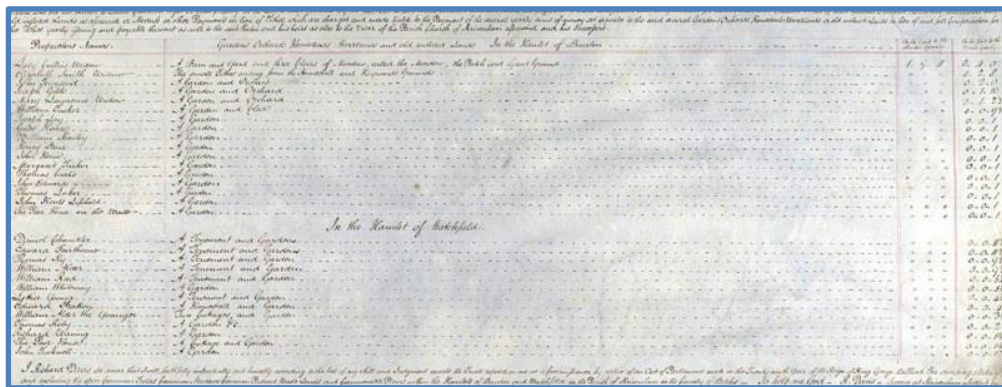


## *The Enclosures Act*

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was a time of big changes. For the country it was the Georgian period, the first of them coming to the throne in 1714. George III's long reign began in 1760 and would continue for 60 years. For the people of Watchfield the end of an era had been marked by the demolition of their Chapel. But at the same time other changes were taking place which, for some, would affect the very foundation of their parish. The whole fabric of society was based on agriculture, and many complex issues, such as rents, tithes, taxes and boundaries had been constantly under change, review and negotiation. But there was a growing trend towards more formality and the use of Parliament, in an attempt to make life more consistent and to settle long-running disputes. The Act for; *'dividing, allotting and inclosing the open common Fields, common Meadows, common Pastures, waste lands and commonable places within the Hamlets of Bourton and Watchfield in the parish of Shrivenham in the County of Berks,'* was passed in 1789. The Commissioners were, Richard David of Lewknor in the County of Oxford, William Jennings of Piddletown in the County of Dorset and Richard Bloxham of Winterslow in the County of Wiltshire. Their job was to; *'hereby award, divide, set out, ascertain, allot, appoint and confirm all and singular the said open common fields etc by the said Act directed to be divided containing in the whole 2251 acres, 25 perches (that is to say) in the Hamlet of Bourton 833 acres 3 roods and 17 perches, and in the Hamlet of Watchfield 1417 acres 1 rood and 8 perches.'*

Notice was given; *'In the Parish Church of Shrivenham immediately after Divine Service on Sunday the nineteenth day of July 1789 that the first Meeting of us the said Commissioners would be held at Lord Barrington's Arms Inn at Shrivenham aforesaid on Monday the third day of August 1789.'* This was followed by; *'Notice of our second or other subsequent Meeting to be affixed in writing on the principal or great door of the Parish church of Shrivenham aforesaid on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August 1789 and also by advertisement in the public newspapers circulated in the neighbourhood of Shrivenham aforesaid (that is to say) the Reading Mercury and Oxford Journal at least 10 days preceding the Meeting in and by which notice and advertisement we the said Commissioners did appoint a Meeting to be held at the house of William Lucas at Shrivenham aforesaid called or known by the name of Lord Barrington Arms on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September.'*

The subsequent scroll (or roll, or membrane) that was produced contain an extraordinary amount of detail of the lands, roads and footpaths within the parish and represent most of the layout of the landscape that we see today. There was much negotiation and exchanging, whereby people literally swapped parcels of land and agreed to forgo rights and rents in exchange for use of other lands.



The Enclosure documents were written up very neatly and with great detail.

## 18<sup>th</sup> Century Wills

**Anthony Gearing, Clothier.** 1711 PROB 11/520

Beneficiaries: His son Richard and his children, Richard, Ann and Elizabeth. His Grand Children, Cornelius, Mary and William Butler. Grand Son Anthony Gearing son of John. Grand Daughter Mary Gearing and Grand Son John Gearing. He made Mary Gearing the Widow of John Gearing Sole Executor.

**John Blagrove, Gentleman.** 1728. PROB 11/619

This John Blagrove is the Elder. To be buried at Shrivenham along with his ancestors. He left everything to his only son John (Executor). He also left some money to his Grandson called Thomas Blagrove.

**John Blagrove.** 1748. PROB 11/762

One of the Blagraves of Watchfield House as he asks that; *'My body be buried without any pomp and with the utmost humility amongst my ancestors at Shrivenham in the manner following. To be carried on the Common Byer covered with the usual Black Cloth by eight of my servants and workmen being with or employed by me at the time of my decease who fairest shall have one shilling each and a pair of gloves. My will is to have no pall holders or things save such are after mentioned.'* He gave to his wife but does not include her name; *'The coach we usually ride to church in with the harness thereto belonging at her own disposal and I give to her a ring of a guinea pure in memory of me. I should give her more was she not amply provided for settled on my marriage.'* He gave all his estates to his only son Thomas (Executor). The Will was witnessed by Martha Whitfield, Thomas Godfrey and Alex Ready.

**James Fox, Labourer.** 1785. PROB 11/1130

Beneficiaries: Brothers, Thomas, Richard and John. His Wife Mary (Executor), his property he owned in Aston Orton near Bampton along with the four acres of land there. Witnesses were John Wirdnam, John Angel Young and Edward Smith.