

# WENTWORTH HOUSE, STONELEIGH

Its origins as the Stoneleigh Workhouse,  
built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.



*Wentworth House as it is today*

January 2014

## Stoneleigh Workhouse

**Part 1. The early history of Wentworth House:** My wife and I came to live in the east part of Wentworth House in July 1968. We knew that the entire house had been the former vicarage of Stoneleigh, that Canon Geoffrey Parks, then vicar of Stoneleigh had been the last vicar to occupy the house, but had, in 1948, moved to the former Parsonage by the Church. After that, we knew that Lord Leigh had purchased the property from the Church Commissioners, named it as Wentworth House and that it had been let out for approximately 10 years before being sold in two parts in 1958 and occupied thereafter as two separate households.

It was after reading Audrey Gilbert's booklet about the ancient buildings in the Village, in which she recorded that she believed that, before the house became the vicarage, it had been a hostel for the poor or infirm, that we became intrigued by the house's early history, who built it and its use before it became the Vicarage. It was however some years later that we learnt that the Record Office at Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust in Stratford upon Avon held an extensive archive of Stoneleigh Estate and Leigh family documents including records about the poor of the Village. With the help of the Archivist at the Record Office we were shown a file entitled 'Stoneleigh Poor' and immediately saw a drawing of what was unmistakably Wentworth House, a design of a building to be used as the Stoneleigh Workhouse. Not only the exterior but the floor plans in this drawing showed a design which was familiar to us, being identifiable as the rooms of our house.

There were various other documents from which we learnt that this design had been made by a Mr Johnson, a Stoneleigh man, who carried on his building business from what is now known as Pear Tree Cottage in Vicarage Road and the builder's yard at the rear of the Cottage. This file revealed some history of the Stoneleigh Workhouse, from its conception in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century until its eventual closure,

according to the weight of evidence, in 1817. Thus began our quest to discover more.

**Part 2. The Workhouse Movement:** Workhouses were founded out of the need to provide for the poor, the homeless, the vagrant, blind or infirm. The Monasteries had a tradition of providing temporary shelter and food for those who came to their doors, but with their dissolution in the sixteenth century by King Henry VIII, the problem was legislated upon by the Poor Relief Act of 1601, whereby Parishes became responsible for the poor in the parish by the levy of a rate in the £ on the assessed annual value of occupied premises in the parish. Relief took the form of cash hand-outs or the provision of accommodation for 'the impotent poor'. Workhouses began to evolve, first examples appearing in Reading, Abingdon, Sheffield, Newark and Newbury. Various enactments followed, significantly 'Knatchbull's' Act in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, which allowed Workhouses to be established on the basis that 'out relief' should be dispensed with and that admission was to be the only option. The hated 'destitution' test was introduced. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century some 2000 workhouses were in operation, some on the 'union' basis whereby groups of parishes combined to provide a workhouse for the poor of the 'union' parishes, of which one was in Warwick, another in Meriden and a third in Rugby. The following extract illustrates what cold, forbidding places workhouses were and intended to be as a deterrent to would be inmates -

*'We went by the field road to Chell, so as to escape as much observation as possible. One child had to be carried as she was too young to walk. The morning was dull and cheerless. I had been through those fields in sunshine, and when the singing of birds made the whole scene very pleasant. Now, when the silence was broken, it was only by deep agonising sobs. If we could have seen what was driving us so reluctantly up that hill to the workhouse ('Bastille' as it was bitterly called), we should have seen two stern and terrible figures – Tyranny and Starvation. No other powers could have so relentlessly hounded us along. None*

*of us wanted to go, but we must go, and so we came to our big house for the time. The very vastness of it chilled us. Our reception was more chilling still. Everybody we saw and spoke to looked metallic, as if worked from within by a hidden machinery, and sounded harsh and imperative. The younger ones huddled more closely to their parents, as if from fear of these stern officials. Doors were unlocked by keys belonging to bunches, and the sound of keys and locks and bars, and doors banging, froze the blood within us. It was all so unusual and strange, and so unhomelike. We finally landed in a cellar, clean and bare, and as grim as I have since seen in prison cells. We were told this was the place where we should have to be washed and put on workhouse attire. Nobody asked if we were tired or if we had had any breakfast. We might have committed some unnameable crime, or carried some dreaded infection. We youngsters were roughly disrobed, roughly and coldly washed, and roughly attired in rough clothes, our undergarments all being covered up by a rough linen pinafore. Then we parted amid bitter cries, the young being taken one way and the parents (separated too) taken as well to different regions in that merciful establishment which the statesmanship of England had provided for those who were driven there by its gross selfishness and unspeakable crassness'. (Extract from 'Voices from the Workhouse' by Peter Higginbotham)*

**Part 3. Stoneleigh plans a workhouse:** It was at a meeting of those householders of Stoneleigh Parish liable to pay the Poor Rate on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1783, that the parishioners resolved to present a petition and request to 'the Honourable Directors and Agents to the Right Honourable Lord Leigh....', asking that some part of the waste land on the Estate be made available for the construction of a parish workhouse. The Parish was of course then of extensive area involving Canley, Fletchamstead and much of the Green Lane area (all now in Coventry City) and Burton Green. The poor, from all stratas of society, were forced by desperate need, starvation and homelessness, to seek the sanctuary, of the workhouse. The wages of the agricultural labourer in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were barely above subsistence

level, hopelessly inadequate, one imagines, to provide housing and the upkeep for a wife and young family.

The Minutes of the meeting were in the following terms –

*A a General Meeting of the Principal Inhabitants of the Parish of Stoneley Assembled the Thirteenth day of February. One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Three, at the Sign of the Swan in the said Parish, in order to take into consideration the most salutary Plan in making and Providing Provision for the Poor and Indigent part of the said Parish, It is unanimously agreed that a Petition and request to the Hon.ble Directors and Agents of the Right Hon.ble Lord Leigh that they will be pleased to give leave and Liberty to the said Parishioners to Erect and Build on some convenient part of Waste or other Land in the said Parish, such Building or Buildings as may be thought most convenient, to accommodate and provide for the Poor of the said Parish which Buildings shall be Govern'd and directed under the denomination of a Workhouse; and in order that the said intended buildings may more speedily and expeditiously be Erected the said Inhabitants do agree to advance the Sum of Two Hundred Pounds, to be collected by a General Rate or Levy throughout the said Parish.*

Witness

Churchwardens ( Joseph Judd Wil'm Rawlins  
Robert Harris

( Ralph Cure Will'm Perks Jnr Thos.  
Harris

*Rich'd Sammons Henry Jackson Thos. Smith Wm. Gamble Richard  
Garlick Hugh Hayes Jos'ph Palfry  
Thos. Jeacock Wm. Watts Rich'd Shephard Thomas Hadley Jno.  
Perkins Abraham Cox Thos. Wootton Jos. Jeacock Richard Farmer  
John Soden (Overseer of the poor) Jane Harborne Wm. Adkins Ann  
Wigan*

That the somewhat unusual mode of address of this resolution and petition to the 'Hon'ble Directors and Agents' of Lord Leigh is, no doubt, explained by the incapacity of Lord Leigh as mentioned in Part 4.

It remains an intriguing question however as to why Stoneleigh Parish, a significant area as it was, considered that a Workhouse was seen as desirable or necessary. For a more populous town or city, a Workhouse might perhaps have become commonplace during the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the point that the 2000 existed towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A document dated 1790 and entitled 'A Copy of the Poor Levy at the Rate of Eight Pence per £ Rent' reveals that the levy for Stoneleigh Village (including Milburn and Cryfield), Fletchamstead, Finham & Hill, Starton Hamlet, Hurst Hamlet and Canley Hamlet totalled £88.12s.3d., hardly a significant sum. There were 92 ratepayers in all representing an average contribution of less than £1 per head, (Lord Leigh's liability was £13.3s.0d., whilst the Vicar, Rev'd Roberts, contributed 4 pence, Richard Farmer of the Manor Farm £1.14s.8d.). On these figures it might reasonably be questioned whether the poor of the Parish were significantly numerous or represented an onerous financial burden on the ratepayers. It is however understandable that finding accommodation for the disadvantaged and physically infirm, single mothers and their children, was a constant problem.

**Part 4. The Leigh Family:** Edward, born in 1743, survived into his



*Fig. 1 Edward. 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Leigh*

majority and became 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Leigh (*Fig. 1*). He was last born of four children, the first two, both being sons, had not survived beyond infancy. His elder sister Mary, born in 1736, (*Fig. 2*), like Edward, never married. Edward's trustees, during his minority included his uncle William Craven, brother of his mother, and related to Lord Craven of Coombe Abbey. Edward went up to Oxford matriculating in 1761, and

returned to Stoneleigh, a well educated and cultured young man. However in 1767, as he was about to set out on the Grand Tour, his mental health began to afflict him, about which he took medical advice before his departure. By 1773 it was clear that he was unlikely to recover and his friends, family and agents were forced to apply to the Lunacy Commission. The Commission, after an inquisition, held that

—

*‘the said Edward Leigh at the time of taking this Inquisition is a Lunatic of unsound mind and that he doth not enjoy lucid intervals so as to be sufficient for the Government of himself, his Manors, Messuages, Lands, Tenements, Goods and Chattels.’*

The Inquisition detailed his Estates in Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Cheshire. On March 1774, Edward was committed to his uncle William Craven and his sister Mary.

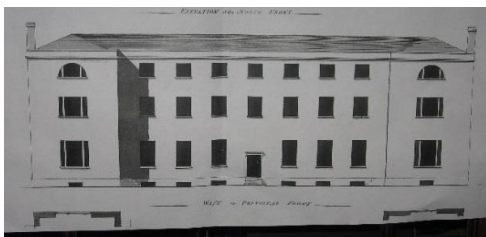
Edward died in 1786, aged 44, at which time the Workhouse was likely to be still in the planning stage or perhaps the early stages of building. Edward had made a valid will in 1767 before he became mentally disturbed. On his death, the baronetcy became extinct there being no male heirs. By his will he granted Mary a life interest in his estate, with gifts over to any issue of hers (there were none), failing whom, to his half-sister Anne Hacket or her issue (this gift failed in the events which happened), ultimately to Edward’s nearest blood relative of his name; thereby hangs other intriguing family history about the disputed Leigh Peerage case and the considerable uncertainty as to the ultimate beneficiary of Edward’s estate. Mary Leigh died in 1806, though during her later years she was closely involved with the Workhouse. It later became apparent that



*Fig. 2 Mary Leigh*

she had personally provided beds and bedding, furnishings, equipment and utensils, if not the entire contents of the Workhouse.

**Part 5. Earlier and final designs of the Workhouse:** Mary Leigh lived in Kensington. She had invited representatives of the Management Committee of the Kensington Workhouse to visit Stoneleigh to assist in the early planning. They were put up at the Swan Inn. The file which we examined at the Record Office contained a design of the Kensington Workhouse (*Fig.3 shows an extract from the drawing*).



*Fig. 3 Front elevation of Kensington Workhouse*

It appeared to be a very large establishment, perhaps too large for Stoneleigh's needs.

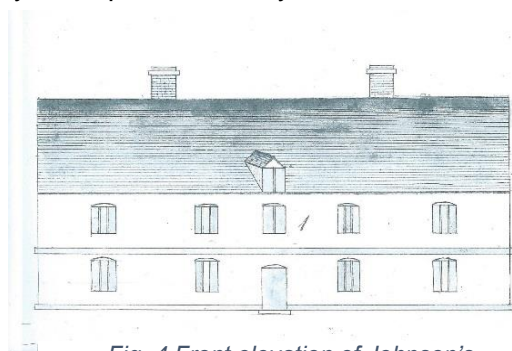
Mr Johnson, the Stoneleigh Builder, was evidently relied upon to provide a suitable

design for the likely needs of Stoneleigh; what is believed to be his first design showed a house with ground floor, first floor and garrets, with two work rooms, fuel houses, Brewhouse and 'Bog Houses' (internally) and two Master's Rooms on the Ground Floor, Bed rooms on the first floor showing 12 beds, and 2 Master's rooms, and four bedrooms in the Garrets with 2 beds in each, a total number of beds for inmates of 16. (*Fig.4 shows front elevation of Johnson's unsuccessful design*)

This plan was accompanied by Johnson's estimate of costs of construction dated 5<sup>th</sup> May 1785 in the total sum of £633.12s.1/2d. This estimate was endorsed by Johnson with a statement in the following terms: 'NB –this estimate was made before the plan of the Wargrave Workhouse was relet'. This reference to Wargrave is obscure though probably the home town of the Leigh family's solicitor, Joseph Hill. However this plan or design came under the scrutiny of



an Architect by the name of Henry Couchman, possibly recommended by Joseph Hill or by William Craven. Couchman was one time



*Fig. 4 Front elevation of Johnson's unsuccessful design. Iron bars at the windows were specified.*

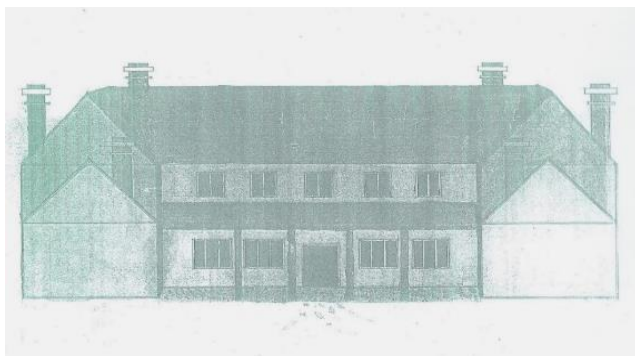
Bridgemaster for Warwickshire (he built the stone bridge over the River Avon at Barford, spent ten years working for Lord Aylesford at Packington Hall, also for the Newdegate family of Arbury Hall and was responsible for The Drapers' Hall in Coventry).

Couchman wrote out 11 points concerning the plan in a document headed 'Remarks on the Utility of the Plan' and 24 points on the following sheet headed 'Remarks on the Estimate', both being signed by him and dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1785. On the plans, one of these points was that 'There should be a common eating room as intended in the last plan' which suggests that there was, in fact, an earlier plan.

Couchman also wrote 'The Bog Houses should not be in the building, they should be in a small detached building'. He concluded 'I am also of the opinion the Building, if executed to this design will have a very unpleasing and awkward appearance, without the good effect of any savings on that account.'

Of the Estimate, he concluded 'As the particulars that was (*sic*) necessary to ascertain the whole expense, are so incorrect, I cannot 'till those particulars are settled, say more than that I don't believe the charges are more than are usual.'

Although Couchman refers in his list of points to an earlier plan, the drawings which appeared to us to show such a strong resemblance to the façade of Wentworth House, were clearly of the house built, allowing for the two single storey structures in front of the two gables shown in this drawing which were later demolished and the alterations made, perhaps before the house became the Vicarage, involving the



*Fig.5 Front elevation of Johnson's successful design*

building up of the middle section between the two gables in what had been the front Courtyard between the two gables and altered fenestration at the front. .

The Fig 5 design was of a two

storey house with the single storey extensions in front of the two Gables. A Brewhouse and Wash House was included, now the ground floor of our attached building which we call The Cottage, converted for separate occupation in 1993, also a Committee Room, now our Kitchen, with Cellar under, belonging now to Dr and Mrs Hadfield, current owners of the West side of the House, a Kitchen with Pantry and Storeroom and Dining Room, all on the West side, a Workroom now our Sitting Room, and 5 Bedrooms; crucially, latrines were to be outside the house. On the first floor described as the Chamber Story there were 10 rooms, probably all bed rooms, possibly one or two for the Master and his family. Allowing 3 to 4 beds for each of 8 bedrooms, the total bedroom accommodation appears to have been planned for some 30 inmates.

Next, appeared a document headed 'Minutes regarding the Mode of erecting the Intended Workhouse at Stoneley according to the plan

hereto annexed'. The details describe architectural details which are evident in the house as it is today, though brick floors in the ground floor Workroom, now our sitting room, have been taken up and replaced by a wooden boarded floor.

The foregoing summarises the records which we have seen as to the designs and the plan adopted. Unfortunately nothing then appears until the Workhouse was in being and occupied. After many enquiries, we have found no title deeds of this period, so that whether the ownership of the site was ever legally transferred by the Stoneleigh Estate to Trustees or Governors of the Workhouse is not known; surprising though it may seem, perhaps Mary with the Earl of Craven, in acting for Edward, purely informally permitted the site to be used for the construction and use of the Workhouse. In practice, it appears that the running of the Stoneleigh Estate was left in the hands of Joseph Hill and the Land Agents, Samuel Butler and Richard Darley.

**Part 6. Life in the Workhouse:** Unfortunately we know little of day to day existence in the Workhouse, how many inmates from time to time or the occupations pursued. There is an undated, somewhat misspelt document setting out the rules of behaviour, a transcript of which is worth setting out here –

***Rules & Orders & Customs of the House & Regulations in order to obtain Suborney Note 1***

*With respect to getting drunk & profain Languidge Rioting & so on we punish according to crimes*

*As to over Bedchambers we are two frequently obliged To lye three in a bed which should Not be, **Note 2** we have the Sick In the diferent wards for that purpose & proper people appointed to attend them we have a Large Room for young Children which is Called the Nursery also a Lying Ward and a midwife apointed at five shilling a person we have a School Room where Children are instructed to Read & The*

*Girls to work also, & at the age of 14 we put the Children out as prentices with a small premium*

*Also apothecary appointed at £40 a year £40 - -With respect to provision & Cloathing as follows –*

*For Mutton & Beef four days a week 64 stone for the week 300 For Bread 200 For Chees & Butter 160 For small Beer 150 For Cook the Consumtiom 45 Children 065*

*For Soap, Candles & Oil 80 For peas, oatmeal & salt 20*

*For Grocery articles 40*

*For Milk 14*

### **Note 3**

*With Respect to Clothing The Men & Boys with Lether Breeches & Coate & Waistcoat with a Yokshire Cloth @ 4/ yard as to Shoes are made in The House are at Least one Third Cheaper –*

*Then when we contracted for them the womens gowns are Made of Brown Surge @ 1s:3d/yard For Shirts & Shifts @ 1s:1d/yard Sheeting of Lancaster dowlas) @ 1s:2d? yard **Note 4***

*The above articles are Chiefly Contracted for We have in the House at this time about 220 but in General 200 **see also Note 2***

*This is a Short account of articles of the greatest? Consumption*

### **Notes**

1 'Suborney' as used above is not a word which I have been able to find in any dictionary. 'To suborn' means to induce another by bribery or other means to give false witness or to commit perjury or to commit some other unlawful act, hence 'to suborn' or 'to commit the act of subornation'. But, as used, the word 'suborney' indicates desirable conduct; does it therefore, as used, somehow connote the

opposite of 'insubordinate'? Thus does 'to obtain suborney' mean to obtain obedience?

**2** As to 'lying 3 in a bed' and the later reference to 'We have in the House at this time about 220 but in General 200', it is scarcely believable that 220 individuals could be accommodated in a building of this size, bearing in mind that at the outset according to the floor plans, the designed bedroom accommodation is likely to have been for some 30 beds! Obviously Stoneleigh Workhouse was getting out of hand.

**3** The amounts for food and provisions stated are presumably annual costs totalling £1029. The equivalent today applying RPI is about £100,000, according to the web-site calculator I used. As to meat, 64 stone represents 896 lbs or 406.4 kilogrammes of Mutton and Beef for the week at a cost of £300 or  $\text{£}300/896 = 38$  pence per pound weight. 896 lbs represents just over 4lbs per person per week for the 220 in the house at the time, or for the 4 'meat' days 1 lb for each of the four days which by today's standard is quite a lot of meat. (But perhaps the 64 stone would have been for carcasses rather than finished meat).

**4** Dowlas is a strong calico or linen (deriving its name from a place in Brittany) used for sheeting, aprons, gaiters, overalls etc. mainly made in the north of England (hence Lancaster Dowlas) and Scotland.

**Part 7. Work:** It appears from the Rules and Orders document dealt with in Part 6 that shoes and clothing for inmates were made in house and that a School Room was set aside for children to be taught to read. This is interesting since we know that Stoneleigh School had been founded in the 1740s. Perhaps it was felt undesirable that workhouse children should mix? At age 14 children were put out on apprenticeships, presumably with local farmers and tradesmen and

evidently the Workhouse paid a small premium to the Master of the apprentice, as was the custom for many decades.

Messrs Margetts of Warwick prepared an inventory and valuation of contents which was dated March 1817. The front sheet is endorsed with a note: 'every Article was furnished by The late Mrs Mary Leigh', who had of course died some 11 years previously. (Mary was frequently referred to as 'the Hon. Mrs Leigh', even though a spinster) The valuation totalled some £82.

The Workshop contained 12 Jersey Wheels, valued in total at 9s.0d. only, presumably for the purpose of spinning Jersey wool, so called because the Channel Isle of Jersey where this type of knitting material was first produced, and widely exported.

Also, the inventory included '5 Linnen Wheels' valued at the total of 2s.6d. Linen is of course, an every-day material with many domestic and other uses.

Margetts' valuation included a section dealing with a limited number of gardening implements, such as, a beetle ( a sledge hammer) and two spades, two muck forks, two garden hoes, a Dutch hoe and Mattock (a pick shaped tool with an axe and chisel type ends to the head), a garden line and reel, iron riddle, a garden roller, but whether such items indicate a formal gardening activity is doubtful.

**Part 8. Management of the Workhouse:** Unfortunately, and as far as known, no Constitution, such as a Trust Deed, Minutes of Meetings or other record exists. We know that a Committee Room existed and the Margetts' valuation records that there were 12 Chairs and a Stand Table and fixed cupboards in the room in 1817. Presumably the Committee was constituted by Parishioners under the direction of the Overseer of the Poor. We do know up until 1817, a Mr and Mrs Walker were resident in the Workhouse. Contemporary documents show that Wm. Walker gave as his occupation 'Workhouse Master' (Walker then

became the licensee of the Swan Inn but he lost the Licence on the Leighs requesting the Licensing Justices to decline renewal. Evidently the Vicar and Churchwardens had refused a reference routinely required by the Justices, as to Walker's character. It transpired that Walker was the last licensee of The Swan leading to its eventual closure and demolition as recorded in Sheila Woolf's interesting booklet – *A History of the Swan Inn*.

**Part 9. The closure of the Workhouse:** Before considering what we do know of the closure, it remains an intriguing question why it closed at that time. Also, what happened to the 200 odd inmates at the time the Rules and Orders referred to in Part 6 above were written? True, the number of inmates had reduced very substantially, as will be seen. Maybe it had been decided as a matter of policy that the Workhouse should be run down over a period of time. It seems logical to assume that the Managers, Committee members, Vicar and Churchwardens and the Leigh family were acutely aware that occupancy of 200 or so inmates with 3 to a bed could not be tolerated even by the standards of a Workhouse. Was it therefore the case that the Workhouse had become unmanageable and no answer to the problem of care for the poor? It seems likely that the running costs of the Workhouse and the level of occupancy of which we know represented a major financial liability for those who had to pay the Poor Rate. Coincidentally, 1818 marked an all-time high in the cost of care for the poor up to that time. Whether the development of Union houses, of which there was one in Warwick, another in Meriden, had any influence is doubtful, Stoneleigh not being a 'union' parish.

Of the fate of the many who passed through the doors of the Workhouse, one can only speculate. The few remaining in the Workhouse in 1817, indicates that over a period of years the numbers had vastly diminished from the occupancy levels at which they stood at the time the Rules and Orders were written, whether by death, or

the finding of gainful employment, others being found accommodation, board and lodging with employers, or relatives agreeing to take care for some. Maybe a policy over a period of years of not taking in prospective inmates but finding bed and board for them in the Village had been pursued by the Managers, it being known that the Parish had secured cottages for the accommodation of some.

There are two documents which help our understanding that the Workhouse closed in 1817. The first took the form of a letter from the Leigh family agent, Richard Darley to Mrs Julia Leigh, the wife of the James Henry Leigh, the estate owner at that time, and Mother of Chandos Leigh (who became the first Lord Leigh of the second creation). Darley's letter to Mrs Leigh referred to 24 souls then remaining in the Workhouse and what was to become of them. The letter is in the following terms –

*On the other side I have taken the liberty of sending you a list of the paupers in Stoneleigh Workhouse and what is to be done in disposing of them but in lodging them I beg you will consider whether it will not be necessary to say have your authority in so doing to prevent their not being received either at the specified cottages or any other that you think more proper. But it would be highly improper to put the old women (11, 12 and 13) as lodgers or inmates with any decent clean people for reasons which I cannot assign and was not aware of until we examined the paupers on the above days – If you could therefore oblige the parish by assigning some place where one person or more could be put to have the care of them, it would be the only thing that we could suggest but this we must submit to you.*

*Mr Garlick who I have just seen is very desirous of getting another cottager in the room of Bratt, but cannot from the difficulty there is, I cannot by any means stress this to you by giving Bratt another cottage.*

*I took the opportunity of stating what you have been pleased to mention, at the Inclosure meeting, but shall on no account interfere,*



*or give any further opinion having clearly understood Mr Leigh would agree to the Commissioner named by Lord C. (Clarendon?)*

*I beg you will excuse the haste in which I write this, the post being nearly off – but I will take the liberty of writing in a few days and have the honour to remain, Madam,*

*Your most obedient, Humble servant*

*Coventry 28<sup>th</sup> March 1817*

*Richard Darley*

**Stoneleigh Workhouse 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> March 1817**

*1. William Hudson aged about 60      works for Mr Soden - Proposed to be lodged at Joseph Hands's, Stoneleigh*

*2. George Clark aged about 70      mason's labourer but so infirm as to be quite incapable of obtaining the least part of his maintenance - Wants to return to his wife at Birmingham and to be allowed 6/- a week*

*3. Samuel Turner aged about 76      carpenter Very infirm having lately had a leg broken, which is not and probably will not be well for some time - Wants 8/- a week and to return to near Birmingham till he gets well*

*4. William Barton aged about 60      very infirm from rheumatism - Proposed to be lodged and boarded at a cottage to be taken by the parish and some person to be paid for the care of him and others.*

*5. William Alliband aged about 35 - Proposed to be lodged at Thomas Judd's*

*6. Job Clark    dumb    works for Mr Garlick    -    ditto as above*

*7. Joseph Rollason (wood leg) aged about 17 - To be lodged at one of the Stoneleigh cottages*

*8. John Horton aged about 12 works at Leasowes - Will endeavour to get him a situation as a farm servant*

9. *William Fretwell aged 11 years works for Mr Soden - to be so employed and lodged at one of the cottages*

10. *Joseph Stanley aged 10 years works at Mr Handleys Stareton - to be so employed and lodged at one of the cottages*

11. *Mary Baseley aged about 70*

12. *Widow Smith aged about 78*

13. *Priscilla Pritchett aged about 70 -These women to be lodged in some cottage to be rented by the Parish and have a person to attend them – they are very unclean and therefore cannot be lodged at separate cottages.*

14. *Mary Purdon aged about 26 - This young woman who is rather silly, is to go to Mr Richards in Kenilworth.*

15. *Ann Edwards aged about 17 - To go to her father's Mr W Heath..*

16. *Mary Fretwell aged about 9 - This is a very decent girl and it is Intended to send her to her friends at Barford if she cannot be admitted to board and lodge with a respectable cottager here*

17. *Sarah Pritchett aged about 9 and 18. Harriet Sammons aged about 5 - Proposed to be lodged and boarded at Thomas Claridge's Stoneleigh, or some other decent cottager.*

19, 20 & 21 *Hannah Horton? with a son and girl left the 24<sup>th</sup> instant – Gone*

22, 23 & 24 *Randle's wife with two boys aged about 8 & 3 years -She has taken a room at Coventry, the overseer is ordered to buy her a bed and some other furniture.*

The individual cases in this list, would I suggest be typical of the condition and personal circumstances of inmates found in a Workhouse - single parents with their young, orphans, abandoned

children of tender years, the Aged and infirm. I found the evident plight of these poor souls quite emotive; who can tell whether they found any comfort in the Workhouse.

The other document we know of is a letter from William Walker, the Workhouse Master and his wife to Mrs Julia Leigh, dated the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1817 written in the most obsequious, fawning terms. Sheila Woolf in her history of the Swan Inn set this out in full but since it give us some insight as to the closure of the Workhouse it is worth repeating here in full –

*To the Honourable Mrs Leigh*

*Honourable Madam*

*I humbly beg leave to offer you mine and my Wife's unfeigned thanks for the many marks of favour and kindness we have uniformly experienced from you and be assured that we shall ever make it our constant study to merit your future favour and patronage by a uniform adherence to that line of conduct that we hope will always merit your approbation.*

*We thank you for this last instance of your goodness in placing us in the situation at the Swan Inn.*

*WE now solicit the favour of being permitted to solicit a part of the goods which we are now in our possession at the Poor House and to pay for them at a fair valuation as it will save us much inconvenience and trouble in making purchases elsewhere.*

*WE would not have presumed to have asked this favour had the establishment at the Poor House continued but as the goods at the*

*Poor House are to be disposed of we shall feel ourselves much obliged by being permitted to select out such as we stand in need of and pay for them at a fair valuation. The favour will add to the many obligations we already feel ourselves under to you in assuring your Ladyship of our unfeigned gratitude we beg leave to subscribe ourselves*

*Your Ladyship's humble and*

*Devoted Servants,*

*Stoneleigh 27<sup>th</sup> March 1817  
Walker*

*W & M*

*A small copper and cooler  
Hearth Grate*

*2 Cranes ? &*

*2 Barrells & Tun ? Board  
Irons*

*1 Stand Iron & 3 ?*

*1 ½ dozen of Ash Chairs  
Table*

*1 Small Stand*

*Dresser and Chest of Drawers  
Pails*

*Barrel Churn & 2*

*4 Feather Bed & Bedstead  
3 Pair of Sheets*

*Cream Tin 1*

The original copy document shows various marginal inscriptions believed to have been made by Mrs Leigh, all items being struck through except the first three in the left hand column and the last two in the right hand column, so presumably Mr and Mrs Walker succeeded in acquiring the undeleted items only.

A record of Workhouse burials from 1789 onwards reveals a total of 576 deaths in a 33 year period. The first entry was for 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1789 'Nicholas Bennett Pauper from the Workhouse' and noted as being the first to be buried from there. The description 'Pauper from the Workhouse' or 'of the Workhouse' was usual. There were two women given as dumb or 'domb'. One assumes 'the paupers' (what a

dreadful label to bear) were buried in unmarked graves. Katherine Adkins, who died in 1800, was described as 'the Wife of Wm. Adkins Workhouse Mistriss', Wm. Adkins being one of the subscribing ratepayers to the Minutes of the meeting at the Swan Inn. John Harris, who died in 1817, was described as a Gardener from the Workhouse and others were described as 'Labourer from the Workhouse'. Of the three women about which Richard Darley found difficulty in describing, being numbered 11, 12 and 13 in the schedule to his letter, Anne Smith died in 1821, the entry reading 'Ann Smith Workhouse March 22 77' (Darley's letter had stated she was about 78 in 1817); Mary Beasley died in the same year and the entry reads 'Mary Beasley Workhouse May 24<sup>th</sup> 71' (stated by Darley to have been about 70 in 1817). Although all the evidence suggests that the Workhouse closed in 1817, the entries of the deaths of Anne Smith and Mary Beasley in 1821 indicated they were both of the Workhouse. Did they continue as inmates there under the care of some person? Or was it that the Workhouse stigma attached after they had left? But the entry is likely to have been indicative of the place of death, so perhaps they did continue as inmates as being the best that could be done for them.

**Part 10. The House then became the Vicarage:** Whilst there is some indication that some of the contents of the Workhouse remained *in situ* for some years, regrettably no records have been found to tell us precisely when the Vicarage use commenced. Robert Turner became Vicar in 1859 and James Wentworth Leigh, his successor, in 1867 (though some records claim 1864). At least we know that the Reverend James Wentworth Leigh was in residence at the time of his marriage some few years later and that the fairly substantial building alterations referred to above, of which there is some evidence, were carried out by his elder brother, the then Lord Leigh, William Henry, before James took occupation on his appointment to the benefice.

*Acknowledgments: Our grateful thank to The Archivist's staff at the Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust for their courteous help in finding the documents, copies of which are partially reproduced in our story. Thank you also to Sheila Woolf of the Stoneleigh History Society for her help and encouragement and for her own and of other Society's' members' ceaseless quest for knowledge of Stoneleigh's past. We have quoted an extract from one of Peter Higginbotham's extensive works on Workhouses and a visit to his web-site at <http://www.workhouses.org.uk> is most informative.*

*David and Jean Vaughan.*

Documents referred to:

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office:

(SBTRO) DR 18/3/69 1-17

The logo is a horizontal, light beige rectangular banner with decorative, slightly curved ends. It has a thin brown border. The text "Stoneleigh History Society" is written in a dark red, serif font, centered within the banner.

Stoneleigh History Society

*Places Booklet 3*