

The Cedars (now Chertsey Museum)

Since 1554 at least 24 families have owned or occupied the Cedars until it became the Museum in 1972. The present building was constructed in 1815, with the annexe (Little Cedars) built during the late 1840s.

The first mention of the site is in 1554 when it was the Angel Inn, owned by Robert Chertsey. In 1701, Sir William Perkins owned the Inn and several other Chertsey properties (the famous local philanthropist who founded Sir William Perkins' School). The Angel Inn was acquired by Henry Weston in 1741 and in 1747 a house on the site is described as 'newly erected'. This house was purchased by William Clark, a solicitor around 1815. It is likely that it underwent major changes and rebuilding at this time, leaving the house in the form that we know today.



During the 1800s the house was owned or rented by solicitors, a chemist and doctors. These families always had a number of staff to assist with the running of the house. Occupants were often active members of the local community. In 1891 the Cedars was occupied by George Boyce, who was the first to represent the town on Surrey County Council in 1889. Dr George Graham-Hodgson and his family were tenants during the early part of the 20th century. The eldest child George sadly lost his life in the First World War. His younger brother Harold went on to become a distinguished doctor in his own right and treated George V in 1929 during a serious illness. He was later knighted.

There are a number of architectural features which are very typical of their period. The brickwork is in a variety of colours, a reflection of the general move from the prevalent red brick of the 18th century. The roof is of the 'Italianate' style, with overhanging eaves; a new development of the time. The construction is unusual, with two king-post trusses, the king posts attached to the tie beams with iron straps. This is usually associated with ironwork, but here it has been executed in wood. The front door has three panels fixed horizontally which links with the fashions of 1815, though the brass fittings are not original. The ironwork outside the house is of a very simple design of spear heads and 'O's, with urn shaped finials.

The inclusion of many large windows was designed to make maximum use of daylight at a time when no electric light was available. Glass was also used for decoration. The coloured glass to be seen above doorways on the ground and first floors is typical of the Regency period. It was quite expensive to produce, but was a simple, effective decorative device. There would have been more stained glass in a number of doorways throughout the house. These features were always carefully positioned in places where the sun would shine directly through them so that their effect could be fully appreciated. The original mouldings to be seen within the house are in a simple, restrained style in keeping with the Neo Classical lines then in vogue. They consist of parallel beads called reeding. The squares at the corners often enclose a rosette. The amount of decoration increased according to the importance of the room. The more important rooms also have taller doorways.



As improvements in services such as mains water and drainage became available, the house was altered. During the later 19th century an area on the first floor which had a balcony was extended to produce a bathroom, and an existing W.C. on the first floor probably replaced an earth closet. Other Victorian extensions extended the large room at the back of the house, now used as the Temporary Exhibition Gallery on the first floor.

The garden was designed to merge seamlessly with the house, in keeping with Regency ideas. The main reception rooms looked out over the garden to the south and west. We do not have drawings or descriptions of the original garden, but it is possible to gather some evidence from maps of the late 1870s. They show a large winding path stretching around a

lawn, with irregular flower beds, a shrubbery and a grotto. We do know that since the 18th century the garden contained two large Cedar trees, which later gave the house its name. The small grotto, which survived well into the 20th century, was a particularly interesting feature of the garden. They were extremely fashionable from the 18th century, and were designed to be places of contemplation. The garden was originally much bigger than it is today. It took in the estate at the back, and also the area where there are modern houses to the right of the building.

Most of the land belonging to The Cedars was sold off in 1958. The house was divided, making Little Cedars a separate dwelling, and a large part of the garden was built upon. The two cedar trees which gave the house its name were felled, though the listing of the building itself in 1951 (Grade II) probably prevented further destruction.

In the early 1970s, the Olive Matthews Trust (owners of the Olive Matthews Collection of Costume held on long-term loan at Chertsey Museum) purchased The Cedars and the then Chertsey Urban District Council worked in partnership with the Trust to create a new Chertsey Museum which opened in 1972. Since then, the Museum has gone from strength to strength, now providing an all-inclusive community facility covering the history of the whole of the Borough of Runnymede. In the late 1990s it was decided that the Museum needed to be updated in accordance with the needs of modern visitors. Work started in 2002 and in July 2003 the Museum re-opened to critical acclaim with extended and improved facilities designed to bring it into line with modern requirements.

References:

Exhibition text by Tim Noble, volunteer at Chertsey Museum in the 1990s