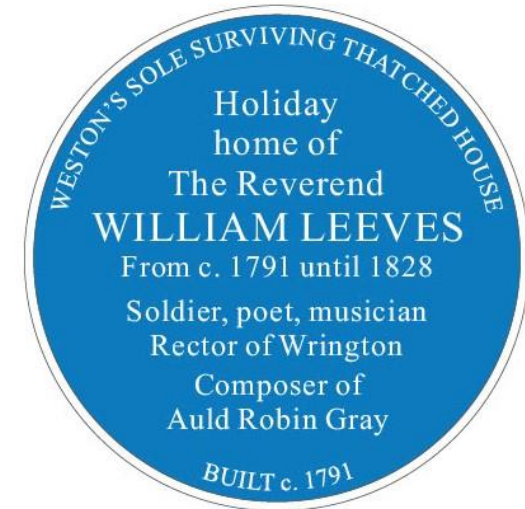




Well-heeled 18th century visitors discovered Weston and in 1810 the first hotel opened (now The Royal), but it was Brunel's 1841 railway that brought mass tourism, booming business and a new chapter in the cottage's fascinating history: occasional residential occupancy, holiday lets, dairy, shop and by 1921 its century-long life as a café had begun.



Improvement Commissioners (the fledgling town's first council) decreed in an 1842 health & safety edict to ban thatch as a roofing material on all new buildings.

Apart from two thatched cottages in nearby Worle and Uphill this remains village Weston's sole surviving reminder of those days when

purely local materials (limestone, clay and thatch) were used for building in Weston-super-Mare.

The charming 1850 retrospective painted by William Brownell in 1874 is on permanent display in Weston Museum's local art gallery. The print is based on an engraving in the Gentleman's Magazine 1805. The photograph was taken in the 1890s. The Blue Plaque was unveiled on 1st November 2023. Notes by JCH. Refer to Dr Birrell's paper for a more detailed history of The Thatched Cottage and its occupants.

The Old Thatched Cottage

Weston -super -Mare



Built circa 1791 as a peaceful Georgian seaside retreat for

The Rev'd William Leeves

1748-1828

Rector of nearby Wrington & Composer of Auld Robin Gray

The sole surviving thatched property from Weston's village days

A Grade 2 Listed Building



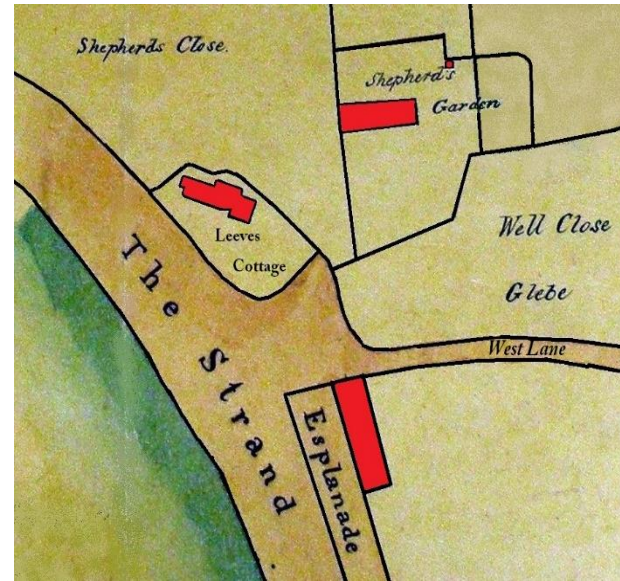
William Leeves was a Foot Guards Lieutenant from London who, at the age of 31, took up Holy Orders and became Rector of Wrington. We cannot be certain why William adopted Weston-super-Mare as his holiday home but journeying the ten miles from Wrington by horse would not have been onerous. Maybe his friendships with the Pigott family (Lords of the Manor), artist George Cumberland, or the poet and philanthropist Hannah More who also

lived at Wrington and was a frequent visitor to Weston and Uphill enticed him, along with other genteel Georgians, to this up and coming resort village (pop 163 in 1811). The date '1774' painted on the current facade might refer to an earlier structure though it is safer to offer c1791 as this cottage's birth.



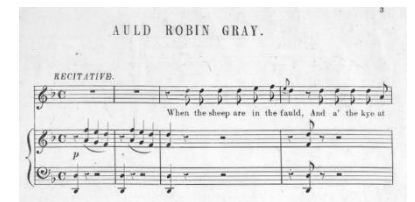
Though William died in 1828 *Leeves Cottage* remained in the family's occupation for up to a further decade after which it became known variously as *White Cross Dairy*, *Ye Auld Robin Gray Tea House*, *Promenade Café* and in 1954 as *The Old Thatched Cottage*.

In the 1960s the café was acquired by cousins Adam and Axentis Michael, and Jimmy Solomon. Axentis and Nitsa Michael's family remain the current owners.



This 1827 map, drawn a year before Leeves' death, shows the cottage set amongst fields with a new, low sea wall and carriageway (ostentatiously named *The Strand*), but in Leeves' days sea views across low marram covered dunes remained

uninterrupted, making this an idyllic spot for the artistically gifted priest to sit writing poetry and composing music. Leeves set the famous Scottish ballad *Auld Robin Gray* to music which became a big hit in the 1904 Proms.



William married musician Anne Wathen and they had five children, one of whom was a hero of the Greek War of Independence (1821-29), chaplain to the new British Embassy and builder of St Paul's Church in Athens (the oldest Anglican church in Greece) and is reputed to have translated the Bible into modern Greek (*Birrell - The History Bureau*). The Greek connection with the cottage remains happily in place to this day.