

Vestry Minutes & Overseers of the Poor

Since publishing the first Watchfield Chronicle in 2009, I have continued to search for and collate further information concerning the history of the village. During my many visits to the Berkshire Record Office I was very aware of the existence of the Watchfield Parish Records consisting of the Vestry Meeting's Minutes and the Overseers of the Poor's Accounts. To prevent any further damage by handling, the original documents have been microfilmed. This is very convenient in that they can be viewed on screen and also photocopied. Upon looking at the documents some years ago, they appeared overwhelming to say the least, there being so many of them. They are written in the hands of numerous people from the latter part of the 17th century to the early part of the 19th century, and at first view, some appear undecipherable. However, in recent years I have considered the challenge and have made a general study of them.

It will be necessary at this point to give the reader an idea of why the documents were written and what useful purpose they served for the inhabitants of Watchfield. Moreover, we can look at what information they might give us for the purpose of this book and historical significance.

For many centuries it was common practice for the Householders or Rate Payers or, '*Neighbours*' as they are sometimes referred, to hold regular meetings in the part of the church known as the Vestry. Over time these meetings became known as Vestry Meetings or simply '*Vestries*.' They could be held at a frequency to suit whatever circumstances prevailed at the time. In the case of Watchfield the records that have survived in the 1690s show that they endeavoured to meet monthly. But throughout the 18th century they appeared to have met according to the circumstances of the parish at the time. At a Vestry dated 1 May 1796 it was agreed that, '*we whose names are under written will meet at the house of Mr Carter to hold a Vestry the first Sunday in every month in the year ensuing at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.*'

Under the relief of the Poor Act of 1597, parishes were legally obliged to elect Overseers of the Poor. The Overseers were elected annually in Watchfield. Two would be chosen; one to serve as the actual Overseer and the other to act as Sidesman, or Assistant/Trainee. The Sidesman would then be elected the following year as Overseer. The Overseer would report to the Vestry about whom he considered to be in need in whatever form that might be. In order to meet that demand the money would be raised by a levy on the Rate Payers at so many pence in the pound. The Rate Payers were local inhabitants of substance, such as Landowners, Farmers, Gentlemen. Each property that they owned would be given a value based on the rental value for one year. The Vestry could, for instance, declare a 2d (pence) tax in the pound. If a Rate Payer had been assessed at £3, then the Overseer could expect to collect 6d from him. This could happen up to four times per annum. Below is an example of a Watchfield rates listing.

**Discovered within the Accounts of Henry Gerring and Tharp Stevens,
Overseers of the Poor for the year 1755.
Received on a Tax (3d) in the pound as follows:**

	£. S. D	Total
Of Mr Blagrave	0.14.7½	
For Jenners	0.8.0	1.5.4½
For Gerrings	0.2.9	
Sir Marks	0.19.8¼	
Do for his Land	0.1.10½	
Do for Robert Youngs	0.1.7¾	
Do for Fairthorns	0.9.11¼1.	19.6½
Do for John Gerrings	0.0.5	
Do for Dentons	0.3.2	
Philip Youngs	0.2.9¾	
Mr Colton	0.5.0¼	
Tythe of Wool & Lamb	0.1.3	
West Mill Farm	1.4.0	
Thomas Anger	0.6.0¾	
Mr Locks	0.2.1½	
Widow Strattons	0.4.10	
Thomas Strattons	0.2.1	0.7.2
John Vokins	0.0.3	
Mr Green	0.6.1	0.8.2½
Henry Gerring	0.2.1½	
Widow Watts	0.3.0¼	
Mr Connors	0.5.6½	
Mr Jenners & Weeks	0.3.11¾	0.15.3¼
Charles Avenill	0.1.7¾	
Jacob	0.1.1	
Anthony Gerring	0.1.1½	
West Mill	0.1.3	
Robert Alder	0.0.9¾	
	6.17.2½	

Received	6.17.2½	
Received	6.17.2½	
Received on a 3-half penny	3.8.6½	

Received of the old Overseers	0.19.6
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Total Received	24.19.8

Explanation of the Accounts.

The money gathered on the above list was collected in the currency of England at the time which was Pounds, Shillings and Pence, shown as £. S. D. There were 12 pence in 1 shilling and 20 shillings in 1 pound.

'Do' in italics is an abbreviation of Ditto (as above). The values in the centre of the blocks to the right (also in italics) are the totals for those blocks. The blocks suggest that some sort of association existed between them which can only be surmised. Therefore, it's logical to assume that Jenner and Gerring perhaps rented land of Blagrave, and the names appearing under Sir Mark, likewise.

Of the list above, Mr Blagrave is one of the biggest land holders and lived in the large house that was then known as Watchfield House. (See the Chapter of that name).

Sir Mark, refers to Sir Mark Stuart-Pleydell of Coleshill House, who owned large pieces of land within the parish.

Mr Colton was the Vicar of Shrivenham (the diocese of which included Watchfield as it does today). The tythe of wool and lamb is an ancient tax payable to the clergy, (the origins of which are obscure), but hence the association here with Rev Colton.

There were four collections of tax in the year 1755, three at the rate of 3d in the pound and one collection at half that rate. This is shown by the several amounts noted at the bottom of the list.

A settlement Act of 1662 stated that people had a right of settlement in their parish of birth. A later Act in 1692 allowed that people could earn a right of settlement if they went to work in another parish. From 1697 the law allowed that Churchwardens and Overseers could provide parishioners with a Settlement Certificate for them to take with them when they went to work in a neighbouring parish. The certificate would also guarantee that if they became unable to work, they could return to their native parish and, if necessary, be supported by it. There is also clear evidence of one parish paying another to look after one of their own when in 1792 an entry noted, '*Received of the Langford Officer for Joy's girl.*' Also, ten years earlier, in December 1782, a Vestry minute noted with regard to Sarah New, '*Agree with Ashbury Parish to give security for her Bastard child.*'

The Overseer was also expected to put able bodied people to work and to make sure that no strangers to the parish were working or soliciting for work. Members of Vestry meetings would from time to time, make it clear about employment. For

example, at a meeting held on 14 January 1759 it was ordered that, *'we whose hands are here under written, do unanimously agree with each other, that we or either of us do or shall not for the future, employ any other Labourers but such as are our Parishioners (except it be in Bean planting Mead time and Harvest), Thatchers, Carpenters and Wheel Rights excepted upon their producing certificate or be sworn to their parishes under the penalty of 20 shillings for each of us that breaks the above order. Note, that if no person or persons can be had in our Tything that can cut wood, plant wood, hedge and such work thereunto belonging, such person that shall happen to want such a man or men shall have the Liberty to have him or them where they may be had most reasonable.'* And two years earlier a Watchfield Vestry declared that they, *'do hereby forbid all and every person or persons belonging to any other Tything (except the inhabitants of our own) not to enter into or upon any of our lands in our said Tything to glean, leaze or pick any sort of corn or grain, lentil on our said Common, grain be carried or cleared of from our said lands and our tything aforesaid.'* And occasionally it was necessary to deal with interlopers as the Vestry of April 2, 1747, made clear that, *'Charles Heath produce a Certificate from the place of his settlement or that he forthwith upon notice given by the proper officer depart to the place of his settlement.'*

A reluctance to work was also a problem in 18th century Watchfield. One local character called James Newport was regularly applying for assistance and in general he got it. But then notes and clauses started to appear as in May 1791 it was agreed to allow him 1 shilling per week instead of 8 pence, and if he agreed to work, be allowed 6 pence per day at the same time. However, two years later he's given an ultimatum, *'find work or no more money.'*

Within the Overseers accounts there are numerous entries made for supplying local parishioners with a determined amount of raw cloth. Also, the accounts of 21 July 1793, show a payment made to Mr Butler of £3.16.2½ for Spinning and Winding Cotton. It's clear from many entries like this that some sort of cottage industry was being sponsored by the Parish. Help could also be given by paying one parishioner to carry out work for another; for instance, on 29 December 1754, John Sly was paid by the parish for, *'Carrying out work, including painting the Blacksmiths Shop.'*

Anyone unfortunate enough to die that had no money could expect the parish to pay for their funeral. There are numerous entries within the accounts of expenses for, Laying the Body Out, providing a Shroud, a Coffin, a Clergyman, Digging a Grave, Ringing the Chapel Bell, and a quantity of Beer for the after proceedings (a clean water supply was still a long way off). This courtesy would also be provided to strangers who had the misfortune to expire whilst visiting the parish.

Tracking down and holding errant fathers accountable for the upkeep of their offspring, is not a modern problem. The Overseers in 18th and 19th century Watchfield were doing it too. The Vestry Minutes of 2 April 1747 noted that the, *'Chapel Wardens (or Overseers) can carry Mary Williams, Widow, forthwith before one of his Majesty's Justice of the Peace to swear to the reputed father of her Bastard child.'* By the early part of the 19th century, it was becoming a regular occurrence, with many Mothers forced to swear before the court as to the father of their illegitimate children. Sometimes the Overseer was keen to establish fatherhood even earlier.

In May 1804, Mary Davis was ordered that, *'She be sworn to the father of the child she is now big with.'* The use of the word, *'Bastard'* is freely used within the documents and they even referred to payments made to women for the nurture of illegitimate children as, *'Basterly Pay.'* The parish would support such offspring but as soon as the father became known, the Overseer could be swift to act. At a Vestry meeting dated 28 April 1811 it is noted that, *'Basterly pay to Alice Lake's child shall be discontinued from Easter last and it is likewise agreed that the basterly bond shall be sued on James & Thomas New likewise.'* But for some reason Robert Atkins was let off further payments when on 21 April 1808 it was noted, *'It is agreed that nothing more shall be required by the Parish of Watchfield from Robert Atkins towards the maintenance of Mary Davis' child, he having at different times paid £41.7.0 and having this day paid in addition the sum of £4.'* We can only assume that it's the same Mary Davis, but a few years earlier a more poignant Vestry minute noted on 1 May, 1802, *'Whereas Mary Davis was delivered of a Male Bastard Child on the 7th day of September, 1801, and since dead, and the expense on the Lying in and 26 weeks pay amounting to the sum of £3.12.6 and that Thomas Vokins is the Father of the said Child, he hereby agrees to pay to the overseers the above sum.'* But if all else failed then a more robust approach was often used as was noted on 20 November 1818 that, *'Mr Shayler and Mr Jordan, that they shall be taken before the Magistrate by force and made to pay up their arrears for Bastard Children.'*

It was a regular occurrence to pay somebody for looking after another elderly or sick person. On 9 April 1734, Elizabeth Vokins was allowed £1.15.0. for nursing Mary, the wife of William Hinton. One assumes that this considerable sum for the period, must have been for a lengthy amount of time. On 4 November 1750, Betty Cox is being paid 2 shillings per week for looking after Cesar Lawrence's wife. Then five years later in November 1755, Elizabeth Green is being paid 6d per week for looking after, *'Old Cesar Lawrence,'* himself. It could also happen within the same family. On 11 November 1764, Thomas Evens is granted aid of 2 shillings and 6d per week and his daughter is given 6d per week for looking after him. It could also be expedient for the Overseer to move people around from one house to another as a proviso for receiving aid. On 16 August 1772, there is a note concerning John Perring as, *'Remove him to William Westalls and buy him a pair of breeches.'* Sometimes whole families were moved. One example of this occurred in May 1800 when Widow Sly and her daughters were moved to the home of Widow Davis.

The services of a medical practitioner were used when necessary and agreements were made between the parties at numerous times. The earliest mention we have by name is Doctor Willis, who in December 1755 was paid 10 shillings and 6 pence for, *'Caring of Hester Leg of her present disorder.'* And Dr Willis was mentioned again in July 1760 when he received £2.2.0 for attending Mary Leg for three weeks. In April 1792, a Dr Ward agreed to be the parish Doctor for the term of one year for the sum of 5 Guineas. The agreements made between the parish and doctor, were worded quite precisely. At a Vestry meeting held on 11 April 1818, the Minutes noted, *'Resolved that Mr Ford be appointed the year ensuing the Medical attendant unto the poor for the sum of 6 Guineas, Midwifery, Smallpox and Fractures excluded, in case of Wilful neglect or enablements to be removed or discontinued by this Committee.'* The following year an agreement worded exactly the same was made with Dr Smith. One wonders if these agreements were the result of what

happened in 1817, when at a Vestry meeting held at Watchfield House (The original) dated 30 June 1817, stated, *'It appearing that in consequence of some misunderstanding, both Mr Gay and Mr Price have attended the sick poor of Watchfield on the Parish account since the last appointment of Overseers. Resolved that they shall both be paid up to the present time in proportion to the sums at which they were respectively engaged and both engagements discontinued; and that they shall then be directed to send to the Vicar sealed Tenders at the terms on which they will give their attendance for the remainder of the year, the gentleman sending the lowest tender to be appointed, but to be removable by Vestry upon any Wilful neglect of duty.'*

In 1818 the Act for the Regulation of Parish Vestries was passed and it was certainly acknowledged and discussed by the parishioners of Watchfield. At a meeting dated 11 April 1818, the Minutes note, *'Resolved also that a committee be formed for conducting in future the business of the Parish in conformity to the Act of Parliament lately passed in the Common House of Parliament and denominated Mr Sturges-Bourne's Bill for the better management and amendment of the Poor Laws.'* The idea of the bill was to set up a voting system in every parish vestry that was dependant on a rateable value of property. A landowner of property that was valued at £50 was eligible for one vote. Going above that in £25 increments entitled the same property holder to another one vote, up to a maximum of six votes. This scale was to be adopted later in the Poor Law Amendment Act for the election of Guardians of the Poor. This change effectively ended the way things were recorded in Watchfield, but I suspect very little changed in practice. However, the big change was to come in 1834 with the Poor Law Amendment Act, which abolished the system of poor relief that had existed since 1601, but with it, came the dreaded, *'Workhouses.'*

The documents that make up the Vestry Meetings and Overseers of the Poor Accounts provide us with a fascinating insight into everyday life in Watchfield during the 18th century. Some of the information it provides is open to interpretation and no doubt more will become clear as studies continue. The following information is a summary of the period by decade and lists notable people and events. Please note that there are some gaps where documents have not survived. The names listed are those who were present at vestry meetings during that decade.

1694 - 1700

Anthony Anger
Thomas Stratton
Samuel Young
Isaac Young
John Blagrove
J. Southby
John Young
William Young
John Weekes
William Avenill

The Newports were a notable family through the decade and required considerable help from the Parish. On 20 May 1694, Sarah Newport was granted 1 shilling and 6 pence (1/6) per week, '*She having two children and her husband being gone for a soldier.*'

1700 - 1703

Anthony Anger
Thomas Stratton
Isaac Young
Thomas Fairthorne
J. Southby
Robert Alder
John Blagrove
John Townsend
Samuel Young
Edward Stratton
John Haines
Robert Gearing
Francis Young
Thomas Watts
John Fairthorne
Henry Gearing
John Young
William Young

The Newport family still features quite heavily in this period with regard to assistance from the Parish

1714 - 1715

Anthony Anger
Edward Stratton
Thomas Stratton
John Young
Thomas Fairthorne
George Stevens

Dinah Newport appears in the records and features regularly for aid from the Parish

1724 - 1725

Thomas Anger
John Blagrove
Thomas Fairthorne
John Gearing
Thomas Watts
John Young
Edward Stratton
Robert Young
Thomas Stratton
Phillip Young

1731 - 1740

Thomas Fairthorne
Thomas Stratton
William Streat
Watts
Thomas Anger
John Blagrove
Phillip Young
Henry Farr
Thomas Evans
William Perrin
Edward Stratton
Anthony Gearing
John Gearing
Henry Gearing

A notable event that took place in this decade was dealing with a problem on the road. At a Vestry held on 21 November 1736 it was agreed, *'To allow to the Supervisors of the Highways a 7d tax in order to defray the expenses of the Trial at Sessions concerning the repairing or rebuilding of West Mill Bridge, that the same be made out on the respective estates within the Tything of Watchfield according to the usual custom, that the said tax be forthwith collected by the Supervisors. If any money remains after the sum of £14.9.8 be paid off, the remainder is to be paid to the immediate Overseer of the Poor.'*

1741 - 1750

Thomas Anger
John Blagrove
Phillip Young
William Young
Robert Alder
James Dackon
Henry Gearing
William Perrin

Edward Stratton
James Blgrave
William Streat
William Thomas
Mary Stratton
John Fairthorn
Thomas Simmons
Thomas Evens
Richard Gooding

A public notice was issued by the Vestry Meeting of 21 April 1746. 'By agreement of us the inhabitants and land holders in the Tything of Watchfield who have hereunto set our hands, do agree as followeth; That is to say, that from the day of the date hereof, and for the term of 12 years ensuing, that no person in the said Tything do brake or cause to be broken by any sort of cattle either the Common called the Hill nor likewise the other Common called the Marsh till the 10th day of May in each year during or broad term, on the penalty of 10 shillings per each beast.

And further we agree that whatever stock shall be stocked into the Common called the Marsh in one week after the 10th of May as aforesaid shall stand as the stocks and no otherways and for every Common that shall then be void the owner of the said Common or Commons shall be allowed 10 shillings for each Common.

And further we agree that for every beast that goes at the Hill Common shall pay the sum of sixpence for the beast at open tide towards the payment for the Commons that shall lay instock at the Marsh and the remainder to be raised by the poll by them that shall stock all the Commons to them belonging.'

The Newport family are still resident in Watchfield, with Robert Newport regularly having his House Rent paid by the Parish. The Parish would also rent property from other people to allocate to the poor, for example, on 4 December 1748, it was agreed to rent a house from Madam Blgrave at £1.15.0 for a year. On 11 November 1776, the Vestry minutes noted that, *'we do agree with Henry Gearing for to rent of him a house for the use of Hannah Liddiard, Betty Stephens and Hannah Stephens at the rent of £1.15s to October 10th next and from that time ensuing the yearly rent of £2 allowing the said Henry Gearing the use of a Buttery.'*

Another family regularly being assisted by the Parish is the Lawrences'; and one in particular is sometimes referred to as, *'Old Cesar Lawrence.'*

1751 - 1760

John Fairthorn
Thomas Simmons
Thomas Anger
Henry Gearing

Richard Gooding
William Perrin
William Thomas
Phillip Young
Robert Alder
Thomas Perrin
Anthony Gearing
Tharp Stevens
Arthur Geering
John Angel Young
John Anger

During this decade it becomes noticeable that certain people are representing certain Estates. This gives more credibility to the supposition that it was the landholders, or owners, who bore sway at the Vestry Meetings and as Overseers. In April 1756, Overseer, Thomas Simmons, is noted as, '*For Mrs Blagrave*' (The Blagrave Estate). In April 1757, Phillip Young is labelled as, '*For late Boat's Estate*,' and the following year in March, Overseer, William Perrin is described as, '*For Maslin's Estate*.'

Within the Vestry Minutes and the Overseers Accounts for this period, there is frequent reference to, '*The Stratton Woman*.' It's difficult to ascertain why the lady in question should be so labelled, but as no other person seems to have been treated in a similar way, one can only assume that it is a mark of disrespect. However, in April 1753, the name, '*Widow Stratton*' appears on the accounts as an Overseer in the place of William Thomas. But whether it is one and the same lady is as yet unclear.

The Stevens family were also mentioned frequently in the 1750's, and in particular Jonathan. He seems to have been considered something of a nuisance by the Vestrys and there were attempts to remove him and his family over the border to Gloucestershire. In October 1756, there was an attempt to take him to Court. But just what for is uncertain. In November the following year the Vestry instructed the Overseers to, '*Make the best agreement they can with Nathaniel Rix to carry the said Jon Stevens and family to North Leach in the County of Glos*.'

Then from 1756 the discovery of one of the most enigmatic of all the discoveries, that of, '*Washingstocks and Shurdles*.' Even after extensive searching through many different sources, there appears to be no definitive answer as to what the following document refers: -

'An account of the ancient accustomed way of drawing the Lotts in Washingstocks and Shurdles in Quidame. Taken by the direction of John Gerring by me Edward Smith the 1st day of August 1756.

The Sunday after Midsummer day, Old Stile, the owners of the said Lotts meet at the Chapple (that being the accustomed place) and each chooses his stick, all of the sticks having different marks signifying the several lotts. The said sticks are put into a hat or some other convenient place and shook together and are from thence drawn. And that person whose stick comes out first has the liberty of choosing the first Lott and so on till all are chosen, and after the Lotts are so chosen the parting of them are as follows: -

The first 5 acre Lotts in Washingstocks Westmill Farm an acre out of which Mr Blagrave hath a half acre (that is) a yard for Gerrings and a yard for Jenners estate. 1 acre

Sir Mark hath an acre to himself. 1 acre

An annex late Dentons out of which Sir Mark hath a yard. 1 acre

An acre called Strattons acre one half to Edward Strattons living and the other half to Thomas Strattons. 1 acre

The other acre called Angels acre and Mr Connor hath half of it. 1 acre

The parting of the above 5 acres

The next 5 acres in Washingstocks.

Sir Mark hath one acre to himself. 1 acre

Mr Grove hath one acre to himself. 1 acre

Mr Blagrave a half for Geerings. ½ acre

An acre to Mr Blagrave's old estate. Every other year and Sir Mark hath it the next year. 1 acre

Mrs Blagrave a half for Watts. ½ acre

Mr Connor a half. ½ acre

Mr Blagrave a half for Alders land. ½ acre

This is the parting of these 5 acres.

The 5 acre Lotts in Shurdles

Sir Mark one acre to himself. 1 acre

Philip Youngs acre out of which Mr Blagrave hath a year for Gearings and Mr Maslin hath a yard. 1 acre

The next acre between Sir Mark & Mr Blagrave 's old estate every other year as in Washingstocks. 1 acre

Mr Connors acre out of which Sir Mark hath a yard. 1 acre

Angels acre out of which Mr Blagrave hath a yard for Alders lands. 1 acre

This is the parting of these 5 acres

Clearly this ancient Watchfield custom is dealing with the usage of land. But this then begs the question of, why this particular 15 acres? The Willington map of 1758 shows that on the north side of the parish, on the Wiltshire border, between West Mill and Coleshill, the River Cole forms the boundary. This whole area on the Watchfield side of the river seems to be referred to generally as 'Quidame,' as names like the following confirm; 'The Farmpiece in Quidam Mead, The Changeable Land in Quidam, Long Furlong above Quidam Hill.' And we also have a small area called, 'Washingstokes.' This particular area is directly opposite the deserted medieval village of Fresden. Is it possible that the river just here was very convenient for the washing of animals, and in particular sheep? Some of the land would have provided easier access to the flowing water than other parts, and hence the need for a lottery type draw for fairness. It's the most logical explanation I can suggest at the moment.

1761 - 1770

Robert Alder
Arthur Geering
Henry Geering
Tharp Stevens
John Angel-Young
John Fairthorne
Thomas Simmons
John Aingel
William Perring
William Vokins
John Carter
John Anger
John Hopkins

During this decade the Vestry issued a statement, which reinforced a local By-Law, originally made 20 years earlier on 22 October 1751. '*Ordered at a Vestry this day held, we whose names are under- written do agree that from this day forward that if either one or more of us shall at any time catch or meet with any person or persons either cutting*

of any live mounds or pulling or digging up any Posts, Rails or Gates or pulling or breaking any dead hedge or mound in the Tything of Watchfield, we do each of us agree to be bound hereby that the person who's mound shall be so cut or broken shall persecute the said persons or person so caught or detected in any of the aforesaid things and all and each of us do hereby agree to pay his or their part towards of said persecution.'

The reference to, 'Mounds' is interesting in that they seem to have been used extensively as boundaries between ownership of land. The mention of mounds can often be found within documents relating to land exchanges. During the mid-18th century much of the agricultural land consisted of hundreds of small strips of land as had evolved from many centuries previously. Indeed, we have reference to one in particular from as early as 931AD within the Anglo Saxon Charter that describes the Parish Boundary of Watchfield, described as a 'Maer Beorh,' being a tumulus or stone pile. (See page 8).

At the Vestry Meeting of 23 August 1767, the following clause was added to the original, *'we whose hands are under written, do agree to keep the Pickers out of the field three or four days till after the Reapers have been a Reaping. Or till orders be given by the Ringing of the Chapell Bell for their entering the field to pick. If anyone will pick before the time appointed aforesaid are to be dealt with according to Law.'*

And at the Vestry Meeting of May 22nd, 1770, yet another clause was added, *'And also if either one or more of us shall catch any person or persons a stealing and gathering the pease in the field upon any ones land, we do each of us agree to be bound to take such person or persons to Justice to be dealt with according to Law.'*

And further we agree that if any Leazes or Pickers come into our field to Leaze or Pick till the Reapers have been a Reaping the space of Four Days or Pick or Glean on any ones land till it be all shocked up, we are bound to take such persons to Justice to be dealt with according to Law.'

At the same Vestry mentioned above, another statement was issued which at first view seemed amusingly odd. *'It is agreed that all the farmers that have Cows that are 3 years old are to be all knobs and all over and above that age and that they keep them on after they come off, when they have had 2 days' notice under the penalty of 2/6 for every knob which is not put on in the time mentioned above to be paid to the Overseer for the use of the poor. And that they be all knobs before they go into the Common, this is to continue for the space of 4 years. We whose hands are underwritten have agreed to the same.'*

However, there is a perfectly rational explanation. Ox knobs are devices that are slipped over the ends of cows' horns that are blunt on the end or have a rounded bulb fitted. There are screw holes in them that allow a couple of screws to hold them in place. They are used to keep the horns from goring people or other animals.

1771 - 1780

John Aingel
John Angel-Young

John Carter
John Hopkins
Thomas Perring
William Perring
Henry Geering
Tharp Stevens
Thomas Perring
Thomas Simmons
Edward Fairthorne
Philip Young
John Anger
John Young
Barfoot Colton

A notable event that took place within the above decade was the generosity of Lord Barrington, who gave to the village a barn. The Vestry Minutes of 26 October 1777 noted, '*Ordered this day at a Vestry held that the Overseers do immediately repair the Barn which Lord Barrington has been graciously pleased to give to the Parish of Watchfield for the use of the Poor and that the Overseers do cause the said Barn to be made into tenements in the most commodious manner as can be achieved.*'

1781 - 1790

John Carter
Edward Fairthorne
Henry Gearing
Thomas Simmons
Thomas Perring
John Angel
Philip Young
John Young
Barkley Wilson
William Appleford
Thomas Norris
William Holder

The Newport family are still being represented in this decade by Widow Newport who received the sum of 1/6 per week from the Parish. James and Mary Newport were also being assisted in 1790. The Newport's had been a local family for at least a century at this point.

1791 - 1800

John Angel
John Carter

John Killmaster
 Edward Fairthorne
 Henry Gearing
 Thomas Perring
 John Warrell
 John Anger
 William Walters
 Thomas Chouls
 John Green
 Barkley Wilson
 William Akerman
 John Crew
 William Holder
 William Hambidge
 Thomas Norris
 John Evan
 Elisha Appleford
 Charles Rickards
 William Stevens

**Discovered within the Vestry Minutes for 22 July 1792 a Watchfield
 Rate List calculated at 6d in the Pound**

John Anger for his own	£0.17.5¼
Stephen Avenills	£0.7.8¼
Thomas Perrin for Lord Barrington	£3.11.8¼
Thomas Perrin for the Vicarage Allotment	£1.4.1½
Thomas Perrin for the Small Orchard	£0.0.7½
Mr Blagrove Esq	£1.0.0
William Appleford for Thomas Blagrove	£4.5.9¾
Chappel Ham	£0.0.1
Henry Gearing for George Donisthorpe Esq	£2.9.1
John Carter for Jeffery Hemsworth Esq	£0.14.7¼
Edward Fairthorne for Lord Holland	£8.17.3
John Green for Lord Radnor	£7.6.4¾
Tharp Stevens for his Mill	£0.5.1½
Barkley Wilson for his own	£0.4.10
Richard Carter for his own	£0.2.0
Thomas Norris for his own	£0.0.4
Thomas Perring for Townsend Close	£0.0.8
William Holder for his own	£0.0.4
Total	£31.10.9¼

It seems that the citizens of Watchfield were not averse to resorting to Bounty Hunting. On 14 July 1793 the Vestry recommended that the Overseers

apply to a Justice for a Warrant to apprehend Tharp Stevens, Thomas Baylis and Henry Powell, and added, *'that the Parish employ some person to bring them in or either of them at what price they can agree at a reasonable rate or if not, to receive nothing.'* But just what they were wanted for is unclear.

Due to poor weather at the wrong time, the years of 1795/6 produced very bad harvests, which in turn meant a short supply of wheat. A shortage of wheat also meant a shortage of bread. Normally the shortfall could have been made up by imports from Europe but the French Wars severely restricted such movements. Civil disorder broke out all over Britain and became known as the Bread Riots. Watchfield too was affected by this shortage and the documentary records give us some idea of how the people coped with this major problem.

At a meeting dated 30 July, 1795, the Watchfield Vestry Minutes note that, *'The Overseers be allowed to sell flower (flour) to the Poor after the rate of 9/- per bushell to such persons as have no landed property of their own except:- Edward Stratton, William Gardner, William Pocock, Richard Warren, John Sly, Betty Sly, Daniel Chandler, Robert Looker, and that the Overseers be allowed to provide for that purpose and that no person be allowed to have any more than what they consume weekly.'*

The Reverend Barfoot Colton, Vicar of Shrivenham, provided money created by interest received from investments made on the sale of the materials from the old Watchfield Chapel, demolished in 1788. In 1795/6 the money was used specifically for providing bread for the poor of Watchfield, the crisis having driven the price of bread up.

There was mischief making of a serious degree to be dealt with at the Vestry dated 31 May 1800. It was deemed to be so serious that the Vestry offered the considerable sum of money of 10 Guineas, *'to any person or persons that will discover the Author of a threatening letter for the Death of the Farmer and burning their property.'* Unfortunately, there is no mention of which farmer it was or any clue as to why he may have been threatened.

1801 - 1810

John Carter
Thomas Perrin
Barkley Wilson
John Anger
Edward Fairthorne
Henry Gearing
Charles Rickards
John Crew
Thomas Norris
Thomas Avery
Edward Stratton

Edward Berens (Vicar)

The money from the interest on the sale of the materials from the old chapel were still being put to good use 20 years after its demise. At a Vestry held on 24 December, 1808, the Minutes note, *'It having been agreed upon a Vestry holden in the autumn of the year 1804 that part of the money arising from the sale of the materials of the chapel at Watchfield should be applied to the support of a Sunday School for girls and the boys the former of which has continued upwards of 4 years, the latter 40 weeks; and Mr Berens having signified to a Vestry holden this day that he has this year received about £31 gross of the said money from the executors of the late Mr Colton, he this day paid the sum of £15. 12s to Deborah Reade the Schoolmistress for 4 years ending December 1808 and £3 to Edward New the Schoolmaster for 40 Sundays in the presence of us.'*

1811 - 1819

John Anger
John Crew
Charles Rickards
Edward Fairthorne
Henry Gearing
Thomas Norris
John Perrin
Barkley Wilson
Thomas Avery
John Dixon
George Stevens
Richard Pinnegar
John Orum

This decade is the last in our study and also marks the end of the records for this category. It seems also that it's the end of the Newport family in Watchfield as there is no mention of the name at all.