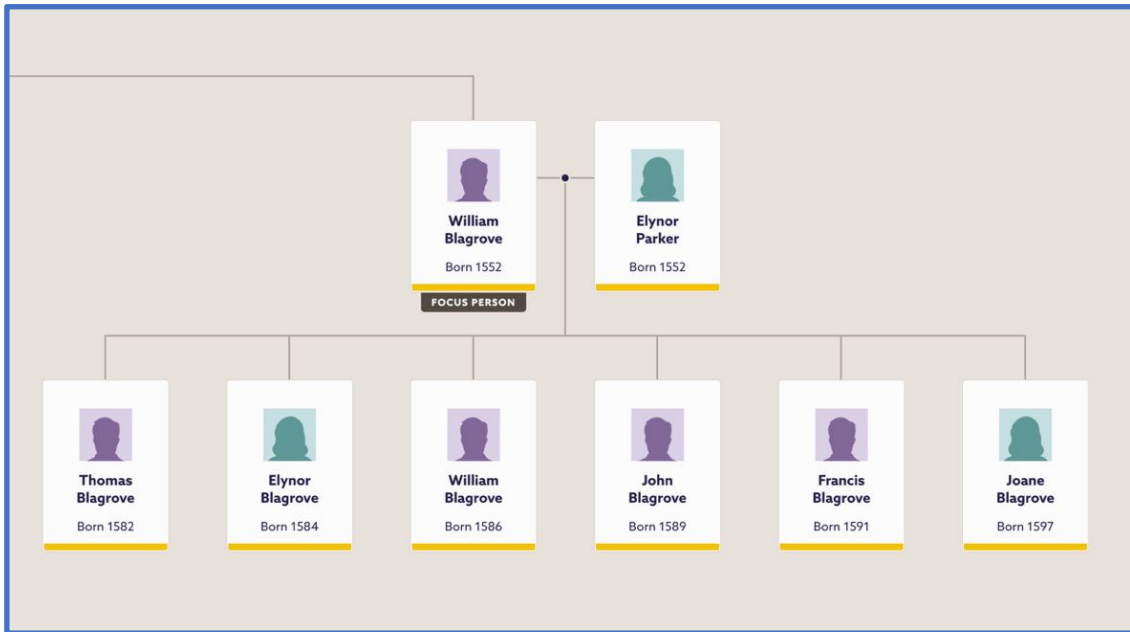


The Blagroves (Blagraves) of Watchfield in the Parish of Shrivenham

By Neil B. Maw



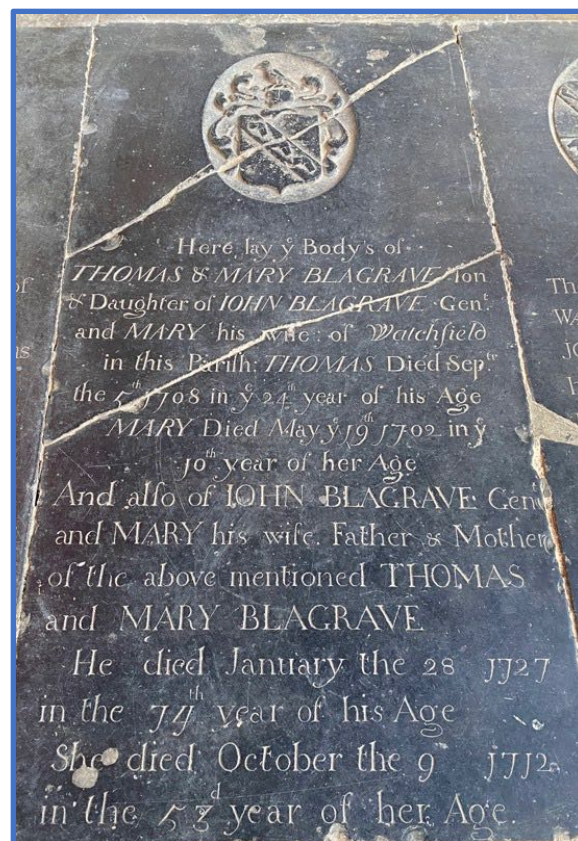
A family name spelled Blagrove was how it started off in Watchfield according to the Shrivenham Parish Registers. It would change slightly to Blagrave later and will be explained further below. There are some enigmas that may be possible to solve if any new documents are discovered. There are two entries of marriages on the same day in 1575 when Thomas Blagrove married either Elizabeth Welford or Alice Joyner? For the family tree we have opted for Elizabeth. In marriages there is also listed Frideswide Blagrove who married Robert Collyns in 1581. It's clear that the family were in Watchfield prior to this as there are numerous entries in the Death Register in this early period. But to make a start at a Watchfield family tree we have used William and Thomas; both got married in the 1570s and likely, although not certain, to have been brothers. We are labelling these as the originals. (Below). We don't know when they were born so have put in an approximate age appropriate to child production.

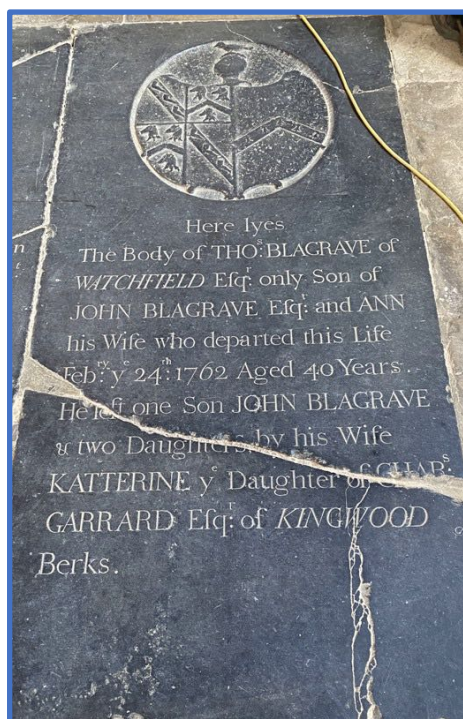


We know from two 18th century maps where the family was located at Watchfield. The Willington Map of 1758 (extract below - courtesy of Shrivenham Heritage Society) shows an impressive estate on the left side (south). The large building is an early Georgian Mansion House (depicted above). The Blagrove's were the likely commissioners of it but we have no documentary evidence to confirm it. As well as other small parcels of land located around the village there is a small estate numbered 3 on the far right of the map (north). It's likely that it was a farmyard with associated buildings. These two locations could represent the two original brothers' home estates. The 1808 map (further below - RBA D/EPB/T4) confirms the same situation half a century later.

Between them they owned large tracts of land within the Parish of Shrivenham, Watchfield being part of it. They continued to prosper from farming in the 16th to 18th centuries, but it's likely that they brought a certain amount of wealth with them from whence they came. At a national level, the family had connections with the slave trade that began in the Elizabethan period. It's possible that the Watchfield Blagrove's of the 1570s were in some way connected, but we have no documentary evidence to date. In 1613 it is recorded that Jane (b.1583) daughter of Thomas, married Samuel Bower, classified as 'Gent.' Some of the Blagrove's were classed similarly and were not of simple peasant stock. They were clearly mixing among wealthy contemporaries.

It is from the Thomas side of the originals that the lavish and expensive memorial stones covered a family vault that makes up the floor of the Vestry in St Andrew's church, Shrivenham. We have only the inscriptions (below: middle - left - right) to say who is in there and have no evidence that any members from the William originals could be too. However, there was certainly family loyalty when John on the Thomas side married Mary Blagrove from the William side on 13th August 1683.





In the Vestry

Left stone

Here lies the body of John Blagrove of Watchfield, Batchelor of Law. Four years a Member of St Johns Co Oxford, who departed this life the ** April 1748, age 64. He married Ann daughter of Johan Hussey Citz and Merch of London by whom he had one son Thomas Blagrove. Also of Ann Blagrove relict of the above John Blagrove Esq and deposited near this place, died March 18th 1784 aged 95 years.

Middle stone

Here lay the bodys of Thomas & Mary Blagrove, son & daughter of John Blagrove, gent, and Mary his wife of Watchfield in this Parish. Thomas died Sept 5th 1708 in the 24th year of his age. Mary died May 19th 1702 in the 10th year of her age.

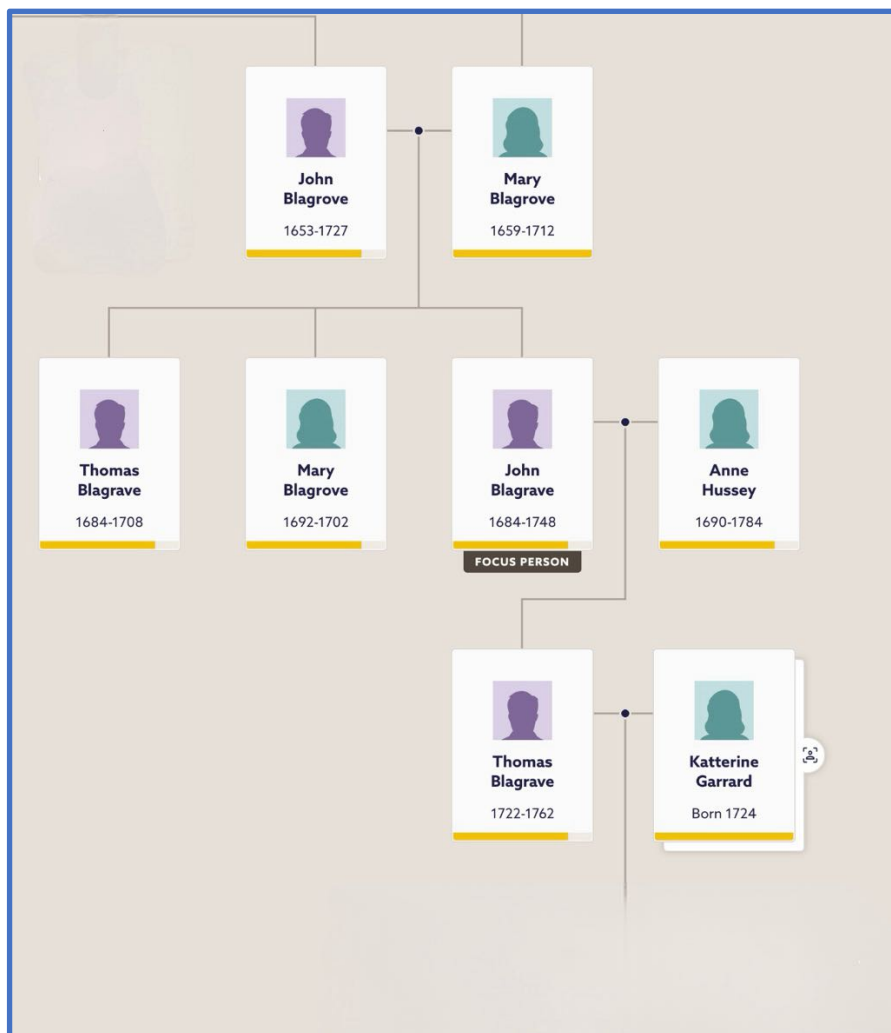
And also John Blagrove, gent, and Mary his wife Father & Mother of the above mentioned Thomas and Mary Blagrove.

He died January 28th 1727 in the 74th year of his age. She died October 9th 1712 in the 53rd year of her age.

Right stone

Here lies the body of Thomas Blagrove of Watchfield Esq, only son of John Blagrove Esq and Ann his wife who departed this life Feb 24th 1762 aged 40 year. He left one son John Blagrove and 2 daughters by his wife Katterine the daughter of Charles Garrard Esq of Kingwood Berks.

The extract from the family tree below represents the people mentioned in the floor stones memorials.



It's likely that it was John who married Anne Hussey who was the builder of the Georgian house shown above. The picture was AI generated from a copy of the original plans of the house, discovered in the back of a water colour painting. For more information on the house please see SHS Listing N984 and SHS *The Watchfield Chronicle* in SHS Publications. However, we have no documentary evidence on the house building at all but constantly on the lookout. When the same John died in April 1748, his estates appeared in an advertisement offering them up to let. It's here that we see the size of his land holdings in Watchfield and Shrivenham. (Below: Glos Journal 6th Sept 1748 p.4)

To be Lett and Enter'd upon at Michaelmas next,

THE ESTATES of the late JOHN BLAGRAVE, Esq; lying in the Parish of Shrivenham, in Berkshire, 101 Acres of Arable, Meadow and Pasture, all Inclosed and Several; with a House, Barns and Closes adjoining; and in Watchfield, in the same Parish, 266 Acres of Arable and Meadow Ground, with Horfe, Cow, and Sheep-Commons in Proportion, and a good House, Barn, Stables, and all other Conveniencies.

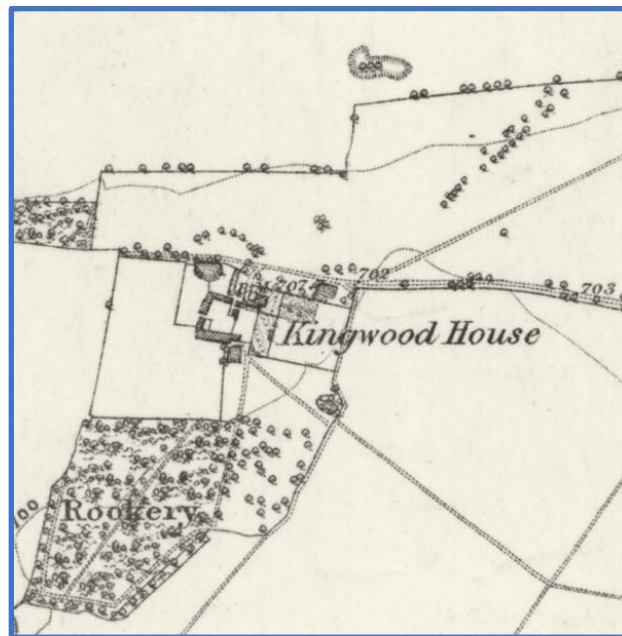
For farther Particulars, enquire at the late Dwelling-House of the said John Blagrove, Esq; in Watchfield.

Thomas Blagrove inherited his father's estates in accordance with his Will (PROB 11/762 dated 28th April 1745). The above advertisement showed that he was letting out the lands and a house. But this was not the main '*Mansion House*' shown above. His Will talks of other lands that he had purchased or leased with the house, barns and closes adjoining, and the precise size of 101 acres matches the size of local Pennyhooks Farm precisely. We have no documentary evidence of this but it's a reasonable assumption. In his Will he specified the use of the Yellow Room furniture for his wife if she remained a widow. Large multi-roomed estate mansion houses were often named by colour for the convenience of the servants.

We cannot find a Will for Thomas Blagrove and it's quite likely that he didn't make one having died at the age of 40. We don't know the circumstances of his death but a brief newspaper note stated that, '*A few days ago died at Bath, Thomas Blagrove, of Lamborn, Berks, Esq; Captain in the Militia of that County.*' The newspaper is the Oxford Journal dated 27th February 1762. The Shrivenham Parish Death Registry recorded that he was buried on the 2nd March 1762. The Memorial stone above, recorded that he died on the 24th February. It all fits so it must be Thomas from the Watchfield family. Further research into this has discovered that Thomas & Katherine resided in Kingwood House, Lambourne. Parish records show that their three children were born there.

Historically there was a Manor or Tithing called Blagrove in the lands surrounding Lambourne. The VCH (Victoria County History) gives details of it going back to the 12th

century (Vol 4 Berks). But the name hasn't survived and it can only be suggested that the name Kingswood has some connection. VCH suggests that the names Hadley and Blagrave that were part of the 'Wodland' parish, became known from the 16th century as Lambourn Woodlands. The locale called Kingwood exists today in the form of a business called Kingwood Stud. A late 19th century OS map shows a large country estate house there called Kingwood House (Below). Katherine was from the family Garrard who lived at the big house, that rumour suggests was a large Elizabethan Manor House. It's possible that being aware of the ancient Manor called Blagrave, Thomas and Katherine were swayed to use that spelling of their family name.



When Katherine died the Shrivenham Parish Death Register recorded that she was aged 61, the widow of Thomas Blagrave Esq of Kingwood, died of palsy, and buried in the Chancel on 3rd December 1785 (the family vault). Her Will provided further proof of Thomas & Katherine's residence. (PROB 11/1205/221). It seems she wrote it out but didn't date it or have it properly witnessed. We learn from within the writings of Probate that it was discovered by her son John in a Bureau in Kingwood House. He took it to the Registrar, along with two witnesses to swear an oath of the authenticity of the Will and John himself stated that he resided at Southcote House in the Parish of St. Mary in Reading. (Below. Southcote House now demolished for modern housing).



In 1766 there was legal problems with Thomas' estate. The problem was the Copyhold land holdings and the ability to sell them. It was Grandmother Anne who got involved with Katherine in the period after Thomas' death, in creating a petition to present to the High Court. (House of Lords Journals Vol 31 - 1766. Ref: YHL/PO/JO/10/7/212). Unfortunately, we don't have a copy of the petition to obtain the detail. It was on behalf of herself (Katherine) and her three infant children, John, Catherine and Agnes, praying leave to bring a Bill, for vesting certain Copyhold Estates, in order to sell the same to Lord Barrington (2nd Viscount). The petition was granted.

At Watchfield, the general evidence suggests that it was widow Ann Blagrove, who occupied the fine Georgian Mansion and did so up to her death in 1784. The parish register recorded that she was 94 years of age and interred on the 26th March in the Chancel - the family vault. Katherine's interment the following year matched the inscriptions of the memorial stones placed above it, who were Blagroves descended from the original Thomas Blagrove.

On the original William Blagrove side. There were males given the distinction of 'Gentlemen,' meaning they had money and did not need to work; Thomas (1618 - 1682) and Charles (1622 - 1672). We can only assume that at the beginning of the 18th century there were two families of Blagroves, one seated at the southern end of the village and

the other at the northern end. Archaeological features suggest that the southern site had been occupied by a premises of quality and substance. The Blagroves from the Thomas side of the originals would continue that quality with the building of the quality Georgian Mansion House (below - drawn by a resident in 1815). The Blagroves from the William side most likely erected a timber-framed farmhouse of good quality in the farmyard at the northern end of the village. (below 2 - an AI interpretation).



This close look at the family at Watchfield has highlighted some interesting points of interest. Firstly, they called themselves Blagroves in the latter part of the 16th century, and it's not until the middle of the 18th that the spelling Blagrave appears. The theory of the link with the ancient Manor of Blagrave near Lambourn is quite compelling

although not proven. The Blgrave family effectively left Watchfield with the death of Ann (nee Hussey) who continued to reside in Watchfield House after the death of John in 1748. Their son Thomas and his wife Katherine, moved to Kingwood, her family home. Watchfield House was occupied after Ann's death by Charles Blgrave, but it's not certain from which part of the family he came. He wasn't there long and a succession of tenants lived there as it gradually deteriorated in the 19th century. (See SHS Listing N984 for more detail). In Shrivenham, John Blgrave owned property and land based at Ivy House in the High Street. (See SHS N1290 for more detail). But we know from the Letters of George Merryweather (SHS N1549) that circa 1815 he was in financial trouble.

We hope this explanation will be of assistance to others who maybe researching other branches of the same family. If you can add to this listing please contact us: info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk