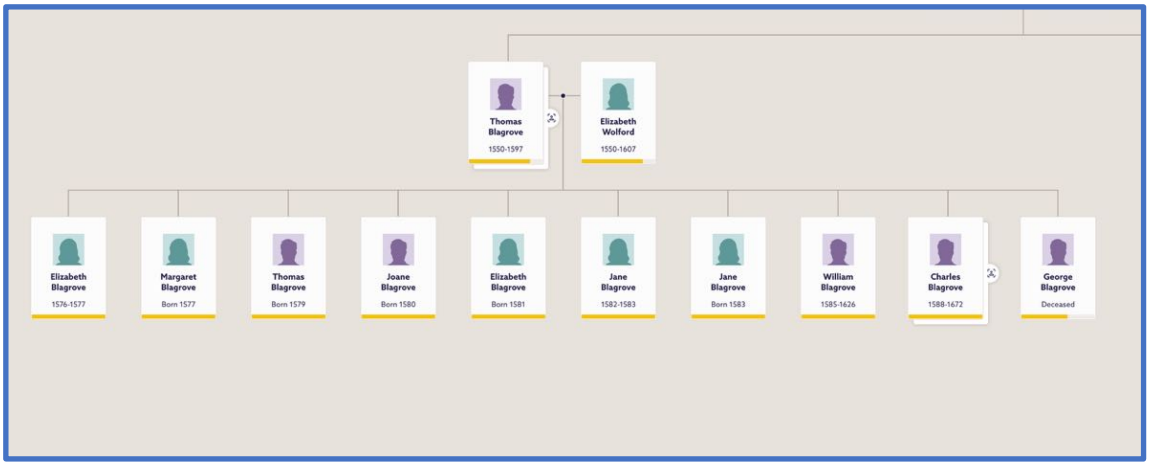
The Blagroves (Blagraves) of Watchfield in the Parish of Shrivenham

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 with a closer study of known documents, or if any new ones are discovered. There are two entries of marriages on the same day in 1575 when Thomas Blagrove married either Elizabeth Wolford 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.

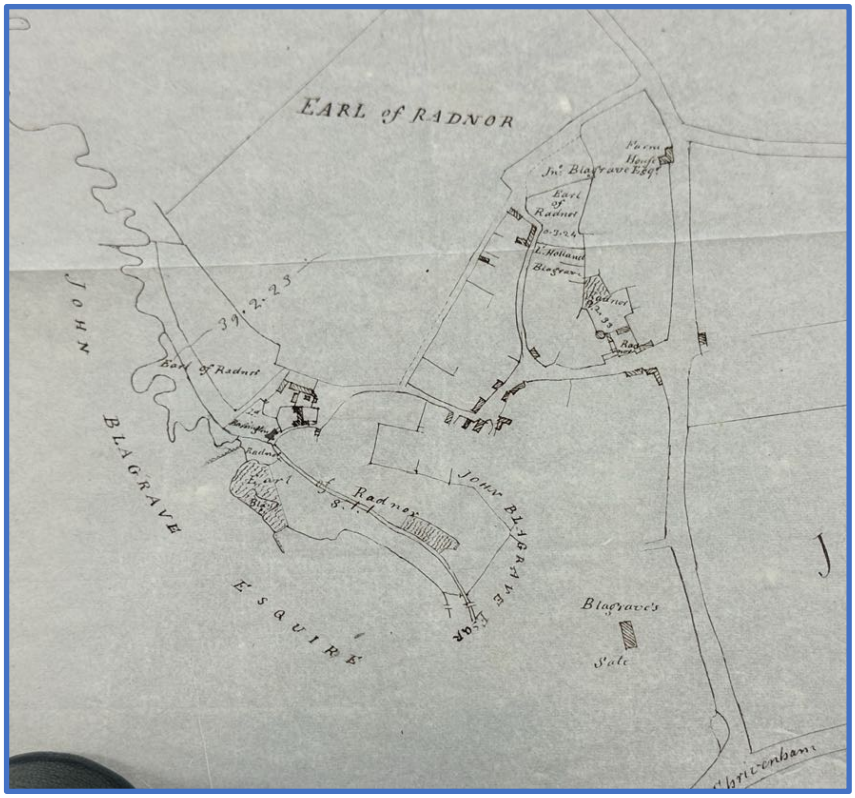




We know from two 18th century maps where the family was located at Watchfield at that particular period. The Willington Map of 1758 (extract below – courtesy of Shrivenham Heritage Society) shows an impressive estate on the left side (south). As well as other small parcels of land located around the village there is a small estate numbered 3 on the far right of the map (north). This became known as Manor Farm in the 19th and 20th centuries and may well have been considered as that well before. It's likely that it was a farmyard with associated buildings. These two locations could represent the two

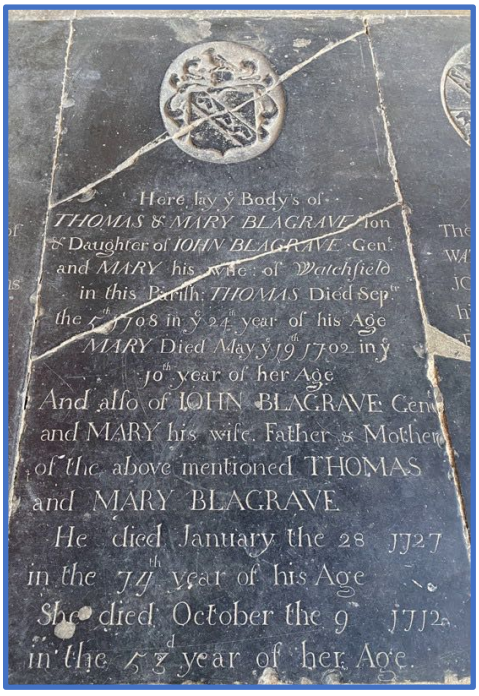
original brothers' home estates. The 1808 map (further below - RBA D/EPB/T4) confirmed the same situation half a century later.



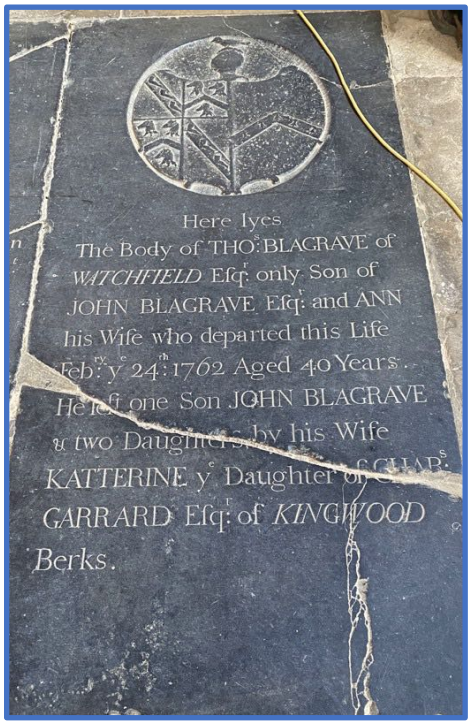


Between them they owned large tracts of land within the Parish of Shrivenham, Watchfield being part of it. They continued to prosper from farming in the 16th to 18th centuries, but it's likely that they brought a certain amount of wealth with them from whence they came. At a national level, the family had connections with the slave trade that began in the Elizabethan period. In the recently published '*Register of British Slave-Traders,*' there is an Elizabeth Blagrave listed who held £300 book value stock in the Royal African Company from 1721 until 1723. But we have no evidence yet if she was connected to the Watchfield branch of the family. In 1613 it is recorded in the Shrivenham Parish Register 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.




Here lyes
ly of JOHN BLAGRAVE of
FIELD Batchelor of Law
years a Member of S: Johns
Oxford who departed this Life
of April 1748 Aged 64.
ried ANN the Daughter of
IAN HUSSEY Citz: & Merch:
lon by whome he had one
HOMAS BLAGRAVE.
ns Also of ANN BLAGRAVE
Relict of the above
IN BLAGRAVE Esqr.
posited near this place
died March y 18: 1784
Aged 95 Years


Here lyes
The Body of THO: BLAGRAVE of
WATCHFIELD Esqr only Son of
JOHN BLAGRAVE Esq: and ANN
his Wife who departed this Life
Feb: y 24: 1762 Aged 40 Years.
He left one Son JOHN BLAGRAVE
& two Daughters by his Wife
KATTERINE y Daughter of CHAS:
GARRARD Esq: of KINGWOOD
Berks.

In the Vestry

Left stone

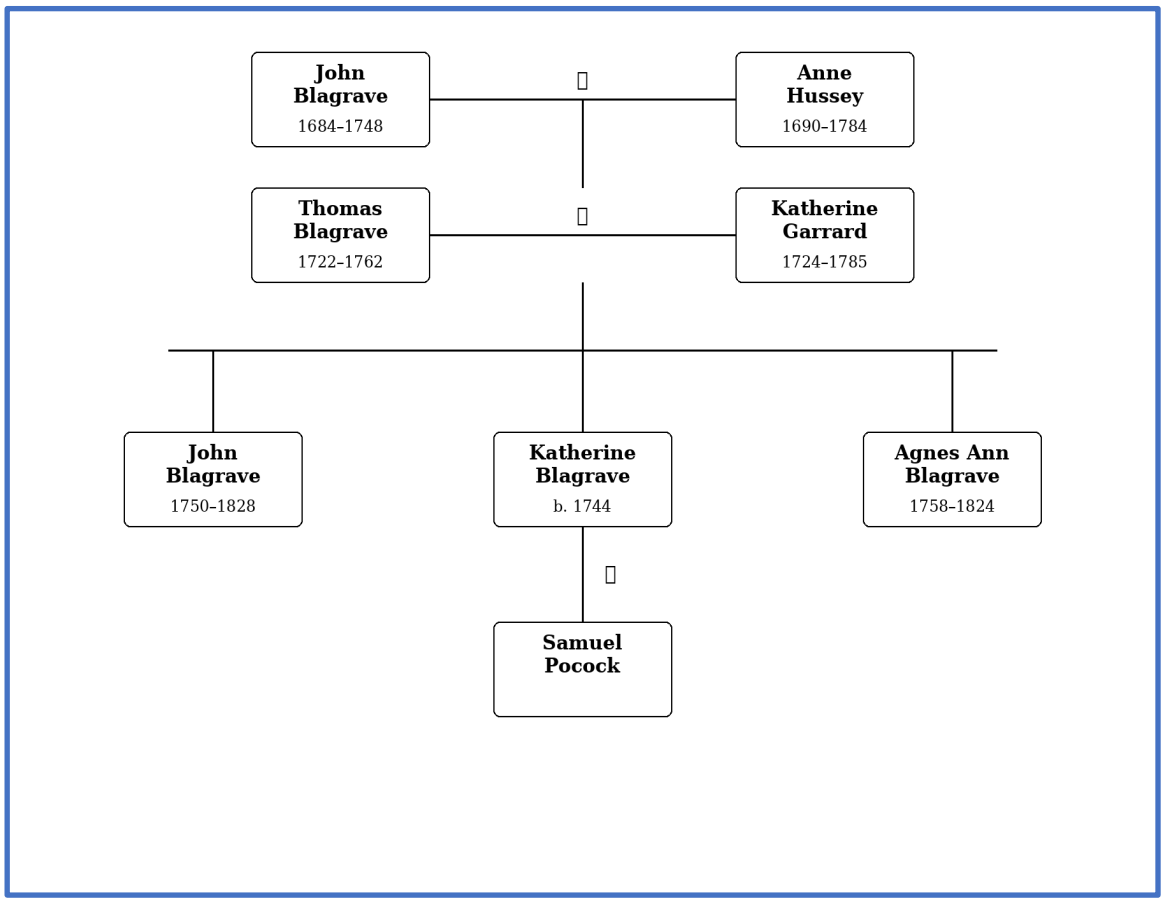
Here lies the body of John Blagrave of Watchfield, Batchelor of Law. Four years a Member of St Johns Co Oxford, who departed this life the ** April 1748, age 64. He married Ann daughter of Johan Hussey Citz and Merch of London by whom he had one son Thomas Blagrave. Also of Ann Blagrave relict of the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

Middle stone

Here lay the bodys of Thomas & Mary Blagrave, son & daughter of John Blagrave, 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 Blagrave, gent, and Mary his wife Father & Mother of the above mentioned Thomas and Mary Blagrave.
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 Blagrave of Watchfield Esq, only son of John Blagrave Esq and Ann his wife who departed this life Feb 24th 1762 aged 40 year. He left one son John Blagrave and 2 daughters by his wife Katterine the daughter of Charles Garrard Esq of Kingwood Berks.



It is Ann Blagrave, who lived to the age of 95 years, that provided the information of what had been at that location in Watchfield before the Blagraves. It was she who almost certainly had built the handsome Georgian house shown above. When the picture of that house is compared to the depiction of a large house in the Willington map below (in red by the number 3) there is a mismatch. Documents in the Royal Berkshire Archives (RBA) suggest an explanation. A Lease and Release dated the 13th and 14th June 1755 gave details of a purchase by Ann Blagrave. (D/EX310/11/2). She paid £530 to Hannah Watts (Widow) to buy the southernmost part of a messuage (house) and also a Close and Backside adjoining the house and the south part of the Orchard as was formerly divided. This immediately shows that the property portrayed on the Willington map of 1758 was an earlier estate layout. And a schedule within the Release takes the story back even further.



There is reference to Purchase Deeds from 1664, 1730 and 1732. '*All of which premises were formerly purchased by Thomas Watts, Grandfather of Thomas Watts the younger deceased, of Sir George Pratt, Baronet, (1605 – 1673) deceased in Fee Simple (Freehold) and were afterwards by Release Settlement and other conveyancing lawfully vested in said Thomas Watts the younger; and all other the Messuage.*'

The documents referred to above were also located in the RBA (D/ER/T66). The earliest Indenture is dated 10th May 1664 and is between Sir George Pratt of Coleshill, Baronet, on the first part; and Thomas Watts of Watchfield, Yeoman, on the other part. For the price of £400 Thomas Watts paid for, '*All that moiety or half part of one Messuage or Tenement situate, lying and being in Watchfield, Berks, from the entry southward with that part of a Chamber as is over the entry and the Backside adjoining to the fourth part of the Messuage commonly called the South Backside and the south part of the Orchard as the same hath been lately divided and marked out by Thomas Watts and John Haines otherwise Morris of Watchfield, Yeomen.*' This confirms that the property was large enough to have been divided into four parts. There are also sentences that deal with free liberty of ingress, and egress that would have been required by all tenants to water, the yard, stables etc. It also included details of all those arable lands in the Common Fields (long schedule list of

field names). It explained in some detail about the documentation that was exchanged between Sir George and Sir Humfrey Forster who previously owned the Manor of Watchfield. There is wording to the effect that Sir George gave his solemn word that he did legally own the property and had a right to sell it. This would be jitters after the Civil War when Humfrey had some of his properties sequestered. Another interesting note is that Sir George Pratt had appointed Thomas Blagrave of Watchfield, Gent and William Fairthorne of Watchfield, Gent, as his true and lawful Attorneys jointly.

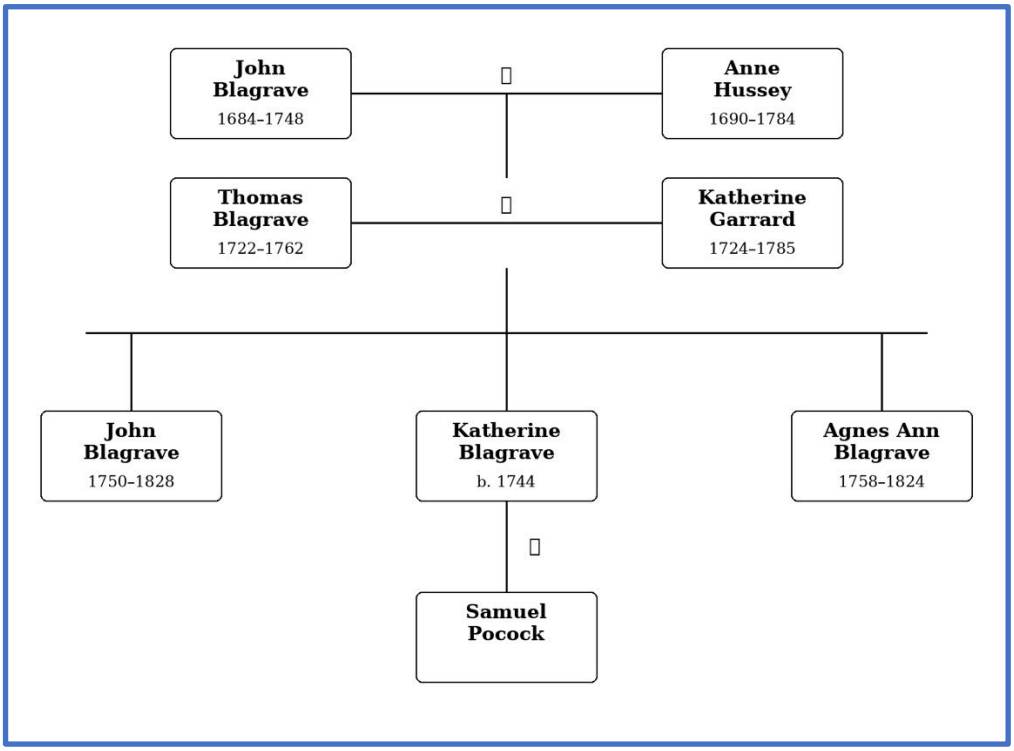
A century later an Indenture dated 1st July 1730 showed that the property was still in the hands of the Watts family and was between Thomas Watts the elder of Watchfield, Yeoman, on the first part; and Moses Minall of Marriage Hill, Parish of Ramsbury, Wilts, Yeoman, and Thomas Stratton of Watchfield, Gent on the second part for, '*All that south part of the Messuage or Tenement being part of the Messuage wherein Thomas Watts the elder doth now dwell hereafter particularly mentioned, (that is to say) the Kitchen and Chamber over it and the one half part of the Garrett which lyeth over the Chamber and Kitchen, the same being now undivided and also the north half part of the garden belonging to the Messuage and several parcels of land in the Common Fields.*' Thomas Stratton was also a Lawyer.

The following day a Marriage Settlement was drawn up Between Thomas Watts, Yeoman, of Watchfield on the first part; Moses Mildenhall of Marriage Hill, Parish of Ramsbury, on the second part, '*In consideration of a Marriage lately had between Thomas Watts the younger of Watchfield and Hannah Minall daughter of Moses.*' The property description was the same.

All this documentary evidence means that there must have been a substantial range of buildings at this location, certainly in the 17th century and likely earlier. It makes sense of how people of the status of the Strattons and Blagraves resided at the tiny village of Watchfield. Using AI, it may have looked something like the depiction below.



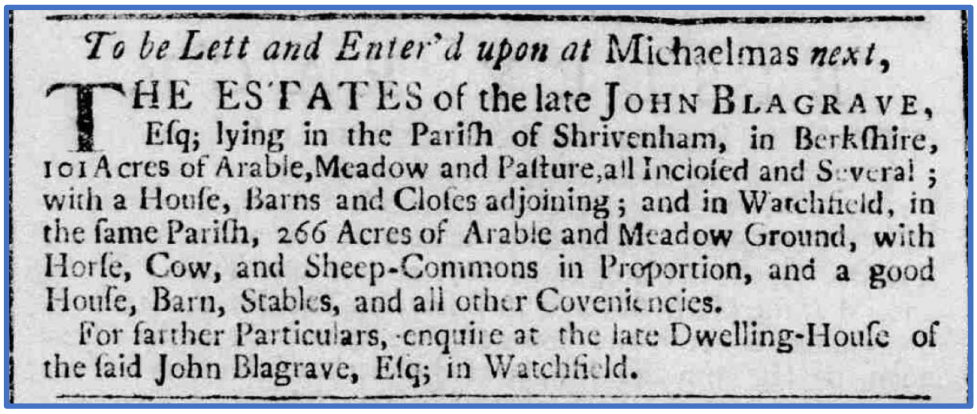
Ann Blagrave's purchase of part of the range creates the question of, did she and her late husband John own and occupy the other part? It may have been in a poor state of repair and Ann was in reality, completing the whole property from widow Hannah Watts, described as *'Hannah Watts, late of Watchfield but now of Great Coxwell, Widow.'* Until more documentation is discovered, it can only be speculated that some time after her purchase, Ann commissioned the erection of the Georgian house. However, to do so she would have needed a substantial amount of money, approximately £2500 - £3000. And it's upon matters financial, that the Blagrave story continues.



At the time of Ann's purchase in 1755, her son Thomas had inherited all of his father's property in accordance with his Will. A single Indenture in the RBA (D/EX310/13) described the debt that Thomas Blagrave had got himself in. The text describes that, '*Whereas Thomas Blagrave conceiving himself to be seized in Fee Simple of Fee Tail with the Remainder or Reversion to himself in Fee Expectant on the decease of Ann Blagrave of and in all and every the Messuages and Lands below named, did by Indentures …*' It continues by explaining that he had borrowed £200, £300 and £500 secured against property that he had inherited but was subject to his mother's use and income for the rest of her natural life. He had lost his father John in 1748 aged 64 and clearly didn't expect his mother Ann to live until she was 95!

Thomas Blagrave had indeed inherited his father's estates in accordance with his Will (PROB 11/762 dated 28th April 1745). The advertisement (below) showed that he was letting out the lands and premises. (Glos Journal 9th September 1748). His Will explained of other lands that he had purchased or leased with the house, barns and closes adjoining, and the size of 101 acres matches nearby 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 Ann if she remained a widow. Large

multi-roomed houses were often named by colour for the convenience of the servants, an indication of just how big the house may have been.



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

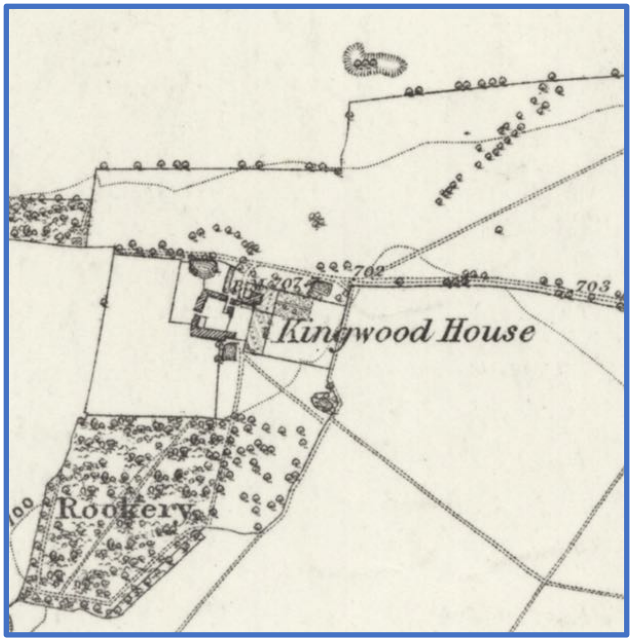
THE ESTATES of the late JOHN BLAGRAVE, Esq; lying in the Parish of Shrivenham, in Berkshire, 101 Acres of Arable, Meadow and Pasture, all Inclosed and Several; with a House, Barns and Closes adjoining; and in Watchfield, in the same Parish, 266 Acres of Arable and Meadow Ground, with Horse, Cow, and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

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

We cannot find a Will for Thomas Blagrave 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 Blagrave, 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, John, Katherine and Agnes Ann, were born there.

Historically there was a Manor or Tithing called Blagrave 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 Kingwood has some connection. VCH suggested 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 were legal problems with Thomas' estate. One 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, Katherine 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. Then there was the problem of Thomas' debt. The Probate was granted to Henry Coleman who answered at the High Court of Chancery to the Creditors. The result was that in order to resolve the whole matter, Ann the mother of Thomas had to pay £1590.11.6 to finish the matter. It certainly caused many awkward moments among the family, mostly aimed at the late Thomas.

At Watchfield, the general evidence suggested that it was widow Ann Blagrave, who built and 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 Blagraves descended from the original Thomas Blagrove.

The death of Ann at the Georgian Watchfield House, ended the branch of the family that are memorialised by the three huge slabs of polished black marble at St Andrew's church, Shrivenham. (See above). There were other branches and we hope to research the Shrivenham side in the future. Meanwhile, if any reader can help with any of this research, please contact us info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk

Below. A water-colour by artist unknown circa 1820. For more info see SHS Listing No: N984. AI Interpretation of the farm yard at the north end of the village.



