

The Parsonage Farm at Watchfield

By Neil B. Maw

It is notoriously difficult to pin-point historic locations, particularly in villages. Everyone knew where everyone else lived and so location was seldom a problem. But for the modern historian it can be difficult to discover just where a particular person or family lived. It can sometimes be achieved by a close examination of contemporary documents and a process of elimination and other times pure good luck. The former seems to have worked in this instance.

Historically, the Young family were a prominent feature within the population of Watchfield. From as early as the Muster Rolls of 1522 there was a Walter Young and later that century Thomas Young got married there in 1579. The Manor of Watchfield had been with the Abbey at Abingdon since the 8th century, so when Henry 8th carried out his systematic Dissolution of the Monasteries, the administration of the village was taken over by him in 1538. Through research, Shrivenham Heritage Society have established the line of ownership of the Manor after the Dissolution that can be read in the SHS online catalogue, Listing No N173.

The late Derek Luker of Oak Road, Watchfield, held in his possession some documents that formed part of the deeds of his house. They were copies of the original Indentures. These indicate that there was a substantial property in that road (below circled in red). The map extract below is from 1758 but it's clear that there were buildings located there even earlier in the 17th century. The Luker documents and other associated papers such as Wills, indicate that the Young family had a strong connection with that part of Watchfield. Just to the north is the location of present day Watchfield House (Below blue circle) and the number 16 noted in the key is '*Mr Young.*'

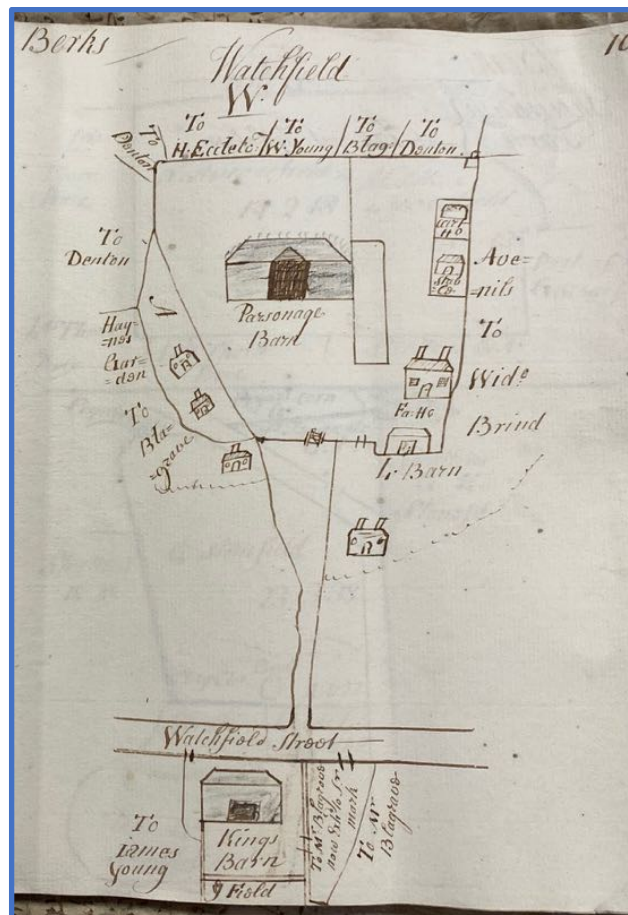
Within the Radnor Estate Papers held at the Royal Berks Archives at Reading (RBA) there are a huge number of documents that relate to Watchfield. Historically the Pleydell family that became the Radnor Estate at Coleshill, owned a lot of property within the village. (Now owned by the National Trust). The Pleydells were also the Lay Rectors

and so held the right to collect the Great Tithe payments that were due from the land holders. The Lease book kept by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell (RBA. D/EPB/E4) gives details of what was known in the 18th century as the Parsonage Farm and house at Watchfield. Historically, the name Parsonage was given to a place or property to where the tithes were paid, and not as modern interpretation has come to be, concerning the church. However, it was sometimes the case that the Rectory or Parsonage was occupied by a Vicar, but originally, they had different purposes.



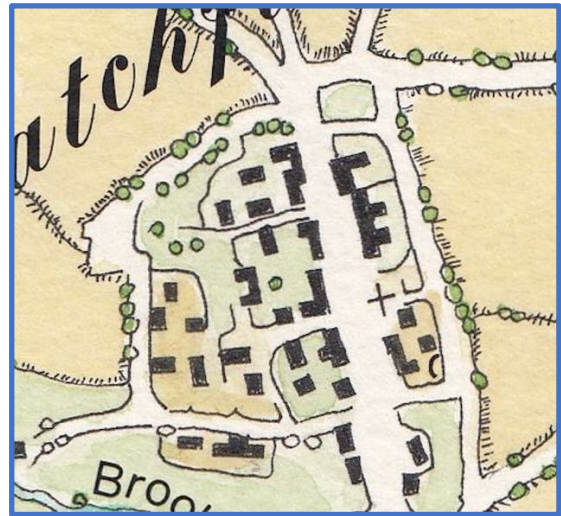
A lease headed Watchfield 12th March 1734 provided the information as to the involvement of the Young family at the west end of the village. Philip Young (1710 - 1777) and John Angel Young (1713 - 1782) agreed to become tenants of, '*the house at Watchfield late Robert Young's.*' Philp and John were probably brothers and Robert a cousin. The lease for the house was renewed in 1737 and included the lands that lay in the Common fields nearby but it's taken by John Angel Young and his father Philip Weeks Young (1688 - 1758). The middle names are both taken from inter-marriages of the

families. And then in 1746 there is lease between the same two people then worded, *'The Parsonage Farm at Watchfield containing two Yardlands and a quarter (in the Common Fields) and all the tithes of Hay and Corn of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, Baronet, in Watchfield, and the messuage and lands late of Thomas Fairthorne.'* The property of Thomas Fairthorne refers to the farm shown at the top of the map extract above (green circle). Thomas owned the farm and what became known as Tuckmill. (This has been extensively researched by Shrivenham Heritage Society and can be seen on their online catalogue listing number N106, and a separate book publication.) He died in 1741 and his whole farm and mill was purchased by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell of Coleshill in 1746.





The position of Parsonage Farm (Watchfield House) and the size of the ground that it occupied strongly suggests that it is, or was historically, of high status. Earlier maps from the mid 18th and later 19th centuries show that it occupied a much larger area than it does today, and that the Parsonage Barn shown above was accessible from the farm (below). The present day road was put in at a later date creating the extremely sharp ninety degree turn by the house.



Moving on towards the end of the 18th century, the Radnor papers give another clue to the location of the Parsonage Farm. An Indenture in RBA. D/ERA/T4. It refers to an original first lease dated 10th November 1791 to William Pocock and then confirmed that it was renewed on 7th May 1821 to John Pocock. It was between the Right Hon Jacob Earl of Radnor on the one part, and William Pocock of Watchfield, Berks, on the other part. For £9.9.0 paid to the Earl Radnor before the sealing of these presents, The Earl doth farm let on a 99 year lease, *'All that Cottage or Tenement being the West end of the late Parsonage House of Watchfield, and also the Moiety of the Yard or Barkside being the West part thereof as the same is now staked out together with the use in common with the occupier of the adjoining cottage of the Well of Water in the Garden there which premises are situate and being at Watchfield and are now in the occupation of William Pocock, together with outhouses etc. And also saving and reserving a road or way of 4 feet wide before the front of the cottage and across the Yard for the use of the occupiers of the adjoining cottage to pass and repass to the Well of Water. Leased on three lives, William Pocock aged about 26, His son Thomas, aged 2 and Martha his daughter age 7.'*

The description above fits in perfectly well when viewed from an aerial perspective (see below). The Well is shown by the blue circle and the approximate line of the path by the thicker blue line passing through the Farmyard or Barkside. There have clearly been alterations to both dwellings over the last 230 years but it's another piece of evidence that confirms that this is the site of the Parsonage House at Watchfield.



The Young family were clearly successful farmers and although we have no documentary evidence yet, it's likely that the earliest part of Watchfield House was built by the Youngs, possibly Robert (1682 - 1738). There are many of them interred in St Andrews churchyard at Shrivenham. (Below).



