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## A guide to exploring a Glasgow tenements

Tenement flats have provided homes to Glaswegians since the 1800s. The blonde and red sandstone buildings are instantly recognisable, and inside there are decorative features and hidden spaces which are steeped in history.

As Glasgow enters its eighth week in lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we've never had so much time to examine our interiors! The [National Trust for Scotland's Tenement House](#), has created a guide for people living in tenements to get to know the history of the features in their home – from ceiling cornices to borrow windows and even hidden beds. Here's where you can find them and why they're there:

### Cornices



Cornices can be found decorating the edges of living rooms in Victorian tenements. While they add a touch of grandeur inside, they protect the stonework outside. Cornicing was also used to block noise passing between flats as the joint between walls and ceilings can be a vulnerable one.

### Ceiling rose



Light fittings are commonly framed by a ceiling rose with an ornamental design. These were not only an affordable way to add a decorative touch to a room, but also the result of a medieval tradition. When a rose was suspended above a meeting table, it symbolised the freedom to speak openly without repercussion.

Ceiling roses in older tenements can often be found off-centre as they were positioned to bounce the light from mirrors and make rooms brighter.

### **Borrow/transom window**



Borrow windows are seen above most front doors in tenements and above internal doors too. Before electricity was used in homes, they allowed natural light to flow into hallways and interior rooms. With the door closed, light would pass but the heat would be retained.

### **Fireplaces**



Glasgow tenements were kept warm by coal fires and the heat emanating from gas lights. Many were not equipped with central heating until well into the 1900s (at the Tenement House, Miss Toward never put central heating in place).

Some fireplaces were covered with beautiful, decorative tiles but today, these have been removed and often fireplaces in bedrooms are now blocked behind a wall.

### **Close tiling**



Many of the closes in Glasgow were tiled and there are some impressive Art Nouveau tile examples still in place. These were for decoration and for convenience as tiles were an easy-to-clean surface for an open space.

Some closes are lucky to have beautiful tiles all the way up while some others only have them on the main landing.

### **Box bed**



The set-in bed was an economical way of providing extra sleeping space. This small sleeping space can only be found in houses built before 1900, as this type of bed was banned for health reasons.

The bed closet would be in the parlour opposite the window that traditionally faced the street and it was kept 'hidden' behind a door. The space at the bottom and shelves at the top could be used for storage.

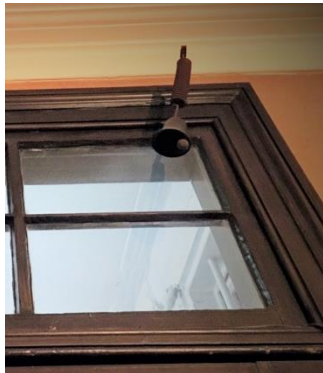
## Bed recess



As the kitchen would have been the warmest room in the house, a bed recess or kitchen bed was built above the floor. The recess bed could be hidden by curtains during the day. At night an earthenware hot water 'pig' kept it warm.

Families who did not have a bathroom might keep a tin bath there, or a 'hurley bed' to be wheeled out at night for children to sleep on.

## Doorbell



There was a time when doorbells were simply a bell by the door. In tenements where the original front door has stood the test of time, there will be a space where the bell push was on the outside edge of the door frame.

Tenement House is owned and cared for by conservation charity, the National Trust For Scotland. It is the former home of shorthand typist Miss Agnes Toward, who lived there from 1911 to 1965. Miss Toward collected many household items and the property offers visitors a chance to take a trip back in time to see what tenement life was like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

For further information on the work of the National Trust for Scotland or to become a member or make a donation visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

**ENDS**

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**Editor's Notes:**

The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland's heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

From coastlines to castles, art to architecture, wildlife to wildernesses, the National Trust for Scotland exists to protect the national and natural treasures we all love. To plan your visit today, enter your postcode at [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

