



Clara's Cottage

The house that is a part of Weston Museum was named for Clara Payne. Clara lived here from 1901 with her husband, Robert Payne, and their four children. This house was typical in the growing Victorian seaside resort of Weston-super-Mare. At first, Clara and Robert rented. By 1919 they had managed to save up enough to buy the house for £280. This works out (roughly) as £15,000 today. The house stayed in Clara's family for many decades.

Clara died in the upstairs living room in 1952. The museum purchased the house from Clara's grandson Jack in 1985.



The front of Clara's Cottage viewed from Burlington Street © Weston Museum

But the house was built long before Clara and Robert lived here. It was completed in 1865 by a builder named William Howlett. William wanted to save money wherever he could. For this reason the inner walls were laid in a cheap way. This used fewer bricks than other methods, but meant the walls inside the house were weaker.

Things were even worse for Clara's neighbours. One of their inner walls was, in fact, the plastered outer wall of the church next door. No wonder one of the walls collapsed during the Second World War when a bomb fell on Orchard Street!

The name on the bricks, Phillips, was the owner of the Royal Pottery in Weston when the house was constructed.

Please take a look around. We have arranged everything as Clara would have had it in 1901.

Kitchen

The kitchen was entered from the back yard. A tin bath hangs on the wall out of the way, ready to be brought inside when needed. The storage tank in the yard was used to catch rainwater. This one has a new iron cover. The pump was used to collect the water for the household. The one you see now came from a well right here in Weston, from Ashcombe Park Road.

In the early 1900s, most household chores were done by women. Clara would have spent much of her time in the kitchen.

The kitchen range was very important. It had to be kept lit at all times during the day. Clara's first job early in the morning would have been to clear out yesterday's ashes and give the range a good scrub. Then she would have lit the range for the day ahead. Baking was done in the oven, whilst other food was heated in saucepans on the hotplates.



The range in Clara's kitchen © Weston Museum

The range was also used when clothes needed to be washed. Water from the tank in the yard was heated and poured into a big metal tub. The washing was then beaten with a stick. Finally it was put through a tool called a mangle to squeeze out the water. Clara would then hang them on the line in the yard. The range was used to heat water for the baths, too. But luckily for Clara the family only bathed once a week!

The shelves of the dresser display tableware. They were also used to store food and cooking items, such as pots and pans.

Parlour

The parlour was meant to impress. This meant that furniture was chosen for looks, not comfort. This might have been why Clara and her family decided to purchase a piano, an expensive item. As well as looking impressive, the piano would have been used for fun and Sunday hymns. Notice how the room is filled with furniture. This was typical of the time.

Normally in a home like this, the parlour was used for special occasions and spending time with friends. In this house, it was used for paying guests.

The room was heated by a coal fire. Coal for the day was kept in a metal container nearby the fireplace. Gas lights were used so that the parlour could be made brighter. The lights were lit with a match, or with an item called a spill. This was a piece of wood or rolled paper used to light fires. If they wanted extra light, they used oil lamps.

Bedroom

This room was used by one of the paying guests. The bedframe was made with sturdy iron. The rails and knobs were brass. The feather mattress was very heavy. Clara would have had to turn it every now and then to make sure it didn't sag too much or fall apart. The bedding was made from natural materials, cotton and wool.

The fire was only lit if somebody was ill. Cold? Put on more bedclothes!

The jug would have contained cold water for washing in the bowl. After washing, the bowl was then emptied into the bucket, called a slop pail. The other container is a chamber pot, used when the guests needed the bathroom.

On a dark, cold night, walking downstairs to use the outside toilet was too much of a hassle, so the chamber pot came in handy.

These guests were lucky. They had gas lights in the bedrooms, just like in the parlour. Many families could not afford this luxury upstairs. Instead, they would make do with candles and oil lamps.



The piano in Clara's parlour © Weston Museum

Toy Gallery

The toys, dolls, and doll houses are displayed here, in what used to be Clara's main bedroom. We present two fine doll houses. The red one on the left was made around 1890 by a local carpenter called Mr. House, which we think is a very fitting name! The doll house on the right was made around 1850.

Above the fireplace you can see a photograph of Emily Davies with her dolls. This was taken in 1886 by her uncle, John Davies, who was a well-known local photographer.

In the case opposite the houses are some of the museum's toys and dolls. The teddy bears are favourites of ours, especially the one with the long nose and the hump on its back. This is actually the oldest teddy bear, made in 1915.

The dolls were made with different kinds of materials. Wax, papier mâché, and porcelain were used. The earliest shown here is a hand-carved figure of an old woman mending a sock, which was made in 1818.

Take a look at the walls. These jigsaws and card games would have been used for hours of enjoyment.



Weston-super-Mare
Town Council