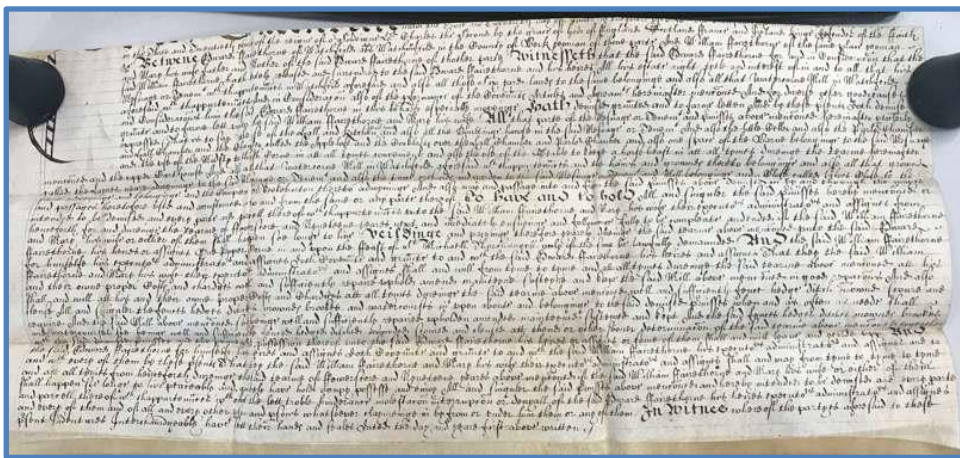


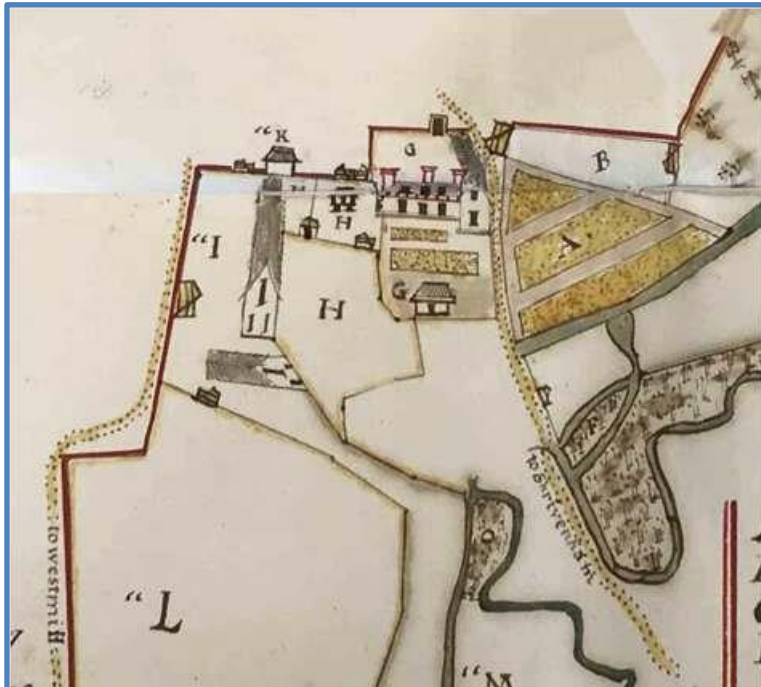
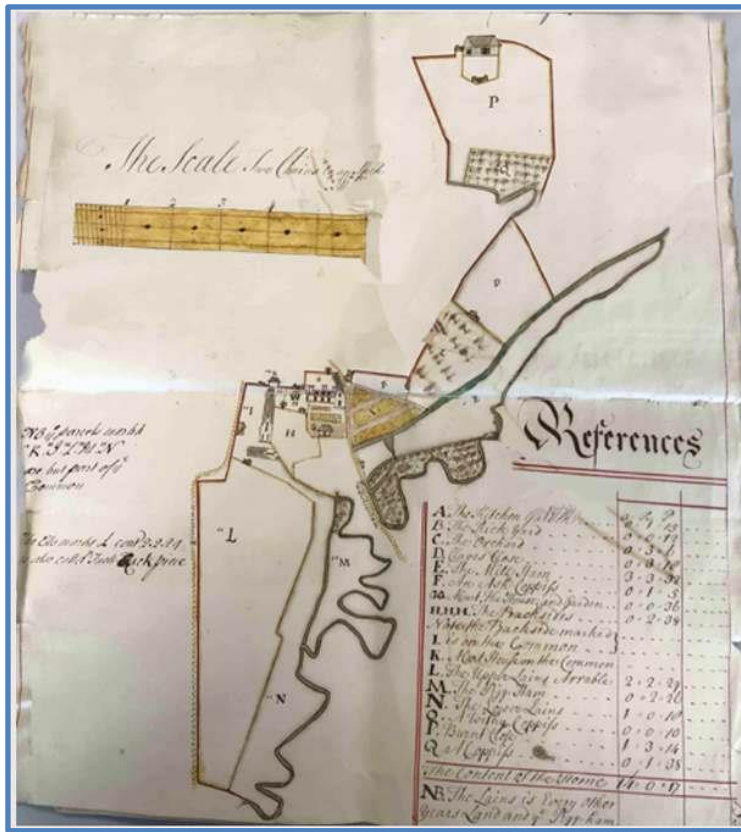
Little Mill aka Tuckmill

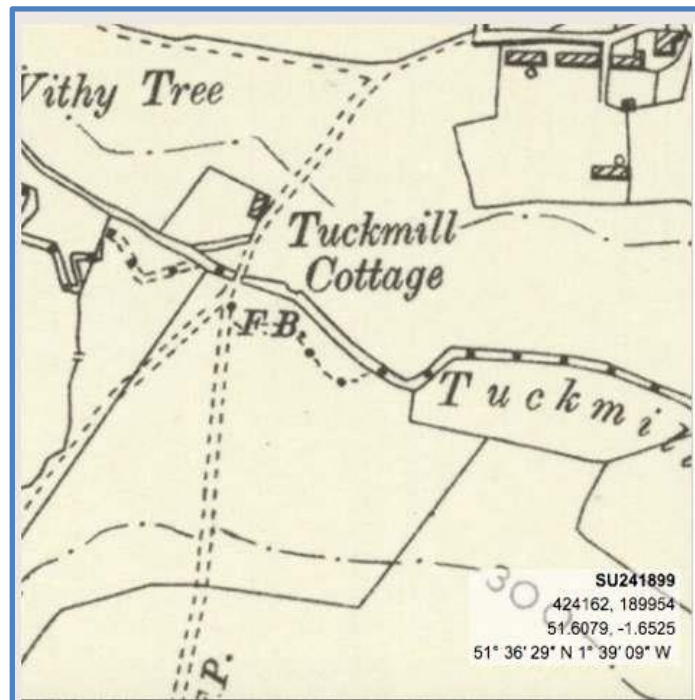
In the light of more information being discovered about the site of what was commonly known as Tuckmill, this whole Chapter has had to be updated (2019). A close study was made of documents contained in the Berkshire County Archives at Reading, Ref No: D/Epb - T46 and National Archives Ref No: C11/159/12.

The earliest documentary evidence discovered so far that describes what buildings stood at the Watchfield location comes an Indenture dated 22nd January 1672. This document is a formal agreement between William and Mary Fairthorne, and their son Edward to whom they are handing over the property to him. Of the property the wording 'Messuages and Tenements with their Appurtenances in Watchfield and also all those six Yard Lands to the same belonging and also all that Water Corne Mill in Watchfield. And there is a description of what is clearly a house with the sentence, '... the Hall and Kitchen and also the Boultinge House in thje messuage and also the Little Cellar and also the Parlour Chamber and Hall Chamber and the Chamber called the Apple Loft and the Work Loft over the Hall Chamber and Parlour Chamber ...' Which is describing a substantial house. Then there is a description of the other buildings on the site ... 'and also part of the Barn belonging to the messuage and the use of the Midsty to thresh the corn and also the use of the Stable to keep a horse beast in and the Upper Cart House amd also all that Water Corne Mill in Watchfield ...' It also goes on to detail the names of the closes nearby.



This is a good description of the property but it would be necessary to have confirmation of the location within Watchfield, and this was provided by an excellent map that is the result of a survey from circa 1752. The four pictures below confirm the location of the Farm & Mill at Watchfield, and the third one shows that it is accessed via a trackway from Star Lane in the old village.





The first two maps above do not include the location of the mill as it was drawn separately. This was because when the estate was sold the mill went into the hands of a man called Gearing. Recent research has also resulted in a better knowledge as to what use the mill was applied, and that it's day of 'Tucking' were very short lived.

It was known from the Willington Map of 1758 that Little Mill and Farm were in the ownership of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell of Coleshill. Recent research has discovered just how that came about and a separate article has been prepared to explain it. To see separate articles concerning the items raised above, please go to Shrivenham Heritage Society Online Catalogue Listing N106.

It is not known yet when Little Mill Farm was abandoned and all the buildings apart from the Mill Cottage and Mill House were demolished. More research is being carried out to ascertain when this happened but it is known that the last building to go was the cottage in 1972, destroyed when vandals set fire to it. The owner of the Golf Course then levelled the whole site that included the wall surrounding the cottage and the gardens, leaving nothing remaining of what once was a substantial farm and mill.

Victor Paget moved into the little cottage that stood on the site of Tuckmill in 1953. He brought up his family there, consisting of his wife and five daughters. The cottage and land had once formed part of the Barrington Estate, the seat of Lord Barrington being nearby Beckett House. Although parts of the estate were sold off in small portions at the beginning of the 20th century, the largest part, including Beckett itself, was sold to the government in the 1937 and became used by the military. In 1969 the military decided to sell much of the land it used during the War of 1939-45, the former RAF base to the North, Tuckmill and fields adjoining. And as Victor put it, in his little booklet he wrote before he died *"on a miserable December day that looked like I felt, my family and I left our beloved cottage."*



Above. The bridge over the dam walls.



Above. The depression made by the water being backed-up by the dam to form a Mill Pond.

Below. The sluice-gate slot that would send the water to the Mill Wheel





Tuckmill Cottage site centre showing the cottage and garden layout.
Courtesy of English Heritage (NMR) RAF photography.
Ref: RAF/106G/UK/1561. Frame 3353. 7 June 1946



Victor's final words on his beloved cottage after he vacated it; *"The building was immediately bolted, barred and sealed up. The most horrible thing about it was that it didn't get sold for another ten years. Added to that was the fact that vandals broke into the cottage and in 1972/3 set fire to it.*

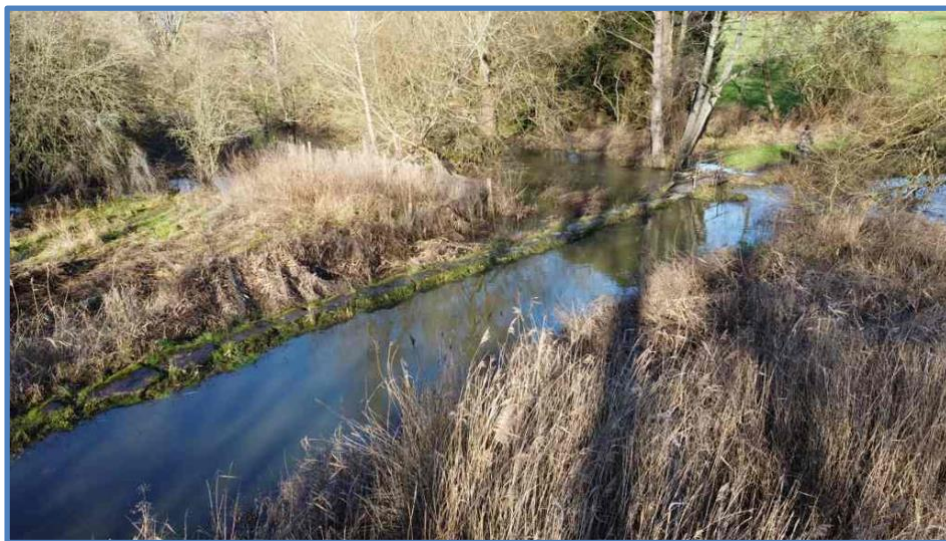


Above. Tuckmill Cottage from both sides. Courtesy of Christopher Thomas, Nephew of Victor Paget. The water-colour is possibly by one of Victor's daughters.





On the south side of Tuckmill Bridge there are numerous sarsen stones laid down to form a raised trackway. It is not certain when they were placed there but their purpose is clear to see during very wet weather.



The Fairthornes at Watchfield

A note came up in a Google search online from Rootsweb which concludes that, '*the Fairthornes were at Lambourne in 1553 and moved to Shrivenham in the early 17th century.*' It's an interesting note and does match existing documentary evidence, if it is assumed that Watchfield and Shrivenham are as one. The earliest evidence we have is for Edward Fayrethorne (sic) who operated a Farm and Mill at Watchfield in 1616. But there is evidence that he was there earlier as his son William was baptised at Watchfield Chapel in 1606. He was clearly doing well as when he died in 1636, he left in his Will, '*all my leases in Eascott and Westcott within the parish of Swindon, lately purchased from John Padnell.*' He also left £80 to each of his unmarried daughters upon their marriage. He also held copyhold land in Longcott. What is not known is how long William had been at Little Mill and Farm (*Tuckmill*), whether he was the first occupier of the location and built everything from new or if he had inherited or purchased it.

It was his second son William who succeeded Edward in running the Farm and Mill rather than his first son John. It's not known yet why this was so. But it was clear that he was a successful man with the farm at Watchfield and other land holdings previously mentioned. However, what is not so well known is that in 1648 he also purchased the Copyhold of West Mill which is about 2 miles along the stream to the west.

By the beginning of the 18th century, we have extensive documentary evidence that Thomas Fairthorne was running Little Mill and Farm. It's extensive because upon his death there followed a Court Case in the High Court of Chancery that would force the sale of his Estate. The result of this judgement from the court resulted in the entire Fairthorne Estate going into the hands of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell of Coleshill. To read more details of all the research on Little Mill (Tuckmill) and the Fairthorne Farm, please see Shrivenham Heritage Society online catalogue listing N106.

It's at this point in history that the Fairthornes seem to migrate in general to Shrivenham. There are Fairthornes still in the village of Watchfield because John Fairthorne is listed as attending most of the Vestry meetings from approximately 1750 until 1770. Then an Edward Fairthorne appears on the Vestry meeting lists from 1770. (Please see the Chapter, *Vestry Minutes*). It is also known by documentary evidence that the Fairthornes were occupants of Fryars Farm and probably Mill during the 18th century. But from this study it is certainly apparent that the Fairthornes success and subsequent high status in society had its roots in Milling and Farming.