

The Poor's Plot of Finmere

The origin of the poor's Plot is not known but it existed long before the medieval open fields were enclosed in 1667. Finmere was a patchwork of fields, pastoral or arable.

The poor's Plot of twelve acres (five hectares) to the west of the village was rough land or "furze ground". Many villagers suffered poverty and struggled to find adequate food or clothing and depended on the clothing charity and on growing their own food on subsidized allotments on the Poor's Plot.

The Deed of the Enclosure states *"At the enclosure the twelve acres were assigned to trustees upon special trust and confidence and to intent and purpose that they shall from time to time, and at all times hereafter, permit and suffer the Churchwardens and Oversees of the poor of the said parish of Finmere for the time being, or the major part of them, to pay, employ, and dispose the rents, issues and profits of the said plot or parcel of ground with the appurtenances, and of every part thereof, unto and amongst the poor of the said parish of Finmere in such sorts as the Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor for the time being shall think fit, in which number of poor people Bridget Tapping and John George shall be accounted as two"*

The Deed continues with references to the killing of rabbits on the land. *"provided also that if any conies shall burrow in the said plot, and the said Sir Richard Temple (landowner to the south and west) or his warrens shall not upon a week's notice destroy the burrows and kill the conies. Nevertheless the tenant or occupier and the Churchwardens and Overseers of the parish may chase out the conies, but not killing any except such as shall burrow"*

For many years the Churchwardens and Overseers let the land by auction, to the highest bidder, for a year on Easter Monday. The fee was divided amongst the poor. However, the crops often failed, due to poor conditions and the tenants changed regularly. Rent in 1825 fell to £8. 2s. 6d for the year.

In 1827 the Duke of Buckingham, whilst out shooting in the area, noticed the Poor's Plot and its problems. He took over the twelve acres from the Churchwardens and Overseers and decided to divide it into 112 plots, three shillings a chain to be charged. In 1834 the Duke lost interest in the Poor's Plot and the Rector, Rev. Jocelyn Palmer, undertook to oversee the allotments. (see note) The £12 annual rent was paid to the Clothing Club Charity.

After the First World War there were few worked allotments and a sale of the land was considered but did not come to fruition. During the Second World War the Ministry of Agriculture took over the control of the Poor's Plot.

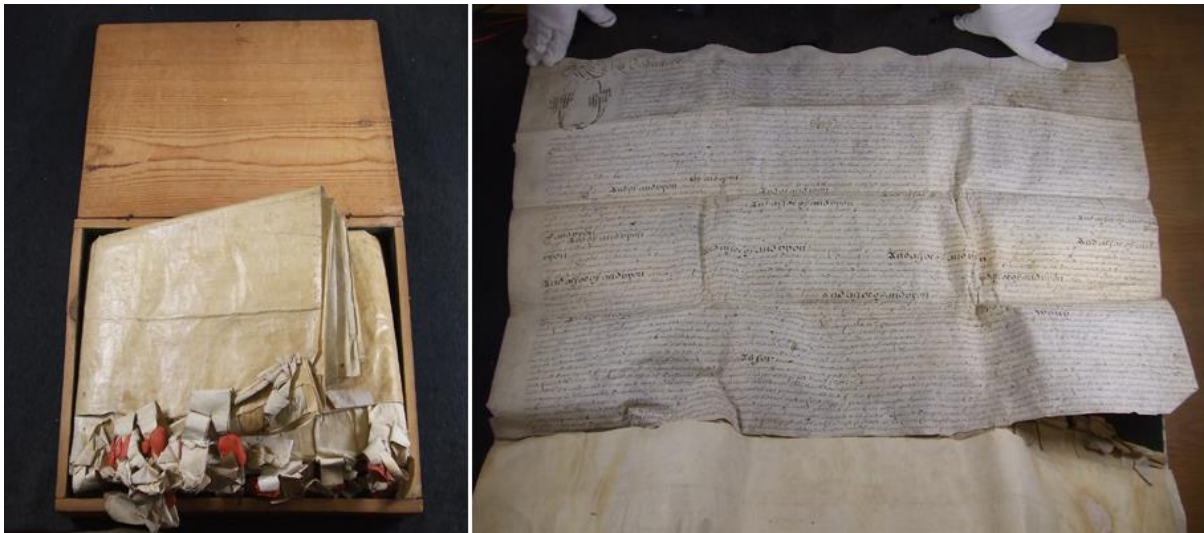
Requests to purchase the land in 1959 and 1963 were turned down. In 1976 it was decided to rent out the twelve acres and to cultivate new allotments in Fulwell Road, beside the village pond. Future revenue from the rental of the field and the allotments would continue to go to help any known hardship cases in the village.

In 1977 the Coal and Clothing Charity was wound up. That year the Poor's Plot trustees agreed to fund a "tea and bun" party for the pensioners to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. The following year, 1978, the first of the Senior Citizen's Christmas parties was held. Organised by the W.I. this event continued each Christmas for the next thirty one years!

The allotments were moved in 1992 to the Water Stratford Road. The original Poor's Plot continues to be rented out to a local farmer and the twenty four allotments rented to Finmere and neighbouring villagers at £10 a year.

The trustees continue to oversee this most historic part of Finmere's past and welcome new holders when allotments become available. Revenue from the field and the allotments continues to help worthy requests and goes towards village amenities when considered suitable.

On the 4th. November, 1977, the Finmere Enclosure Deed of 1667 was lent (on revocable deposit) to the keeper of Western Manuscripts at Oxford Bodleian Library, by the then clerk of Finmere Parish Council. Unfortunately during 1980 it was transferred from the library to the Oxfordshire County Archives in Cowley.



Anita Bilbo
Secretary to Finmere Poor's plot

Note

*(William Jocelyn Palmer writing in the Rector's book)extract from 'The Millenium History of Finmere.
'The rents from the poor's plot began to fall in arrears and the occupiers to be disorderly, exchanging their chains amongst themselves without any reference to their superior and even to assert their right to hold and cultivate as land belonging to themselves (as Poor) who they paid no rent.'*