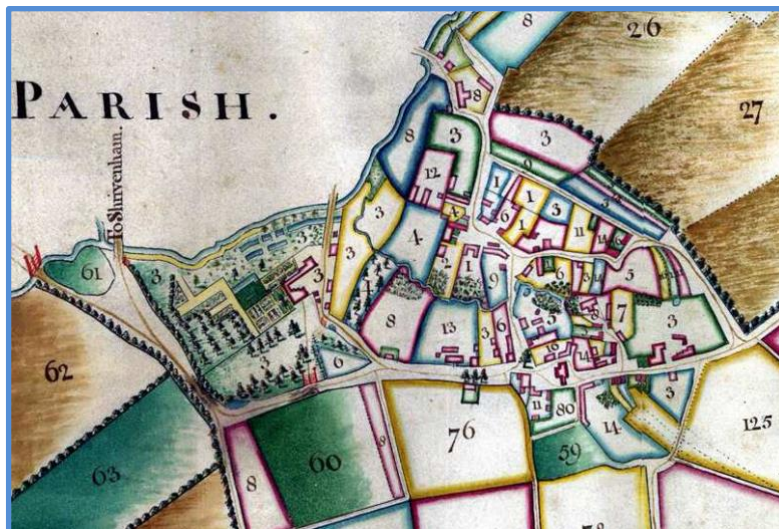


The Watchfield Chronicle

A History of a Berkshire Village

By Neil B. Maw



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Introduction

As a young boy, I played in the fields and woods that stretched out from the 'new' part of the village of Watchfield. It was new because it was a council estate, built at the southern end of the High Street in 1956, just off the main A420. My father had recently left the army fire service at the nearby Royal Military College, and as a family we moved from the military quarters of Wellington Square, where I was born, to our new house just around the corner in Barrington Road. During a very happy childhood I stumbled on things that sparked my interest in archaeology. I clambered over old walls of buildings, waded through soggy ditches, and dug up ancient bones and artefacts. I soon realised that there was much to be investigated in Watchfield. As a boy, I had not the means or intellect to check it out. Let's see if, as a man, I can do it some justice.

If you chat to some of the more senior inhabitants about Watchfield, you will immediately discover two things that they find irksome. Firstly, they insist their village is in the Royal County of Berkshire as it always has been for centuries, and not Oxfordshire, as it has become in recent years due to political fiddling. Secondly, they emphasise that Watchfield is a village in its own right and not an extension of Shrivenham. So often, many objects that are located within the parish boundary of Watchfield are referred to as 'Shrivenham'. Therefore, as I embark on this attempt to reveal some of the history of the village, I do promise to keep the 'S' word to an absolute minimum and keep the content firmly within the Parish boundary.

However, it is necessary to point out that Watchfield has for many centuries been located within the 'Hundred of Shriovenham'. The Hundred was introduced by the Saxons and was a division of a shire for administrative and other purposes. In the Domesday survey of 1086, Watchfield is included and is noted as being in the Hundred of Shrivenham. By the mid 14th century, it also included seventeen surrounding villages.

We may never know exactly when Watchfield came into existence, but its origins are undoubtedly ancient, and like the majority of villages and towns within England, it just evolved with time. There is plenty of evidence to substantiate this, but to date, the evidence has not been put together. This is my attempt to do just that. There are gaps in my research; frustrating periods for which I can find no information and it is my earnest wish that others will fill in these voids in the future. But for now, I present this to you, in the hope that you will share with me, the delights of the beautiful village that is Watchfield.

Neil B. Maw. June 2009

Updated July 2019

Updated April 2023

To Mum & Dad - Villagers for over half a century

"If at first you don't succeed - Try & Try again."

