

# AN OLD HOUSE IN LEONARD STANLEY

by *F P Meadows*

There is an old house in The Street, Leonard Stanley, which had its origin in the 14th century, and which still contains portions of the original fabric. It is the oldest recorded house in the village. Having undergone several stages of enlargement, alteration and restoration, surviving a great town fire in 1686, and narrowly escaping demolition in 1957, it is now a complex building of differing dates and architectural styles, and in a good state of preservation.

The original building is thought to have been built for some important person, probably connected with the wool trade. The weaving industry, which started in Leonard Stanley in about 1550, had already been established on the premises when Richard Cornell (Cornwell or Cornwall) purchased the property in January 1560. During the following two hundred years, the house was almost continuously owned and occupied by weavers or mercers, first by the Cornell family and later by other families to whom the house had passed by marriage.



This is reproduced from *Old Cottages in the Cotswold District*, by W.G. Davie & E.G. Dauber, 1905.

The extensions and improvements made throughout the house were indicative of the owners' increasing prosperity. In recent years the house fell into decline and was divided into separate dwellings. In 1947 there were seven such divisions under various ownerships, having been sold off separately over many years. Due to dilapidation the house was threatened in 1957 with demolition. Fortunately it escaped this fate and after restoration and conversion it now comprises three separate dwellings. The largest, of which the sitting room and kitchen occupy the site of the original building, is named 'The Mercer's House'. The other two are named 'The Weaver's Cottage' and 'Vine Cottage'.

One of the earliest recorded references to the property is in the Inquisitions Post Mortem of Gloucestershire of 1392 in which it is stated:-

'It would be no damage to the King or any other to allow Roger Barbour to grant 4 messuages and 3 shops in Gloucester and Stanley St Leonard to Sir Roger, chaplain of St Mary in St Mary's Church before the gate of St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester, in aid of the maintenance of himself and his successors for ever. The premises are held of the said Abbey by the service of 9s. 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. yearly, and are worth 4s. 6d. clear, and not more, because they are in very bad condition. Roger would retain sufficient to discharge all his responsibilities'.

As the property was held of St Peter's Abbey in Gloucester, it may be deduced that formerly it was part of the endowment of the Priory founded by Roger de Berkeley II, Lord of Dursley, in his manor of Stanley in about 1130. This was an Augustinian Priory dedicated to St Leonard, from which was derived the name Stanley St Leonard, the earlier form of Leonard Stanley. To ensure its safety during the turbulent times of King Stephen, the Priory was transferred from Augustinian Canons to the Benedictines of St Peter's Abbey.

Stanley St Leonard grew up around the Priory and, with the growth of the wool and clothing industry, it increased in size and prosperity until it became a market town. Most of the weaving was done at home. This particular house with its weaving shop and cloth store was but one of several such premises, although, perhaps, larger than most.

## EARLY BUILDING

The original building was an open hall of three bays of cruck framed timber construction with wattle and daub infilling. One cruck bay and the foot of another still survive. In what was formerly the eastern external wall there are preserved two original unglazed windows with diagonally set and closely spaced wooden mullions. They are among the finest examples of their kind in the country. Today they can only be seen from inside the 'Weaver's Cottage'. The house became L-shaped by the addition of a two storied cross wing at the northern end. A room and a porch were later added in the angle. This room later became 'The Weaver's Cottage', and the porch could have been the double decker one that was removed when the building was renovated in 1958. At the period when the said room and porch were built, an upper floor was added to the remainder of the house. The next extension was in the 16th century when a wing of close-studded timber framing with a jettied upper storey was built, projecting from the rear of the original block. This is believed to have been in existence in 1559, when the house was leased for sixty years to a weaver named William Taylor. The lease gave the following description:- 'one tenement, a backsyde with one weaving shoppe in the said backsyde, the dwelling house containing iii rooms tyled and the said weaving shoppe contenyng ii rooms thatched.' The weaving shop was on the ground floor and housed two looms, and above it was a wool and cloth store.

Another close-studded extension was made on the east side of the house to form the existing two-gabled frontage to The Street. With this extension the earlier jettied frontage of the upper storey disappeared. Unfortunately, this small extension was found to have encroached on the highway. It was in the late 16th or early 17th century, when the building of houses in stone commenced in Leonard Stanley, that most of the dwelling part of the house was faced with Cotswold Stone, and stone-mullioned windows and drip stones were inserted. There were in all some ten stages in the construction, ending about the beginning of the 17th century.

The town suffered a serious fire on the March 23, 1686, by which the house was apparently unaffected, but many other buildings in The Street, until comparatively recently known as Church Street, were completely destroyed. The destruction was so great that King James II issued an appeal for the relief of the victims.

In the 1950s the whole house had become very dilapidated, and in 1956 closing orders had become operative on all but one of the component cottages, the occupiers having either been rehoused or had found themselves alternative accommodation. Matters reached a crisis in 1957, when a closing order was made on the only remaining occupied part, followed shortly by demolition orders. The Stroud Rural District Council appears to have had no alternative but to acquire the property, demolish the house and redevelop the site. Strong objections were made by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and a 'stay of execution' was granted. In November 1957, Mrs Beck, a lady from King's Stanley, came forward with a scheme for conversion into two residences and a shop, and applied for a grant towards the cost of the work. The scheme was approved and after having purchased the separate parts of the property, Mrs Beck received an improvement grant. Restoration and construction commenced in January 1958 and cost more than £3,000.

## OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

From the discovery of the title deeds amongst documents deposited in 1958 at the County Record Office by a firm of solicitors, it is possible to give something of the history of the occupants between 1549 and 1838.

In February 1549, Richard Pate and Thomas Chamberlain were granted by the Crown the possession of the former Chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church of St Mary de Lode, Gloucester. This included a tenement and orchard in Leonard Stanley, which were occupied by William Harmer. In the following year Chamberlain released his interest in the estate to Pate.

In January 1560, Pate sold the house to Richard Cornell, a

weaver of Leonard Stanley. Cornell was the supervisor of his father's will of 1551, but being, apparently, a man of some means, he received no legacy. Bequests were made, however, to his two sons John and Edward. John was left 'so muche tymber in ye wood that wyll make a lome', and Edward was bequeathed a loom and the rest of the timber after the death of Richard's mother.

Richard Cornell's successors never occupied the whole of the premises until the time of the wealthy Thomas Scott in the late 17th century, and Richard himself did not live there until 1586. In September 1559, four months before the house was formally conveyed to him, Richard leased it for sixty years to another weaver, William Taylor. The orchard at the rear was leased separately to William Selwyn, a clothier of King's Stanley, from 1561 until 1568, when he assigned it to Taylor. In 1578, Taylor assigned his lease of house and orchard to Morice Holder, a yeoman of Nympsfield, who had probably surrendered the lease to Richard Cornell by 1586, when the latter settled the house on his son John. At the same time he leased 2½ rooms in the house, occupied by Walter Chapman, to another son, James Cornell, who also was a weaver. James merely received Chapman's rent, but Richard probably lived in the house from 1586. The latter died in 1592, and his will contained various bequests of household goods typical of the period. He had four sons and six daughters at the time of his death. John, the eldest son, received his weaving tools: a warping bar, a 'scarrowe', a 'rathe', and a 'holding board'. John's son, Richard II, received a great chest. It was probably John Cornell who added the stonework to the front part of the house. When Richard II married Joan Aburge of Dodington in 1624, John settled the house on him, reserving to himself 'the dwelling house part of the premises and such additions of buildings as are added thereto'. In the rentals of the Manor of Leonard Stanley from 1645 onwards, the occupants of the house paid 1s. 6d. per annum for an encroachment on the waste near the house, which probably refers to land taken out of the roadway when the front portion was added.

Richard II eventually became a farmer. By 1649 he had settled near the home of his wife, Joan, and had become known as 'of Chipping Sodbury, yeoman'. In the meantime, the house had been let to tenants like James English and Richard's sister, Joan Beere (or Beare).

In 1649, Richard II sold the house for the sum of £69 15s. 0d. to his cousin John Cornell's father-in-law, a mercer, named Thomas Webley. Webley had begun an association with the property in 1626 when James Cornell assigned to him the 1586 lease of 2½ rooms. Although Webley described himself as a mercer, he actually dealt in anything yielding a profit. Something may be gathered of his business ability in the depositions taken during a lawsuit he brought against Samuel Ball of Stonehouse in 1647. Ball's wife, Deborah, had been buying clothes from Webley without her husband's knowledge, and according to Webley, without paying for them. Their cost had been put on her husband's account, and after a few years it amounted to more than £9. Deborah alleged that the goods had been paid for and brought witnesses to prove it. Other deponents claimed to have been similarly cheated. The most distinguished of these was the Lord of the Manor, John Sandford, of the Priory, Leonard Stanley, who said that his wife had bought cloth, and that two months later, as she was walking past the shop, Webley demanded payment again. Deponents on behalf of Webley included his three children. The eldest daughter, Mary, had married into the Cornell family. Her husband was John Cornell, a clothier of Stonehouse, grandson of Richard I. Webley's other daughter was named Hannah, and the son, George.

### THE WEBLEYS

The Webley family seems not to have been a happy one. In his will of 1671, Thomas left his son George 'one shilling of lawful English money. Also I do give him... all those particular debts that are owing to me by Doctor Rutherford and Doctor Madocks, Theophilus Cowley, Thomas Blanknett, Thomas Shaa, William Andrews and Daniel Blanch, which particular sums ley upon my shop booke'. Hannah received: 'my chests and boxes which she hath not already of her own belonging to the shop', and Mary: 'the great spice mortar and all scales, weights and measures that are in or belonging to the said shop'. A house and land that Webley had bought in King's Stanley was left to the daughters on condition that they allowed their mother, Edith, her livelihood and main-

tenance. Another indication of family upsets appears in the will of Mary's husband, John Cornell, in 1661. He described himself 'as heretofore of Leonard Stanley, clothier, and now living at Wotton-under-Edge'. He left his wife only five shillings, whilst the poor of Leonard Stanley received £5, and the bulk of his personal estate he left to his brother, William.

Judging from the inventory attached to Thomas Webley's will, the house was adequately furnished, but there were not as yet any of the gold and silver objects which gave an impression of opulence to the inventory of Sarah Scott in 1693.



*A modern view of the building.*

Webley's daughter, Mary Cornell, survived her husband by more than forty years, dying in 1707 aged about eighty-five, and was the last of the Cornell family to live at Leonard Stanley. Her younger sister, Hannah, married a man named Scott, who apparently left her an estate in Spert Hill, Wilts. With the £200 realised by the sale of that property she bought the house from her father in 1667 and leased it to him for the lives of himself and his wife at the nominal rent of a shilling per annum. The object was probably to prevent a claim on the house by Thomas' son, George. In 1693, George, released his claims to Thomas Scott, the son of Hannah and then the owner of the house. Thomas Webley's widow, Edith, was still living in part of the house when Hannah died in 1677.

Hannah and Mary carried on their father's business as partners until Hannah died. At the court of October 17 1673, the presentment of the manorial jury included a reference to their being involved in the illegal trade practice of forestalling by buying up commodities so as to control the market. Mary appears to have retired from business on Hannah's death; there is no further reference in the manor court papers to her illegal practices.

By her will of 1677, Hannah left 'the homestead which I now dwell in' to her son Thomas; and another house in the village to her daughter Hannah. Her personal estate was divided between them. Two gold rings and four silver spoons were included in the will.

### OTHER OWNERS

Thomas Scott, the next owner of the house, described himself as a mercer, although, like his mother and grandfather, he did not restrict his trading to cloth. In 1689 he and Anne Packer were presented at the manor court for forestalling the market with butter. He was a man of some substance, as his will and the inventory of his widow suggest. In 1693 he was able to lend £500 to his cousin, John Partridge of Leonard Stanley. The house, in his time, was probably at its best, and it was probably the only time at which it was wholly occupied by a single family. He died in September, 1693, leaving the house, £540 secured by mortgage, and land at Brockley Field to his wife Sarah for life, with remainder to his three daughters, Anne, Sarah and Mary. His wife survived him by only a few weeks, and her will, made not more than three days after his death, is a pathetic document. She left all her property in trust for her three daughters, all of whom were minors, with the proviso that 'whereas I, the said Sarah Scott, am at this present time bigg with child, if it shall happen through the mercy of God that the said child shall be born alive and live in this world' it should receive its share of the property. Though her will was not proved until June 1694, her inventory is dated November 6, 1693, so it was likely that she died in childbirth.

The inventory reflects the wealth of Thomas Scott. In the kitchen chamber (the best bedroom) there were five gold rings, six silver spoons, a pair of silver buckles and a silver bodkin. In the same room was a chest of drawers (at that time a recent introduction), a large looking-glass and a brass clock. Mercery and grocery wares in the shop and warehouse were worth £305-15s. 8d., and £165-13s. 9d. was owing in debts.

During the minority of Sarah Scott's daughters, the house was probably held by John Cam as Trustee. Mary did not marry, but Sarah married George Barron, a baker of Putloe - and Anne married John Crowther, a local shop-keeper. The Barrons sold their share in the house to the Crowthers in 1741/2. Anne died the following year, but John Crowther and his son Thomas kept shop there until their deaths in 1760 and 1761 respectively. The house then passed to Margaret and Catherine Crowther, sisters of the younger Thomas. Both died unmarried, Catherine in 1766 and Margaret in 1792. Margaret left all her property to her faithful servant, Hammoleketh Baker, who sold the house in 1803 to Thomas Miles, Surgeon. Miles was still resident there in 1834, when he owned Chapel House immediately to the north together with the orchard behind it.

There is a memorial tablet to him and his wife and brother in Leonard Stanley Parish Church.

### THE STREET

The Street itself is not without its history, but no longer is it the main thoroughfare of an important market town; and no longer is it traversed by visitors to the Priory and busy with pack-horses laden with wool. The most notable events that took place there were the visit of Henry VIII and his queen, Anne Boleyn, to the

Priory in 1535, and the Great Fire in 1686. Henry VIII with his queen and retinue had travelled from Gloucester to stay overnight at the Priory, from whence they proceeded on the next day to Berkeley Castle. The King was probably making visits to the wealthier religious houses that he had already planned to plunder; and it is probable that he also wished to be out of London at the time of Sir Thomas More's execution. There is no doubt that the magnificent spectacle of the royal visitors in their elaborate and costly clothes, proceeding along the street and disappearing into the Priory followed by the royal guard, the attendant ladies and gentlemen and other members of the Court, was something previously quite unknown and dumbfounding to the inhabitants.

The great fire of 1686, that destroyed all the houses and buildings in the street, except the few stone-built houses, wrought a great change in the former market town, which has never since regained its former importance.

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