

Saint Leonard's Chapel, Clanfield

By JOHN BLAIR

SUMMARY

Cottages on the Clanfield–Radcot road (SP 2840 0120) mark the site of St. Leonard's chapel, first mentioned in the early 13th century. Throughout its recorded history it was a dependent chapel of Bampton mother church. After falling derelict, the chapel was rebuilt by one of the vicars of Bampton in 1237–44, when it had a resident chaplain whose duties included helping the poor. It was still functioning in the early 14th century, but had become a private dwelling by 1657. The core of the present building is a rectangular-stone-built range, perhaps the chapel itself. It is suggested that the chapel may have been founded in the 12th century as a hospital served by sisters from the Knights Hospitallers' preceptory nearby, and later reduced to a simple chapel-of-ease with hospice functions.

By the road between Clanfield and Radcot stands a row of simple cement-rendered cottages. Despite their unpromising appearance, they mark the site of a wayside chapel dedicated to St. Leonard. A survey in 1985 disclosed thick walls which are presumably remains of the chapel or a building connected with it.

Although within Clanfield parish, St. Leonard's was not a chapel of Clanfield church but directly subject to the ancient mother church of Bampton.¹ Thus the archives of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, proprietors of Bampton church from the mid 11th century, provide most of the evidence. The first reference is in a grant to the Dean and Chapter by William son of William de Karlinton, made with the advice and assent of the Chapter's proctor in Bampton church, of 2 acres in Weald for the maintenance of St. Leonard's chapel at Clanfield 'and [those?] dwelling there (*et ibidem commorantium*)'.² The formulae suggest an early 13th-century date, and a John son of William de Kerlington witnesses a Wootton deed in 1213×28.³ The scribe of the Chapter's cartulary may have omitted something between *et* and *ibidem*; whether this is so or not, the phrase suggests that more people than merely a chaplain were living beside the chapel.

A charter of the Dean and Chapter dated 1244 expresses, in florid terms, the mother church's obligations to its daughter: 'Whereas the chapel of Clanfield, which is a daughter of our church of Bampton, lately ruined and newly repaired by Master N[icholas] portioner in that church, cannot rejoice in the care of ministers without its mother's help; the mother should not deny her bountiful breasts to the daughter, lest she who claims maternal rights

¹ For Bampton minster and its parish see J. Blair, 'St. Beornwald of Bampton', *Oxoniensia*, xlix (1984), 47–55; J. Blair, 'Parish versus Village: the Bampton-Standlake Tithe Conflict of 1317–19', *Oxfordshire Local History*, ii.2 (1985), 34–47. Clanfield church was itself subject to Bampton, where Clanfield corpses were still buried in the early 15th century (Exeter Dean and Chapter, MS 648).

² Exeter D. and C., MS 3672 pp. 8–9.

³ *Eynsham Cartulary*, ed. H.E. Salter, i (O.R.S. xlix, 1907), 149.

acquires the name of stepmother'.⁴ By arrangement with Thomas archdeacon of Totnes, the chaplain serving and dwelling there was to hold the chapel with all obventions, oblations and possessions, saving due service to Bampton church and without prejudicing its rights. If the chaplaincy fell vacant, the Chapter's proctor at Bampton was to find a successor. The new chaplain was to swear fealty to Bampton church and its rectors and pay to Bampton, in token of subjection, half the obventions and oblations made at the altar on St. Leonard's day, keeping all other revenues for maintaining the chapel and helping the poor. The following year, Archdeacon Thomas duly granted the revenues of 'St. Leonard's chapel near Radcot Bridge' to Richard chaplain of Clanfield, repeating the conditions of 1244 and the statement that the chapel had lately been rebuilt in honour of St. Leonard by Master Nicholas, portioner in Bampton church.⁵ This must have been Master Nicholas de Totnes, instituted to two-thirds of the portionary vicarage of Bampton in 1237.⁶ The chapel, then, was rebuilt from a ruinous state between 1237 and 1244, and was served by a resident chaplain whose duties included helping the poor.

In 1247, the Dean and Chapter released 4 ac. in Clanfield in return for a messuage, croft and 4 ac. there granted to maintain St. Leonard's chapel.⁷ In 1327×38, a survey of Bampton rectory manor mentions St. Leonard's chapel on the farmer's land at Clanfield, from which the vicar of Clanfield took a quarter of the oblations and the farmer half the residue. A messuage and 4 acres beside the chapel were held, with herbage of the chapel and tithes of Simon le Palmere's meadow at Weald and Burroway, by Hugh Doyd, who paid 6s. 8d. p.a. and maintained the chapel roof.⁸ Possibly it was becoming redundant: nothing is said of the chaplain (whose house may indeed have been the one now occupied by Hugh), and half his share of the oblations had been annexed by the vicar of Clanfield. Whether the chapel survived until the Reformation is unknown; it was certainly defunct by 1657, when James Shilton surrendered in the rectory manor court a moiety of a chapel called St. Leonard's chapel and a tilth called Burrowayes in Clanfield. Luckily, the Exeter material includes a map of 1818 captioned 'a tenement in Clanfield called St. Leonard's chapel'.⁹ This shows, amid a scatter of open-field strips, the house with its garden, the surrounding 'home close' and a strip called Green Close extending eastwards from it. Thus the tenement and curtilage are readily identified on the Clanfield inclosure map of c. 1839 (Fig. 1).

As shown on the 1839 map, the building was a long, narrow range on a roughly west-east alignment, extending almost to the street. At this stage it seems to have consisted of three cottages with an outhouse at the west end. In the early 20th century the west end was truncated, removing the outhouse and reducing the westernmost cottage to a lean-to shed; in c. 1942 the building was extended on the north, west and east and re-modelled once again as three cottages.¹⁰ Despite these changes, a survey in February 1985 revealed thick stone walls (Fig. 2). The original north wall of the central and eastern cottages is 68 cm.

⁴ Exeter D. and C., MS 3672 pp. 9-10: 'Sane cum capella de Clanefelde, que est filia ecclesie nostre de Bampton, nuper diruta et per Magister N. eiusdem ecclesie partiarium denuo reparata, ministrorum solacio sine sue matris adiutorio gaudere non valeat, nec ubera munificencie sue mater filie denegare debeat, ne ipsa que materna iura sibi vindicat noverce nomen assumat'.

⁵ Exeter D. and C., MS 3672, pp. 10-12.

⁶ *Rotuli Roberti Grosseteste* (Linc. Rec. Soc. xi, 1914), 450.

⁷ *Oxon. Fines*, ed. H.E. Salter (O.R.S. xii, 1930), 134-5.

⁸ Exeter D. and C., MS 2931.

⁹ Exeter D. and C., MS 2934 f. 5; Exeter D. and C., MS 13/74363a. (This map actually shows the building aligned north-south, presumably in error.) E.A. Pocock, 'The First Fields in an Oxfordshire Parish', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* xvi (1968), 86-7, locates the chapel tenement in the context of Clanfield and its open fields.

¹⁰ Information from Mr. Willmer, the owner.

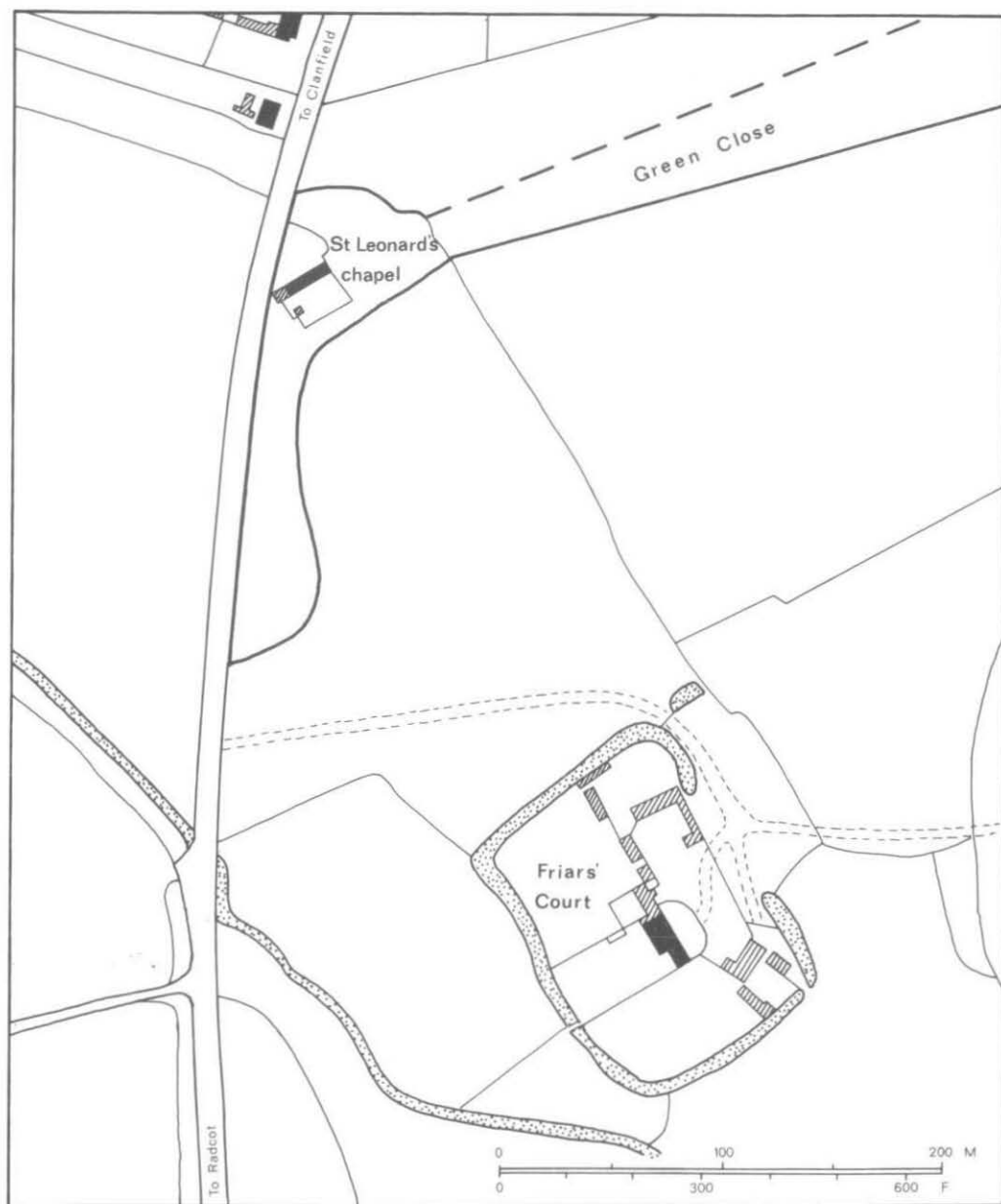


Fig. 1. St. Leonard's chapel and Friars' Court in *c.* 1839, after the Clanfield inclosure map (Oxfordshire Record Office QSD/A Vol. F opp. p. 36). The heavy line defines the boundary of the chapel tenement as shown on the 1818 Exeter map.

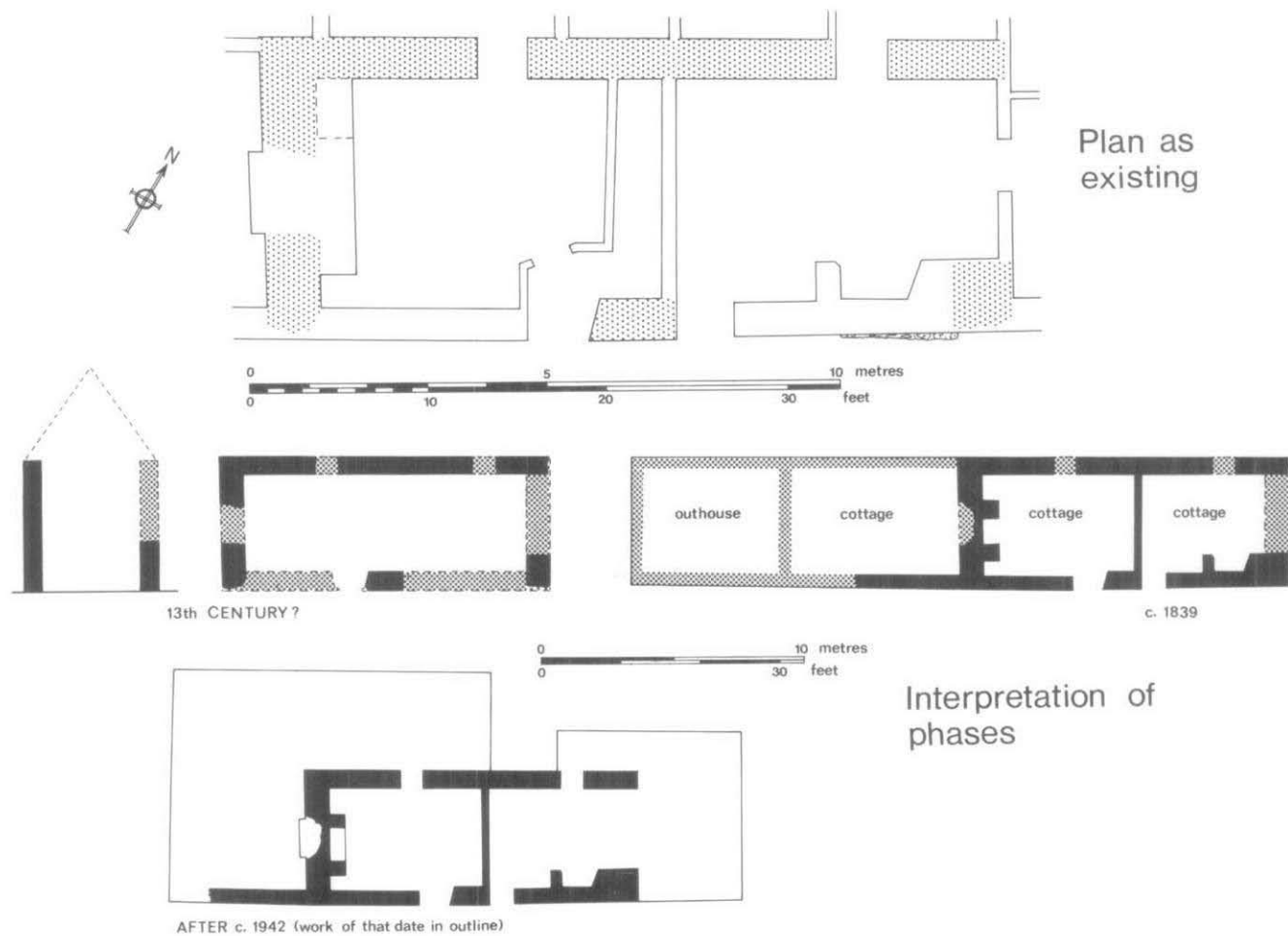


Fig. 2. The cottages on the site of St. Leonard's chapel, Clanfield: plan as existing, and inferred phase-plans. In the upper plan, proposed original walling is stippled; post-medieval windows are not shown. In the phase-plans, surviving walls are shown in solid black and inferred walls are stippled. (Survey by John Blair and Emma Hall, 1985.)

thick, and survives to a height of c. 4.9 m. The transverse wall between the central and western cottages is 93 cm. thick, and must represent the west gable-end of the same building. The fabric of both these walls is hidden by plaster. The south side wall is mainly post-medieval, but includes a short section which is much thicker than the rest (70 cm.) and ends on a played door-jamb. This fragment is built of small, carefully-laid stones not much thicker than roof-slates, very different from the rough later walling around it. The east end wall must have been removed in c. 1942; its former presence may be reflected in the otherwise unaccountable block of thick masonry beside the fireplace in the easternmost cottage.

These fragments represent the north, south, west and possibly east walls of a rectangular building measuring c. 10.6 by 3.7 m. internally and c. 4.9 m. in height, with a door on its south side. The wall-thicknesses (93, 70 and 68 cm.) suggest a medieval date. It is quite possible that this was the chapel itself, in which case it is presumably as rebuilt by Nicholas de Totnes in 1237–44. It could, on the other hand, be the chaplain's house or some associated building. How many people lived here in the 12th and early 13th centuries, and how many buildings they needed, is unknown; it may be noted that within living memory, the uprooting of a large tree in the field south-east of the cottages unearthed massive blocks of masonry.¹¹

Although the origins of the chapel are unknown, its location, its dedication and its earliest recorded functions suggest an interesting possibility. It lies a little way outside Clanfield village, immediately north of a moated manor-house called Friars' Court. This is traditionally identified with a preceptory of the Knights Hospitallers, mentioned from the 1240s onwards and described in 1338 as a messuage with a garden, dovecote and other adjoining crofts.¹² This community existed by c. 1180, when its one remaining female member was sent to join her sisters at Minchin Buckland.¹³ The Hospitallers had arrived in England in c. 1144; in the words of Knowles and Hadcock, the main object of their preceptories was 'to provide funds and trained recruits for the order in the Holy Land, and at home to show hospitality to travellers and pilgrims. Sisters, who devoted themselves to prayer and sick-nursing, were attached to some of the preceptories, in England until 1180.'¹⁴

If sick-nursing facilities once existed at Clanfield, there seems a strong possibility that St. Leonard's chapel began as a small hospital (very likely a leper hospital) served by sisters of the nearby preceptory. In its wayside location, near a centre of population but isolated from it, it resembles others (St. Bartholomew's at Cowley is a local example), while St. Leonard was a favourite dedication for leper hospitals.¹⁵ With the later medieval decline of leprosy, hospitals often fell into decay or became almshouses.¹⁶ The removal of the last sister from Clanfield in c. 1180, the early 13th-century reference to people dwelling at the chapel, its dereliction by the 1230s and its reinstatement for charitable purposes are all consistent with this general pattern.¹⁷ The chapel must always have been subject to

¹¹ Information from Mrs Smith, one of the occupants.

¹² *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 105–6; L.B. Larking (ed.), *The Knights Hospitallers in England* (Camden Soc. lxx, 1857), 26–7; D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (1971), 302. Clanfield deeds of the 1240s mention the Hospitallers' land: *Oseney Cartulary*, ed. H.E. Salter, iv (O.H.S. xcvi, 1934), 507, 512–13. The moated farm is captioned 'Frier Court' on Davis's *Map of Oxfordshire* (1797).

¹³ Knowles and Hadcock, *op. cit.* note 12, 284.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁵ See list in *Ibid.*, 313–38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹⁷ A relevant parallel is Gosford (*V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 106). This also sent a sister to Buckland in c. 1180, and was later said to have been a 'house of sisters'; the Hospitallers built a chapel there shortly before 1235, and the property was later annexed to Clanfield preceptory.

Bampton church, so it is perhaps not surprising that the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, rather than the Hospitallers, controlled it in the 13th century. Thereafter, it suffered the gentle decline of an establishment whose original purpose had become irrelevant, leaving little but tradition to justify its existence.

I am very grateful to the owner, Mr. J. Willmer, and the occupants, Mr. and Mrs. J. Hall, Mr. and Mrs. G. Hobbs and Mr. and Mrs. A. Smith, for access to the building; to Miss Emma Hall for helping me to survey it; to Mr. G. Fowler for other help; and to the Dean and Chapter of Exeter for permission to cite documents in their possession.

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