apron or lace frilled

cotton dresses and sometimes handkerchiefs were all treasured items.  

Though the aristocrats and gentry were able to dress in fashionable styles, the middle classes and plebeians also began dressing in their own simple styles. Due to the importation of cotton and calico from India, textiles became an important manufacturing industry. Cotton was a favourite choice because it was lightweight and easy to wash and dye in colours suitable for home. People from different classes were able to purchase and tailor their own clothes and women started using cotton for petticoats, bodice and skirts. According to Styles the plebeians not only wore cotton fabrics and wore certain styles that suited their class but their styles of aprons, scarves around their collars and caps or bonnets was actually emulated or copied by the higher classes. Therefore besides purchasing all kinds of household items and decorative artifacts and elements, clothes was also a key consumer product that not only created a fashion trend during this era of novelty and change but it also made the people adopt an attitude to change, improve their appearance and cultivate taste and decorum.

This thesis examines why eighteenth-century Town Houses were designed and decorated as they were. While the focus of most of my research is upon the

Town House in London, other urban centres will also be discussed. Where possible, class differences will be considered, although it should be noted that there is less primary source material regarding middle class experiences than that of the aristocracy and gentry. A variety of primary sources have been used for this thesis including the architectural plans and designs of the Adam brothers, eighteenth-century handbooks and manuals directed at householders, the furniture catalogues of craftsmen such as Thomas Chippendale, and some diaries and letters of the period.

The second chapter of this thesis provides a review of the key changes of the period. It will focus on consumerism and its influence on the residents of the Town House. It will also discuss how the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment created changes in people’s lifestyle as well as how issues of gender played a key role in consumerism. Chapter three examines individual rooms and their purpose and uses to the residents of the eighteenth-century Town House.
CHAPTER TWO: The Georgian Town House & Society

Understanding the Georgian Town House and its design requires knowledge of some key aspects of eighteenth-century English society. This chapter considers the economic, social and cultural factors that influenced the development of the Georgian Town House. These include the rise of consumerism and consumption, Enlightenment ideas regarding happiness, and new gender understandings that emerged during this time.

Consumerism in the eighteenth century influenced and changed the lifestyle and attitude of the English people. As a consequence of economic and political shifts of the time, consumption became an important part of many people’s lives. With Britain’s colonization of many parts of Asia, Britain’s East India Company and trading partners brought back home several new, exclusive goods that had never been seen, used or even tasted in England before. They brought back not only new food products like tea, coffee and sugar, but also exclusive fabrics like silk, cotton, calico and beautiful chinaware made of porcelain. At the same time, new goods were produced in England encouraging the desire of many people to possess something novel. Along with economic and political changes, new philosophical understandings, often referred to as the Enlightenment, affected
many beliefs and attitudes of the period. The Enlightenment focused on ideas of liberation, sensation and individuality and these ideas encouraged people to change the way they thought and alter their lifestyle and to better themselves. These ideas were pivotal in the way people purchased, consumed and owned new products.

Neil McKendrick, J. H.Plumb and John Brewer in their book *The Birth of the Consumer Society: The Commercialization of the Eighteenth Century England*, made the significant point that all kinds of goods and necessities from food to clothes, furniture, to a wide variety of household items were all bought and consumed by not only the upper levels of society but also by the middling sort.  

McKendrick *et al* also believe that the extensive range of products manufactured for the home market and the huge varieties of exotic items imported from the colonies all created a consumer society compelling the gentry and other classes to shop, own and imbue taste and refinement by emulation. Consequently there was increased interest, especially in cities such as London, in the purchases of decorative, artistic and luxury items for the beautification of the Town Houses often wealthy and middling sort.

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Just as household products became significant so also did different types of food products and commodities become part of the new lifestyle. England’s trade success resulted in the importation of new products such as sugar, tea and coffee during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries consequently there was a boom in the consumption of these food items. Initially because sugar, tea and coffee were considered luxury products, they were only available to those of the aristocracy, gentry, middling classes and merchants and traders of imported goods. Historians such as Sidney Mintz argue that the purchase of such luxury items were important markers of one’s wealth and gentility. The possession and consumption of these products made people feel sophisticated, genteel and accomplished.35

Integral to the growth of consumerism in eighteenth-century England, was the development of trading companies in the previous century. Realising how lucrative it was to have trade links with countries in Asia, London merchants lobbied the English monarch in the early seventeenth century for the right to establish a trading company. The East India Company sent its first ship to the East Indies in 1601. The East India Company initiated new trade routes to India and China that developed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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Besides importing spices from the Asian countries, cargoes of calico, muslin, brass and bronze ornaments from India and luxurious silk fabrics, Chinese porcelain, lacquer ware, furnishings and exotic fans from China were imported. These products boosted and brought about a change to the English economy at home. The more these imported, exotic and luxurious items were displayed, sold or became available to the wealthy English public the more the desire to purchase and own similar items provoked the imagination of those from the other classes, especially the middling classes. Therefore demand and the virtues of owning items of taste and luxury promoted the development of manufacture of similar goods with an oriental appeal in design and aesthetics.

Initially tea was brought to Europe through the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century. In 1689 heavy taxes were imposed on it thus making it very expensive. Later, when the English East India Company started importing tea from China, prices dropped due to fewer taxes. Tea became affordable to more people and not only the wealthy. When coffee houses developed all around London, in the early and mid eighteenth century, tea was also sold as a drink. Tea was considered to have medicinal qualities, boosting its popularity.

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and many sectors of society felt a need to have this beverage resulting in tea becoming a household commodity. As it was still a luxury product drinking tea had particular attributes attached to it. Imbibing it was a sign of having better taste and everyone from the gentry to the domestic class wanted to drink tea. 39

Similarly coffee and sugar were other commodities that became important household items at this time in England. Coffee was introduced into England during the mid seventeenth century when a London merchant, Daniel Edwards, who had enjoyed the brew while he was in the Middle East decided to bring back some coffee beans to England. In 1652, when coffee became popular, Pasque Rosee, a servant of Edwards who knew the art of coffee brewing, opened up a coffee house in the city. 40 As more and more people started drinking this special brew more coffee houses sprang up around the city and with that coffee drinking became a social and cultural phenomenon in London much like tea.

The importation of coffee was also a luxury and according to Berg, drinking coffee and tea ‘moved from occasional to habitual beverages… [and] were

popularized in public and domestic social settings.\textsuperscript{41} During the course of the eighteenth century the price of coffee decreased. \textsuperscript{42} Coffee houses developed throughout London and visiting coffeehouses was a new social trend during this period of enlightenment and learning. The consumers were made up of the gentry, merchants, tradesmen, shop owners, labourers, domestic wage earners, laymen, builders, butchers, scholars, poets, doctors and scientist who came not only to drink coffee but to socialize in a ‘space in which “news” was both produced and consumed.’ \textsuperscript{43} Prior to the coffee houses, there were few such public places to gather and exchange information. People living in the city found it useful and beneficial to go to these coffee houses to drink coffee and even tea but they also went there to imbibe knowledge because they became a nucleus for social gathering. The coffee houses were not only the haunt of traders, merchants and ordinary folks they were also popular places visited by well known writers, poets and artists, such as Dryden, Swift, Addison and Steele. Other intellectuals, who discussed politics, theology, philosophy and many other topics that were of interest in England became more visible in these spaces and

\textsuperscript{42} In 1714 coffee sold for five shillings per pound; while tea cost between twelve and twenty-eight shillings per pound.
since it cost only a penny to sit in these coffee houses, they became known as the “penny university”.  

Like tea and coffee, sugar was another important commodity that was introduced into England as a consequence of the colonization of the West Indies. Sugar cane products became viable through the slave trade in these colonies and were produced in vast quantities for the British public. During this consumer-oriented eighteenth century, sugar was initially a luxury only affordable to the wealthy because there was a huge tax on it. Later on, it’s sweet quality enticed others too and it was used for sweetening tea and with the arrival of cocoa it became popular for the manufacturing of chocolates and many other confectionery items. The introduction of sugar actually revolutionized the English taste and eventually their consumer behavior in the process of cooking and eating.

This consumption of food products and many other personal items, from clothing to shoes and hats became a way of improving the lifestyle of not only the wealthy gentry but also the lower classes. Even though certain classes had very low incomes they too somehow bought food items, they too spent money

45 The Dutch took sugarcane to the Caribbean from South America.
on the items they needed or wanted. According to Claire Walsh, ‘everyone needed to shop in the period regardless of their social standing or income because everyone needed to buy food and clothing.’ Another crucial point that led to more consumers purchasing was because London was becoming very overcrowded and land was used for building housing and this also led to less space for individuals for growing their own food items or rear animals for meat. Due to this the English public was compelled to buy more and more of their commodities or food items from the shops and traders.

Besides food commodities other products became household names in England and synonymous with taste, refinement and beauty. One such product was Wedgwood pottery. Wedgwood pottery was not only well known all over Britain during the consumer era but it also was the most sought after and most successful brand of pottery. Though many historians believe that it was Josiah Wedgwood’s clever division of labour, and his reduction of cost in the manufacture and the sale of his pottery that made it very popular, McKendrick believes that there was a much more important reason. According to McKendrick, Josiah Wedgwood besides being artistic and an excellent potter of

these beautiful porcelain products also had good business sense, and was able to market different products according to class.\textsuperscript{49}

Wedgwood employed clever marketing tactics to sell his products to the aristocratic and middling classes. His marketing ideas manipulated the taste and preferences of the wealthy as well as the middling classes. His entrepreneurial skills were an important factor that compelled many in English society not only to admire the beauty of porcelain pottery but to purchase it. In a letter to his partner, Thomas Bentley, Josiah Wedgwood reveals how he wanted to make ornamental Flowerpots, Bow-pots and Tea-pots and good vases at half the price he would usually sell them.\textsuperscript{50} In this case, his purpose was to sell these items to the middle classes whom he felt admired these vases in the palaces of the aristocrats. Because there was a growth of the middling class in England, in comparison to the aristocrats, he felt, they would definitely buy these potteries. His letter suggests that he had clever marketing acumen and instincts in a class

conscious society and used this knowledge to tap the middle classes’ desires for luxuries.\textsuperscript{51}

All these commodities were enticing and all had some form of attractive, appeal, all had the lure of quality and availability which was difficult to avoid during this exciting period in England’s history. According to Berg, ‘the sociabilities of commerce and shopping’ were not only for certain class of people or certain individuals. The availability and the desire to possess and own objects of beauty were interlinked and these drove people of all classes to desire, to purchase and to consume.\textsuperscript{52}

Consumers in England did not just want to buy or shop for new things and commodities because it was available. They were also compelled to purchase by the art of advertisement and they were attracted to displays in shop windows. They were also given the choice of being able to pay for their products by credit payment.

To entice English customers to purchase their goods and commodities advertisements played an important role in eighteenth-century retailing.

McKendrick argues that advertisements ‘provide[d] the most obvious public


evidence of how businessmen tried to manipulate consumer demand'.

Advertisements became more prominent because of the increase in literacy and the accompanying development of newspapers, journals and pamphlets. During this era, advertisements were considered as 'puffing', and were blamed for either bullying or forcing people into buying products. Besides advertisements glass shop windows, which new technology helped develop, and their attractive display of goods which made items look shiny, bright and appealing was another force that lured customers to shop.

Shop windows were able to display their products in a better and magnificent way because the glass used on these windows was made in bigger sheets. Advertising their goods in this manner compelled passers by to stop and look. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg on his trip to London in the latter part of the eighteenth century noted on his walk from Cheapside to the Strand in London that,

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54 David Allen, Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740-1830, (Oxon : Routledge, 2008), Pp. 50 to 51, 140 to 141.
55 “Puffing” was introduced into the English vocabulary by R B Sheridan, in ‘The Critic’ to describe the way adverts were used prolifically everywhere to force people to purchase all varieties of items, from McKendrick & et al, Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth century-England, (London : Hutchinson & Co.(Publishers) Ltd, 1982), P. 148
On both sides [I see] tall houses with plate-glass windows. The lower floors consist of shops and seem to be made entirely of glass, many thousand candles light up silverware, engravings, books, clocks, glass, pewter, paintings, women’s finery, modish and otherwise, gold, precious stones.  

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At the same time the growing trend in improved literacy also was a major factor in advertisements becoming a rampant form of selling. People were not only able to read the cost, the labels on the items but also the descriptive adverts ‘puffing’ the quality of the new products on display.  

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Changes in the credit system also played a role in eighteenth-century consumerism and consumption. The credit system came about when commercialization and the purchasing of goods created widespread indebtedness which was a growing concern for the government. To ease this dilemma of massive public indebtedness, new financial systems, such as ‘public credit, government deficit finance’ and the creation of the Bank of England and the Stock Exchange were established.  

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With development of new financial systems at the beginning of eighteenth-century wealthy landowners used their assets as mortgages and took up huge

loans to facilitate their purchases and payments. Wage earners, especially those from the lower classes, were also paid wages using different forms of credit facilities by their employers. According to John Brewer there was a widespread ‘informal credit system throughout eighteenth-century England’ which included and involved almost everyone from the gentry to the ordinary wage earning labourer. 60 Even though this mode of payment was advantageous, because it helped the English economy, it also brought about several financial and political problems. Those who relied heavily on credit eventually became indebted to banks, merchants and shop owners. Merchants and businesses, who suffered because of these creditors, ended up joining the Wilkites movement started by radical politician John Wilkes. In late eighteenth century efforts were made to tighten up credit processes.61

In making sense of eighteenth- century consumer patterns amongst different social classes, notions of emulation are important. Harold Perkin’s work on the industrial revolution informed us that, ‘At the bottom the key to the Industrial Revolution was the infinitely elastic home demand for mass consumer goods. And the key to that demand was social emulation, keeping up with the Joneses,

the compulsive urge for imitating the spending habits of one’s betters.’ 62 This insight into England’s later industrial era also points to social factors like emulation within the classes as part and parcel of the eighteenth-century consumer’s lifestyle.

In this era of plenty many new products from all over the world were displayed in London shops with glass windows. London, the busy industrial hub of the nation, populated by those from all levels of society was the scene of many activities, from industrial works to trading in streets and alleys. In the midst of all these activities the aristocracy and gentry lived in mansions and town houses not very far from the middling classes and poorer people. Many people from the lower classes tried to emulate those from the higher classes. Those from the lower levels of society often worked for the middling classes and the wealthy as domestic maids, housekeepers and butlers, whilst others worked as shop assistants, couriers, building masons, butchers, printers, news couriers and labourers. All, however, were influenced by the new social changes. Many men and women employed in menial tasks worked extra hours to earn a little more money in order to purchase and possess certain items, especially clothes that

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could give them a certain edge of respectability and standing in society. The historian John Styles argues that those from the lower levels of society sometimes wore clothes that made them look genteel or well dressed. These clothes could take the form of hats or caps that had trimmings of gauze and ribbons. Some young ladies also wore scarves around their dresses and bought fabrics so they could sew their own dresses to meet current fashion trends.

Amanda Vickery believes that this social behaviour can be understood as the ‘traditional interpretation of the transmission of …taste, whereby modes, manners and artistic ideas…[are] filtered out through the gentry to the provinces and trickled down to the lowly.’ McKendrick further clarifies this notion that the diffusion of goods and ideas across society mirrors the consumer society, where ordinary people emulated the social norms and lifestyle of those above them.

Other historians, however, have argued that not all purchasing of products or commodities can be categorized as emulative. For example, Colin Campbell notes that if ‘a shopkeeper was…able and willing to purchase a product [which]

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previously [was only consumed by aristocrats] it does not mean that he was mimicking the gentry's way of lifestyle. It could be that he was purchasing items for 'their own sake rather than for any prestige.'\textsuperscript{67} In the same vein Lorna Weatherill, also thinks that even though there was evidence in diaries, account books and inventories of the consumption of so many goods, it does not indicate how the people, consuming or purchasing these goods, thought about it. She argues that whether the English people of this era were compelled to consume because they were trying to emulate other classes or whether the goods were absolutely necessary is debatable.\textsuperscript{68} It is possible that both factors played a role in the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century.

While it is difficult to know exactly why individuals purchased items, there is no doubt that many middle class households displayed an assortment of commodities in their Town Houses which were often of a type cheaper than those bought by members of the aristocracy or gentry. They bought calico fabrics, for example, for curtains, tablecloth, bedlinens or even to decorate their furnishing, instead of using expensive quality cotton or damask. They also wanted to make their inner sanctums, whether it was the drawing room, the

hallway, the women’s parlour or the music room, beautiful in order to create an aesthetic appeal and show ‘taste’ and also refinement.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, integral to new consumer behavior was the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was about developing new understandings of about nature; it was now believed possible to know the mind of God through an exploration of the natural world. New philosophical ways of thinking questioned whether men and women could find happiness through other ways and not only through salvation in God. Many intellectuals believed that the human mind was able to think and decipher for them what was better for their being. These questions reflected broader discussions about what it was to be human, the role of government and the types of legal and judicial systems that best suited these new understandings. Even though there was controversy over the attainment of happiness through material things many came to believe that they could find happiness in nature, and human beings could and should be happy. They felt that happiness promoted well being, especially in the mind and body. 69

The controversy over the attainment of happiness was a topic of some debate at this time with many philosophers having their own views of what constituted

happiness. Some believed that it came through believing in God and then there were others who believed that religion had nothing to do with happiness but that man just had to follow his urges and find pleasure as animals do. When philosophers like John Locke, in his ‘Essay Concerning Human Understanding,’ tried to explain that the human mind found happiness through material goods, to satisfy their emptiness, or to even fulfill their ego, he was considered as materialistic by other intellectuals especially those from France and Germany.  

Locke’s theory also stated that if one person found happiness in knowledge and learning and another found it in luxury and riches, it only proves that each of these people’s preference for ‘Happiness was placed in different things.’

At the same time, to challenge this passion for consumer items in England, a clergyman, Rev. Dr Trusler, in 1796 addressed men who were wealthy and those who had small fortunes and also those who earned a living, about how they should learn to live with their fortune, whether it was hard earned or even if it was a small fortune. His main point was explaining how living standards

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{70} In eighteenth century European philosophical thoughts on the human mind and its workings were discussed hotly and men like Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Paul Henri Thiry, Baron of Holbach and Diderot all had their own views and wrote and published their thoughts on this controversial matter. \textsuperscript{71} Darrin M. McMahon, ‘Pursuing an Enlightened Gospel,’ in Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf & Ian McCalman, (eds.), \textit{The Enlightenment World}, (London :Routledge, 2007), Pp. 168, 169, 170 & 171. \textsuperscript{72} Rev. Dr. Trusler, \textit{The Way to be Rich and Respectable, an Address to Men of Small Fortune}, (7\textsuperscript{th} Edition, London 1796), in Defining Gender Online, Documents : Section 111: Consumption & Leisure: Pp.4, 5, 8, 9, 10,11, 31 to 41, archived from Defining Gender Online : \url{http://www.defininggender.amdigital.com}. Accessed on : March 3, 2015.}
and consumerism influenced people’s lifestyle so much in the city of London and how the lure of buying luxuries and all sort of other superfluous expenditure was affecting the lifestyle of people with wealth.\textsuperscript{73} He argued that new habits of possessing luxurious items and spending using credit brought about many losses and made many men lose their honour and fortunes; his advice was to curb overspending by being frugal and economical.\textsuperscript{74} He also noted it was not honorable to put on an appearance of being wealthy, being boastful and showy because it was not graceful living. Instead he believed that every man should accept his own situation. People should live within their means and be content with their income and wealth.\textsuperscript{75} Trusler believed that happiness in life came with good health, politeness and acceptance. This debate about the nature of happiness is indicative of the sorts of philosophical discussions taking place in the eighteenth century; such discussions were an integral aspect of new ways of thinking.

\textsuperscript{73} Rev. Dr. Trusler, \textit{The Way to be Rich and Respectable, an Address to Men of Small Fortune,} (7\textsuperscript{th} Edition, London 1796), in Defining Gender Online, Documents : Section 111: Consumption & Leisure, Pp. 3, 4, 8, 9, 39 to 41, archived from Defining Gender Online: \url{http://www.defininggender. amdigital.com}. Accessed on: March 3, 2015


According to philosopher David Hume, it was natural for people to feel pleasure and happiness which allowed them to naturally gravitate towards anything that gave them happiness.\textsuperscript{76} During the Enlightenment era, the belief was in the pursuit of happiness and this would lead to social cohesion and the general good was important. Therefore for people from even the lower levels of society having or purchasing anything new such as a hairpin or even buckles for shoes were considered as luxuries and gave the owner some form of pleasure and also happiness.

Integral to the attainment of refinement, taste, politeness and other new social etiquettes, was reading. Reading increasingly became a social activity during the eighteenth century and it became the new wave that helped women and men learn appropriate behaviours and manners. Printing and the commercialization of print culture accelerated in the eighteenth century making reading widespread and accessible. People learnt how to socialize, how to speak politely, how to interact with those of the higher classes and all through the help of self help manuals and pamphlets. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele who wrote and published articles on the popular newspaper, \textit{The Spectator} encouraged people to read and attain the essential principles of the

\textsuperscript{76} David Hume, \textit{A Treatise of Human Nature}, (1739).
polite culture.\textsuperscript{77} Because reading was important socially and culturally, people living in the cities, and especially in Town Houses, frequently had a special section or sanctum in their homes as a library. This library or reading room was not only important for gaining knowledge but was also reflective of particular social and intellectual attributes that were increasingly valued during the eighteenth century.

Along with intellectual shifts concerning the relationship between man and God, and man and Nature, new understandings also developed during the eighteenth-century regarding the appropriate roles of men and women. With the era of Enlightenment and learning people came to believe that men and women were different physically and these physical differences contributed to their roles in life.\textsuperscript{78} This is where we see a demarcation between the male and female body reflected in social settings. So in nature and science the female body was no longer a corruption of the male body but something different, this was then reflected in society when men were active in the political sphere and the domestic domain was for women. Thus public discourses of the eighteenth century cast women as creatures of sentiment and love with little rational though


and therefore most suited to focus their energies on motherhood and the
creation of the comfortable family home. 79

Many married women who lived in town houses in the city were influenced by
notions of taste and refinement to improving their lifestyle and to show others
that they had taste and decorum. These were essential elements in their social
standing as the items bought and the way they were displayed in their homes
revealed more than just a family’s wealth; they were markers of cultural
refinement, politeness and good taste. In many upper- class homes women
decided what to purchase for their interiors. They decided on what type, colour
and pattern of wallpaper went on their walls; they chose the fabrics that
matched their drawing rooms and bedrooms; they decided what china, porcelain
and ceramic pottery and vases decorated all their rooms. For example Lady
Sophia Shelburne, who was married to the second Earl of Shelburne, a
politician and wealthy landowner, was very much involved in the decorations
and interiors of her London home.80 The Shelburnes entertained guests in their
London home, due to the Earl of Shelburne’s political life; however, Lady
Shelburne was not interested in politics so much as self improvement. She
undertook a course in botanical drawing from a well known botanical illustrator,

79 Thomas Gisborne, An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, 1797. Accessed from Internet Archive,
80 Amanda Vickery, Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian London, (London : Yale University Press,
2009), Pp. 150 & 151.
Georg Ehret; she learned to draw classical designs and also designed patterns for needlework.  

She did needlework from tambour to chenille by watching and learning from her father’s cousin Mary Delany. She was friendly with women who were artistic especially those from the bluestocking society, such as Lady Elizabeth Montagu, who introduced her to someone who taught her how to embroider unto satin. She learned to play the guitar and she also collected hot house plants for doing up the hot houses in her homes.  

From Lady Shelburne’s diaries we learn that she decided what upholstery fabrics to use on the furniture; had her bedroom wallpaper done in quality Indian paper; even collected water colour paintings to decorate the walls of her bedroom. Similarly, other women made decisions as to what colour and style of wallpaper to put on their walls and they made sure it came from the best wallpaper designers and merchants, like Trollope and Sons. Women especially were captivated with Wedgwood pottery and many women, as we see via letters and diaries, ordered, displayed and used Wedgwood’s vases and jasperware as tableware in their Town Houses.

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Lady Elizabeth Montagu who owned a house in the city of London, known as Hill Street House, remodeled and redecorated many times. She not only decorated her dressing room with the latest chinoiserie style, she also hired Robert Adam because he was well known for classical designs, to do more. For one of her chambers Adams designed a new ceiling, and filled it with new carpets and furnishings. The walls were decorated with flowers and cupids in the early 1770s and Elizabeth Montagu referred to it as the ‘Cupidon Room’. It was said that she always wanted to have the most fashionable trend of the period and also the best architect to decorate her homes.  

Wealthy women also had the authority over the staff employed in the day-to-day housework and routine. The housekeeper’s and servants’ workloads were assigned by the mistresses of the town houses. Even in the wealthy middle class homes, the lady of the house was in charge of what products were purchased for the kitchen and what decorative items were bought and displayed in their homes, too. 

While new conceptions of domesticity emphasized the role of mothers and wives in creating nurturing spaces for families, it should be noted that not all

women married at this time. Many women remained unmarried and in the case of upper and middle class families were often forced to live with parents and family. Other women were separated from their husbands or were widows. While some single women were fortunate enough to have their own Town Houses, in the main, single women who were dependent upon family for shelter experienced many difficulties. Some single women, however, were able to take advantage of the new emphasis placed on female sociability during the eighteenth century to socialize with other women in similar circumstances. Some of these single women were also part of the Blue Stocking group and therefore were able to meet other members or fellow sisters to discuss women’s issues, women’s writings and literature. Elizabeth Carter was one of these very enterprising single women who supported herself by writing for the Gentleman’s Magazine. Carter, who was born in 1717, lived with her father, a clergyman, read voraciously and learnt several languages like Latin, Greek, Spanish, German as well as other languages, and with this wealth of knowledge went on to write and publish poems and essays. This also indicated that she

87 Amanda Vickery, Behind Closed Doors; At Home in Georgian England, (London : Yale University Press, 2009), Pp. 208 & 209
purchased consumer items especially books and manuals, all part of the
enlightenment era of improving and refining her lifestyle.

Women like Eliza Haywood (1693-1756), who started writing when her husband
left her, became an editor with Charlotte Lennox (1720-1804), and published the
*Lady’s Museum* for women’s readership. She was also well known for writing
novels and went on to publish the *Female Spectator* from 1744 which dealt
with women’s issues.91

Lady Elizabeth Montagu was another enterprising woman who besides being a
philanthropist was also a patron of literature and the arts and sponsored other
single women. After her husband’s demise, her inheritance gave her not only
independence but also wealth which allowed her to exert her knowledge and
autonomy to represent herself as a virtuous and sociable person.92 She used
her Georgian Town House not only to entertain but also considered it as a
‘Temple of Virtue and friendship’ and believed that social intercourse,
intellectual communication and good taste were more important than
possessing luxury.

The development of new perceptions of the role of men and women in eighteenth-century society along with an increasingly urbanized, consumer culture were integral to the types of Town Houses built in England and how spaces were designed and furnished. New understandings about appropriate social interactions and happiness meant that many people wanted to surround themselves in their Town Houses with beautiful things, such as artwork, paintings, sculptures, porcelains, ceramics, silverware, clothes made of luxurious fabrics like silk and cotton. Both men and women wore jewellery, extravagant furs and hats, expensive shoes and gloves and even wanted to be seen in theaters watching dramas, plays and operas, walking or strolling in parks enjoying the pleasures of nature, which all defined their well being and showed they had taste and refinement. These ideas and qualities also extended to their homes, especially to their town houses. In the developing cities of London and Bath, where many members of the upper middle classes owned, lived or rented Town Houses, people displayed their possessions not only for their own enjoyment but also to show off to their guests and visitors that they had the ability to own and know the value of artistic things and their attractive power.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses specifically on the rooms in the Town House.
CHAPTER THREE:

INTERIOR OF THE GEORGIAN TOWN HOUSE

This chapter examines the interior of the Georgian Town House, focusing on the designs of the key rooms as well as their function. In doing so, this research considers issues already discussed such as the growth of consumerism, the importance of taste, and the role of domestic spaces in facilitating intellectual and social intercourse. How these rooms were used by members of the household, as well as by visitors, is a critical aspect of this chapter thereby showing that the Town House reflected and reinforced certain values and beliefs of the time.

The chapter is organized room by room, starting from the main entrance to the house and moving from the ground floor rooms, through to the first floor, and then to the upper floors where children had their bedrooms. The final section of the chapter considers the spaces that were primarily the domain of servants; the kitchen in the basement and bedrooms that were usually on the top floor of the house. Where appropriate, the form and function of specific rooms will be considered in terms of their use by different classes.
The Main Entrance/Hallway/Gallery

Hallways were an important aspect of the Georgian Town House. They provided an imposing entrance to many houses and in many instances boasted grand staircases that lead to the first floor. Since Town Houses were built with limited space the staircase was a crucial factor in the house. Handrails and balustrades were often highly decorated in order to ensure the staircase attracted attention.93 (See Image 6: Example of staircase in a London Town House).

Robert Adam’s architecture and design of staircases, especially in London town houses, were elaborate and made to impress. 94 This elegance was especially displayed in the staircase of Home House (1775-1777), in London. As the occupants walked up the stairs they were greeted with walls decorated with trompe l’oeil painting and scagliola columns.95

The main staircase was used by the family members of the residence while the servants were expected to use the ‘other’ staircase at the back of the houses which lead to the kitchen and sometimes to the basement of the Town House.

The hidden or back staircase for the servants and maids was a new innovation in the town houses of the eighteenth-century. According to Paul Langford, architectural historians believe that this shift of keeping the servants at a distance from the masters and mistresses was an indication of separating ‘the polite from plebeian life.’ It is interesting to note that back stairs were even utilized in the less wealthy homes, such as those of the middle classes, which did not have as much space or resources as the upper classes.

The gallery, usually on the ground floor, was a long chamber or walkway often used for displaying the portraits of the family members and paintings of famous artists thereby displaying the wealth of the owners. This gallery was often an exhibition room and built in such a manner that visitors while walking through the gallery were forced to see the artistic display along the wall.

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The gallery not only displayed paintings in the town houses of the gentry it also displayed various objects of art like vases, mirrors, clocks especially on the elaborate mantel shelves of fireplaces. Porcelain ornaments like figurines, vases and decorated bowls and cisterns from the countries such as India were also popular.

The ground floor of the Town House was similar for both the aristocracy/gentry and the middle classes because it was the entry point to the inner sanctums of the house. As such it was an important place to show good taste through the

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display of luxury items. Architects and designers such as Robert Adam often integrated luxurious motifs and designs into the walls, ceilings and stairs of these spaces. (See Image 7: Ceiling in the drawing room of No.6 Royal Terrace, Adelphi created by Robert Adam about 1772). The middle classes also used the ground floor of their Town Houses to display new consumer products, thereby emulating the upper classes. However the ornaments on display were often of a lesser quality than those in wealthier households.

Image 7 : Ceiling in No. 6 Royal Terrace, Adelphi, 98

The Dining Room

The most important ground floor room in many Town Houses was the dining room. This dining space in a town house of the wealthy was normally decorated with elegant furnishings and tableware. The walls of the dining room usually displayed family portraits and well known paintings. The centre piece would always be the main dining table and chairs which in some instances were carved and decorated with rococo designs. Some furnishings might have naturalistic patterns of gardens, fruits, flowers and vines to give the setting an exclusive dining appeal.

Whether the Town House residents were from the gentry or middle class the dining room was an area for social intercourse. It was also the room that allowed visitors other than relatives to enter and to be entertained. Therefore when guests were invited the owners would have their best dinnerware.

99 Rococo style and design was from France. It represented French splendour and magnificence and at the same time was considered as a style without rules. The rococo designs had key elements like ‘C’ and ‘S’ scrolls. The designs were combined with motifs of fish, shells, fruits and flowers on luxury goods like furnishings and ornaments. Neo classicism another important architectural and art form was the return to classical antiquity which focused mainly on Rome, a place where art represented Enlightenment, antiquity, new philosophy, artists which all blended with style.

displayed for dining. Entertaining guests at home became synonymous with the ability to display the appropriate social etiquette. Decorum and polite manners became part of these assemblies or functions to show that the Town House residents were genteel and had taste. To show that they had taste the owners and host of these functions would have their best dinnerware displayed for dining. (See Images, 8 & 9 which are examples of Wedgwood pottery; a Punch bowl and a Tea pot).

During this period, tableware and dining sets became more affordable with the extensive availability of English pottery and porcelain developed and crafted by men such as Josiah Wedgwood. Wedgwood China was so popular during this era because it was a novelty and everyone in England wanted to own pottery. Porcelain pottery like teacups was also used at this time for drinking tea. According to McKendrick, pottery was a much sought after item not just as a luxury possessed by the gentry and middling class but other classes also wanted to purchase and ‘hunger[ed] to possess’ Wedgwood pottery.101 Owning Wedgwood pottery carried with it a mark of distinction and showed that the possessor had artistic flair. Not only was Josiah Wedgwood a genius and creative master of beautiful pottery but he had an innate business acumen and

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excellent marketing skills which ensured an array of pottery was available for those from different levels of society.

Image 8: Wedgwood Jasperware Teapot (1785-90)

People started eating on dinnerware that was from well known pottery makers and also forks, spoons and knives from silversmiths. (See Image 10: Mahogany knife box with silver cutlery.) Dinnerware also indicated the difference between the classes, because the gentry would often have their silverware, crystal glass ware and ceramics embellished with their family crest or names. In the case of middle-class households, they would not have family crests or emblems on their dinner sets, or possess quality porcelain, but would instead use cheaper chinaware for tea cups and saucers.

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For some middle-class households, the ground floors of their Town Houses were workspaces. The owners or lessees of these houses would use the ground floor to conduct their trade or business, while the upper levels of the house had a domestic function.¹⁰⁶ In some cases they might even rent out the top floors.¹⁰⁷

**The Parlour/Drawing Room**

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The Georgian Drawing Room at No.1 Royal Crescent, Bath displays how this room was decorated for socializing and relaxing.\textsuperscript{108}

The Drawing Room or parlour was an essential part of most Town Houses. It was similar to a living room and was customarily built in the same way as in the palatial country houses of the era. During this time country houses or manors of the gentry and wealthy landowners always had parlours which were used as ‘informal sitting and eating rooms.’\textsuperscript{109} Mark Girouard argues that in the mid eighteenth century the parlour was transformed into the drawing room. Drawing rooms were built specially for women and were considered as mainly for the ladies to be on their own while the men were left to drink and discuss politics in the Dining Room.\textsuperscript{110} The custom of women retiring to their own sanctum leaving

men on their own became a practice in the eighteenth century and the drawing room became an important part of the town house.

In the eighteenth century Town House drawing rooms were built on the ground floor and connected to the main hallway or close to the staircase. These rooms often had beautiful furniture such as lounging sofas and walls with tapestries that complemented the décor. Image 11 of a Georgian drawing room in Bath depicts an example of this eighteenth-century décor, style and elegance. In a similar style Pickford House’s drawing room in Derby also encapsulates this same type of beautiful cohesive interior designed by Robert Adam.\textsuperscript{111}

Eighteenth-century sociability and being able to mix with others showed that one had social skills in entertaining, communicating and decorum. Consequently Town Houses were built with special rooms and chambers, such as the Drawing Room that allowed the owners and their family members, guests and visitors to be part of this domestic cohesiveness. This cohesiveness of the family gathering was a significant part of the changing trends in the social makeover of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{112}

Robert Adam’s design of drawing rooms focused on privacy in the domestic sphere and transformed the entertaining of visitors and guests. Adam came up with the idea of buffer zones between the drawing rooms separating the women and men so that when they retired after dinner the rambunctious behavior and loud laughter by the men would not disturb or affect the women. Adam’s reason for creating such a built-in buffer zone was because men’s behavior after consuming alcohol, become more animated and noisy.

Accustomed by habit, or induced by the nature of our climate, we indulge more largely in the enjoyment of the bottle. Every person of rank here is either a member of the legislation, or entitled by his condition to take part in the political arrangements of his country, and to enter with ardour into those discussions to which they arise; these circumstances lead men to live more with another and more detached from the society of the ladies.

As social tradition required, after dinner the male guests retired to the master’s drawing room to play cards and have drinks, while the female guests adjourned to the mistress’ drawing room to have their own privacy. According to Vickery, women during this era liked specialized rooms for their own entertainment which transformed their living space because the ‘escalation [in] domestic sociability

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across the genteel and middling ranks [had] profound implications for
architecture and space, manners and gender.’  

115 It gave women a place to do their own womanly thing, like having some form of social ritual and traditions to improve and relate to new bonds of friendship and kinship.

This attitude was prevalent during this time because women were considered to be different physiologically. They were not like men; instead they were viewed as more delicate, less rational, and more emotional and therefore were given space to be on their own. Being ‘delicate’ also implied that women’s conversations were mainly related to feminine issues like home, family and children, whereas when men gathered and had conversations it most likely included coarse humour, politics or even bawdy language and these it was believed offensive to women.  

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To indicate their status many masters and mistresses tried to ensure their drawing rooms were decorated tastefully. Therefore this room was not only well furnished from ceiling to floor but was filled with everything that was popular of the era, from silverware, chandeliers, mirrors, clocks, tapestries, gold and silver ornaments, marble, pottery made from porcelain, jasperware, ceramics and

chinoiseries. Lady Elizabeth Montagu was well known for entertaining guests and having social gatherings at her town house, Hill Street House, and hired Robert Adam to design a new ceiling and filled the chamber with new carpets and furnishings. ¹¹⁷ Ceilings and mouldings of Drawing Rooms were often decorated with motifs. The walls were sometimes tastefully decorated with portraits, paintings and gold gilded ornamental mirrors.

In some drawing rooms of the wealthy householders the furniture was specially made by the well known Chippendale family and also others like Thomas Boulton and William Kent. ¹¹⁸ Their names lent an air of elegance to chairs, settees, side tables, card tables, cabinets and commodes therefore giving the room the much sought after attitude of taste, class and artistry. Chippendale’s exquisite furniture was supplied to many of the well known houses during the eighteenth century and especially between 1766 and 1776. Chippendale for example supplied an extensive range of furniture to David Garrick’s house at the Adelphi Building in London. ¹¹⁹ Chippendale also published his designs in his book, *The gentleman and cabinet-maker’s director: being a large collection of...*

¹¹⁹ Thomas Chippendale, ‘The gentleman and cabinet-maker’s director: being a large collection of the most elegant and useful designs of household furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and modern taste,’ archived from http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ChippGentCab Accessed: 13/05/2015
the most elegant and useful designs of household furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and modern taste, (1754), and these were then used by other cabinet makers.\textsuperscript{120} The quality of these elegant furnishings also depended on the class of the people who lived in these town houses. Those of the gentry and aristocratic lineage favoured the well known makers of furniture, wallpaper, clocks, mirrors and tapestries. At No.17 Grosvenor Square, owned by the Courtenays, Earl of Devon: 

Lord Courtenay’s dressing-room had some thirty china figurines over the chimney. In the first floor rooms all the curtains were green, generally ensuite with green upholstery, while the carpets-fitted in the drawing rooms were Wilton-pier glasses, girandoles and marble slabs were important features. \textsuperscript{121}

For the middle class, some were able to do up their homes with the new and artistic décor and then there were those who also wanted to have an air of taste and gentility and therefore decorated and beautified their town houses with items of a lesser quality. For example, Josiah Wedgwood decided to produce a set of Bow-pots, Tea pots and good vases with the intention of marketing them

\textsuperscript{120} Thomas Chippendale, ‘The gentleman and cabinet-maker’s director: being a large collection of the most elegant and useful designs of household furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and modern taste,’ archived from http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ChippGentCab. Accessed: 13/05/2015

at a lower cost for the middle class who were very interested in decorating their homes but could not afford to buy premium products.\textsuperscript{122}

While the gentry used expensive tapestries to adorn their walls and furnishings, the middle class turned to wallpaper, a new trend in decoration which became very popular during the eighteenth century. According to John Wood, a well-known architect and designer who built and designed interiors of houses mainly in Bath, wallpaper was extremely fashionable from 1740 and because it was colour printed it was easy to match with other furnishings such as curtains and upholstery.\textsuperscript{123} Wallpaper was a cheaper fashion statement especially for the middle classes because it allowed them to decorate their living spaces at an economical cost. Because of its affordability people were able to replace or repaper their rooms often. Martha Dodson of Cookham, in Berkshire, for example, who was a widow of a wealthy tinplate worker, wallpapered her rooms in 1748, 1749, 1753, 1758 and 1760. The cost for papering her chamber was £1 15s and chintz paper for her other rooms cost her £1. 13s. \textsuperscript{124}

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The Bedrooms

The bedrooms of Town Houses were mainly on the second and third floors of the house. Normally the masters’ and mistress’ bedrooms were on the second floor which also housed the special drawing rooms of the owners. The children, other family members and relatives’ bedrooms were usually built on the third floor. The other occupants, like housekeepers, servants and maids who worked there were also given rooms to sleep and their rooms were normally on the top floor or the house. All these floors with the bedrooms were connected by staircases.

The master’s and mistress’ bedrooms were on the same floor and were often built with attendant dressing rooms or closets. The mistress’ dressing room would also be a boudoir, or a sitting room which was used for visiting lady friends or family. Lady Shelburne, in Shelburne House London, used her dressing room to write letters, read sermons as well as entertain her closest friends. In a similar manner the master of the house’s dressing room was used for private moments or even as a study. Often these rooms had the latest,

most fashionable and best quality wall paper to enhance the space. The furniture in these rooms would often be from the best furniture makers such as Chippendale. The windows too were dressed in the best damask fabrics with curtains to match the décor of the room and furnishings as we see with the dressing room of Lady Elizabeth Montagu at Hill Street, London in 1767.\footnote{Amanda Vickery, \textit{Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian London}, (London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 150.} Some mistress' bed rooms were decorated with oil and water colour paintings. For instance Lady Shelburne displayed her own water colour paintings in her dressing room to show that she had taste and refinement.\footnote{Amanda Vickery, \textit{Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian London}, (London: Yale University Press, 2009), Pp. 145, 155 & 156.}

Children's bedrooms were usually on a different floor from those of their parents'. The inclusion in the Georgian Town House of bed rooms specifically for children mirrors what some historians believe was a shift in the relationship between parents and children from the seventeenth century onwards. Historians such as Lawrence Stone argued that the emotional bond between parents and their children became more important from this time onwards, as the household moved away from primarily a unit of production to one of reproduction.\footnote{Lawrence Stone, \textit{The Family, Sex and Marriage: 1450 to 1750}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).} (See Image 12 of eighteenth-century painting of children with their mother). Whilst many historians have since determined that the relationship between parents
and children might not have dramatically shifted during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there is no doubt that consumer goods directed at children became more common from the eighteenth century onwards.\footnote{Linda Pollock, \textit{Forgotten Children: Parent child relations from 1500 to 1900}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).} According to J H Plumb children became a sales target during this consumer era. All the things that would appeal to children, like toys, books and clothes became part of the purchasing and emulating craze.\footnote{J H Plumb, ‘The New World of Children in Eighteenth century England,’ in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J H Plumb, \textit{The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth century England}, (London: Europa Publications Ltd, 1982), Pp. 286 & 292.} In this same manner education also became crucial because the parents felt that their children had to be groomed to have the same aspirations they had in social etiquette and decorum.
Children were not only nurtured but they were viewed as separate from adults. According to Ralph Houlbrooke, upper class and wealthy middle class families wanted their children to be inculcated with good manners. The parents felt that to blend or advance in society the children had to have the prerequisite of decorum and good polite manners.\textsuperscript{132} Parents also took interest in their children’s schooling to see that they did well or progressed in their studies.\textsuperscript{133} Books were written for children to improve their reading and authors even wrote literature on how to bring up children.

Besides being decorated with furnishings, children rooms had toys not only for boys but also for girls. Dolls and doll houses, mechanical toys, toys representing Noah’s Ark, Animal Farms which were all part of enriching their lives.\textsuperscript{134}


The Library/Music Room

Image 13: A Georgian Library at No: 1 Royal Crescent, Bath.  

Image 14: Depicts a painting from 1771 of a young girl reading in a library.

The Library was one of the most important rooms in the Georgian Town House. From the late seventeenth century onwards scientific inventions, artistic fervor, culture and knowledge all became crucial aspects of living tastefully.

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Consequently reading books was also an important past-time for members of the upper and middle classes.

Before the eighteenth century, literacy levels throughout England were low with the historian David Cressy estimating that in the late seventeenth century only 40% of adult males and 30% of adult females were able to read.\textsuperscript{137} Historians believe that literacy increased during the course of the eighteenth century because of the emphasis placed by the Protestant faith on an individual relationship with God, via the reading of the Bible. Following on from this, reading privately for one’s own satisfaction became important. Reading became an act which ‘when repeated and constantly reinforced by commonplacing’, allowed men and women to reflect on whatever text they have read with a new insight.\textsuperscript{138} As quoted by one contributor to \textit{The Spectator}, ‘I am now in the Country, and employ most of my Time in reading, or thinking upon what I have read.’\textsuperscript{139}

The eighteenth century in England witnessed an explosion in publishing.

Numerous books were published, novels were printed, pamphlets, leaflets and newspapers were placed in coffee houses and shops, manuals for politeness,

\textsuperscript{139} The Spectator, 2 September 1712, in David Allan, ‘Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740-1830,’ (London : Routledge, 2008), p. 174
gentility and moral behaviour, newsletters and periodicals like *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, were all popular and became readily available for people who could read and who wanted to be part of polite society. 140 Women and men had access to these varied reading materials. Just as men were reading political newsletters and having discussions in coffeehouses, women too were reading books such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*. (See Image 14 of a young woman reading). Individuals from across the classes enjoyed the benefits of reading. Thomas Carter, an apprentice tailor, was given a collection of the well known texts, *The Seasons*, by his employer. John Cannon, a grazier, borrowed books from a gardener’s collection. Whether for pleasure or in order to study a particular topic reading provided the chance for individuals to change their lives and was an integral aspect of new ways of thinking in eighteenth-century England.

Consequently having a library or a room specifically for reading and learning was part of most Town Houses. The Library or study was not just another ordinary room. It also had all the elegance and characteristics of the other main rooms of the Town House. This room was also well furnished with quality cabinets and shelves for housing the new books that were popular during this

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era. To complement the sanctum and acknowledge its significance in the house the library often had bookcases made of oak and glass fronted cabinets along with writing tables. Some also had elegant library tables for writing and mahogany chairs or even settees for reading. (See Image 13 of the Library in No: 1 Royal Crescent).

Reading and similar cultural pursuits became imperative and fashionable. Therefore having a reading room in the Town House was crucial because residents wanted to be seen as well read, knowledgeable and therefore polite and cultivated. In her book, *Feminism in Eighteenth Century England*, Katherine Rodgers mentions that girls were not sent to school and learned at home ‘if [they were] so fortunate as to have a learned father, brother or friend who took an interest in teaching [them].’ In this respect I think the library could be an important part of the Town House for young ladies and girls to attain a better education as well as allowing them to learn the skills of socializing and being polite. It also opened up their world to gaining independence. Rodgers comments that ‘Lady Mary Pierrepont (Wortley Montagu), provided by her father with instructions in needlework and wood carving, read voraciously in his library

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and taught herself Latin and several other languages.'\textsuperscript{142} This indicates that a woman like Mary Wortley Montagu was capable of learning on her own and her extensive reading made her an accomplished writer who went on to publish essay, poems and satires known as “town eclogues”.\textsuperscript{143} It is also worth noting that within the usual understanding of appropriate behavior for women, during this era, such extensive learning was unusual and what enabled Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to be educated was access to a library at home.

Sometimes the Library was also a music room in which children and young ladies played on the pianoforte or even violins. Just as reading was increasingly important, so too music was considered a necessary accomplishment. Being entertained with music was a part of eighteenth-century social lifestyle and well known composers such as George Frederic Handel had great popular appeal in England.\textsuperscript{144} Socializing at home was a form of hospitality and it also integrated families and visitors or guests. This act of socializing at home was another shift in the domestic scene of the town house residents. Even though attending

\textsuperscript{143} Isobel Grundy, Lady Mary Wortley, (Montagu), not only had a gift for languages, she travelled extensively in Europe and constantly wrote to her daughter, Lady Bute on philosophical topics, education for girls, works of modern novelist and about her experiences on fishing, gardening, farming and social habits of her neighbours.  
\textsuperscript{144} George Frederic Handel’s well known works included the classical oratorio, \textit{Messiah} in 1741 which became a success when it was first played in Dublin in 1742. He also composed music for operas, accessed from British Library Online, \url{www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/musicman/handel/index.html} Accessed : 26/05/2015.
plays, dramas and operas was a major socializing and cultural movement in London at this time, the gentry and middle classes also created entertainment at home. This indicated a move towards having more intimate entertainment with family members in the privacy of their homes.

Some libraries also housed portraits of well known historical figures, also marble statues and busts of classical Greek scholars such as Plato and Socrates, as well as ancient sculptures signifying the neo classical designs and aesthetics of ancient art. An example of this was Shelburne House in London where the Earl of Shelburne in 1771 had a sculpture gallery and later converted it into a library which also housed some of his collected sculptures. These special furnishings and décor suggests that the owners wanted the library to be a special place not only for attaining knowledge but for displaying their class and taste.

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Image 15: A middle class family living in a town house was also influenced by the consumerism of the era. This image shows the family well dressed and having tea using silverware and porcelain tea cups.  

The Kitchen

The kitchen was usually built at the back of the ground floor or on the basement floor. It was the area predominantly occupied and used by the housekeepers, butlers, maids and servants. Kitchens were big open spaces that housed an open cooking section, had huge wooden working tables and in some houses had a dining section for all those who worked for the master of the house. Whilst in many kitchens the cooking was undertaken using open brick ovens, by 1750 iron foundries started to manufactured cast iron ovens which were also known as perpetual ovens. They not only kept food warm all the time, some of these

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ovens had quality door casts and were fashionably outfitted to suit the tastes of the era.\textsuperscript{148} Other new features that brought about changes in the kitchen were improved kitchen utensils, superior fire grates and clockwork spits for roasting meat. These technological innovations in the eighteenth century helped improve cooking for not only for Town House occupants but also assisted in catering for big functions and dinners for visitors and guests.\textsuperscript{149}

Besides these new technologies the cooks in Town Houses also had help with numerous publications of cookery books. Among these writers of cook book the most well known was Hannah Glasse who published her \textit{Art of Cookery} in 1747 and specially wrote ‘to improve the servants and save the ladies a great deal of trouble.’ \textsuperscript{150}

These kitchens were also built with stairs which led to the upper floors of the house to cater and tend to the needs of the masters, mistresses, children and their relatives. These stairs was also used by the housemaids, chambermaids and laundry maids to gain access to the upper floors without being noticed by visitors or guests to the house.

\textsuperscript{149} Learning Books for Cooks, 1700s food, British Library, archived from British Library Online, \url{http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/booksforcooks/1700s/1700sfood.html}. Accessed: 20/5/2015
The kitchen provides us with insight into how consumerism played a big part in the production of food, the serving of food and also the functioning of the household.

The Housekeeper, besides being in charge of the female servants and maids in the household, was also accountable and responsible for marketing of all the food for cooking and storing.\textsuperscript{151} Though the cook was hired to prepare the meals the housekeeper prepared the sweet deserts and ‘made tea for the drawing room’.\textsuperscript{152} The Butler was in charge of the serving of food for breakfast and luncheon, assisted by the housemaid. His supervisory skills and knowledge of his duties was especially judged during dinner.\textsuperscript{153} How the various items were placed on the dinner table, especially the good dinnerware to the execution of the food and fruits were all indication of the successful functioning of the household. In the town houses he was the person who announced to the family when food was served and during the course of the meals he served the wine and after the meals he also saw to the serving of tea. \textsuperscript{154}

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Before the eighteenth century the gentry and middling class were used to producing food in bulk at home. In the increasingly urbanized eighteenth century with the importing of foreign goods and especially food items like coffee, tea, sugar and spices, food became an item that could now be purchased. With the opening up industries and shops, traders and new merchandising, food items from meat, like pork, chicken, pheasant and ham, spices, flour, lard, fruits and vegetables were all now purchased for home consumption. What is more, new varieties of fruit and vegetables were available; a consequence of new food technologies and better transport systems meant food could travel longer distances. From the pocket book of an eighteenth-century English Housekeeper, Sarah Harrison, we learn in detail, how, when and where several food products, from meat to spices were bought and also ways and means to store and save all these food items. This pocket book informs us that new social trends were taking place; people were buying all types of food items from traders and shops for home consumption. From her writings we learn that she advises others to buy all the necessary food items such as flour and spices like nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, ginger and peppers from a reputable grocer because


all the items can be bought together and kept and stored for a long time.\textsuperscript{157}

People living in the Town Houses of London were able to go to these merchants and traders and buy their groceries and cook them at home.

Just as new types of food became available during the eighteenth century, other household items also made an appearance. Tableware, especially forks, spoons, knives made of silver and glassware were normally not seen on dinner tables or kitchens of the middling sort, before the eighteenth century. New technologies, such as rolled sheet iron and Sheffield plate made kitchen utensils readily available. During this period silverware and glassware became popular. People purchased exclusive silver utensils like forks, spoons, knives, tumblers, drinking vessels, glass and crystal bowls, decanters, plates and ornaments that were not only attractive to the eyes but complemented the dinner tables.

Although silverware was expensive and used primarily by the gentry and wealthy middle classes, at the same time servants who worked for them in their Town Houses also learned to use utensils such as forks, spoons, knives and glassware. It could be argued, therefore, that due to the close proximity of those from different social groupings in the Georgian Town House, new habits were disseminated across classes.

**The Top Floors/Servants Rooms**

The top floor of most the Town Houses was the area where the servants normally had their resting or sleeping areas. (See Image 16: Interior rooms of the Town House showing top floor.) These rooms were often shared by those of the same gender.

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Though servants had rooms in which to lodge they were not decorated in the same manner as the other rooms of the Town House. Many of the servants’ rooms may have had only beds to rest or sleep. Many servants came from the lower levels of society and therefore they had few possessions except for their clothes. Some of these female maids and male servants were given clothes or uniforms to wear to indicate their duties. Once again we see with the provision of uniforms the desire to separate servants from the family group in the household. Amanda Vickery suggests that some of these servants did have some private or personal treasures kept in small boxes.\(^{160}\) At No. 44, Grosvenor Square, maids had a locked drawer and key in a wainscot chest.\(^{161}\)

The Housekeeper, usually an older or mature woman who held a higher position in the household, would usually have a room of her own. Due to her position, her room would have a bed and other furniture, like a table and chair, a chest of drawers, and maybe even a box to hold certain valuables she might possess.\(^{162}\) In terms of the design of the room, it is worth noting that the Housekeeper’s room at No. 6 Grosvenor Square contained wooden panels (wainscoting) to the

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ceiling, unlike the four rooms in the garret, servants' bedrooms, which contained bare walls.  

Similarly a governess, who was not a menial servant but employed to watch over and cater to the young children in a town house family, would be given her own room. According to historians, in some cases the governesses in the wealthy households would be family members who were spinsters and widows who had experience in doing this job. This room might have similar furniture, to that of the housekeeper and also be decorated with wallpaper to give it some eighteenth-century finesse.

Butlers also had they own space in the house. Many butlers were given a room on the basement floor close to kitchen. This room could double as the Butler’s pantry because this room was used for storing all the dinnerware, glassware, silverware and tea sets. These items were the responsibility of the butler.

All these rooms were very significant to the residents, visitors and servants who lived and entered the Town House. The importance placed on these houses and

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164 Historian Anne Laurence, mentions this in, Women in England: 1500-1760, (1994), P. 135, and Amanda Vickery, in Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England, (2009), P.188, also informs us that ‘unmarried womenfolk [were] exploited as housekeepers, tutors, chaperones and companions.’

their rooms is encapsulated in the words of Sir Edward Turner Ambrosden, resident of No. 2 Grosvenor Square, in his 1743 letter to S. Miller regarding his house:

I have Cornices in the House from which I write, which could draw your eyes out of their sockets! I have Proportions which would command your attention during the two courses, in short, a House, on the glimpse of which you would pronounce – I’m satisfy’d! ¹⁶⁶

A detailed examination of the interior structure and design of the Georgian Town House, and the use of the rooms, provides a fascinating perspective from which to consider eighteenth-century English society. As noted by the medieval historian Eileen Power,

It is the greatest error to suppose that history must needs be something written down; for it may just as well be something built up, and churches, houses, bridges or amphitheatres can tell their story as plainly as print for those who have eyes to read.\(^{167}\)

The form and function of houses, both in the past and the present, are usually a consequence of a society’s economic, social and cultural concerns. This is certainly true of the eighteenth-century Townhouse that has been the subject of this research.

The ideas of the Enlightenment, new consumer understandings and shifting familial relationships played a pivotal role in how Georgian Town Houses were designed and used. At the same time it could be argued that the architecture of such houses then worked to reiterate the importance of domesticity, family relations, gender barriers, taste, social etiquette and decorum.

Enlightenment ideas played a significant role in how many people in the eighteenth century thought about where they lived and how they lived. Having the appropriate sensibilities, such as taste and politeness, became markers of good character. The importance placed on having the right taste, manners and social accomplishments compelled people not only to become genteel by reading manuals in order to acquire these social attributes but also to live a lifestyle surrounded with beauty and beautiful things.

Consumerism and the purchase of new and fashionable clothes as well as of household items from furniture to tiny trinkets was an integral part of the desire to display one’s good taste. New economic shifts in England because of the colonizing of new territories in Asia and elsewhere brought about new trade routes and the importation of interesting and exotic goods was one of the major factors leading to consumer spending. These and other factors such as the development of new financial institutions, access to credit facilities, and the growing cash economy increasingly enabled the growing middle class to become wealthy and thereby own or lease properties such as town houses and decorate them in style.

Family relationships also shifted during the eighteenth century, not only between men and women but also between parents and children. Consequently we see
rooms in the eighteenth-century Town House designed and decorated to appeal to the different requirements of men, women and children.

It should be noted that while Town Houses were primarily designed and decorated by men, in many instances the mistresses of these homes also had a major role in the decorating schemes and design of the interiors. Their opinions and ideas provide a window for us to view such women in a different light. Though scientific ideas of this time categorized women as feeble, weak-minded and fragile, the interest many women took in their houses shows them to be creative and strong; they had ideas about what they wanted in their houses; they wrote their ideas in diaries and account books; they discussed these with designers and shop owners, thus conveying their decisiveness, creativity and strength.

As well as domestic spaces becoming increasingly important to many upper and middle-class women their families also became a focal point. A shift in how children should be nurtured placed more emphasis on the role of the mother in raising families, and the design of Town houses reiterated this domestic shift. Children had their own rooms and they were filled with new types of toys and books with which they could amuse, and educate, themselves. Music was also an important part of this domain, with the acquisition of a musical skill viewed as
especially important for many young women as it displayed an appreciation of the fine arts. Town houses, therefore, reinforced the perception that men, women and children had different sensibilities and interests.

The interior design and decoration of many Georgian Town Houses provides a fascinating site from which to view the eighteenth century in England. The emphasis placed in their design on beauty, taste and domesticity suggests a subtle shift in the eighteenth century from a pre-modern world where one’s position in society was ordained by God to one where education and the acquisition of the appropriate sensibilities were becoming increasingly important as markers of status. The Eighteenth-Century Town House is a microcosm of that society.
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‘Image of house plan with servants’ quarters on the top floor’. Image 16.
