



The Twickenham Museum Archive

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by Anthony Beckles Willson (04/09/2003)

A plaque on the south façade claims that the house was built in about 1720. There is no actual verification of this although it may be taken as a reasonable date. The earliest view of the house so far identified is a watercolour of c1835 taken from the north-east (original in Guildhall Library, London). The earliest documentary evidence yet uncovered suggests that by 1741 when he died, the house, with others, was the property of Thomas Twining. The Twining family's long association with Twickenham, documented elsewhere, started in 1720, included the foundation of a technical educational museum in 1860, the endowment of some almshouses in 1875 and ended with the donation of Dial House to the parish for use as the vicarage in 1890.

The properties were originally copyhold of Twickenham Manor (sometimes called Yorkhold). The records of this manor, ACC 682 held by London Metropolitan Archives, are fragmentary and incomplete, so identifying the original owner or tenant has not been possible yet.

Listed, grade II, the house is described in the schedule (TQ 1673 21/46) as: "C18 House of 3 storeys. Three bays wide on ground and first floors, one window on second floor in gable. Two-light casement windows to upper floors. Central entrance with restored door case."

The principal section of the house was built as the southern half of a pair divided by a chimney stack forming the major section of a party wall. There is a fireplace at each floor level, with a winding staircase to the left and a cupboard to the right in the recesses left by the chimney stack. The external walls are of 14" brickwork following the line of the property boundary, gabled at each end of the pair. The outer skins of the external brick walls are of fairly uniform yellow London stocks built in Flemish bond (alternate stretchers and headers course by course). The houses share a small internal courtyard and the walls, ancient and modern, facing this are of weather-boarded timber construction.

The roofs are pantiled between the parapets. The joints between the clay pantiles are pointed with mortar in a traditional fashion. The original pairs of supporting rafters are numbered (although some have been replaced) and there is no ridge piece in no 25.

The rafters are collared. Those on the street side spring from a wall plate resting on the outer edge of the external brick wall. Those on the other side rest on a substantial 9" x 6" beam spanning between timber posts rising from the ground floor. The ends of the timbers at the southern gable are held together by a continuous iron strap threaded through the end of each timber and secured with washered nuts. The strap runs along the surface of the inner plaster face of the gable. This gable is not at right angles to the building and was probably built following the line of the property boundary.

The inner wall of the principal section of the house facing the courtyard, constructed of timber, is weather boarded. Internally some surviving weather boarding can be seen on the end walls of the old kitchen and bathroom at ground and first floor.

There is a side section of the house, of trapezoidal form which abuts the adjacent property (24 The Embankment). This was later extended to the rear, probably to form the kitchen. The kitchen was originally of one storey and the line of its pitched (approx 40°) lean-to roof can be seen on the flank wall of the adjoining property. The original weather boarding of the rear of the side section has survived on the inner timber walls of the kitchen. At the short side (between the kitchen and the house) there is a small section of old 4½" brickwork in the thickness of the wall. This brickwork may have been colour washed at some earlier date, before being covered with the weather-boarding. Its original extent or function is not apparent today.

It is likely that there was a water closet at the end of the kitchen which replaced an earlier privy. The original soil drain runs from this point diagonally across the courtyard and passes beneath the floor of the other cottage into the street.

A further extension over the kitchen was built, probably about 50 years ago to form a bathroom and this, too, has its weather boarded internal walls.

The origin of the side section is not clear. Although it may have been built at the same time as the principal section it could equally have been either an earlier construction or a later addition. It was originally of two stories with a lean-to pitched roof falling from front to the rear. The original line of this roof can be seen on the flank wall of the adjoining property at second floor level together with a socket for a purlin. There is no sign that this section ever had a fireplace of its own at either level and it may not have originally been built as a part of the domestic accommodation of the house, rather as a store or workshop.

The side section has no flank wall of its own: it was built against the external side wall of the adjoining property, already in place. This property has a projecting plinth with bull-nosed corner bricks, suggesting that there was originally an alley way leading to the inner courtyard, or just open land.

While the front wall of the side section is faced with matching yellow stocks it is backed with softer bricks some of which are pink. This inner face, where it can be seen, at ground and second floor level is built in English bond (alternate courses of headers and stretchers). It seems unlikely that the whole wall would have originally been built using different bonds. The older bricks are eroded where they have been exposed to the weather on the north face at roof level. There is a triangular section of hard cement rendering at the back of the parapet which may have been applied to repair exposed erosion.

The brick façade of the house is seamless: there is no evidence externally of a joint or junction between the principal and side sections. However, the roof line is awkward, hinting at a later "infill" triangle of brick, making the gable asymmetrical.

The different (incompatible) bonds of the brickwork noted suggest that the house was re-faced at some stage, either replacing the original facing brickwork or, conceivably, weather-boarding fixed to a timber sub-structure. The latter might account for the

markedly forward position of the older windows in relation to the wall face (the three modern first floor windows facing the river are set back 4 ½").

It is likely that originally there was no parapet over the gable ends of the two houses, the pantiles over-sailing the wall and trimmed with a barge board. The parapet brickwork is of quite clumsy construction and finish.

The windows, although today more or less symmetrical do not offer positive clues, having been altered over the life of the building. The two ground floor single hung sash windows are of different ages, that to the right being older and possibly original, with heavier glazing bars. The window to the left is formed of two odd sashes rather than a pair with a proper meeting rail. The third window, facing Church Lane is larger than the others; it too has only a single opening sash. The three first floor windows are modern insertions into frames that earlier held pairs of side hung casements. There is a photograph showing these casements which are also described in the listing description. At one time the centre window was blind, possibly bricked up to reduce window tax at the end of the 18th Century. The window facing Church Lane remains as a pair of side opening casements, rather larger than the other three. The window heads are arched with fairly crude brick soldier courses: full bricks at ground level and half bricks at first and second floors. The arches do not seem to be original construction.

The front door and door case are modern additions carried out, autographed and dated by Arthur Collier, lighterman, in 1973. There is a press report of the time relating the episode, in which Arthur Collier is described as a builder specialising in period design. Prior to this there was no door case; just a recessed four-panelled door with a horizontal lintel above.

Inside, the division between the two sections is marked by a raised floor beam at ground level with vertical timber structural members. The floor beam rests on a brick sleeper wall. The principal timber posts extend up through the house to support the roof wall plate mentioned above. The post behind the external brick wall appears to be free standing, having no structural relationship with the wall. There are also horizontal members at each level which retain mortices (as does the floor beam) which originally accommodated vertical intermediate framing timbers between each floor.

It can be speculated that this timber construction pre- or post dated the principal section of the house. If of earlier construction it formed the external side wall of a small building to which the principal section was in due course attached. If of later construction it formed an original weather-boarded side wall of the principal section of the house, matching that still to be seen outside in the courtyard and inside in the short end walls of the former kitchen and bathroom.

At second floor level the left side beam rests on the timber post which is free-standing behind the external wall, and extends into the brickwork, although it does not actually bear on the wall. A long timber wall plate is resting on (and may be fixed to) its upper surface. This roof beam is not actually parallel with its opposite number on the street side. This could be held to have been because the post formed the side of an already existing side section and the builders decided to make use of it to support the new roof.

There is a second post rising through two floors at the centre of the house. This may be recycled timber: it carries a large open mortice with marks from earlier dowels securing a tenon. The mortice bears no relation to the structural needs of the house as seen today. The post is an integral part of the structure of both parts of the house but it could possibly have been part of an earlier structure standing on the site of the principal section today. More likely, perhaps, is the possibility that it came from the roof of another demolished building of some stature. It is tempting to offer the theory that it was recovered from the roof of the parish church next door when it collapsed in 1713, but this is romantic speculation of a kind irritating to certain historians.

The floors of the house are timber joists supported at intermediate positions by sleeper walls and by cross beams at the upper levels. The joists are generally at 16" centres, 4" deep and vary in width from 4 1/2" to 2 1/2". The solid floor of the old kitchen is built over ground that originally was part of the courtyard. The space below the ground floor had become filled with debris, ash and domestic rubbish up to the undersides of the floor boards. A representative selection of this debris has been salvaged and includes clay pipes, bottles and glass, clay marbles and evidence of diet: animal bones, oyster shells and whelks or winkle shells.

In 1976 the lean-to roof over the side section was replaced with an attic store room approached via a ladder from the room below.

At one time there was a partition running from behind the front door to the foot of the stairs. A section of this partition has survived, clearly formed from re-cycled timber material. One section of the panelling seems to have been previously a tall window shutter and the other, studded with iron nails, may have been a narrow panel door.

There was also a door at the foot of the stairs separating these from the corridor.

If it can be held that the original house was built in two stages then the addition of the kitchen, the bathroom and the attic storeroom made five separate building operations over the years. That is, until the summer of 2001 when the storeroom was connected to the principal section to form a small flat at the second floor level, making the sixth alteration/extension, so far.

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