

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.

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.