

## 🌿 The Village Landscape 🌿

Finmere is not a classically picturesque village of the type that appears on chocolate box lids or jigsaws, though that might have been the case if its many thatched stone cottages had not been demolished. Nevertheless, most regard it as a pretty village where the harder lines of modern houses are softened by the trees that grow in village gardens, the Old Rectory, the playing fields and along the roads, though the impenetrable heights of Cypress Leylandii conifers dominate some areas.

### The Village Pond

In 1921, the state of the village pond was causing villagers concern. A Parish Meeting was called on 5 August to discuss cleaning it out. Mr Horwood advised the meeting that it would cost £20 but was contracted to do as much work as £9 19s would cover. On 16 September, another meeting was called to raise a special rate for the cleaning. The meeting also agreed to claim the pond as the sole property of the Parish.

The poor state of the pond remained a problem. At the Parish Meeting in 1932, Miss Ashwell, Finmere's representative on the Rural District Council, reported that the Sanitary Inspector required it to be cleaned. A year later, the Meeting heard that there was insufficient money for this but, in 1934, Miss Ashwell reported that the pond had at last been thoroughly cleaned. Later, the Parish Council again tried to claim the pond and land surrounding it as common ground, but this claim was disputed. The matter was not resolved until July 1993, when it was agreed that two-thirds of the pond belonged to Hill Leys, a third to the parish and the land alongside Fulwell Road to the cottage known as The Mere.

### The Commemorative Trees

In the early 1970s, fifteen maples and poplars were planted along Mere Road. Finmere parish has planted four commemorative trees: the Cross Tree, the Jubilee Tree, the Silver Jubilee Tree and the Millennium Tree.

#### The Cross Tree

The Cross Tree was already a substantial tree by the 1880s. It may have been planted in 1809 when the road from Water Stratford was straightened and a curve was made in the road between Stone House and the Fulwell Road. The small green then created is not normally called the 'village green' but in 1925 the Parish Meeting agreed 'that the District Surveyor be asked to take measures for the removal of road metal from the Village Green.'

An old pond has been restored at the school and, at the west end of Fulwell Road, the village pond, now sometimes called the Mere, may just have been the original 'mere' in Finmere.

1920	2000
£20	£480



The village pond in autumn 1999



### **The Cross Tree in 1912**

The postcard was posted on 11 September 1912 to Miss Barrett who was staying in France. The old Post Office is in the shade to the right.

After the Second World War, the tree became dangerous. The Parish Meeting of 1949 received a letter from the Divisional Surveyor requesting lopping or felling of the 'dangerous' Cross Tree. Howard Temple of Warren Farm told the meeting that he was the reputed Lord of the Manor and that he did not claim the tree. It was decided to ask the County Council to have the tree lopped but no action had been taken a year later. In 1973, the Parish Council decided that Cross Tree should be felled and replaced with a plane tree. This decision was supported in the 1974 Village Plan.

*The 'historic' Cross Tree, a dead elm, should be replaced immediately. (Finmere Village Plan 1974, Oxfordshire County Council)*

Tim Whitely of Evenley cut down the tree in 1974. The following year, Peter Symes-Thompson presented an oak tree as a successor to the elm. This stands on the smaller of the two greens and, each Christmas since 1997, it has been decorated with festive lights to mark the start of Christmas celebrations.

### **The Silver Jubilee Tree**

A horse chestnut given by Miss Elaine Young, a former head teacher at Finmere School, was planted in July 1977 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. This grows on the site of the original Cross Tree.



**Silver Jubilee in 1977**

## The Jubilee Tree

In 1887, there was an air of optimism in Victorian England as the villagers celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the marriage of Queen Victoria and Albert (Albert had died in 1861). The school mistress, Annie Hubbard recorded that Finmere school had a holiday for the occasion.

*13 June 1887. In commemoration of the 'Jubilee' a holiday was given in the morning, and in the afternoon the children had tea in the schoolroom provided by the Rector and other friends.*

*2 August 1887. Reverend Seymour Ashwell and Mrs Ashwell visited the school this morning and presented each child with a medal in memory of the 'Queen's Jubilee.' (School log book)*

The school manager, Reverend Seymour Ashwell, recorded the feasting and races.

*1887. The Jubilee was kept in the village on 15th June. By each person in the parish being given 1lb of beef and 1 pint of Ale. The children and all old people receiving parish relief and over 70 and all widows had tea... provided in the Schoolroom. 'Bran pies' containing presents and sprints in the 'old yard.' Most of the able bodied people and young men went to Shelswell where there were sprints and fireworks after. (Rectors' Book)*

In the autumn, a commemorative tree was planted.

*19 October 1887. A tree was planted near Finmere House to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. (Rectors' Book)*

The Jubilee Tree still stands at the junction of Mere and Valley Roads. It was surrounded by railings and twice these were threatened with removal. During the Second World War, Miss Emma Ashwell spoke about 'War Ships Week' to the Parish Meeting of 27 March 1942. The Meeting agreed to remove the 'iron railings round the Coronation Tree' as a contribution and it was decided to keep the nameplate. The railings were probably not removed and were again discussed by the Parish Meeting in 1952. The Meeting resolved to remove the iron guard at the base, which was considered a danger to children who climbed the tree. Unfortunately, it was found that the tree had grown around the guard and it could not be removed.



**The Jubilee Tree with Finmere House behind in the 1920s**



**Professor Ian Macpherson, Chairman of the Parish Council, plants the Millennium Tree**

### **The Millennium Tree**

**W**ith the aid of a grant from Cherwell District Council's Millennium Tree Planting Grant Scheme, the fourth of Finmere's commemorative trees was planted on 1 January 2000 after the New Years Day service at St Michael's church. The Millennium Tree, a cherry, with its commemorative plaque, stands outside the village hall on the edge of the village playing fields.

### **The Village Streets**

**T**he village streets did not have formal names until 1973, when the Parish Council agreed to the following names for the village roads:

Banbury Road: Red Lion to Kings Head  
 Valley Road: Kings Head to Old Rectory  
 Townsend Road: Cross Tree to Village Pond  
 Mere Road: Red Lion to Jubilee Tree

The name 'Townsend Road' proved unpopular with residents and 'Fulwell Road' was adopted instead.



**Rector Ricky Yates blesses the Millennium Tree**