

Royal Ontario Museum
Department of Museum Volunteers
Docent Data Sheet

Samuel European Gallery – South Wing – Renaissance Section
English Room of the 1500s

- The Renaissance appeared in England around 1530, the last European country to be influenced by the movement.
- The growth of commerce and foreign trade and the rise of a new propertied class led to distinct improvements in standards of comfort.
- In early Tudor manor houses, the life of the household was centred in the great hall but the hall became less important as smaller, more private rooms for family and friends were introduced.
- Style, despite foreign influence, possessed genuine national character. The classic orders were freely interpreted.
- Most Tudor furniture was simply designed, solidly made with Renaissance decorative motifs used on a limited scale.
- During the reign of Elizabeth, the quality improved.
- Mannerist motifs of griffins, grotesque figures, exaggerated leaf scrolls and heavy cup and cover turnings were added to Renaissance designs.
- Oak, indigenous to England, was commonly used for furniture. Now dark with age and polish, these pieces would have been a golden tone, when new.
- This room simulates a bedroom used as a withdrawing room for family and friends during the day.

Wall Paneling

- Circa 1580.
- From a house in Norwich, an important urban trade centre near the coast northeast of London.
- Merchants in the two cities were closely connected; travel was mostly by water in England in this period.
- Oak panels were typical wall coverings in better homes.
- Ionic pilasters with carved plinths show Renaissance influence.
- Panelling helped reduce cold and dampness.

Plastered Ceilings

- Were first introduced in Henry VIII's reign.
- This modern ceiling of plastered, geometrically-patterned panels was made specially for the room and is based on a contemporary design.

Window Glass

- Was becoming larger and more common.
- The leaded pane windows, of modern manufacture, simulate authentic ones.

Flooring

- Oak boards of various widths are a modern replica.
- Rush carpeting, often sprinkled with herbs to scent the room, was standard floor covering. (Note the watering can found in front of and slightly to the left of the Cupboard described below).

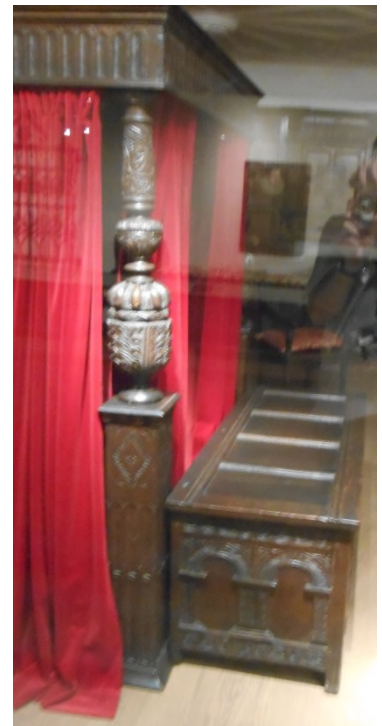
Bed

- Accession # 914.11.3
- Baldon Manor, near Oxford.
- Circa 1600.
- Tudor beds, large and often lavishly decorated, were an important status symbol, representing the continuation of one's family.
- Hangings and linens were expensive because all textiles were made by hand.
- As a result the bed was the most valuable piece of furniture in the room.
- It could be used during the day for extra seating.
- Oak, carved and turned.
- Four-posted beds, with panelled headboard, were introduced after 1500.
- A heavy wooden tester rests on a carved and inlaid headboard and on foot posts.
- Bedposts are carved in cup and cover design.
- Modern hangings simulate period fabric.
- Hangings would have added richness, warmth and some privacy.



Chest

- Accession # 915.6
- Circa 1610 – 1630.
- Oak.
- Panelled chests carved with fashionable decoration were now more usual than the earlier board type.
- Joiners' use of panel and frame greatly improved the construction and design of furniture.
- Classical arcades and columns carved with stylized foliage.
- Note the cup and cover design turning in the adjacent bed post.



Cupboard

- Accession # 968.26.5
- Circa 1600 – 1620.
- Oak, carved and turned.
- An example of a court or short (i.e. low) cupboard introduced from France during Queen Elizabeth I's reign.
- Designed in two stages with open shelves to display plate and pewter.
- Upper stage enclosed by a central door, used for storage of plate and food.
- Decorated with carved relief in a geometric pattern.
- Wood inlay on upper frieze and stage, a new technique.
- Note the carved cup and cover design supports.
- On the top right surface of the cupboard, note the Sweetmeat Glass, the Nautilus Shell cup, and the Coconut Shell cup (with cover), examples of the growing fascination with 'exotic' collections from far and wide. (Link to the collections in the Baroque section).
- Note the cup and cover design turning at the corners of the lower shelves.



Portrait of Two Children Holding an Apple

- Accession # 965x38.2
- England.
- Circa 1610 – 1620.
- Oil paint on wood panel.
- Artist unknown.
- Coats of arms indicate children were from socially prominent families.
- Collars and cuffs have been overpainted.
- Lace collars cover original ruffs.
- As styles changed it was customary to call in artists to modify dress and hairstyles. (Look at painting in case opposite to see example of ruffs).

Harpsichord

- Accession # 913.4.97
- Italy, Venice.
- 1596.
- Maker, Giovanni Celestini.
- Rare example of Celestini instrument – few survive today.
- Cedar case, painted grey-green.
- Oil painting on inside cover, of putti dancing and singing, added in 1600s.
- Mechanism is a unit in itself and can be removed from the outer decorative case.
- Venetian keyboard instruments were widely exported.
- Queen Elizabeth I, who was an accomplished musician, owned a Venetian virginal which is in the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Armchair

- Accession # 925.19.7
- Circa 1600.
- Oak and ash.
- Utilitarian; rustic.
- Three-legged chair with a triangular seat.
- Represents a traditional type going back to the Middle Ages, which remained popular into the 1600s.
- Although of medieval type, parts of the spindle ornament are based on classical mouldings deriving from Renaissance architecture.
- Good example of turner's work.
- Turners used lathes to create balusters, columns and household wares like bowls and plates from wood.



Settle

- Accession # 927.23.9
- Circa 1650.
- Oak.
- Located along the rear right wall.
- Mortise and tenon construction.
- Turned supports.
- Used as a seat, as a bed and for storage.
- Scroll and leaf motifs carved on each of four recessed back panels.
- Stools, settles, benches and chests remained most common seating in 1500s.