

The Mills

If the Willington map is examined more closely, just above Watchfield House there is a ditch that lies parallel with the course of the brook. We know that it is a ditch because I remember it most clearly. The Willington map shows the ditch with breaks in it, but it was continuous. Its southern end turned towards the brook and at its northern end ran under the trackway through a brick lined tunnel into a circular depression. Although the exact purpose of the ditch is still something of an enigma, we can be certain that it represents a clear case of water management. One of the main uses of flowing water was to harness power and the whole layout at Watchfield House strongly suggests a Mill.

The Hearth Taxes of 1662/3 show a property containing 8 hearths occupied by Richard Franklyn, which must have been a substantial building, and the only building to fit that description was Watchfield House. If Richard Franklyn lived in such a property in 1663 and had an association with Thomas Young, the Miller, it seems more than likely that such a mill would have been located on the estate. A conveyance dated 1786, (BRO D/EX310/16) concerning a property just to the north of Watchfield House, contains this sentence in part; *'and the Mill Pond on the West and with the Yard and Barton belonging to the dwelling house lately of Ann Blagrove on the South.'* Other information in the document confirms that this reference to a 'Mill Pond' must be in the close proximity of Watchfield House. It would suggest therefore, that the circular depression on the north side of the trackway was the Mill Pond referred to. Another clue is found in the Saxon boundary description of the year 931, which describes; *'Along the stream to the Mill Stream.'* The Ordnance Survey map of 1878 in the picture below, and the clip from the Barrington Estate Map following, clearly shows channel cuts on the Shrivenham side of the brook. The picture showing the wall marks where a channel was later blocked off. An aerial photo of 1946 shows quite clearly two channels almost creating a small island.

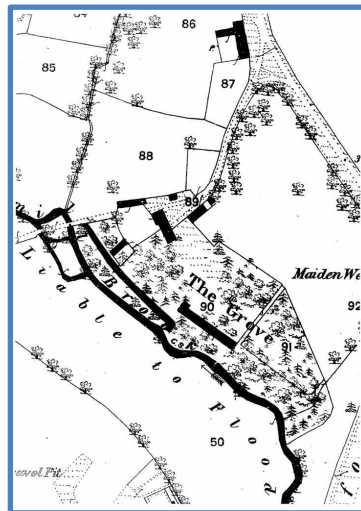
About 350 yards downstream from Watchfield House is the site of what is generally known as Tuckmill. Although there is little to see now, its location is Grid Ref: SU 9010 2415. Much has been learned in recent years from documentary and archaeological research and is encapsulated within a separate book called *Tuckmill in Watchfield* – available [HERE](#).

Included in the entry of the Domesday Survey of Watchfield it states that; *'There are 8 slaves, and a mill rendering 25s.'* So, at the end of the 11th century, we know there is a mill within the parish. By the early 17th century, we know there were two mills, one called West Mill and the other known as Little Mill. West Mill is located on the River Cole just off the Highworth road and still bears that name today. The location of Little Mill was unconfirmed and popular assumption was that it and Tuckmill were one and the same, and this has proved to be the case by documentary evidence.

The Domesday Survey of Shrivenham notes that; *'In the manor are 2 mills rendering 20s'*. Of the mills of Shrivenham we can account for one of them, Friars Mill, being modern day Friars Farm located on the Highworth Road out of

Shrivenham on the B4000 at Grid Ref: SU9055 2220. But where could the second mill have been located? A study of the water courses around Shrivenham Parish does not leave much in the way of choice. On the West we have a small section of the River Cole running north to Friars Mill. There is no obvious spot on this section that would suggest another mill. There is nothing in the way of a substantial water course on the south until we reach Beckett. Here several small courses join together and enter the ornamental grounds of Beckett House, when it leaves that estate by the old A420 and turns into Tuckmill Brook. It is at this location that some authors have suggested that a mill once stood, and also that it was the ancient mill known as Fowers Mill of the White Capon fame. However, a close examination of the site shows no evidence whatsoever of ancient water management other than the cuts put in for the nearby lakes of Beckett Estate. Also, documentary evidence suggests Fower's Mill is one and the same as today's Friar's Mill mentioned above, the name having been corrupted over the centuries. For a more detailed explanation please go [HERE](#). From this geographical point onwards, the only place where a mill could have been located, is along this stretch of brook, that is to say, either Watchfield House or Tuckmill. Moreover, the physical evidence would suggest that any mill on the Watchfield House site would have been located on the Shrivenham side of the brook.

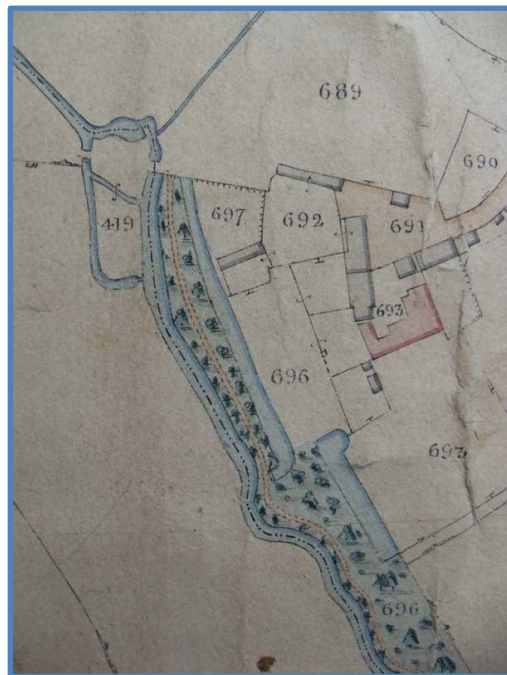
Information from the Shrivenham Hundred Court meetings (*D/EEL M38*) show William Fairthorne held Little Mill as early as 1616 and church records show that his son William was baptised at Watchfield in 1606. We also know by the drawings that there existed a whole farm at Watchfield that included the mill. With this information, it is now possible to make some sense of the '*The Mills*.' The two mills within the parish of Shrivenham referred to by the Domesday Book, are Friars (Fowers) Mill and the mill located at the site of the old Watchfield House. The one mill entry for Watchfield is not clear yet whether it refers to West Mill or Little Mill aka Tuckmill.



Watchfield House location above - courtesy Berks Record Office, Ordnance Survey.

Ref: BRO MF 602. Sheet No 12.8

Photo below taken from a Barrington Estate map of 1865 (Courtesy of Shrivenham Heritage Society) shows the same in more detail



The wall blanking off the old mill channel cut at Watchfield House