

*The Millennium  
History of Finmere*

Published by: Finmere and Little Tingewick Historical Society, Finmere, Oxfordshire

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Printed by CopyTECH (UK) Limited: [info@copytechdigital.com](mailto:info@copytechdigital.com)

ISBN 0 9533253 1 8

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## 🌀 Foreword 🌀

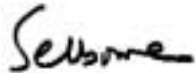
**F**inmere's association with Selborne in Hampshire began with Roundell Palmer, my great-great-grandfather. He was son of William Jocelyn Palmer, a kindly Rector who dominated village life in Finmere and Mixbury during the first half of the nineteenth century. Writing anonymously in the History of Mixbury by James Charles Blomfield, Roundell described his father as:

*A wise, patient and loving pastor among his people. There was not one of the young or old, whom he did not personally know well, or whose conduct of character he did not study... He kept his eye on everybody; and, when any went wrong, he watched for his opportunities to do them good; seldom, if ever, giving up even the worst... He was a good neighbour and a fast friend, and by nature sociable... [and] lived plainly and simply.*

After Oxford, Roundell practised law and was elected to Parliament. He was appointed Lord Chancellor and took the title Lord Selborne after his Hampshire estate in 1872 and The Earl of Selborne ten years later. As well as many good works at Blackmoor, near Selborne, Roundell maintained his links with Finmere, contributing to its charities and the church.

Roundell recognised the importance of local history, and wrote a section on Roman remains for an edition of Gilbert White's Natural History of Selborne. Blomfield quoted from this famous work in his History of Finmere, maintaining the association between Selborne and Finmere.

Local history makes an important contribution to rural life, where today new commuters rub shoulders with the established agricultural community. I am pleased to continue the link established between our parishes by my great-great grandfather by contributing this foreword.



Earl of Selborne, KBE, FRS  
Selborne, Hampshire  
September 2000



## ☞ The Millennium History ☞

The first *History of Finmere* was written by Reverend James Charles Blomfield and published in 1887. Like many of the historians of his day, Blomfield was a clergyman. He was the Rector of Launton and Rural Dean of Bicester. His later years were devoted to chronicling the history of his Deanery and, by his death in 1895, he had published nineteen parish histories and had begun work on four others. His *History of Finmere* was one of the finest volumes in the series.

Much has happened in Finmere since Blomfield's time. There were also events of his time and earlier that he did not know of, or found no interest in reporting. The idea of a new history—'to update Blomfield'—originated with Philip Willison and Anita Bilbo. They formed a Finmere Historical Society in 1986 to write a new book. After Philip's death in 1990, the history was put on hold.

The idea did not fade. During the summer of 1996, Barry Cranfield, Anita and others marshalled interest in the idea of a historical society. In August, about fifteen people met on the sunlit lawn of the Kings Head. After an evening of historical tales, we founded the *Finmere and Little Tingewick Historical Society*.

From that date, about twenty people have been involved in the Society, helping to collect information, develop ideas and raise funds. The stated purpose of the Society is to compile this *Millennium History*. In the course of doing so, we have published a new edition of Blomfield's *History of Finmere*, many newsletters and a web site ([homepage.virgin.net/finmere.history](http://homepage.virgin.net/finmere.history)).

### A Millennium of Village History

Archaeological remains exposed in gravel quarrying and during the construction of the bypass have revealed that the Finmere area was settled from at least the Bronze Age, perhaps from around 4000BC. These and later farmers lived in isolated homesteads and it is unlikely that there was a recognisable village here until around 1000AD. Finmere is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086AD, when its population would have been approximately 100 people.

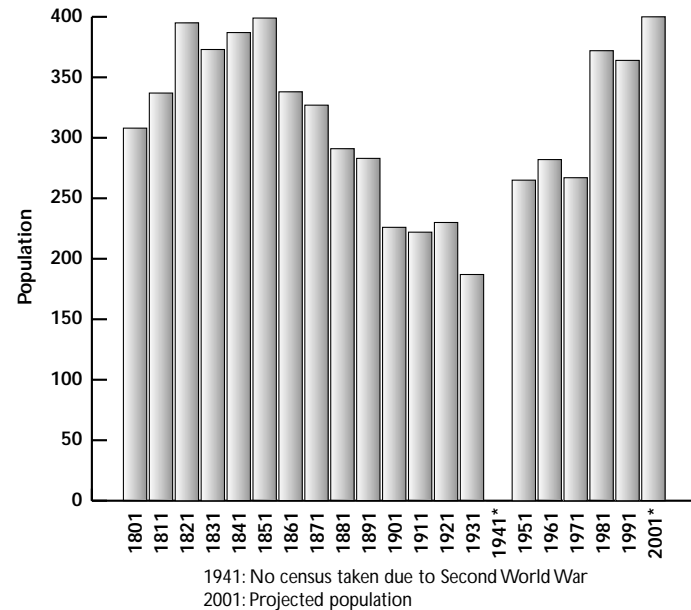
The population grew slowly through the medieval era, when villagers farmed narrow strips scattered across three open fields: South Field (to the south of the village), Mill Field (to the north) and Field next Fulwell (to the west). Their produce was eaten or bartered and would have provided a poor living—the more so for the vagaries of the weather and the ravages of disease. From the late twelfth century, or before, the Church of St Michael provided a focal point for worship and pastoral care.

Research by Tim Killeen suggests that Finmere was held by Robert D'Oilly at the time of the Domesday Survey.

The medieval way of life was swept away in the mid-seventeenth century. The land in the parish was then owned by the Temple family of Stowe and Sergeant Thomas Waller, a lawyer. They regarded the medieval strip fields as inefficient and they were certainly unprofitable for them. In 1667, the landowners 'inclosed' the landscape, creating a patchwork of rectangular fields and woodland. They also doubled the rents charged to tenant farmers.

Agriculture was less labour-intensive following inclosure and the parish could no longer support its expanding population. Desperate measures were tried including, from 1831, sponsoring emigration to America from the parish rates. Others workers moved to the towns and the population of Finmere parish dropped from a peak of 399 in 1851 to 187 in 1931.

This impoverished parish is the starting point for our Millennium History of Finmere. In the following pages, we tell the story of the village people, and their pleasures and miseries, and we describe how Finmere has retained its rural character through its transition from a poor agricultural village to a wealthier commuting community.



**Population of Finmere Parish 1801-2001**

## Contributors

The Millennium History has been written and edited by a small team, supported by a larger group of villagers and friends of Finmere. No one section of the book can be described as being written or researched by one person and while Andy Boddington has taken the lead, researching and writing many chapters and editing the volume as a whole, other contributors have written part or complete chapters. The main contributors are:

Finmere and Little Tingewick	Andy Boddington
The Village in the Nineteenth Century	Andy Boddington
St Michael's Church	Andy Boddington and Ricky Yates
The Rectories	Andy Boddington with contributions from Ricky Yates
The Parish Land	Andy Boddington and Anita Bilbo
The Roads and Railways	Railways: Ian Hudson with contributions by Andy Boddington and Mike Hammond. Roads: Anita Bilbo and Andy Boddington
A Well Regulated Parish	Andy Boddington with contributions by Anita Bilbo and Tim Killeen
Water and Services	Tim Killeen with contributions by Andy Boddington
My Poor People, They Be Well Instructed	Andy Boddington
A Unique and Boldly Revolutionary School	Andy Boddington with contributions by David and Mary Medd
The Village Landscape	Andy Boddington with contributions by Anita Bilbo and Rosemary Crabtree
The Villagers and Their Houses	Andy Boddington with contributions by Anita Bilbo and Rosemary Crabtree
Finmere House	Andy Boddington with Ian and Sheila Macpherson
The Public Houses	Andy Boddington
Finmere at Work	Andy Boddington
Shop and Markets	Andy Boddington with several contributors
In Hall and Field	Anita Bilbo and Andy Boddington
Making Our Own Entertainment	Andy Boddington and Anita Bilbo
Sports and Shows	Anita Bilbo and Andy Boddington

Guides and Scouts	Pat White with contributions by Anita Bilbo
The Women's Institute	Rosemary Crabtree
Finmere During the Second World War	Memories: Ian Hudson. Evacuees: Andy Boddington. Airfield: Tony O'Gorman
The War Memorial	Andy Boddington
Finmere at the Millennium	Andy Boddington

Many villagers have helped by supplying photographs, lending documents and recalling memories. They are individually acknowledged in the text. Our particular thanks are extended to: Gladys Allen, Fred and Sylvia Barnes, Wilfred Davis, Jean Flowers, Lester Jarvis, Clementina Sikes, Barbara Shirley, Fred Tew, Alan and Denis Tunks, and Ron Wakelin. Several libraries and archives have supported our research including: Buckinghamshire County Archives, Buckingham Library, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, Huntington Library (San Marino, California), Lambeth Palace Library, Oxfordshire Archives (now Oxfordshire Record Office) and Post Office Heritage.

Our particular thanks to Keith Rogers for designing and publishing this book. Don Imrie and Ian Macpherson proofread a near final version of the text. Responsibility for any remaining errors lies with the editor, Andy Boddington.

## ☞ Finmere and Little Tingewick ☞

The northeast corner of Oxfordshire is bounded by the River Great Ouse and the line of the Roman road from Alcester (Bicester) to Towcester. The parish of Finmere is tucked into this corner, six hundred hectares (1,500 acres) of muted landscape. There are no hills here, just soft folds of clay and gravel. The highest land, in the south of the parish near Widmore, is a modest 125 metres (413 ft) above sea level. It falls away to the north to its lowest point at the River Great Ouse, near Bacon's House, just 35 metres (115 ft) lower.

The village of Finmere rests in a shallow valley in this modest landscape. The Turnpike Road built in 1744 bypassed the village, which has remained for the most part hidden from people hurrying by on the road that became the old B4031. Its seclusion has been protected by the new bypass, which opened in 1998.

Finmere village lies on the borders of two counties and is close to a third. It extends from the village pond on Fulwell Road to the old Roman road at the Red Lion, a distance of about a kilometre. The settlement continues beyond the Roman road, but the houses here lie in Buckinghamshire and are known as Little Tingewick. If you rest at the bar in the Red Lion, you are drinking in Little Tingewick. A few years ago, a pint in the Kings Head, sadly now closed, was drunk in Oxfordshire. Many passers-by wrongly think that the Red Lion is in Finmere and that Finmere is in Buckinghamshire. To add to the confusion, parts of Finmere were treated as being in Northamptonshire in the Domesday Book of AD 1086 and, in the nineteenth century, the parish was within the Poor Law Union of Brackley, also in Northamptonshire.

Historians and geographers recognise that villages develop in different ways. Many, like Tingewick, are nucleated villages, which grow around the church or manor. This type of village often has remote hamlets or 'ends.' Little Tingewick is an example of an end. Finmere grew differently. It was a dispersed settlement of scattered farms and cottages along the valley, with large gaps between houses. Only since the Second World War has a continuous village landscape been created through infill with new houses.

Day to day, however, Finmere and Little Tingewick are a single community. Our Millennium History covers Finmere village, its parish and the hamlet of Little Tingewick. For convenience, we often refer to all as Finmere, just as passers-by and many villagers do in conversation.



**Location of Finmere**

In this 1794 map of Oxfordshire, Finmere is shown as Finmore towards the top right of the map.

In 1979, Finmere Parish Council proposed that Little Tingewick should be transferred from Buckinghamshire to Oxfordshire. Bert Horwood, landlord of the Red Lion, denounced the idea.

*It's all tommy rot. I do more trade with Tingewick people than I do with Finmere. I think it will cost money that could be spent on something else. (Oxford Times, 16 March 1979)*

Mrs Mildred Tredwell, however, took a contrary view.

*It's a good idea. Although I've lived in Little Tingewick for 42 years, I go to Finmere church and have been on the church council there for 40 years. I think we are more Finmere than Tingewick. (Oxford Times, 16 March 1979)*

The proposal was rejected.



**Bert Horwood at the county boundary in 1979**

## The Meaning of Finmere and Tingewick

Finmere, with its mere, springs and wells, has a long association with water. This includes the name of the village itself. The authoritative English Place Names Society suggests that the Old English name for Finmere, mere-fina, might mean 'pool frequented by woodpeckers.' Woodpeckers nest in the village but it is uncertain whether the fin element derives from the Old English word fina, meaning woodpecker, or fyne, meaning 'mould.' Perhaps the village name means 'mouldy pond,' or just very damp. Until the middle of the last century, the village was most often known as Finmore, the name Finmere only becoming firmly established with wider availability of Ordnance Survey maps in the late nineteenth century.

Tingewick is also derived from an Old English name, Tidinga-wic. It means 'dairy farm of the people of Tida.' Little Tingewick is the detached portion of Tingewick village alongside the old Roman Road, adjacent to Finmere.



### Cottages in Finmere before the First World War

Although clearly identified as Finmere, we are not certain where these cottages were.

## ☞ The Village in the Nineteenth Century ☞

In the 1880s, former Finmere curate John Burgon recalled village life in the mid-nineteenth century using romantic phrases typical of many writers of his period.

*A humbler village one has seldom seen... And yet... There was an air of cleanliness, of decency, even of comfort, about the place and about the people. Squalid poverty there was none. The peasantry behaved respectfully to strangers. The Church, however unattractive aesthetically, was fully adequate to the requirements of the parish, and was filled twice every Sunday with a truly devout and attentive congregation...*

The poverty may not have been squalid but it was extensive, and Finmere was far from an idyllic village in which to live.

### Palmer's Finmere

For much of the first half of the nineteenth century, the parish can be accurately described as Palmer's Finmere. Although he resided at Mixbury until 1852, Reverend William Jocelyn Palmer dominated life in Finmere for nearly forty years from 1814. John Burgon described him as a 'grave good man, who exercised supreme parental and patriarchal authority throughout the parish.' Palmer took a conscientious interest in the physical and pastoral well-being of his parishioners and brought a period of stability to the church. He made great efforts to improve the lives of the village poor and subsidised the village charities. In return for his benefaction, villagers were expected to abide by Palmer's strict views of how they should conduct their lives.

The parish was a patchwork of fields set to pasture or ploughed for arable crops, and worked by hand and horse. Agriculture was profitable for the landowners and tenants but rarely provided sufficient work for the men of the parish. Poverty had been a problem since the medieval open fields were inclosed in 1667 and probably from before then. Many poorer villagers struggled to find adequate food, clothing and warmth. They were dependent on village charities, poor relief and growing food on the subsidised allotments known as the Poor's Plot.

The main part of the village was known as Towns End and stretched along what is now Fulwell Road between the church and the village pond. In 1851, two-thirds of the villagers lived in this area (238 people). Their crowded cottages, with their thick walls of limestone and thatched roofs, would now fetch a premium price but nearly all have been demolished. Only Westbury Cottage, the Thatched House and Cross Tree Cottage remain. Within Towns

Palmer's work is well documented. He was a prolific writer of letters and made diligent notes of meetings. Several maps of the parish from this period have survived. John Burgon, an outstanding biblical scholar and later Dean of Chichester, was curate during Palmer's illness in 1851–53. Burgon penned a rose-tinted, but informative, portrait of village life in Palmer's time for Blomfield's History of Finmere. In the 1880s, Louisa Ashwell painted a series of watercolours of a village little changed since Palmer's time.



### The view towards the Cross Tree

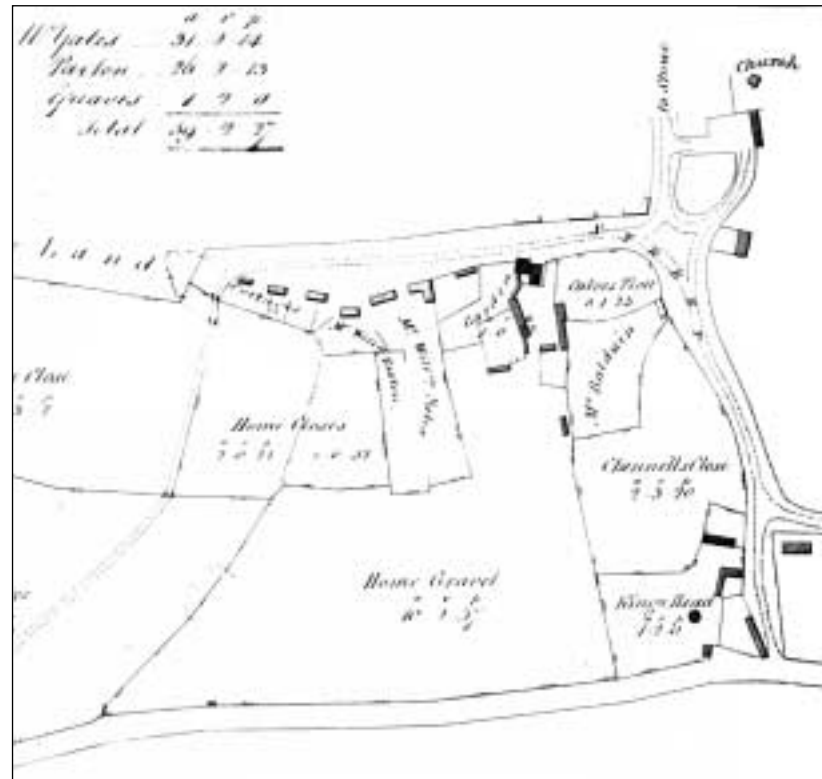
A painting by Louisa Ashwell in the 1880s. The painter was sitting between Town Farm and Falcon Hethe. The railings of Town Farm can be seen on the right. Louisa was wife of Rector Seymour Ashwell.



## The Cross Tree in the 1880s

This painting by Louisa Ashwell shows the Cross Tree to the left, already then a substantial tree, and workers' cottages on the Water Stratford Road.

End, Thomas Shephard's farm stood on the north side of the road. This was later known as Tile House Farm and the farmhouse is now Falcon Hethe. Opposite was the farm of Robert Paxton; the farmhouse is now Town Farm at the entrance to Stable Close. Robert was one of the wealthier farmers. He emigrated to America in 1830 and in 1851 poor relatives occupied the farm.



### Plan of part of Towns End and the Kings Head: 29 June 1813

The houses and Tile House Farm on the north side of Fulwell Road were omitted from this map.

In the 1880s, a large tree was growing at the cross roads near the church. It was known as the Cross Tree and may have been planted in 1809 when the road was widened. In the mid-nineteenth century, a set of stocks standing near the Cross Tree was used to punish offenders; these had been removed by the 1880s. The Water Stratford Road was probably diverted to its current line in 1809—the narrow lane to the church originally continued past the church tower to rejoin the current road. This left a small strip of land on the opposite (west) side of the road, which originally was used as gardens for the cottages.

The small school along the church lane was erected in 1824. It was packed most days with about sixty children aged five to sixteen, though children were frequently absent to help their parents on the land. Beyond the school was a fine brick building built by Reverend Robert Holt in 1793. This is now Glebe House. Church House, a thatched cottage now demolished, lay between this house and the church.

In the 1850s, St Michael's church was in need of repair and expansion to accommodate the growing congregation. The Parish Clerk, Gabriel Friday, aged seventy-three, administered parish matters. The Rectory was a low thatched cottage at the entrance to what we now call the Old Rectory. It was occupied by the Rector's sister, Mary, and two servants, Thomas Dale and William Spacey. John Burgon described Mary as 'the best ornament of the Rectory... a lady full of almsdeeds, well read and of a most excellent understanding.'

Along what is now Valley Road, five families occupied cottages on the site of the house now known as Titch's Cottage. Opposite, Stone House was a two-storey thatched cottage until 1879. The next house was John Tappin's thatched cottage on the site of the bungalow now named Debdale.

Dr Charles Clark lived at Finmere House with his brother, James. Robert Greaves, publican, brickmaker and farmer, occupied the Kings Head. Bricks were made in two brickyards in the south of the parish, one at Widmore Farm and another further east, and were stored behind the Kings Head. A bakery traded from the house, now named Kings Cote, next door.

There were further clusters of houses around Hawthorne Cottage, on the present Mere Lane, and at Little Tingewick, around the Red Lion.

Outside the straggling village, there were four farms. In 1851, William Markam and Samuel Lett farmed at Widmore, Richard Lambourne at Warren Farm, Mary Tredwell at Bacon's House and William Barrett at Finmere Grounds. Gravel Farm was then just a barn and yard. One in three men laboured on the land. Five farmers employed eighty-four boys and men aged

The original line of the Water Stratford Road can still be seen on the east verge just north of the present Rectory. Miss Margaret Rankin, who inherited the cottages in 1976, gave the strip used for cottage gardens to Fred Tew in 1990. It is now his chicken run.



**The view towards the churchyard gate and Church House**

The picture was painted by Louisa Ashwell in the 1880s. The churchyard is bounded by Church House (now demolished), which adjoined the present Glebe House.

Palmer's labourers were allowed a quart of Palmer's home brewed beer daily. John Burgon noted that the remains of the rent dinner were put to good use. 'The liquor in which the beef had been boiled, and the remains of the beef and vegetables—with the addition of dumplings and two or three loaves of bread—made an excellent soup, and next day dined one hundred children.'

thirteen to seventy-two, including the Measey brothers who were shepherds; James at Finmere Grounds and John at Bacon's House.

Many village cottages were in a good condition, especially those let at subsidised rents by the Rector. Palmer purchased and let eighteen at subsidised rents from 30s to £3 a year, paid half-yearly. He employed a mason and carpenter to keep the cottages in good repair, and provided his tenants with a dinner of beef and plum pudding when they paid their rents. His tenants, however, faced eviction if they did not conform to his 'conditions of holding,' including to 'maintain a fair character for honesty, sobriety, decency, and good neighbourhood in all respects, and at all times, and towards all persons.' The rules also dictated that tenants' sons and daughters had to enter work, service or take up apprenticeships once of age. Villagers who obeyed the rules were well cared for by Palmer and his sister, Mary, who lived at Finmere Rectory. Those who crossed him encountered the sterner side of his character. After Palmer's death, Seymour Ashwell continued Palmer's good work on the houses, though it is not known if he also hosted rent dinners.

## The 1851 Census

Robert Greaves, landlord of the Kings Head, enumerated the first full census of Finmere in 1851. There were 399 people, including nine visitors, living in Finmere parish; 355 lived in the village and 44 on the farms. About 20 people lived in Little Tingewick. Finmere's population was larger than at any time before and is only now again approaching that level after a period of decline.

Thirty-three women were in work including nineteen lacemakers, eleven in service and three assistants to the doctors at Finmere House. The parish also supported a number of tradesmen and craftsmen:

Blacksmiths: John and William Cozens

Brewer: William Adkins at Warren Farm

Butcher: Corbett Coleman

Carpenters: Isaac and Isaac Jones (father and son), William Bayliss and John Tapping

Cooper: Benjamin Godfrey

Errand boy: Joshua Bayliss aged 21

Gardener: James Holland

Gatekeeper: William Baxter, who collected tolls on the Turnpike

Grocer: Charles Cattell, also a shoemaker

Shoemakers: John Hunt, Joseph Aris and James Rouse

Railway labourers: Edward Paxton and Daniel Windsor

Eighty-four year old William Horwood laboured to maintain the roads.

Three men and twenty-one women were paupers. The larger number of women may reflect the Rector's opposition to lacemaking and increasing competition within the industry. Some Finmere paupers had been sent to the workhouse at Brackley. People did not move home as often as today: two-thirds of adult men were born in the parish, along with one-third of adult women.

## Palmer's Later Years

In the 1850s, Finmere was rapidly changing. The Buckinghamshire Railway was opened in 1850 as part of the London and North Western Railway (LNWR). The single-track line linked Banbury to Bletchley and Oxford and carried four trains a day in each direction. There was a station near Finmere at Fulwell from which Banbury could be reached in thirty minutes, Oxford and London in two-and-a-half hours. The railways were changing rural life, making it easier to migrate to the towns and, as the towns grew and the villages shrank, they helped villagers keep in touch with distant friends and family. The population of Finmere reached a peak of 399 in 1851, at the end of Palmer's residence. Thereafter, numbers fell as people left to find employment in the towns.

Palmer's health began to fail under the strain of old age and family problems. His family life had at times been gruelling: his wife was seriously ill for several years; a son died at the age of nine; another was lost in a shipwreck homebound from Quebec; a third son, William, caused Palmer considerable anguish as he debated joining the Russian Orthodox Church, finally converting to Catholicism after his father's death. Under these pressures, Palmer's judgement began to fail.

When the Buckinghamshire Railway cut through the north of the parish, it destroyed meadows in the Rector's glebe land. Palmer unwisely used the eight hundred pounds paid as compensation to purchase houses and land near the Rectory on the plot of land now occupied by Titch's Cottage. Six years later, Rector Frederick Walker was given permission to remove the 'Farm House and Outbuildings divided in Five Cottages.'

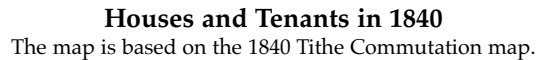
*Two classes of pasture and certain parcels of land on which are now standing a small House and Eleven Cottages and an Infant's School... [The] Cottages were, when purchased, and are now, in a ruinous state and condition; and that a part thereof are so ancient and dilapidated as to admit of no reparation; so that the same are an incumbrance and not any advantage to the Rectory of Finmere. (Faculty to take down and remove certain Cottages belonging to the Rectory of Finmere... 1854)*



**The view from the Rectory garden towards  
Mere Road**

The picture was painted by Louisa Ashwell in the 1880s.

*This saintly man entered into rest on the 28th September, 1853, aged 74 years and 7 months; greatly loved and deeply revered, as well as severely mourned by all that knew him... In compliance with his orders, he was interred in the simplest manner, and sleeps among his children in Mixbury churchyard.*



## ☞ St Michael's Church ☞

The earliest reference to St Michael's Finmere dates to the late twelfth century, though there may have been a church here before then. During the Middle Ages, it was a typically unpretentious village church, with a modest nave and chancel overlooked by a squat tower. Until 1560, the Abbey of St Augustine, Bristol, appointed Finmere's clergymen though the reason for this arrangement is no longer known. The priests visited the village infrequently and the church was often in disrepair. It was almost a ruin between 1520 and 1666, when much needed major repairs were undertaken. After that date, St Michael's was entrusted to the care a series of good rectors and patrons who dedicated themselves to improving the church fabric, the standard of worship and the quality of life in the village.

### Palmer's Legacy

The village and church owe much to Rector William Jocelyn Palmer and, in return for his benefaction, villagers were expected to attend church regularly. John Burgon recorded that Palmer's sermons were 'sound, simple and short.' Holy Communion was celebrated monthly and, on the day before the service, parish clerk Gabriel Friday walked around the village to draw up a list of parishioners who intended to communicate. Some parishioners were not welcome at Palmer's services, including:

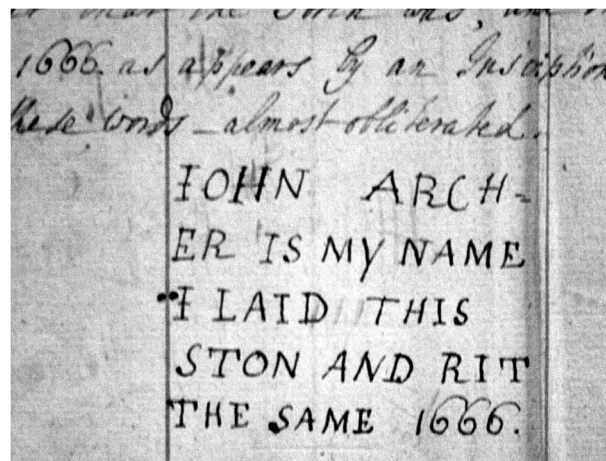
*A certain person [who], in defiance of his repeated admonition, persisted in listening to an itinerant ranting preacher under the 'cross tree.'* (John Burgon)

On Sunday, 30 March 1851, everybody attending a place of worship in England and Wales was counted for a government census of worship. Palmer returned the information for Finmere:

*Finmere. Population 399. St Michael's Parish Church. On 30 March. In the morning 220; in afternoon 220. Average attendance in morning 220; in afternoon 220. Signed W.J. Palmer Rector.*

Despite Palmer's insistence that everyone attend church, we should not trust these surprisingly consistent figures. They reflect his contempt for the census, which he regarded as an intrusion by politicians in church affairs, and he refused to return figures for Mixbury, where he was also Rector.

Whatever the true attendance figures, St Michael's Church was regularly full and it is probable that Palmer had begun to plan to expansion. Already in his seventies, however, his health was failing. During the last two years of his life, he was largely confined to his Rectory by infirmity and curate John Burgon ministered for the parish until Palmer's death.

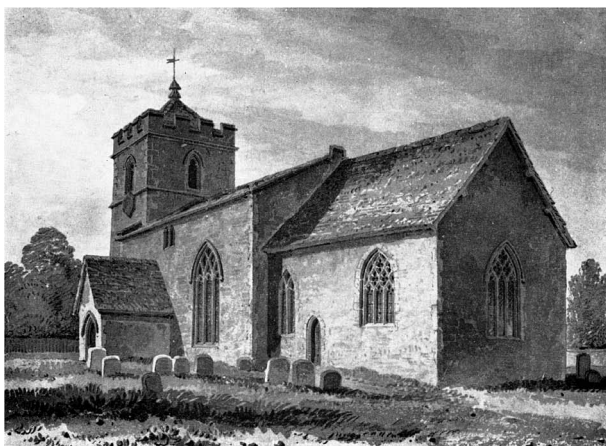


**John Archer recording the 1666 rebuilding of the church**

The photograph shows a copy in the Rectors' Book of an inscription, now lost, in the porch of St Michael's

In John Burgon's otherwise admiring account of the village, he described St Michael's as 'singularly deficient in architectural beauty... and containing no single feature calculated to distract attention from the proper business of the sanctuary.'

William Jocelyn Palmer's family contributed more than half the cost of rebuilding the church in 1858.



St Michael's Church in 1824

1858 2000  
£100 £6,580

The sanctus bell, or priest's bell, was rung during services to call the attention of people at work in the fields or at home to the service, encouraging them to stop and pray for a moment.

1858 2000  
£820 £54,000  
19s 5d £64

1858 2000  
£94 £6,200

## Frederick Walker's Rebuilding

The task of repairing and expanding the church fell to Palmer's successor, Frederick John Walker. Shortly after his arrival in Finmere, Walker surprisingly recorded that the church was in good repair. He possibly had not probed behind the wooden panelling in the chancel as, two years later, major repair work was underway.

*2 June 1856. The repairs of the Chancel were begun. The south wall was in a very weak state, caused by the Sedilia which had been unseated. The Sedilia were much defaced as was the Piscina & were unfit to be re-set up. These injuries had been inflicted when the Chancel was ceiled and panelled round the walls. (Rectors' Book)*

On Sundays, the church was full and there was a general expectation that the population of the village would continue to increase.

*1858. From the increase in population, the ancient church of Finmere was inconveniently small to the people. Increased room had long been desired & an offer of £100 having been made to the Rector by a friend of the Parish, a Vestry meeting was called on January the 9th at which it was resolved that subscriptions should be obtained towards building a North Aisle to the Church. (Rectors' Book)*

The north aisle was designed by George S. Street and provided accommodation for eighty-eight parishioners. As well as the new aisle, the south and east walls, and windows and doors were rebuilt and repaired. A cross was placed in the nave in place of the broken sanctus bell and another was erected in the chancel. The construction cost, excluding the architect's fees, was £819 18s 1/2d, including 19s 5d for beer for the workmen. These costs were matched by donations of £848 11s 10 3/4 d.

*The alterations have been effected in excellent taste, and are in complete architectural keeping with the older portions of the edifice, reflecting great credit on the architect. (Buckingham Advertiser, 20 November 1858)*

	£	s	d
Incorporated Society for Promoting the Enlargement, Building and Repairing of Churches and Chapels	50	0	0
Oxford Diocese	45	0	0
Merton College	50	0	0
Other clergymen	18	3	0
Offertory collections at the opening services	94	7	9 3/4
The family of the late Reverend William Jocelyn Palmer	455	0	0
Parishioners	52	16	0
Reverend Frederick Walker	61	0	0
Other donors	22	0	0

### Donations for the 1858 rebuilding of the church

On 30 May 1858, Frederick Walker celebrated Trinity Sunday in St Michael's Church. After the service, the church closed for rebuilding. Services were held in the cramped schoolrooms for five months. In November, on a wet and stormy Sunday, the church was re-opened with much ceremony. Clergymen from all the parishes in the Bicester Deanery attended, accompanied by two Bishops and the Rural Dean, J.C. Blomfield, who was later to write the History of Finmere. Rector Frederick Walker, who described the events as 'a day which will long be remembered in the annals of Finmere' recorded the proceedings in detail in the Rectors' Book.

*15 November 1858. The main work being all but complete the church was re-opened. At 11 o'clock a procession of 21 clergy with the Bishop of Oxford and the newly consecrated Bishop of Nelson, New Zealand attended by the Reverend J.W. Benson & J.C. Blomfield (Rural Dean) as Chaplains left the Rectory and walked in procession to the Church.*

*Morning Prayer was said by the Rector. The 1st lesson was read by Reverend B. Maddock, Curate of S. Georges, Liverpool (the former curacy of the Rector) & the 2nd by the Reverend G.H. Palmer, Rector of Mixbury. The hymn 'O Word of God Above' was sung after the morning Prayer. The office of Holy Communion was said by the Bishop of the Diocese, the Epistle being read by the Rural Dean, the Rector of Launton, and the Gospel by the Bishop of Nelson. The hymn 'Jesus the very thought is sweet &c.' having been sung, the Bishop of Oxford preached from the text 'No man cometh but by ME.' The offertory was collected by the Churchwardens in the Nave, by I.J. Anderson of Liverpool in the Aisle & by the Reverend I [?] Larne in the Chancel. The Bishop of Oxford celebrated—the Bishop of Nelson, the Rector and the Rural Dean assisting—about 120 communicated, very many being of the poorer sort (the Mixbury Chalice was lent on the occasion).*

[?] Walker's handwriting here cannot be deciphered.

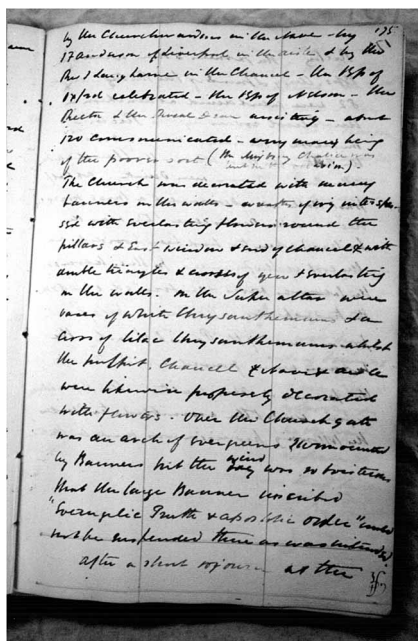
*The Church was decorated with many banners on the walls, swathes of ivy interspersed with everlasting flowers around the pillars and east window and end of Chancel & with [?] triangles and swathes of yew & everlasting on the walls. In the Super altar were vases of White Chrysanthemums & a cross of Lilac Chrysanthemums above the pulpit. Chancel, Nave and Aisle were likewise properly decorated with flowers. Over the Church gate was an arch of evergreens decorated by banners but the day was so boisterous that the large Banner inscribed 'Evangelic Truth and Apostolic Order' could not be suspended as was intended.*

*After a sojourn at the Rectory, the farmers and their wives, the Bishops, Clergy & friends of the Rectory, in all 82, were entertained at luncheon in the School rooms by the Rector. The health's of Queen, the Bishop of Oxford, the Rector, the Bishop of Nelson, the Churchwardens and the Reverend J. Burgon were drank. At half past three, all adjourned to a large marquee erected in the Rectors close (to be near the boilers) where tea had been provided at the cost of the Farmers for their labourers, the labourers wives and confirmed children. The trades people of the Parish paid 0s 6d,*

The week before the opening was bitterly cold, with four degrees of frost (28°F, -2°C) on Tuesday, 11 November. The Buckingham Advertiser speculated that a wet winter was coming.

*Such early frosts do not necessarily indicate a severe winter, but the contrary if the old saying be true about St Martin's Day—the 11th of November: 'If Martinmass ice will bear a duck. The winter will be mud and muck.'*

As a short-term forecast, this proved correct and the weather had turned by the weekend.



Frederick Walker's description of the reopening of  
St Michael's in the Rectors' Book

each person not of the Parish 1/- each. The farmers wives poured out the tea & the farmers and others waited. The Bishop addressed a few words to the assembled tea drinkers.

[A] procession was made from the tea at 6 o'clock [to] evening service in the church. Prayers were said by the Rector, the first lesson read by Reverend B. Maddock, the 2nd by Reverend I De Sales, Rector of Fringford. The Sermon was preached by the Reverend J. Burgon, fellow of Oriel College, a former Curate of Finmere. The subject of the sermon was the 5th commandment. A collection was made at the door after the service (£3-15-3?).

The Church was crowded at both services and thus by the Blessing of God has brought to a conclusion a work which it is hoped will long tend to the Flock of the Blessed Deity & a day which will long be remembered in the annals of Finmere.

The celebrations continued the next day when the schoolchildren had tea in the schoolroom. On the Tuesday, the remaining cake and other food was distributed to those who could not attend the luncheon or the tea, including the infirm.

The church extension proved overambitious. The rebuilt church could hold more than two hundred people. At the opening ceremony, only 120 villagers attended and—unknown to those who had worked hard to improve the building—the population of Finmere had reached its peak. In 1851, there were 399 people in the parish; ten years later, there were sixty people less. Fifty years later, in 1931, the population reached a low of 187 and many of those parishioners attended church less frequently than Victorian villagers.

## Seymour Ashwell's Woodcarving

As the rain fell on the afternoon of Tuesday, 31 December 1901, mourners filed into St Michael's Church. Churchwardens Alfred Lepper and William Barrett guided villagers and visitors to their pews in a church still adorned with Christmas decorations. The schoolteacher, Miss King, played the organ. Mourners had come to commemorate the life of Finmere Rector Seymour Ashwell, who had died at the Rectory, aged 64 years.

*During the 35 years of his incumbency he made great changes in the parish, the building of a new rectory, the improving of many cottages in the village, thereby adding materially to the comfort of the occupants, besides being a large subscriber to the schools, of which he took a large interest. (Bicester Advertiser, 4 February 1901)*

Seymour Ashwell had worked diligently to improve the decor of the church, which had been enriched with dedications to his family.

*Beneath the lovely stained-glass east window, erected to the memory of the deceased's mother, were the words in white lettering 'Alleluia' and 'Emmanuel.' Wreaths of ivy hung at the ends of the choir stalls, and in the sill of another beautiful stained-glass window in the wall of the south aisle (erected to the memory of the deceased's father) had been placed floral wreaths. The massive stone pillars were draped with ivy, and above were the texts 'Glory to God' and 'Prince of Peace.' A floral anchor was hung on the lectern and the front of the pulpit was decorated with a large cross of white blooms. (Bicester Advertiser, 4 February 1901)*

Ashwell was a skilled woodcarver and he spent many years carving decorations to enliven Finmere's otherwise plain church. Among his contributions are the pulpit, font cover, reredos, tower screen and the ends of the pews in the choir and nave. Ashwell also rebuilt the Rectory (now the Old Rectory), commissioned Hill Leys, and continued Palmer's good works to support the poor and the school.



**Ashwell's font cover**



**Detail from Ashwell's font cover**

### **Carvings by Seymour Ashwell in St Michael's Church**

**Pulpit.** The pulpit is of English oak with walnut panels, on a base of Corsham Down stone. Seymour Ashwell carved the panels, cap and cornice to designs by Swingen Harris in 1874.

**Font Cover.** Carved and presented to the parish in 1879.

**Reredos.** Erected in 1881, the Reredos was made of English oak and is painted with panels representing the four Evangelists. It was carved and paid for by Seymour Ashwell to the designs of Swingen Harris.

**Tower Screen.** 'June 13th [1884]. An oak screen placed across west Tower Archway at the expense of the Rector—the carving on it being done by him.'

**Choir stalls.** The ends were carved between July 1886 and 1891.

**Nave stalls.** The carving of stall ends began in 1891 and was completed before his death.

### Other Improvements by Seymour Ashwell

1868. Vestry constructed at the expense of Seymour's father, also patron of the church, William Ashwell.

1869. An organ purchased from Messrs Bevington for £25.

1869	2000
£25	£1,600

1879. Memorial window in south nave in memory of William Ashwell, who died at Chetwode Priory in 1870, aged 70 years.

1880. New churchyard gates erected at expense of Seymour Ashwell and young holly trees planted against churchyard wall.

1881. Chancel repainted 'in quiet colour to emphasise the architecture.'

1884. Glass for a memorial window at the west end portraying The Annunciation. New glass in the east window depicting The Ascension, the old glass from the window put into the south window in the Chancel.

1886. 8 stone corbels which support the hammer beams, carved at Seymour Ashwell's expense.

1895. A figure of St Michael, carved by Mr Hitch of London, was placed over the entrance in the porch, paid for by Mrs Bethell of Finmere House and Seymour Ashwell.

### After Ashwell

William Jocelyn Palmer	1814	<i>W.J. Palmer</i>
Frederick John Walker	1853	<i>F. Walker</i>
Seymour Ashwell	1866	<i>Seymour Ashwell Rector</i>
Henry William Trower	1902	<i>Henry W. Trower</i>
George Dangerfield	1919	<i>George Dangerfield</i>
Alfred Wheeler	1935	<i>Alfred Wheeler</i>
Christopher Francis Cross	1940	<i>C.F. Cross</i>
Percy Augustus Parrott	1948	<i>P.A. Parrott</i>
Maurice Geoffrey Sheldon	1956	<i>M.G. Sheldon</i>
Frederick Hosier	1960	<i>F. Hosier</i>
Leslie Ronald Swingler	1962	<i>Leslie R. Swingler</i>
Anthony Hichens	1976	<i>Anthony Hichens</i>
Donald James Allan	1978	<i>Donald J. Allan</i>
Ronald Bernard Jennison	1984	<i>R. Jennison</i>
Warwick John Yates	1993	<i>Warwick Yates</i>

Seymour Ashwell, one of Finmere's longest serving Rectors, died two years into the twentieth century. His predecessor, Palmer had been Rector of both Finmere and Mixbury and, in 1931, this link was revived when the two parishes were united as a single living. This arrangement continued until 1976, in which year further parishes were brought into the group.

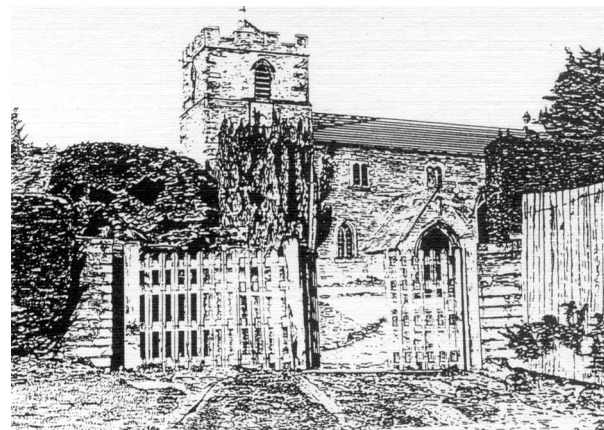
Leslie Swingler was the eighth Rector of the twentieth century and the last clergyman to be Rector of only Finmere and Mixbury. His was not, however, a full-time post; he was also secretary to the Oxford Diocesan Council of Education. After his departure in 1974, he was for three years Diocesan Youth and Community Officer and lived in Headington, Oxford. He then retired to Norfolk, where he died on 21 August 1993.

The presentation to the living was suspended after the departure of Swingler. For a period of eighteen months until the end of 1975, Reverend C. Rhodes, who lived at Somerton and worked on the Church Times, took Sunday Services. Although he was never officially appointed Rector or priest-in-charge, he signed himself acting Rector in the church registers, an unofficial title.

At the beginning of 1976, Reverend Anthony Hichens returned from missionary work in Guyana and was appointed priest-in-charge of Stratton Audley, Godington, Stoke Lyne, and Finmere and Mixbury. He resided in a newly purchased property in Stratton Audley. In the middle of 1978, Reverend Donald James Allan became priest-in-charge of Finmere and Mixbury and took up residence at the Rectory in Finmere. With Anthony Hichens, they together looked after the ten parishes which were to become the Shelswell Group and later the Shelswell Benefice. Hichens retired in April 1995 and lives in retirement at Middleton Cheney.

Donald Allan had been appointed following the retirement of Reverend John Sergeant, who lived at Newton Purcell with responsibility for that parish along with Fringford, Hethe, Cottisford and Hardwick cum Tusmore. Sorting out how the ten parishes were to be run resulted in arguments and correspondence covering nearly five years. Finally, the new Benefice of Finmere with Mixbury, Cottisford, Hardwick with Tusmore, and Newton Purcell with Shelswell (the Northern Benefice of the Shelswell Group) was formed by Order of Her Majesty in Council and came into effect on 1 March 1983, with Donald Allan as Rector.

Allan remained in post for just a further six months before taking up a post in Essex. His successor as Rector of the Northern Shelswell Benefice was Reverend Ronald Bernard Jennison. He was instituted and inducted on 4 February 1984. Before coming to Finmere, he had served two pairs of English-speaking chaplaincies in the south of France and held the title of



**St Michael's Church in 1979**

Drawn by Norman Burnley

Archdeacon of the Riviera. Ronald Jennison retired on 30 June 1992 and moved to Tingewick. He died on Easter Day, 1998.

Warwick (Ricky) John Yates was instituted and inducted on 29 January 1993. By Order of Her Majesty in Council, he became the first Rector to the newly created ten-parish Benefice of Shelswell on 1 December 1995.

## Church Attendance

The changing engagement of rural people with their church is an important thread of village history. In comparison to the nineteenth century, church services are now held less regularly; the number of clergy has been reduced; many parishes have been combined into benefices; and services often attract smaller congregations. Records from St Michael's, however, show that there has not been a simple decline in church-going but a more complex change in the patterns of worship.

We have very little information on attendance during the nineteenth century, when attendance was almost compulsory. John Burgon recorded that there were eighty communicants on Easter Day 1852, forty-four men and thirty-six women. The average number of communicants on Sunday was about thirty. In 1854, Frederick Walker noted that there were between eighteen and thirty-six communicants at services through the year. Half the adults attended on Sundays (115 of 228), and just six at the daily service. These numbers, he noted, were not increasing.

By 1919, attendance had settled into the now familiar pattern of a small number of regular communicants and a larger participation on holy days and festivals. In 1920, only three parishioners on average took communion at the mid-week Holy Communion. An average of eight people took communion on Sundays, down from about thirty seventy years before. The holy days and festivals attracted an average of fifty-six communicants, and Easter numbers were much the same at seventy years before.

Easter	73 communicants
Whitsunday	50 communicants
Harvest	46 communicants
Christmas	42 communicants

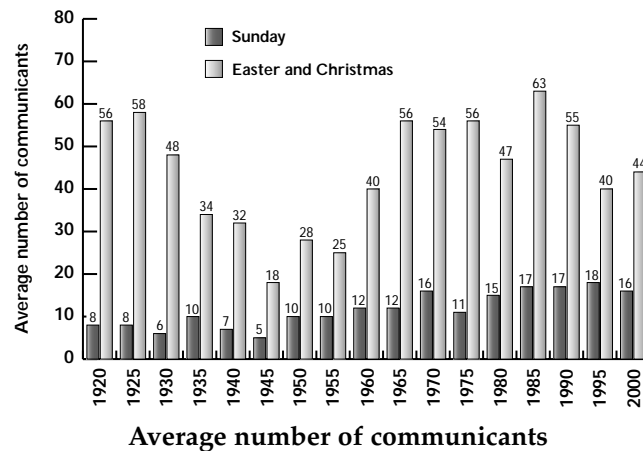
The analysis is based on numbers of communicants because this information has been reliably recorded since 1919. The number of communicants will generally be less than the total attendance at services and our data may exaggerate the decline in congregation sizes during the twentieth century. The data has been sampled at five year intervals.

### Weekly services in 1854:

Sundays 11 am (with sermon), 3 pm  
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday 9 am (Matins)  
Wednesday and Friday 9 am (Litany)

### Weekly services in 1919:

Sunday, Holy Communion 8.00 am  
Sunday, Matins with Sermon 11.00 am  
Sunday, Children's Service 3.00 pm  
Sunday, Evensong and Sermon 6.00 pm  
Wednesday, Holy Communion 8.00 am

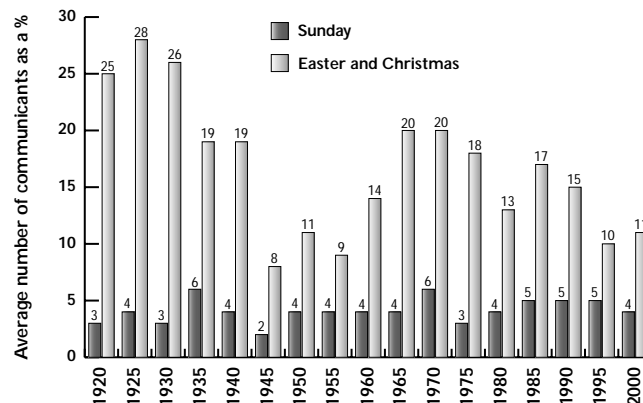


Communicants on holy days and festivals

	1920s	1980s
Easter	72	40
Whitsunday	47	20
Harvest	50	–
Christmas	44	70

The number of Sunday communicants remained at an average of seven until the end of the Second World War, since when it has averaged thirteen, reaching a peak of seventeen in 1985. Participation at holy days and festivals fell to a low of eighteen in 1945 and then increased to sixty-three in 1985. The number of communicants at Easter, Whitsunday and Harvest Festival has declined. The last Harvest Festival at which communion was taken was in October 1993, though a popular family service has continued. In contrast, communion numbers at Christmas have nearly doubled.

One of the reasons for a decline in church-going was the decline in Finmere's population, but the fluctuating number of parishioners alone cannot explain the changes. The popularity of Rectors and the average age of parishioners play a part. While the 1940s and 1950s were a low point the recovery in numbers from 1965 at a greater rate than the growth in population was perhaps due to younger people coming to the parish.



Average number of communicants as a percentage of the population of Finmere

Not all communicants will have lived in Finmere but the population of nearby villages has declined and grown in a similar way.

## The Churchyard

The churchyard, with its traditional yews, hollies and other trees, is both a place of rest for the dead and a historical record. At St Michael's, visitors are first greeted by the village memorial to the dead of the First and Second World Wars. To the left, are reminders that death can be premature, including the grave of James Shaw of the Kings Head, who died in a carting accident. A memorial cross nearer the tower commemorates Edmund and Elizabeth Symes-Thompson, one of many graves for this family in the churchyard; the majority are clustered behind the tower.



### A burial in the 1930s

The photograph shows the grave of Elizabeth 'Nun' Sikes in April 1939. She was daughter of Charles Clark of Finmere House. Joyce Sikes stands to the right.

Some of the earliest memorials in the churchyard are in the southeast corner. They include the Bakers' tomb, an ironstone chest tomb protected by railings, beneath which are buried Isaac Baker (died 1728) and his wife Susannah (died 1744). Behind the church, the graveyard is crowded with graves, the congestion eased by extensions in 1907 and 1955. Here, in new graves and old, are many of the familiar Finmere family names that recur throughout this book: Barnes, Barrett, Davis, Lepper, Paxton, Sikes, Tredwell and Wakelin.

On 21 May 1907, a Parish Meeting was called to discuss increasing the size of the crowded churchyard. It was agreed to accept an offer of a piece of Glebe land to the east of the churchyard from the Rector and Patron. Messrs Yardley, Tredwell, Windsor and Lepper were appointed to a working party to oversee the work. Miss Alice Ashwell and Mr Cottrell were appointed collectors of funds.

*On October 11th 1907, the Bishop of Oxford Francis Paget consecrated a piece of ground which was given to the Parish as an addition to the existing Church Yard by the Rector (being part of the Glebe) for a Burial Ground. The morning had been very wet but at 11.40 the Sun came out and the consecration ceremony was carried out in sunshine.*

*There was a good congregation of Parishioners and 4 of the neighbouring clergy were present and the consecration deed was attested by the Reverend R.R. Kirby, Rector of Mixbury & the Reverend P.E. Raynor, Rector of Tingewick. The Expenses connected with the fencing, levelling, etc. and also the legal — amounting to £37 were defrayed by the parish with good will. (Reverend Henry Trower in the Rectors' Book)*

1907	2000
£37	£2,380

The churchyard was again extended in 1955.

The collection from the village raised £32 13s 6d; the balance was contributed by the Rector.

Motorised mowers are not well suited to traditional churchyards and on 15 September 1980 the Parochial Church Council agreed to ask for a faculty (permission) to level mounds in the churchyard to make mowing easier.

## Catholics and Nonconformists

During the later twentieth century, the Church of England has become more responsive to the ecumenical movement, which sought to embrace all believers in Christ. Before, it was often hostile and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholic worship was severely restricted. Despite this opposition, some areas of the country, including north Oxfordshire and Finmere, were generally friendly towards Catholics. William Keat, who lived at Bacon's House in the seventeenth century, had to worship privately. He nevertheless felt a part of the village community and bequeathed five pounds to be distributed to the poor of Finmere each year by the Church of England Rector and the Churchwardens.

The parish was not friendly towards Catholics during William Jocelyn Palmer's time as Rector. In 1825, the government proposed to allow Catholics to sit in Parliament. Finmere Vestry, led by Palmer, sent a petition of protest.

*With every feeling of duty & respect for your Humble House, we your petitioners conceive that the particular tenets of the Romish Church are not mere speculative doctrines, but rather indeed most mischievously practiced as the history of this County & all of Christendom shows. (Vestry Minute Book)*

Lady Gifford, a Catholic living at Finmere Grounds in the 1930s, had a private chapel on the site of the current barns. It was brick built, with altar and stained glass windows, and held about thirty people.

Non-conformism was not welcome and no chapels were built in the parish. There was a 'poor Family of Quakers' here in 1739 and in the 1830s two houses were licensed for non-conformist worship. In 1854, there were seven or eight 'dissenters' in the parish and no place of worship and, by 1866, there were no dissenters at all.



The congregation at St Michaels, 1 January 2000

## 🌀 The Rectories 🌀

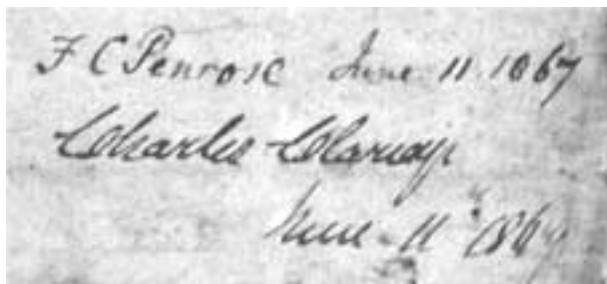
The first mention of a Rectory in Finmere is in 1601. It stood in what is now the garden of the Old Rectory and was destroyed by a 'tempestuous hurricane from the west' in 1661. Rebuilt, it burnt down in 1668. The replacement building was still standing in the 1850s:

*It was really a picturesque old structure; roomy, rambling, and irregular, as all such tenements should be... A spacious projecting window on the south side admitted you into an umbrageous garden, which was simply delicious. (John Burgon.)*

Lancelot (Capability) Brown designed the garden while he was working at Stowe in the 1740s. This Rectory was known as the Parsonage or Parsonage House until 1852, at which date William Jocelyn Palmer first describes it as Finmere Rectory.

### Seymour Ashwell's' Rectory

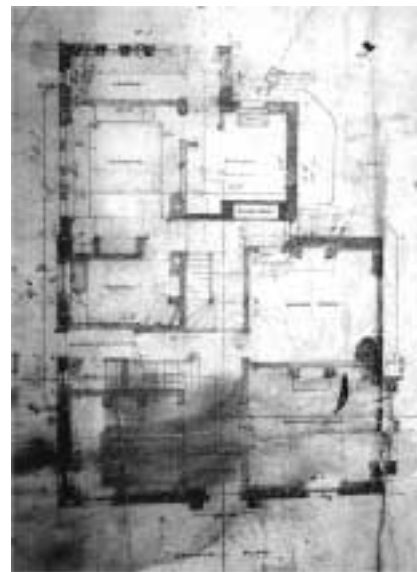
The old rambling Rectory was too modest for wealthy Seymour Ashwell. In 1866, his father William Ashwell, also the patron of the church, purchased the "Apprentice Ground." This lay south of the churchyard and was already in use as the Rectory garden. Rector Richard Ells had bequeathed it to the village in 1703 and the rent paid by his successors periodically sponsored a village apprentice. In 1867–68, a new Rectory was built in the garden (this is now the Old Rectory) and the old building demolished. The architects of the new Rectory were F. C. Penrose and Charles Claridge and their plans show a brick-built house of the decent proportions desired by wealthy Victorian families.



F. C. Penrose June 11 1867  
Charles Claridge  
June 11 1867

#### The signatures of the architects, F. C. Penrose and Charles Claridge

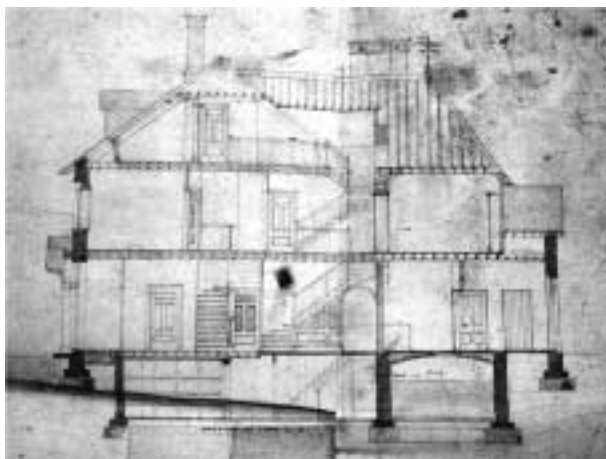
The house was built of brick, trimmed with Bath Stone. Its ground floor had a dining room and study, with pantry, kitchen, larder and scullery to the rear. There were three bedrooms on the first floor accompanied by a dressing room and nursery. Both floors had a water closet. The attic under the eaves housed four smaller rooms for servants; the Ashwells retained four servants and a governess, Rose Temple from London. The attic also incorporated



Ground plan of the 1886 Rectory



The South Elevation of the 1886 Rectory



**West-east cross-section of the 1867 Rectory**



**The new Rectory extension under construction in 1996**

a lumber—a room used, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘for storage of disused chattels.’

In the basement was a large tank, about 10 feet square. Rainwater was collected on the roof and diverted around the exterior of the house into the tank, which incorporated an overflow pipe. The soft water collected was pumped into tanks into the attic to provide additional washing water. The house also had cellars for wine and beer. An outbuilding housed a coal store, “knife, boot and wood house” and an earth closet.

Finmere was again bustling with building activity in October 1879 when work was under way on extensions to the Rectory and Lepper’s House (now Stone House). The Buckingham Advertiser reported the scene.

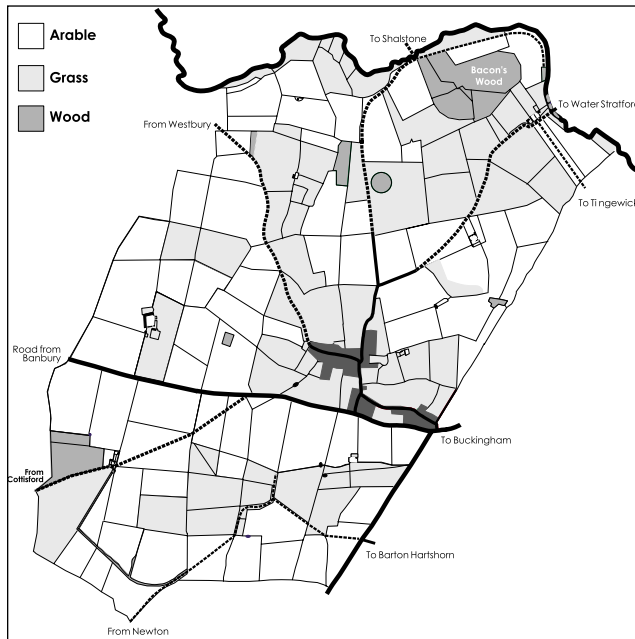
*Building operations at Finmere are more active now than for some considerable time past. Among the improvements, great alterations and additions have been made at the Rectory for the Rev. Seymour Ashwell, Rector of Finmere. The work has been done by Mr G.W. Wells, builder at St John’s Road, Oxford. The whole work is being carried out according to plans prepared by Mr S. F. C. Penrose of St Paul’s Church Yard, London. Also the residence of Mr Alfred Lepper, of Finmere, is undergoing great attractions and additions by the same builder, Mr G. Wells of Oxford. The building will be a great feature of the parish of Finmere. The works are being done to a very satisfactory manner by Mr J. Roberts, general foreman, who is superintending both jobs and to whom great credit is due. (Buckingham Advertiser, 18 October 1879.)*

## **The Modern Rectory**

**T**he Old Rectory was sold in 1931, when the parishes of Finmere and Mixbury became a joint living, and from 1931 to 1956 there was no resident clergyman in Finmere. The Old Rectory in Mixbury was sold in 1959 and Reverend Maurice Sheldon rented a bungalow, now called Terra Firma, at Tile House Farm in Fulwell Road, while the current Rectory in Water Stratford Road was constructed. The land for the new Rectory had been part of the Glebe land until sold in 1946; it was repurchased in 1957. The Rectory was designed by Surman and Chilton and was built and occupied in 1958. The Rectory was altered and extended in the summer of 1996. Surman and Chilton were based at St Aldgates, Oxford, and designed several new clergy houses in the Diocese of Oxford in the 1950s and 1960s including the Rectory at Lower Heyford, four years before Finmere.

## ☞ The Parish Land ☞

The greatest change in the parish landscape in recent centuries was the sweeping away of the medieval open fields and their replacement by rectangular hedged fields in the late seventeenth century. The formal agreement for this inclosure was signed in 1667 but it likely that some fields were inclosed before then. The medieval rabbit warren (Warren Farm) was not inclosed until 1760–73 and Finmere Northend (we are not certain where this is) until 1771–84. Only one small fragment of a map from the seventeenth century has survived, but the Tithe Commutation Map of 1840 shows the fields much as they would have been immediately after inclosure.



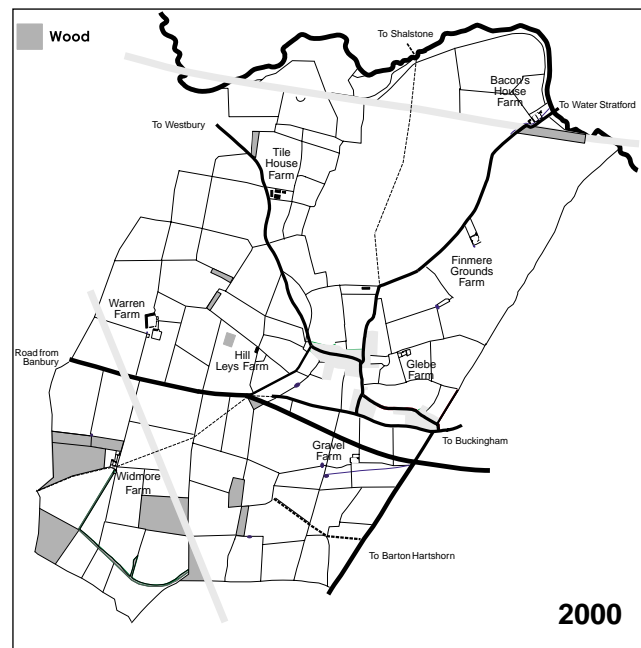
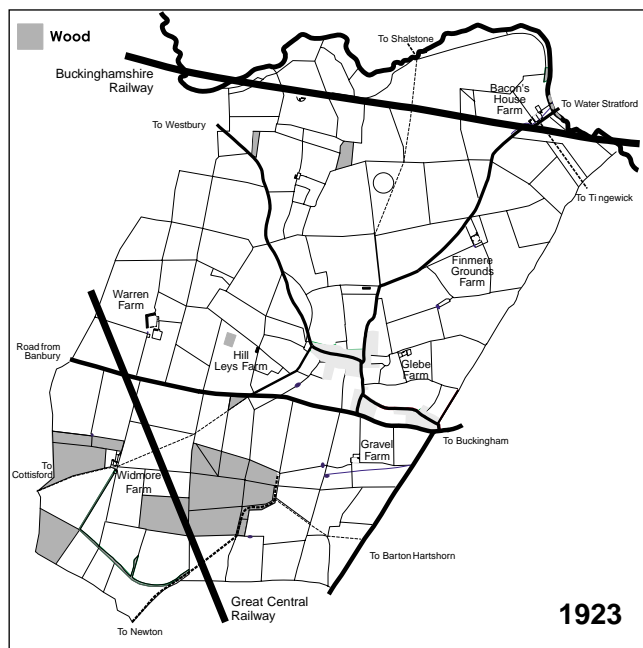
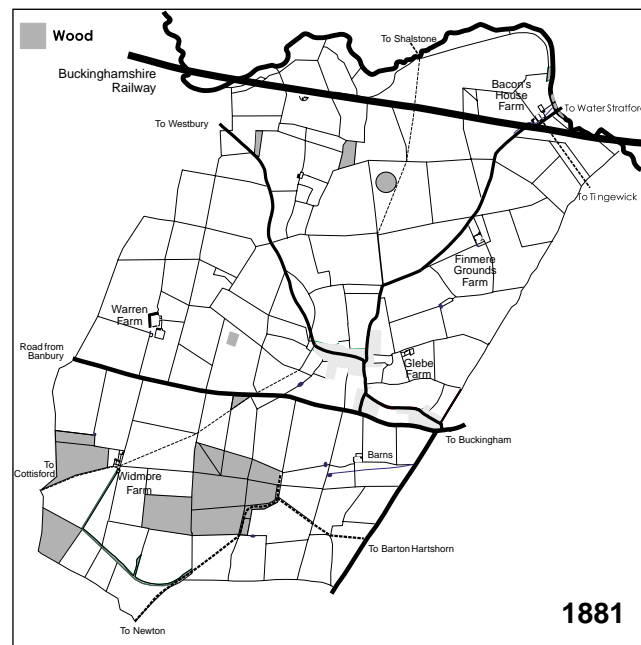
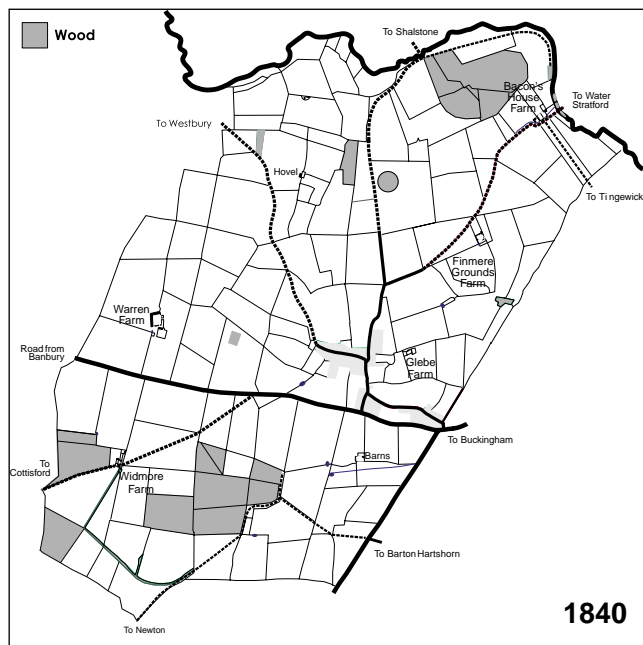
**Land use in Finmere parish in 1840**

Based on the Tithe Commutation Map drawn as part of an agreement to convert tithe payments from produce to rent charges, though in practice much of the Tithe in Finmere was paid as rent before this date. The map was drawn by Robert Russel, a valuer from Brackley.

Later, the railways cut through the parish. The Buckinghamshire Railway, which opened in 1850, made the greatest impact. In the north of the parish, Bacon's Wood was felled and its timber was probably used in construction of the railway. The tenants of Bacon's House Farm took the opportunity to create larger fields. Nearly half-a-century later, the Great Central Railway cut through the parish from north to south but this had little effect on the fields or woods, the latter perhaps because much of the wood used for railway construction at the end of the nineteenth century was imported.



**A fragment of a late seventeenth century map**  
This is the earliest map of Finmere and shows the area of the medieval rabbit warren (now Warren Farm) to the west of the village. It probably dates to the time of inclosure.



### The changing landscape: 1840 to 2000

The maps are based on the 1840 Tithe Map, 1881 and 1923 Ordnance Survey maps and a recent field survey.

There were also changes in the crops grown. In 1919, Finmere Grounds and Bacon's House Farm had 163 acres (66 hectares) of arable land and 284 acres (115 hectares) of grass. In 1991, the consolidated Grounds Farm contained 422 acres (171 hectares) of arable and 17 acres (7 hectares) of pasture. Alf Lepper described the changes on Tile House farm:

*[It is] a mixed farm. I do a bit of beef, sheep, pigs and arable, mainly arable. And that is the big change in village acreage today. It's nearly all gone arable. There's some now going back to grass but its mainly arable now. We were forced into it you see, during the War. (Hello Finmere, BBC, 13 June 1971)*

During the 1960s and 1970s, many more hedgerows were removed, particularly north of the village.

## The Landowners and their Farms

Finmere Parish has had at least nine farms. Bacon's House, Glebe Farm, Finmere Grounds and Warren Farm are described below. Town Farm and Tile House Farm were on Fulwell Road within the village and date to at least the seventeenth century. Hill Leys was commissioned by Seymour Ashwell, possibly for his retirement. It was designed by Swingen Harris and may have been completed after Ashwell's death in 1901. The inscription in Latin on the front means 'A mind that is conscious in its own right.' Gravel Farm first appears on maps in the early twentieth century, though there were barns on the same site in 1840. Widmore Farm was originally two red brick cottages, probably erected in the early nineteenth century, perhaps for the brickworks.

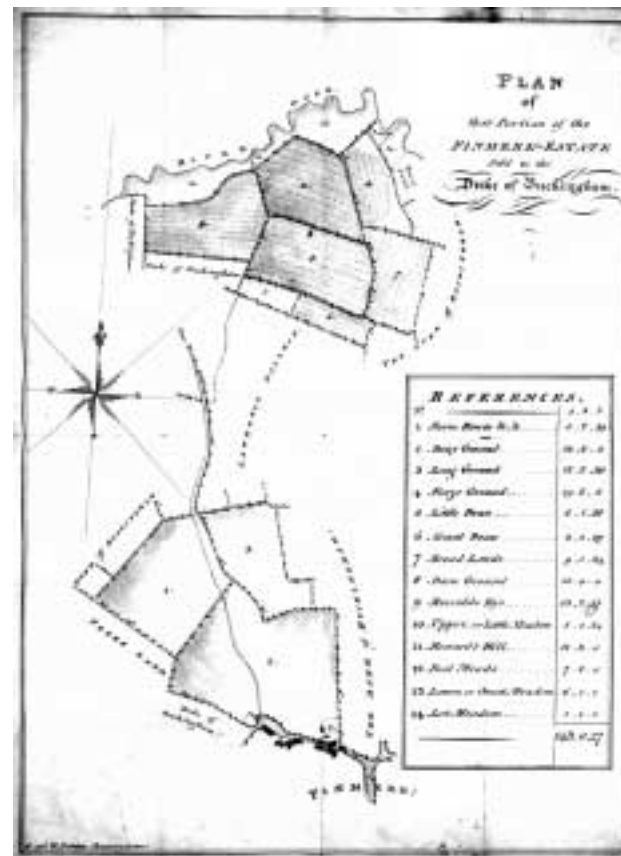
## The Stowe Estate

In 1547, the manor of Finmere became the sole possession of John Blundell, a mercer (textile dealer) of London. He had purchased all the land in the parish, except the glebe. The patron, the Abbey of St. Augustine, Bristol, owned this and the rent from the tenants helped support the Rector. After his death in 1559, Blundell's land was divided between his three daughters, two of whose sons sold their inheritance.

The sales by Blundell's descendents allowed John Temple of Stowe to buy one portion of Finmere in 1602 and his son, Sir Thomas Temple, to buy a second portion in 1614. In 1753, Richard Grenville-Temple grasped an opportunity to purchase a third part of Finmere, which had passed to Edward Bacon of Bacon's House. Typically, for the family, the £8,800 paid was rather more than it was worth but Richard Grenville-Temple argued:

*I am very unwilling as it lies so near me, that it should not be purchased by some of the family.*

Details of landowners before 1547 can be found in Blomfield's History of Finmere.



Map of part of Finmere purchased for the Stowe estate in the 1820s

1753 2000  
£8,800 £1m

We follow contemporary usage and Blomfield in using the name Bacon's House, though early maps show it as Bacon House.

The status obsessed Grenville-Temples achieved their highest ambitions on 31 March 1822, when George IV granted the title Duke of Buckingham and Chandos to Richard Temple-Nugent-Brydges-Chandos-Grenville. Richard was a close friend of Robert Holt, Finmere Rector. Holt died in 1802 and Richard dedicated his memorial in St Michael's church.

1848	2000
£1.1m	£70m

Garroway's Coffee House was in Exchange Alley, Cornhill in the City of London. It opened in 1669, probably to sell fur for the Hudson's Bay Company, and became one the chief auction houses in the City.

1848	2000
£30,000	£1.9m

The family purchased further properties in 1763, the early 1820s and the 1830s. The Grenville-Temples then owned most of the parish, except for the Glebe and an area behind the current Tile House Farm. Finmere was incorporated into the Stowe Estate, part of the massive landholdings built up by the family to further their attempts to increase their status.

Bacon's House, named after its early owners, was the former manor house and manorial courts were held there. Later, as part of the Stowe estate, there was no need for a manor house in Finmere and the Vestry and the Stowe Steward dealt with parish matters. The Grenville-Temples pulled down much of Bacon's House in the early nineteenth century leaving a more modest farmhouse, and demolished its water mill. The current building retains seventeenth century features behind its eighteenth century front.

The farmhouse at Finmere Grounds was probably built soon after inclosure in the seventeenth century and the farm to which it was attached was called Thornhill Farm. It was home to the Barrett family from 1823 to 1904. The Warren, which became Warren Farm, got its name from an artificial rabbit warren. This was constructed in or before 1339—long before rabbits became a pest—to breed rabbits for food.

## The Disposal of the Stowe Estate

In his drive for social advancement, the first Duke of Buckingham and Chandos accumulated crippling debts through excessive borrowing, extensive land purchases and energetic collection of rare artefacts and books. His son, the Marquis of Chandos, was also a poor financial manager and the family spiralled into debt. By the 1840s, their financial woes could no longer be hidden. At 6 am on 30 August 1847, bailiffs smashed into Stowe House to seize goods on behalf of creditors. On 29 April 1848, it was determined that the family's main borrowings totalled £1,094,000. This extraordinary debt could not be sustained and the majority of landholdings were put up for sale. On 10 May 1848, Finmere was auctioned at Garroway's Coffee House in London. The asking price was £30,000 but the highest bid was just £27,700. To disguise the failure to sell, Finmere was 'bought in' by the auctioneers at £31,300.

Warren Farm, along with the title to the Manor of Finmere, was later privately sold to Mr W. M. Warner of Oxford for £9,000 in August 1848. He hoped to live in the farm but Mr French had a lease that prevented this. Thomas West of Silverstone inquired about purchasing Finmere Grounds in 1851 but a price could not be agreed. Two years later, Merton College Oxford bought Bacon's House and Finmere Grounds Farms for £11,833 at an auction at the White Hart in Buckingham.

On Sunday, 25 November 1849, in the midst of the uncertainty about ownership of Bacon's House Farm, farmer William Treadwell killed himself by discharging a gun loaded with glass fragments through his bowels. At the inquest, he was described as a man of substance who had been in a low desponding way for some time. Rector William Jocelyn Palmer recorded his death in the parish registers as being 'by his own hand having been of unsound mind for sometime previously.'

The Tredwell family of Bacon's House is spelt 'Treadwell' or 'Tredwell' in some early documents and consistently as 'Tredwell' in later documents.

Bacon's House Farm, was let to Mrs Mary Treadwell for £143 a year and Finmere Grounds to William Barrett for £237 a year. With six cottages in the village at £10 a year, Merton College's total rental in Finmere was £390. By 1932, the farm rents had risen to £572 11s but from that year, they were reduced to £450. In 1947, they were raised to £700. The Tredwells continued to farm Bacon's House until the death of Charles Tredwell in 1978 and were farming Finmere Grounds by 1929, after the tenancy of William Roper. The house at Finmere Grounds fell into a bad state of repair and was demolished in 1965. Mrs Tredwell remained tenant of Bacon's House farmhouse until her death in 1991 but by then the lands were being farmed with those of Finmere Grounds by Radstones Estates Ltd. Jonathan and Joanne Brooks bought the two farms in 1993.

1848    2000  
£390   £21,000

1947    2000  
£700   £14,000

1856    2000  
£73    £4,200

## The Glebe Land

The Rector's income came partly from rent payments in lieu of tithes and from renting the glebe land, which extended from the Rectory into Tingewick parish. The field in Tingewick was used to pay the salary of the Parish Clerk. In 1856, the Glebe barn was rebuilt at a cost of £73 1s 9d.

*1856. On January 23rd the roof (thatched) of the glebe barn fell in. This barn was built by Rector Palmer in 1826. The timber for the new roof was all cut in the Glebe with the exception on 30 feet of planking. (Rectors' Book)*

The rebuilt barn survived until 5 April 1997, when village children burnt it down. Earlier, in February 1947, Glebe Farm was sold to Captain Wood Jackson for £2,000, £220 more than the reserve.

Finmere Grounds had a circular, thatched pig house on the site of the present barns. In 1949, it burnt down.

*Nothing but rows of blackened standards, a practically destroyed diesel engine and a scene of general desolation remain at Finmere Grounds... about 700 pigs perished in a devastating fire on Friday Night. (Buckingham Advertiser, May 1949)*

One former farm worker remembers that 'the dead pigs were cooked up and fed to other pigs.'

1947    2000  
£2,000   £40,500

*A four-year-old Welsh ewe at Hill Leys Farm, Finmere, near Buckingham has made farming history by giving birth to six sprightly lambs. The lambs were born within two hours and yesterday both they and mother Betsy were alive and full of spirits. There have been crowds of visitors to the farm to see the lambs...*

Farmers Weekly, 10 March 1961.



LOT 1

LOT 2

LOT 3

LOT 4

FLINMERE

MR ALFRED LEARD

LITTLE TINGENICK

Scale 1000



### Plan of Glebe Farm from 1947 sale catalogue

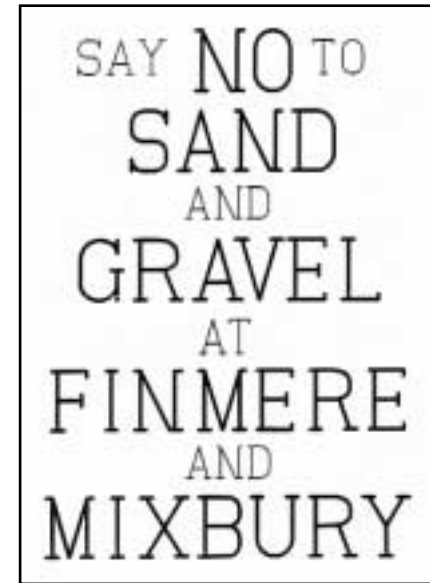
## Finmere Quarry

In 1990, rumours of local farmland being excavated for a quarry and a landfill site rallied almost all of the residents to attend a meeting at the village hall and to form an action group called FAMAGE—Finmere and Mixbury Against Gravel Extraction. The Parish Council of Finmere and Mixbury Parish Meeting, together with Cherwell District Council, were unanimously opposed to the application from Regal Reclamation Limited. The proposal was to take 120,000 tonnes of sand and gravel a year, and to fill the hole with inert waste within a period of fourteen years.

The main objections were the lack of market need, environmental impact upon the village, increase in heavy vehicle movements on an already busy road, and sixty-eight possible contraventions of the structure plans and minerals and waste disposal policies. Despite a well organised and prolonged campaign, permission was granted at appeal and extraction commenced in 1993. The quarry is now operated by Premier Aggregates and infilling commenced in November 1999. The land filling phase will take fifteen years to complete based on 75,000 tonnes of waste being accepted each year.

It is a condition of Premier Aggregate's operating licence that they continue to monitor the site for a period of thirty years, or until such time as any environmental concerns have been alleviated, after completion of infilling and restoration work. The operating company cannot surrender this responsibility and, in case of problems such as insolvency, a bond has been lodged with the Environment Agency to ensure sufficient funds to continue environmental monitoring for the designated period. On completion of land filling, the majority of the quarry site will be returned to agriculture, with small areas retained as a nature reserve, including woodland, impoverished heath land and a pond.

In the autumn of 2000, Premier Aggregates applied to increase the volume of land fill, raising a mound seven metres over the pits, and for a recycling and crushing facility. This application is being strongly opposed by the Parish Council and FAMAGE was reformed.



**A protest poster**

# ALIFE *news*

20TH OCTOBER 2000

ISSUE 2

## Will you still want to live in Finmere?

Welcome to our second newsletter. The first one circulated one month ago introduced ourselves as an independent group of villagers who have formed an action group in order to object to the recent proposals by Premier Aggregates (Finmere Quarry) to extend their operations at their site.

After studying the proposals, visiting similar sites in operation and researching into the possible effects of the expansion of the site we are very concerned about the following, which may effect the village in various degrees and pose a serious threat to our quality of life in Finmere.

### Substantial increase in noise and airborne dust

This would be due to the substantial increase in the volume of waste handled on site, 1000 tons of Category A waste (brick, rubble, concrete) would be brought in each week. A portable crusher would be in operation at Foxley fields farm, this would handle 100 tons per hour. Noise and dust generated from this machine would be in addition to that produced by the normal activities of the permanent recycling plant.

### The rubbish mound

The visual intrusion of a mound a quarter of a mile long and thirty two feet high on the main road to the village. This mound would contain 1.25 million tons of waste of which 555,000 tons would be category C waste (food and food processing waste). The lorry/trailer from this would possibly carry to the village dependant on the wind.

### Risk of environmental pollution

We are concerned that contaminants may leach into the local water chain from category C and D waste (food waste, food processing, contaminated soils and electrical cabling). This may also have an impact on the growing noise if population in and around the village, causing further health risks.

### Litter and traffic

We believe there would be a possible doubling of the number of lorries carrying rubbish to and from the site resulting in more rubbish along the local roadsides and clay and dust on the road.

**Would you choose to live in a village with these prospects and their consequences which will be with us for at least the next sixteen years??**

## What we are doing

We are currently putting together our report to Cotswolds County Council planning department which outlines our objections to the application. We have been investigating the number and location of all waste disposal and recycling sites within the proposed 35 mile catchment area and will be preparing a map showing the various sites. If accepted the course of waste for recycling and disposal will stretch as far north as Coventry and will extend to Luton, Kettering, Haverly Hampstead and Harlow. It will include towns such as Northampton, Banbury, High Wycombe and Oxford.

## Our next task

On completion of the report we will plan our presentation to the Planning Committee which will take place on 27th November at 2pm. This has to be brief and we are only allowed five minutes.

**Free transport for all Finmere residents who wish to attend the presentation to the planning committee meeting on the 27th November.**

We are sure you will acknowledge that a sizeable presence in the public gallery has a significant influence on many decisions. Please mark the date in your diary and try to make the effort to come along. More details will be given at the village meeting (see later).

ALIFE news: the newsletter of FAMAGE

## ☞ The Roads and Railways ☞

Until the eighteenth century, villagers travelled slowly on local by-ways and drove roads. Local landowners and gentry helped improve transport by financing the first turnpike roads at the end of the seventeenth century. They were managed by local trusts and the costs of construction were recouped by tolls collected by pikemen. The Temple family of Stowe helped finance the turnpike that passed Finmere. It ran from Bedford via Stony Stratford, Buckingham, Tingewick, Aynho and Banbury to Warmington in Warwickshire. The section that bypassed Finmere (the old B4031) was the first to be built in 1744. There was a turnpike at 'Finmere Warren Gates,' the tolls from which produced an income of £253 a year in 1784. After construction of the turnpike, the old Roman road was left as a bridleway. In 1813, a turnpike branch was laid from the Red Lion to Bicester.

### The Stowe Road

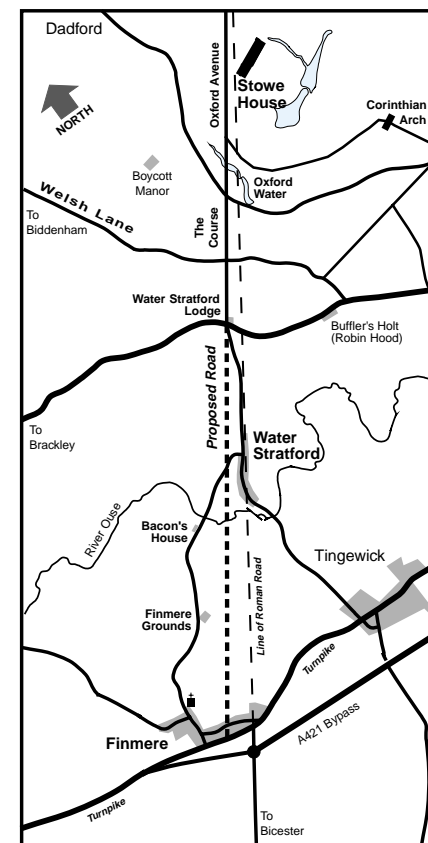
Lord Temple, Richard Grenville, inherited Stowe in 1749. Building on the work of his uncle, Lord Cobham, Temple energetically reshaped the house and grounds. By his death in 1779, he had overseen the creation of one of the finest garden landscapes in Europe.

Lord Temple's magnificent estate needed good road connections. He planned that visiting nobility and royalty would approach on perfectly straight roads lined with trees. As they rode closer to the estate, grand vistas would open revealing the glory of Stowe, the splendour of its temples and the opulence of the main house. The approach from Buckingham was known as the Grand Avenue. It leads from the town centre via Chackmore to the Corinthian Arch. Once through the arch, visitors were treated to a panoramic view of the south front of the house. From the southwest and Oxford, the approach was along The Course, the tree-lined avenue from the Lodge on the A422 Buckingham to Brackley Road to the current entrance to Stowe. Thereafter, the Oxford Avenue continues over Oxford Water to the north front of the house.

A map in the Huntington Library, California, shows that Temple planned to link the turnpike at Finmere to the Oxford Avenue. The Huntington map is undated but is likely to date from the early nineteenth century. Although the Temples obtained part of Palmer's Glebe land before 1822 to construct the road, it was not built. This was probably because of the increasingly disastrous state of the family's finances as they strove to fight off bankruptcy.

Finmere would have been quite different if the road had been built. There would have been a lodge where the school now stands. A tree-lined avenue would have stretched north through Town Close and Finmere Grounds past Bacon's House.

1784	2000
£253	£20,000



The proposed road to Stowe

**The Buckinghamshire Railway: The road and the rail and steam and the sail.**

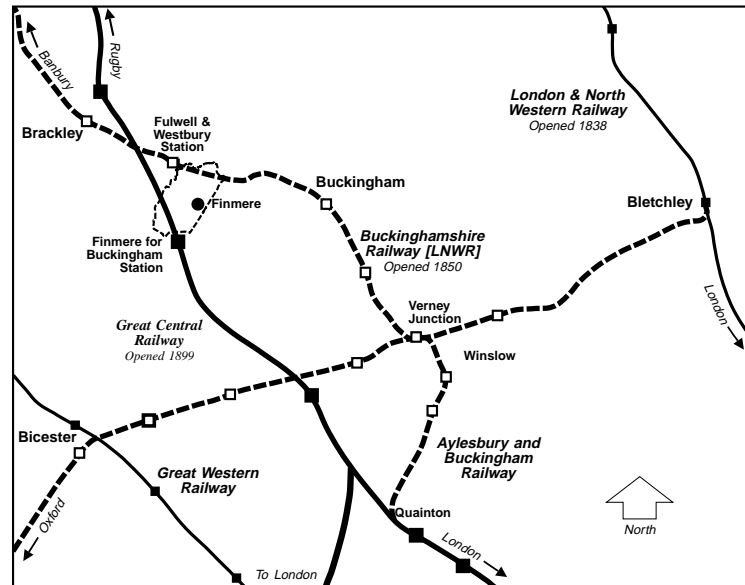
Now to describe the great Bucks Line,  
I think I'll have a try,  
And tell you how the work went on,  
Through hills both hard and high...  
At the entrance of the County  
On Oxfordshire's north side  
We first encounter Bacon Hill  
A cutting deep and wide  
Twas Bacon's Wood, a place of note,  
A favourite game preserve;  
But the game was kill'd, the wood was fell'd  
The Company for to serve  
Then the Surveyor he came forth,  
With a quick discerning eye,—  
He drew his chain—the Act was pass'd—  
Then the land they did buy;  
The Timber-merchant then stepp'd in,  
And fell'd the noble oak;  
Both elm and ash, and lime and beech,  
Soon felt the Woodman's stroke.  
This work was done with quick dispatch;  
Soon all was clear'd away,—  
The brush, the timber and the roots,  
Was gone without delay.  
Then the Surveyor next began  
His level for to gain;  
Wallace, he did the contract take,  
And rent the rocks in twain...

*Extract from a private memoir published by Charles Whitehall of Gawcott, 1849.*

## The Buckinghamshire Railway

Sir Harry Verney of Claydon House and the Duke of Buckingham of Stowe were both enthusiastic promoters of railways. In the 1840s, Verney supported a scheme to link Oxford and Bletchley, and the Duke backed a project to connect Buckingham and Brackley. By 1847, they had decided that they would work together to develop a scheme that became known as the 'Buckinghamshire Railway.'

Robert Benson Dochray was engineer for the line. The first turf was cut at 5 pm on Tuesday, 20 April 1847 in a field adjoining the Cross Trees public house in Buckingham. The line was to run from the London and North-Western Railway (LNWR) at Bletchley to Claydon. From the new Verney Junction near Claydon, one line branched south to Oxford, the other north to Banbury. The Banbury line ran through the north of Finmere parish, where its construction led to the clearance of Bacon's Wood.



The Buckinghamshire and Great Central railways

The construction of the railway was sometimes hazardous, especially in bad weather. There were many accidents, including two in Bacon's Wood:

*Buckinghamshire railway. A fatal accident occurred on this line on Thursday, the 27th ult. at the cutting in Bacon's Wood in the parish of Fimmere, in the county of Oxford. While Thos. Winterburn, aged 19, and Alfred Dewett, aged 17, railway labourers in the employ of Mr Wallace were at work getting earth and filling wagons, a slip of earth fell and killed both on the spot. A Coroner's Inquest was held next day before Mr Churchill Esq. one of the coroners for the county of Oxford, at the house of Mr William Treadwell at Bacon's Farm, where a verdict of accidental death was recorded. (Buckinghamshire Herald, 30 July 1848)*

*On the 14th Inst. Brown, a workman employed at the Bacon's Wood cutting, on the Buckinghamshire railway, in blasting rocks, was injured by the top of his fingers being cut off by the blow of a sledge hammer, accidentally given by the man who was forming the hole for the powder. The injured man was holding the drill where the other was striking. Brown was taken to the surgeon, and is going on favourably. (Jackson's Oxford Journal, 22 December 1848)*

By August 1849, the permanent way was laid from Buckingham to Brackley and the railway opened on 4 May 1850.

*On Wednesday last, the line from Banbury from Bletchley was opened to the public... The first train left Banbury at half-past six am, and although the morning was a wet and cold one, yet an immense number of persons congregated to witness the departure of the first train... Along the line, vast numbers of passengers were congregated and cheered the trains as they passed and testified the delight which this novel scene afforded them. (Jackson's Oxford Journal, 4 May 1850)*

The Oxford branch opened on 20 May 1851. The total cost of the fifty-three miles of railway was £1,120,000. The line was leased to the LNWR who, according to The Standard newspaper, planned to 'run few trains, and will use light engines with large carriages, holding a large number of passengers, running at moderate speed.'

The nearest station to Fimmere was Fulwell and Westbury, located in the valley by Fulwell House, where platforms and the converted station house remain. There was also a halt at Bacon's House Crossing for goods traffic. Ron Wakelin recalls watching the Royal Train pass Bacon's House Crossing on its way to Brackley in 1950. It carried King George VI and the present Queen Mother on their way to Silverstone for the first Grand Prix d'Europe. The line was closed in 1963.

#### **Buckinghamshire Railway timetable, May 1850**

Banbury departures.

Weekdays: 6.30, 9.45, 13.50, and 17.00. Sunday: 9.45.

Bletchley departures.

Weekdays: 9.45, 11.55, 4.15, and 7.15. Sunday: 11.55.

In 1922, there were seven services in each direction on a weekday.

1851	2000
£1.12m	£81m

## The Great Central Railway

The Parish Meeting did not object to the building of the new line but, on 28 March 1895, resolved that footpaths should not be obstructed by its construction.

1895	2000
£250,000	£18m

1895	2000
£11.5m	£810m

1895	2000
£420,000	£30m

Finmere Station was on the former Great Central Railway (GCR), the last mainline to be built in this country and the first to be closed. Sir Edward Watkin, the visionary and adventurous chairman of many railways, was the driving force behind its construction. A Manchester-born son of a wealthy cotton merchant, he planned to link the industrial centres of Manchester and Sheffield with the expanding markets of continental Europe. Watkin was already chairman of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway (MSL) and proposed to link this to the south coast, eventually continuing to Paris through a channel tunnel, for which funds of £250,000 had been put aside.

Sir Edward initially planned to run his link over the lines of existing operators but could not reach agreement with them. Work commenced on a new £11.5 million line, known as the London Extension, on 13 November 1894. This ran south from Annesley, Nottinghamshire to join the Metropolitan Railway at Quainton Road, Buckinghamshire and continued as a joint line to Marylebone. A later, alternative route linked to the Great Western at Princes Risborough to go forward to Marylebone.

Walter Scotts, civil engineers from Newcastle-on-Tyne, constructed the section from Brackley to Quainton Road at a cost of £420,000. It involved excavations of cuttings at Mixbury, Finmere, Chetwode and Steeple Claydon. Finmere Station was built just over a mile from the village, 54.5 miles from the London terminus at Marylebone. It had a small goods yard with a cattle pen, coal staithes and store, and a wooden bridge over the line was built for use by the local hunt. The station was advertised as 'Finmere for Buckingham,' to entice customers from the slower service provided directly to Buckingham by the LNWR. The entrance to the station was between the lines under the bridge and traps waited in its shelter for passengers. The line opened for passengers on 15 March 1899.

Local entrepreneurs were keen to exploit the new station. Paxton & Holiday developed a live stock market on land adjacent to Finmere Station. Work on the Shelswell Inn began in May 1900, though the magistrates were initially reluctant to grant a licence to Hall's Brewery of Oxford, despite a petition signed by local residents. Finmere Station was also a popular alighting point for day-trippers from London. Shelswell farmer, Joseph Watson, described the visitors to Bicester Licensing Magistrates:

*Two or three special trains came down on Sundays during the summer bringing excursionists from London. Sometimes fifty or sixty got out at Finmere and he should think the average for the summer would be about 25 or 30. They came for a holiday to the villages round... a great many alighted at Finmere for Buckingham,*

*but had to walk the four miles as there was no conveyance to be hired in [Newton Purcell]. (Bicester Advertiser, 1 September 1899)*

At the same hearing into the application for a licence for the Shelswell Inn, the Chief Constable of the Oxfordshire Constabulary reported that the excursionists did not leave until two o'clock in the morning during the summer.

During the early 1920s, wealthy commuters took advantage of a new evening slip coach service, including: Admiral Roger Keyes, Tingewick; Captain Ferrass Loftus, Tingewick Hall; the Honourable L. Fleischman, Chetwode Manor; and Charles Trotter, Barton Hartshorn Manor. As the train approached the station, the guard released the last carriage, which was braked as it entered the station, allowing the express to continue without stopping. It had been thought that the slip coach was introduced as a service to prominent local residents; another suggestion is that a director of the GCR lived locally and this may have been the reason for attaching a slip coach to the evening express. In 1922, the fastest journey time from Fimmere to Marylebone was one hour and nine minutes on an express that stopped at Aylesbury only. The first service of the day at 7.59 am took longer and did not arrive in Marylebone until 9.48 am, a journey time of nearly two hours.

The GCR remained independent until 1923, when the London & North Eastern Railway absorbed it. On nationalisation in 1948, the line became part of the London Midland Region.

During the Second World War, Fimmere saw frequent rail movements due to its close proximity to the airfields and military camps. Prisoners of War were marched from the station to the camp at the crossroads between Water Stratford and Stowe. After the war, there was little local custom and the station was only busy at the beginning and end of Stowe School terms.

After the Second World War, motorcars and buses provided increasingly effective competition to the railways. In 1961, Fimmere Parish Council agreed to support Oxfordshire County Council in objecting to the British Transport Commission to proposals to close the former Central Railway and Fimmere Station. These protests were ignored and in 1962, Dr Beeching proposed to close the former GCR line, which was already starved of freight and express passenger services. In February 1963 it was reported that Fimmere Station would close to passengers the next month.

*Monday 4th March 1963 has been fixed as the date when all passenger services will be withdrawn at the smaller intermediate stations on the Great Central Line between Aylesbury and Nottingham Victoria. Among the stations affected are Quainton Road, Calvert and Fimmere. (Buckingham Advertiser, 1 February 1963)*



**The Station Master and two of his staff pose during a quiet moment, around 1910**

#### **Suicide at Fimmere Station**

*The villages of Newton Purcell and Fimmere were thrown into a state of great excitement on Saturday night by the rumour that a well-dressed man had committed suicide by deliberately throwing himself in front of an express train on the Great Central Railway near Fimmere Station. It appears that as the nine o'clock express from Sheffield to London was nearing Newton Purcell, a ticket collector saw a man come out from the side of the line and fall down in front of the train. The train was travelling about 70 miles an hour and the brake was at once applied... It was ascertained that the man's body had been cut in two parts...*

*On Monday, Mr Dancer of the 'Kings Head,' Brackley... identified the head as that belonging to a man named Thomas William Twynham, a native of King's Sutton... On Saturday [Twynham had] called at the 'Red Lion,' Little Tingewick, where he only stopped a few minutes each time... but it was noticed by those present that he appeared very downcast and depressed. On Tuesday afternoon, an inquest was held at the Shelswell Arms... The jury brought in a verdict that the deceased committed suicide during a fit of temporary insanity. (Jackson's Oxford Journal, 28 June 1902)*

In 1956, the station provided the following facilities and services:

Goods traffic.

Passengers, parcels & miscellaneous traffic.

Furniture vans, carriages, motor cars, portable engines and machines on wheels.

Horse boxes and prize cattle vans.

Carriages and motorcars by passenger or parcels train.

In its last years, the Permanent Way Department used the station yard for the storage of thousands of sleepers.



**Finmere Station, 22 March 1961**

The 13.15 pm departure from Nottingham Victoria waits to depart  
Finmere for Marylebone.

Surplus steam locomotives from other regions were transferred to the line while other regions adopted new diesel locomotives. The service was run down and, on 3 September 1966, Watkin's London Extension operated as a through route for the last time. His vision of a central link from the industrial towns of the north to continental Europe had lasted just sixty-seven years and the line was never profitable.

Watkin's vision may yet be revived by Central Railways plc. The company is pursuing a proposal to rebuild the line, despite the defeat by Parliament in 1996 of a private bill to rebuild the railway. It estimates that a rebuilt line will remove 40% of projected traffic between the UK and the continent from the roads. The project is meeting heavy opposition from local environmentalists and residents who argue that it will disturb the peace of many villages, including Finmere—especially at Warren Farm. The company is optimistic that it will complete the project by 2005. If it succeeds, which is by no means certain, Watkin's vision of a direct connection from the north of England to the continent through a channel tunnel will have at last been realised.

## The Bypass

**A**t the end of 1998, the old Turnpike Road from Tingewick, which passed the Red Lion, the Kings Head and on to Croughton, became a 'no through' road. Traffic was diverted to the new, long sought, bypass.

Although Finmere has benefited, the bypass was most needed by the villagers of Tingewick where the narrow and busy A421 blighted the main street. A survey of road traffic between Tingewick and Finmere in 1992 recorded more than 11,000 vehicles a day; one in eight vehicles was a heavy goods vehicle. The route was also due to become a primary route linking the M40 at Banbury with Buckingham, Milton Keynes and the M1.

Three options for the route of the bypass were put forward for consultation in 1992. Two planned to join the existing road east of Little Tingewick, and one the Bicester road south of Finmere. The planners hoped that work would begin in late 1995.

Once the southern route, across Aerodrome Farm and joining the Bicester road, was chosen, it was proposed to extend the carriageway westwards. The views of Finmere villagers were sought at an exhibition held by Oxfordshire County Council at Finmere school on 8-9 October 1993. Four options for the route were displayed. One would create a new roundabout outside the Red Lion; the others crossed Gravel Farm to join the B4031 west of the village.

Villagers expressed concerns about the effect of the bypass on ecology, landscape and local business, but they also welcomed the relief of traffic and accidents at the Red Lion junction. Despite being the most costly option, it was decided to build the most southerly route across Gravel Farm, though the County Council would not accept a proposal to take the route south of the farmhouse.

Construction of the £12.5 million three-mile scheme commenced in November 1996. Earth excavated during the roadworks was used to level out a dip in the A421 near Little Horwood. In 1998, the Tingewick Bypass and the Finmere Diversion were opened, giving much relief to both villages.

During the 1990s, the GCR cutting at Finmere was used as a landfill site for domestic waste and for spoil from Finmere Quarry.



**Finmere Station in its final years**



The Station Master on Fimere Station in 1904

## 🌀 A Well Regulated Parish 🌀

In medieval times, local matters were governed by the manor. In Finmere, the influence of the manor declined earlier than in many parishes because it became part of the Stowe Estate owned by the Temple family. Disputes, payments to the poor, administration of charities and other local matters became the responsibility of the Vestry, succeeded by the Parish Meeting in 1894 and the Parish Council in 1952.

### The Vestry

A Vestry has existed in Finmere since at least 1729, when the surviving churchwardens' accounts begin. These accounts show that most of its duties were concerned with maintenance and running of the church, though it occasionally dealt with broader parish matters, such as ridding the fields of vermin. By 1815, the Vestry had considerably extended its responsibilities and continued to do so under William Jocelyn Palmer (1814–53).

By common law, the Vestry was chaired by the Rector. Its members included two churchwardens—one appointed by the Rector, one by the parish—the parish constable and the overseer of the poor. The Steward of Stowe Estate also attended some meetings. Detailed minutes of Finmere Vestry survive from 1814 and are particularly detailed on matters of poor relief.

### The Parish Meetings and Council

The Local Government Act of 1894 required smaller parishes to hold annual Parish Meetings at which parishioners could make decisions on local issues. Finmere's first Parish Meeting was held on 4 December 1894 at 6.30 pm in the village schoolroom. The Rector, Seymour Ashwell, was elected chairman and thirty-two electors were present. The Meeting agreed to form a committee to enquire into the village charities. 'The meeting being of the most amicable character closed at 7.20 pm.' Later that month, the Parish Meeting convened again and decided not to become a Parish Council, which would have had modestly increased powers and monthly meetings. Thereafter, the Meeting was usually convened just once a year and a new Chairman was elected on each occasion.

After the Second World War, the population of the village, which had been declining for a century, began to grow again. It exceeded the lower limit, 200 persons, required to form a Parish Council in 1948 and the Parish Meeting asked Oxfordshire County Council to establish a Council. The request was rejected; the village was considered too small. The Meeting applied again in 1952. This time, the County Council agreed the request, recommending establishment of a Parish Council with five members on 9 May.

One effect of inclosure in the seventeenth century was to increase rents and it became more important to protect stock and crops. A systematic plan was instituted to kill all vermin thought to be a danger to crops, cows, sheep, and poultry. The Churchwardens' account book records frequent payments to villagers for killing vermin and reveals that villagers netted hundreds of 'Sparrows' each year. In 1731, the Churchwardens paid '2 pence per duson' for them. Four pence was paid for an 'old heg hog' and two pence for a young one. Between one and twelve foxes were killed each year, even though packs of hounds were kept at Tusmore and Bucknell. The price for a dead fox, or a 'fock's hed,' was one shilling. In 1731, the Churchwardens handed out 12s 10½d in rewards for dead vermin from a total expenditure of £2 18s 10½d.

1731	2000
2d	£1
12s 10d	£200

*The first Parish Meeting under the Act of 1894 took place on Dec 4<sup>th</sup> at 6.30 all particulars will be found in the Minutes of the Parish Meetings.*

#### Note of the first Parish Meeting

Written by Seymour Ashwell in the Rectors' Book

The Parish Council minutes for 1970 record a proposal to form a Village Association to care for the trees, verges, wells, pumps and footpaths, but this was not established.

From 1814, there is an air of desperation in parish discussions about the poor. In 1817, the Vestry resolved the unemployed should be allocated to work on farms.

*Mr Robert Paxton overseer proposes that the occupiers of every £80 or thereabouts should take among them certain labourers as per list to be employed throughout the winter to Lady Day... one each for every £80 aforesaid to which the undersigned agree:*

*Robert Paxton takes 4 men & 2 boys  
Mr Bennett takes 4 men and 2 boys  
Mr Taylor 5 men 2 boys  
Mr White 3 men 2 boys  
Mr George 3 men 2 boys  
Mr Yates 2 men 1 boy  
Mr Baldwin 1 man 1 boy  
Mr Newman 1 man 1 boy  
Mr Palmer & Mr Newman — 1 man*

Vestry Minute Book, 21 October 1817

*At the first meeting of the newly constituted Parish Council, the Reverend P.A. Parrott was unanimously elected chairman. Mr G.E. Barnes was elected vice chairman and Mr Barnes also agreed to take on the Clerk's duties. A special church service was held Sunday last. (Bicester Advertiser, 1 August 1952)*

Parish Council minutes reveal little of the tensions of the meetings over the years. Discussions over planning have been particularly contentious, with some villagers welcoming new housing developments and others strongly opposing them.

## Poor Relief

The inclosure of Finmere's medieval open fields in the seventeenth century was of considerable benefit to the landowners and tenant farmers, but its impact on many parishioners was less favourable. After inclosure, most families worked for a wage earned from the tenant farmers or landowners, if there was sufficient work. Employment was not always available because inclosure, and later mechanisation, had made agriculture more efficient and less dependent on manual labour. The rural economy was also battered by a series of recessions that began after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. In 1765, a century after the open fields were inclosed, twenty-one Finmere families were poor enough to receive relief—half the population of the parish. In 1821, twenty-three families applied for relief to purchase bread following a price rise.

The village poor became reliant on relief schemes and charities. The Vestry and the landowners set up several schemes for poor relief. In 1817, wealthier tenants agreed to take on unemployed men and boys in proportion to their landholding. From 1818, or earlier, the village operated a 'roundsmen system,' which employed men and boys on relief on the highways or in the Duke's woods. In 1820, there were thirty-three men on the rounds but unemployment was increasing rapidly. Six years later, the majority of the village relied on relief with only nineteen of ninety men in employment.


## Palmer and the Poor

When William Jocelyn Palmer became Rector in 1814, he took charge of a poor parish and found the charities deficient in funds. He resolved to recover the missing money and reform the way that the parish supported the poor. This was an urgent task, as the parish paupers were becoming an increasing burden on wealthier villagers. Farmer Robert Paxton was then the overseer of the poor and was responsible with the Vestry for raising the poor rate and distributing it to the needy. Some years before 1815, he had purchased cottages to house the poor but had not been reimbursed. The Vestry in 1815 resolved to repay him and proposed to sell the cottages at an auction at the Kings Head. The Duke of Buckingham

objected, concerned that the poor would be further disadvantaged by the sale of their homes. Unwilling to defy the Duke, the Vestry accepted that the cottages should remain for rent.

*Resolved that the tenements purchased by the parish be inspected... [so that] being put in proper repair at the expence of the parish, a proper rent may be obtained. (Vestry Minute Book, 27 March 1815)*

The deteriorating economic climate and growing parish population hampered Palmer's efforts to help the poor. In 1821, labourers were paid twelve shillings a week in the summer, falling to eight shillings in October and seven shillings in December. In 1826, the maximum rate was eight shillings, though the Duke insisted on paying nine shillings. In the ten years from 1811 and 1821, the population grew by fifty-eight people (17%).



1821	2000
12s	£35

In 1826, the problem of the poor seemed insurmountable and Palmer was determined that the Vestry take steps to resolve the problems. The 'poor summit' held in August that year made twenty-one resolutions, written in typically forthright Palmer statements.

*Resolved that in the present state of things it seems to be the general opinion that the lands of the parish of Finmere are incapable of furnishing full and profitable employment for the labouring classes and that there is a prospect of a still further burden in the present state of manufacture of pillow lace...*

*Resolved that the state of the county in general is such to preclude the hope of finding employment in any of the neighbouring parishes.*

*Resolved that the system of parish relief & forced employment of labour... has destroyed in a great measure the national check upon too great an increase of the labouring classes...*

*Resolved that it is incumbent therefore on every well regulated parish to make some provision by which it may be relieved of an otherwise growing burden.*

*(Vestry Minute Book, 25 August 1826)*

The Vestry also noted that the principal check on the growth of the 'labouring classes' was the difficulty in procuring a house and resolved that no new houses be built for workers. To prevent the burden increasing, the Vestry also declared that no newcomer to the village would be given 'legal settlement' and thereby become eligible for poor relief.

*The difficulties of the parish arise solely from an excess of the labouring population. No means will be so likely to afford relief as those which have a tendency to prevent its growth and reduce its numbers. (Vestry Minute Book, 18 September 1826)*

Another fifteen resolutions were passed, including encouraging poor people to enter domestic service.

In 1831, the rates were used to subsidise emigration to the Americas. The Paxton family left their farm on Fulwell Road in 1831 and in 1832, four more families left for New York. Records are incomplete but it appears that subsidised emigration continued until at least 1844, sometimes sponsored by the Duke of Buckingham rather than the parish. Not all emigrants reached their intended destinations. In 1844, Thomas Smith and others from Finmere boarded a ship intending to land at New York, but they were landed at Quebec instead.

*Charities affixed on Church door*

1/	Plot for Sufferers	2	-
	Balance at Bankers	11	6
		13	6
2/	Widow's Fund - Widows' Fund	1	5
	Widow's Fund - Widows' Fund	1	5
	Widow's Fund - Widows' Fund	1	5
3/	Widow's Fund - Widows' Fund	2	6
	Balance at Bank	2	6
		3	6
4/	By Bazaar Sunday School	4	-
	Gifts &c	2	-
	Balance in hand	3	2
		9	2
5/	Check for offering account	-	1
	Deposited at 10/10/10 of credit to	14	-
	the Poor's Plot - each 1/10/10	14	-
	120 Stoves for the poor	30	-
	Plot at 1/10/10	30	-
		44	1

*Signed by*  
*W. J. Palmer, Rector*  
*at Church of St. Andrew*  
*March 1843*

**Note of charity payments 'affixed on Church door' in 1843**

There were a number of other charities. William Baker left £100 in 1770; the interest was used to maintain the tomb of his parents in Finmere churchyard and to provide payments for the poor. Stephen Painter bequeathed £100 in 1834 for the benefit of the Sunday Schools. Corbett Barrett left three cottages for almshouses and £500 in stock in 1928. The cottages proved unsuitable and were reclaimed by the executors leaving £20 stock, the interest from which was to be used to subsidise the rent of poor people.

## The Poor Union

Poor relief was financed by poor rates charged to all land and house owners. In 1862, £43 15s 6d was collected. From 1847, possibly from 1835, Finmere subscribed to the Brackley Poor Union and destitute parishioners were sent to the Brackley Workhouse. This practice continued until at least 1920, when John Tompkins, aged seventy-five years, was the last Finmere person to die there. The Poor Union also provided some local relief for paupers not in the workhouse—the out-poor.

*Brackley Union, Tenders for Provision, Coal &c.*

*Notice is hereby given that the Board of Guardians will receive Tenders for the supply of good standard wheaten bread, at per loaf (to weigh 4 lbs) to the out-poor of several parishes of the Union... at such undermentioned places as the Relieving Officers shall direct [including] Finmere. (Jackson's Oxford Journal, 3 June 1848)*

The problem of the poor began to ease from 1850, when the railway reached Finmere. Families began to move to the rapidly growing towns to seek employment in industry. The parish population fell from nearly four hundred in 1851, to 226 in 1901 and to a low of 187 in 1931. From 1930, Finmere was connected with Bicester and not Brackley on Poor Law matters but responsibility for the poor remained a parish matter.

The Poor Laws, first passed in 1598, were finally swept away by the Labour Government after the Second World War. On 7 June 1948, the National Assistance, National Health Service, and National Insurance Acts created the welfare state and transferred responsibility for the poor from the parish to central government.

## Charities for the Poor

A range of local charities supported the poor. The most important were: the Poor's Plot, Ells' Apprentice Charity, Keat's Crowns, and the Coal and Clothing Clubs. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, many of the charities were in deficit partly due to losses incurred during the term of Rector Robert Holt, who died insolvent in 1802. William Jocelyn Palmer chased the arrears and, to prevent further problems, opened the charities to scrutiny by affixing the annual accounts to the church door.

*Upon accession of Rector William Jocelyn Palmer to the Incumbency of Finmere at the end of the year 1814, there appeared an account in the Rectors' Book... of [the] Ells Charity... which shewed some loss to the Charity from insolvency or otherwise... But no account appeared any where of Keat's Crowns or the profits of the Poor's plot... Moreover, there appeared in the ensuing vestry at Easter 1815... that considerable arrears were due on all the Charities except the Poor's plot...*

*The recovery and collection of arrears having been effected after some time and considerable trouble, they were dispensed in a manner proper to each distinct charity... In the year 1823, it was resolved... that an account in the way of a balance should be exhibited at the Easter Vestry and having been signed by the Minister and Churchwardens that it should be published... by affixing on the Church door year by year. (William Jocelyn Palmer writing in the Finmere Charity Book, 1823)*

## Poor's Plot

**T**he origin of the Poor's Plot is not known but it existed before the fields were inclosed in 1667, when twelve acres (5 hectares) to the west of the village were assigned to trustees. The Plot was furze ground or 'rough land' and was initially auctioned for rent each Easter Monday. The income from the rents was divided amongst the poor.

The Duke of Buckingham was concerned about the plight of the Finmere poor. From 1826 to 1833, he leased the Poor's Plot and let it at low rents to paupers, so that they could grow food to eat and barter. In an attempt to improve the Plot, he subdivided it into small allotments in 1834 but these were too large for spade husbandry and too small for the plough.

*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) tho they paid no rent. (William Jocelyn Palmer writing in the Rectors' Book)*

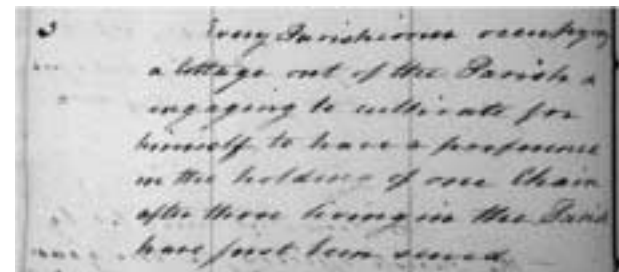
Concerned at this abuse, William Jocelyn Palmer took over the land in 1834 for £12 a year and let the land at a subsidised rent of 3 shillings a chain (20 metres) to poor parishioners. This income was paid, after expenses, to the Coal Club. The overlooker managed the land. In return, the tenants signed an agreement to abide by thirteen rules for management of the Plot.

In 1894, the Parish Meeting reduced the rent by a shilling to two shillings a chain. The office of overlooker of the Poor's Plot was abolished and a voluntary steward appointed annually by the allotment holders. In 1902, the allotments were relaid to make them straighter.

After the First World War, many of the plots lacked tenants and, in 1932, the Parish Meeting suggested that half the Poor's Plot be farmed but allotment holders rejected this. During the 1930s, many of the plots were vacant. The Poor's Plot account had a deficit in 1935 and 1936, when much of the ground was not cultivated and more holders were giving up. This had not improved by 1938 when the sale of the Plot was discussed but no decision was made.

The Vestry maintained the charities until the passing of the Local Government Act in 1984. That year, trustees were elected for the Ells Charity, Poor's Plot and the Keats Crown, the other charities remaining under the management of the Rector and churchwardens.

1834	2000
£12	£830
3s	£10



**One of Palmer's rules for tenants of the Poor's Plot**  
From the Rectors' Book

During the Second World War, all suitable land was pressed into use to grow food. The Oxfordshire War Agricultural Executive Committee received authority from the Ministry of Agriculture to take over the Poor's Plot and cultivate it in the 'National Interest' and the Committee took control on 25 March 1942.

In 1959, Mr Bertram E. Allen of Hill Leys made an offer to purchase the land but the Trustees refused, as they did again in 1963. The plot was eventually purchased and incorporated into Hill Leys. A new plot of 'allotments' was laid out on the Water Stratford Road beyond the village hall.

Ells' Charity

Rector Richard Ells bequeathed an acre of land (0.4 hectare), Rickyard Close, to the parish in 1703 and the land became part of the Rectory garden. The rent was used to sponsor apprenticeships for young people from Finmere. Seymour Ashwell purchased this 'Apprentice Ground' in 1867 to become the site for his new Rectory. The proceeds of the sale were invested in financial stock, which was expected to show a better return than the rents. The charity sponsored apprentices to train as coopers, wheelwrights, tailors, carpenters, and shoemakers and for other trades. In 1935, it was agreed that the funds should be used to 'provide outfits for boys and girls going into service.' In 1957, the accumulated interest from the charity was used to pay for new church heating.

Keat's Crowns

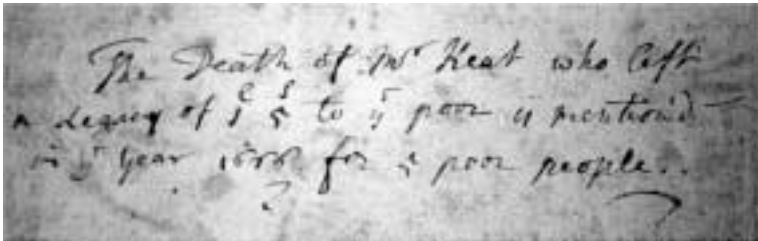
William Keat moved to Finmere from Hagbourne, then in Berkshire. He died in 1666 and is buried at St Michael's church. He was a gentleman and a Catholic and left an annuity to pay a crown (five shillings) to five poor people in Finmere each year. The annuity was from rental of land at Breech Furling at the south edge of the parish, adjacent to Newton Purcell parish and the Bicester road, later Mr White's farm. The Crowns may have been distributed until 1961 as, in 1962, Parish Council minutes record that 'Keat's Crowns had not been distributed this year.'

Persons... for the five crowns from Mr White's farm.

The Widow Crow	5s
John Paxton Senr	5s
Harry Seaton	5s
Widow Clifford	5s
Elizabeth Adams	5s

Vestry Minute Book, 3 January 1826.

1660	2000	1760	2000
5s	£33	5s	£27
1860	2000	1960	2000
5s	£16	5s	£3



Record of the death of William Keat in the Parish Register

## The Clothing and Coal Clubs

Good clothing and a supply of coal throughout the winter were essential to maintaining villagers' health. Many poor families would have found it difficult to save the money needed, a problem partly solved by the subsidised Clothing and Coal Clubs. John Burgon provides the first reference:

*With reference to the 'Finnere Provident Clothing Society,'... the average gross deposits used to range between £40 and £50, on which the Rector allowed the depositors interest of 33 per cent.*

1850	2000
£50	£3,600

*Parishioners who subscribed during the summer at four stated periods, were entitled to a ton or half-a-ton of coal, according to their subscription, for their winter supply, at 3s less per ton than the cost price. The farmers kindly carried the coal for them. Poor and destitute widows received as a benefaction five cwt. twice in the course of the winter.*

The Parish Meeting in 1894 agreed that the surplus rents from the Poor's Plot were to be used for the Coal Club. In 1956, weekly subscriptions were fixed at 2s 6d.

1956	2000
2s 6d	£1 75p

The school log book, which dates from 1874, provides further information on the Clothing Club. Parents who subscribed received subsidised clothes each November, when the school closed for a half day to allow distribution of garments. Many children's clothes were also purchased directly from shops in Buckingham using vouchers or 'tickets'.

*11 November 1895. Bad attendance today. Several children having gone to Buckingham with their parents to purchase [Clothing] Club goods.*

*4 November 1898. Several children have been absent to take clothing tickets to Buckingham... Half holiday given for the Clothing Club.*

William Jocelyn Palmer's son, Roundell Palmer, and later the first Earl of Selborne, donated the interest on £60 of stock in 1872, then £1 17s 6d a year, to the Clothing Club or to be divided among five old men. In 1954, the stock produced £1 11s 4d for the Clothing Club. The Coal and Clothing Clubs continued until at least 1963.

1872	2000	1954	2000
£1 17s	£110	£1 11s	£24

## Finnere Friendly Society

Many villages also founded mutual or friendly societies which paid subscribing members in cases of illness or death. Our knowledge of the parish Friendly Society is limited to two references in local newspapers.

Buckingham Advertiser, 2 June 1900

*The Finnere Friendly Society has issued its annual balance sheet. The total funds were as follows.*

*Jan 1st 1900 Buckingham Savings Bank £136 14s*

*Treasurers hands and box £ 1 11s 3d*

*Total funds £138 5s 3d*

*Average per member £5 10s 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d*

*The Society is based on the permanent principles and numbers 25 members. Mr Ambrose Durrant is secretary and Mary Anne Dewett, treasurer.*

Buckingham Advertiser, 4 August 1900

*Finnere Friendly Society, donations and subscriptions;*

*Rev. Seymour Ashwell £2*

*E. Slater Harrison £2*

*G. Herbert Morrell Esq. M.P. £1*

*Rev. W. Cotton Risley 10s*

*Rev. Herbert Dale 5s*

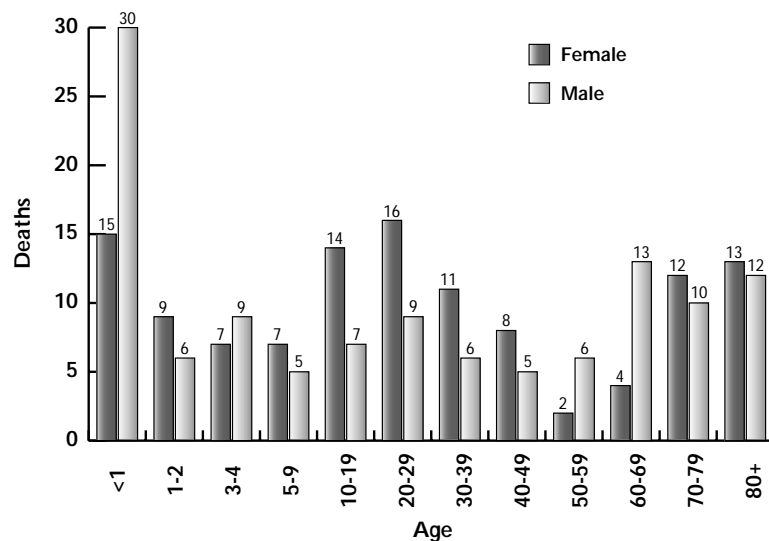
*Rev. L. E. Goddard 5s*

## Health and Medicine

It is often assumed that people lived short lives in the past but this view is too simplistic. Once the hazards of birth and the first year of life have been passed, villagers could expect to live to a respectable old age. More than a quarter of those dying in the second quarter of the nineteenth century had lived to sixty years of age (27%) and more than a tenth to 80 years or older (11%).

The main hazard was birth. One in five children died at birth or before their first birthday (19%). Surprisingly, mortality was higher for boys. One in four died before their first birthday (25%) compared to one in eight girls (13%). Boys also died at an average age of fourteen weeks compared to six weeks for girls. Just three women are recorded as dying in childbirth but this understates the strain that childbearing placed on women's health. The death rate of women of childbearing age is conspicuously higher than that of men. Women who reached the age of eighteen lived to an average of fifty-two years, whereas men lived to an average of fifty-six years.

Our data is for 1826–51, twenty-five years during which Rector William Jocelyn Palmer recorded the cause of death for many villagers.



Age of death: 1826–1851

Of those children that survived the first year, one in five (19%) died of phthisis (tuberculosis), which is recorded as striking from the age of thirteen upwards. Non-specific fever accounted for twelve deaths (6%) followed by scarlet fever, which killed nine young people (5%). Lesser killers were measles, whooping cough, dysentery and typhus fever, each killing just a few people over the quarter century.

An outbreak of measles struck in 1897.

50 St Johns St

Oxford

January 16th 1897

*In consequence of the prevalence of measles in the parish, I recommend that the Finmere Elementary Schools (Day and Sunday) should be closed until Monday February 8th.*

W. Dyson Wood

Medical Officer of Health for Oxfordshire

School records cast some light on the health of the children. Alongside the perennial colds, there were outbreaks of whooping cough in 1874, 1884 and 1901; scarlet fever in 1901; chicken pox in 1909; influenza in 1891 and 1918; and measles in 1888, 1897 and 1911. A severe outbreak of measles struck in 1888. On 22 October, the day after the village feast, just eleven of more than forty children were well enough to attend school. The school was closed for a fortnight and many children did not return until late November. Seven-year-old William Ridgeway Paxton did not recover.

*25 January 1889. I am sorry to record the death of William Paxton which took place today after a fortnight's severe illness. The poor child never really recovered from the measles... he was the most intelligent boy in Standard I. (School log book)*

## The 1918 Influenza Pandemic

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 that marked the end of the First World War was widely celebrated but it was a time of little cheer at Finmere. In March 1918, the worst outbreak of influenza of the twentieth century began in Kansas, U.S.A. It spread to Europe with the American troops and, by August, had mutated into a deadly strain. Across the world, an estimated thirty million people died during the epidemic. When it hit Finmere at the end of October, assistant teacher Miss Osborn was taken ill. The school closed for three days and re-opened on Monday 4 November, though four children were absent sick. The next day, Miss Osborn was taken ill again and on Wednesday only thirteen children were well enough to attend. By this time, Rector Henry Trower had succumbed. There was no improvement by the following Monday, and teacher Emma Pearson sought advice.

*The school bell was rung but only 6 children came so wired to Oxford for advice. Received orders to close the School for a fortnight or longer if necessary. (School log book)*

The Rector died on 16 November and the school did not reopen until Wednesday 20 November. A few weeks later, teacher Emma Pearson was taken ill.

*10 December 1918. Mistress taken seriously ill at noon today with a relapse of influenza; so the school had to close. (School log book)*

She did not return to the school, though we do not know if she died.

## Clergymen and Doctors

Rural clergymen not only took responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their flock, they also cared for their physical health. In the early nineteenth century, Rector William Jocelyn Palmer 'knew something of medicine, and kept a supply of drugs, the use of which he understood, and helped his people much in that way.' While he resided at Mixbury, his sister Mary attended 'to the wants of the sick and poor [of Finmere] with the greatest diligence.' John Burgon wrote:

*The medical officer of the district was instructed not to trouble himself to supply the sick with medicine, but only to prescribe. One of the Rector's daughters, in her piety, charged herself with the task of preparing, and... sending out the drugs. Obviously enough, it was not infrequently explained that not medicine, but a more nutritious diet—sometimes, that a more bracing air—was the thing needed. The want, whatever it was, was supplied.*

In 1822, the Vestry Minute Book mentions payment of a doctor, 'Mr Southern the doctor's bill is paid.' From before 1830 to 1874, Finmere had a resident doctor in Charles Clark who lived at Finmere House. Older villagers still remember that the 'Trumpet Clock' in Water Stratford House, built by his son-in-law John Sikes, would trumpet 'call Doctor Clark' whenever he was needed.

Parishioners with more serious illnesses were sent to the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford. In 1770, Reverend Thomas Long subscribed £3 3s to the Infirmary, a practice continuing in 1825, when the Vestry 'resolved that the Overseer be desired to subscribe for the parish annually to the Oxford Infirmary.' Proceeds from the Harvest Festival service were also donated to the Infirmary. In 1845, William Jocelyn Palmer had cause to write to the Radcliffe to criticise its treatment of a parishioner.

*Anne Kirby, an in-patient nine weeks, sent out on the 28th June, says that her bed was not made every day and on one occasion that it went a whole week without being made... Her case was that of abscess above the right hip joint which discharged largely and wetted the sheets and cloths—owing no doubt to the lack of care and shifting her other hip and back became sore by excoriation.*

Palmer also criticised the local doctor, either the district medical officer or Charles Clark of Finmere House, in the burial register.

27 March 1841. Benjamin Neale. 14 years. Some ill managed complaint of the abdominal viscera. In the last stage an opening appeared at the navel—the contents of the stomach and bowels discharged from thence. The medical man having neglected to examine the abdomen in the earlier stage of the complaint.



Dr Clark's medical kit

1770	2000
£3 3s	£110

Later in the nineteenth century, Seymour Ashwell continued Palmer's active interest and was a 'most active member of the Committee of Management of the Radcliffe, of which he took a deep interest.'

## Crime and Policing

It is tempting to paint a picture of past village life as poor, harsh but essentially virtuous. Despite its strength of community, Finmere has always had to deal with crime. In William Jocelyn Palmer's time, girls were not allowed out after dark. Another security measure was the curfew bell at St Michael's church, which was rung on winter evenings until the First World War. It was a signal that fires were to be extinguished and people should retire from the streets. Payment for ringing the bell was set at eight shillings in 1703 in a legacy bequeathed by Rector Richard Ells. The payment had remained unchanged when the curfew bell was last rung in 1918.

1703	2000
8s	£54

William Saving was appointed special constable. One of his tasks was to ensure that there was no dancing on Sundays. He was paid £1 a year.

1823	2000
£1	£64

From medieval times, the peace in many parishes was kept by the parish constable, initially under the oversight of the manor and later the Vestry. The first mention of a constable in Finmere is in 1823, when a special constable was appointed by William Jocelyn Palmer's vestry to prevent undue jollity on Sundays.

*Resolved that for the better order of the parish and especially for the keeping within decent bounds the disposition to play on the Lord's Day, a thing not at all to be encouraged or approved but by no means to be allowed until the proper business of the day be over and then only so far as allowed by law. It is expedient that a special constable be appointed to assist the petty constable. (Finmere Vestry Book 15 April 1823)*

Oxfordshire created its county police force in June 1857 but then, as now, the village lacked a police presence. Just one policeman was appointed to keep watch over the ten parishes in the north of the county, including Finmere. In 1895, PC West lived adjacent to the Rectory but, as he was a member of the Buckinghamshire constabulary, he could not help Seymour Ashwell with his burglary (below).

In the 1950s and 1960s a police house was maintained on Banbury Road but community policing was short-lived. Attention turned to self-help and, following a public meeting on 23 September 1992, villagers decided to initiate a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Within a month, every house had been visited, information circulated and six warning signs erected by the police in the village.

There were many minor crimes. In 1849, James Harris was convicted for stealing Henry Wilson's velveteen jacket and, because he had a previous felony conviction, he was transported to Australia for seven years. The same

year, four joints of mutton were stolen from the shop of butcher Corbett Coleman. Minor assaults were also common. At Bicester Petty Session in November 1856, Silence Barnes of Finmere was fined £1s 6d and costs of 8s 6d for beating Joseph Windsor, son of Daniel Windsor of Finmere. Below, we profile some of the more significant crimes that attracted the attention of villagers and the press.

## Armed Robbery at Warren Farm

In the early hours of the 20th of November 1848, masked burglars broke into Finmere Warren Farm. Farmer George French was woken by three men bursting into his bedroom armed with a gun and batons. He was robbed of more than forty pounds. This was one of several robberies in the area and, after the government and the Buckingham Detective Association offered a reward of £150, police apprehended the burglars.

The trial of Joseph Buswell and John Marriott attracted widespread interest, and the respected newspaper Jackson's Oxford Journal swept national news from its front page to lead with the story. At Oxford Assizes, the judge sternly remarked on the terrible nature of the crime. A gang of ruffians had invaded a home in the dead of night and were bent on plundering by violent means, and he did not doubt that Buswell and Marriott were part of that gang. If the law did not make an example of such desperate characters, there would be no security for life or property. Under these circumstances, the judge felt it his duty to sentence Buswell and Marriott to be transported to Australia for the term of 20 years.

## Daring Burglary at the Rectory

In 1895, 'a most daring burglary was committed at Finmere Rectory.' On Saturday evening of 18 October, a thief climbed up railings placed to secure the ground floor windows to the porch. Although the dogs barked and Seymour Ashwell investigated, the thief went undetected. It appears that nothing was stolen on this occasion. On Sunday evening, during dinner at 7.00 pm, the dogs barked again. The dog in the house scampered up the stairs and the Rector and his son followed. The dog led them to Mrs Ashwell's bedroom but nothing amiss was noted. It was only when she retired to bed that Mrs Ashwell discovered that much of her jewellery was missing. Although the police, led by Superintendent Brown of Bicester, searched the area the next day, no clues were discovered.

## The Railway Sting

In 1953, the Railway Police launched a sting operation at Finmere Railway Station. On three occasions, a railway porter collected money from passengers without tickets and failed to give the fares to the railway company. Unfortunately, the passengers were plain-clothes police officers. At

1856	2000
10s	£28

1848	2000
£150	£9,450

1895	2000
£100	£7,050

The Buckingham Advertiser reported the following articles as missing, 'which at the lowest computation are valued at £100.'

Gold watch, Old Geneva  
Silver gilt hunter watch, with S.A. on the outside  
Amber necklace  
Two imitation diamond pins  
Silver amethyst brooch  
Long gold chain  
Gold neck chain and locket  
Gold bangle bracelet, with gold twist  
Pale coral brooch, oval, with pendants (gold tassel)  
Broad silver bracelet  
Diamond (cluster) ring, in purple velvet case  
Carbuncle ring  
Pearl ring  
Gold earrings with turquoise  
Coral earrings  
Oblong enamel brooch  
Gold locket with onyx  
Amethyst brooch and earrings  
Silver locket, containing miniature  
Plain gold bracelet  
One sealskin purse, containing £4  
Ditto leather, £3  
Black leather purse  
Light brown ditto  
Dark coloured ditto  
Ruby and moonstone ring  
Gold chain with gold locket, set with corals, in white velvet leather.

the trial before Bicester magistrates, the porter claimed that he had put the money, a total of 16s 10d, into his pocket and had forgotten about it. The chairman of the magistrates, Sir Algeron Peyton, did not believe this account. He sternly remarked that it was a serious case and that he had considered sending the porter to prison. Instead, he imposed a fine and costs of £12 13s.

1953	2000
£12 13s	£190

### Assault on Boys

One of the most serious crimes occurred a year earlier. In 1952, Percival Tibbett appeared before Sir Norman Kendal, Chairman of Buckinghamshire Quarter Sessions at Aylesbury. Tibbett lived at Gravel Farm and one Finmere villager remembers the farmer giving boys 'half-a-crown to sit on his lap.' At the Court, Tibbett was found guilty of three sexual assaults on boys and was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment—a surprisingly light sentence by modern standards.

1952	2000
2s 6d	£4

### Neville Heath

One of the darker characters to visit Finmere was a notorious murderer. Neville Heath, a Mitchell pilot attached to the South African Air Force at RAF Finmere, is reputed to have been a regular customer at the Red Lion and the Shelswell Inn. Heath sexually assaulted, mutilated and murdered Margery Gardner in London and Doreen Marshall in Bournemouth. He was hanged at Pentonville Prison on 16 October 1946. It is highly unlikely that he murdered anyone in this district.

## 🌊 Water and Waste 🌊

Good health was partly dependent on good hygiene, especially the quality of the water supply. Until the mid-nineteenth century, villagers drew water supplies from surface springs and wells, and excrement was dumped in convenient but unhealthy cesspools or on the fields. The first attempt to improve hygiene was made by Dr James Clark, who lived in Finnere House.

*[James] was instrumental in effecting some much needed improvements in the sanitary condition of the village, by the removal of cesspools and other nuisances injurious to health from the doors of the cottages, and by the covering over of the brook where it ran through the village. He was also a very clever mechanic, as was evident from... the windmill for pumping water, and other ingenious contrivances, which are on the premises of his late residence. (History of Finnere, Blomfield)*

### A Victorian Dowser

Fifteen years later, Seymour Ashwell was concerned that villagers should drink clean water. In 1887, he employed a West Country dowser to prospect for locations for wells.

*October 19th. John Mullins came from Colerne in Wiltshire and marked by means of a 'divining rod' different places on the Glebe where Wells of Water could be dug. The rod in question being a small hazel twig of this shape /\... A well at the East end of this Parish was dug at one of the places indicated and arched over with a date stone on top. At the expense of the Rector. (Rectors' Book)*

The well at the east end of the parish was on Mere Road (marked [A] on the map overleaf). Builders destroyed it in the late 1970s but the date stone has been preserved.

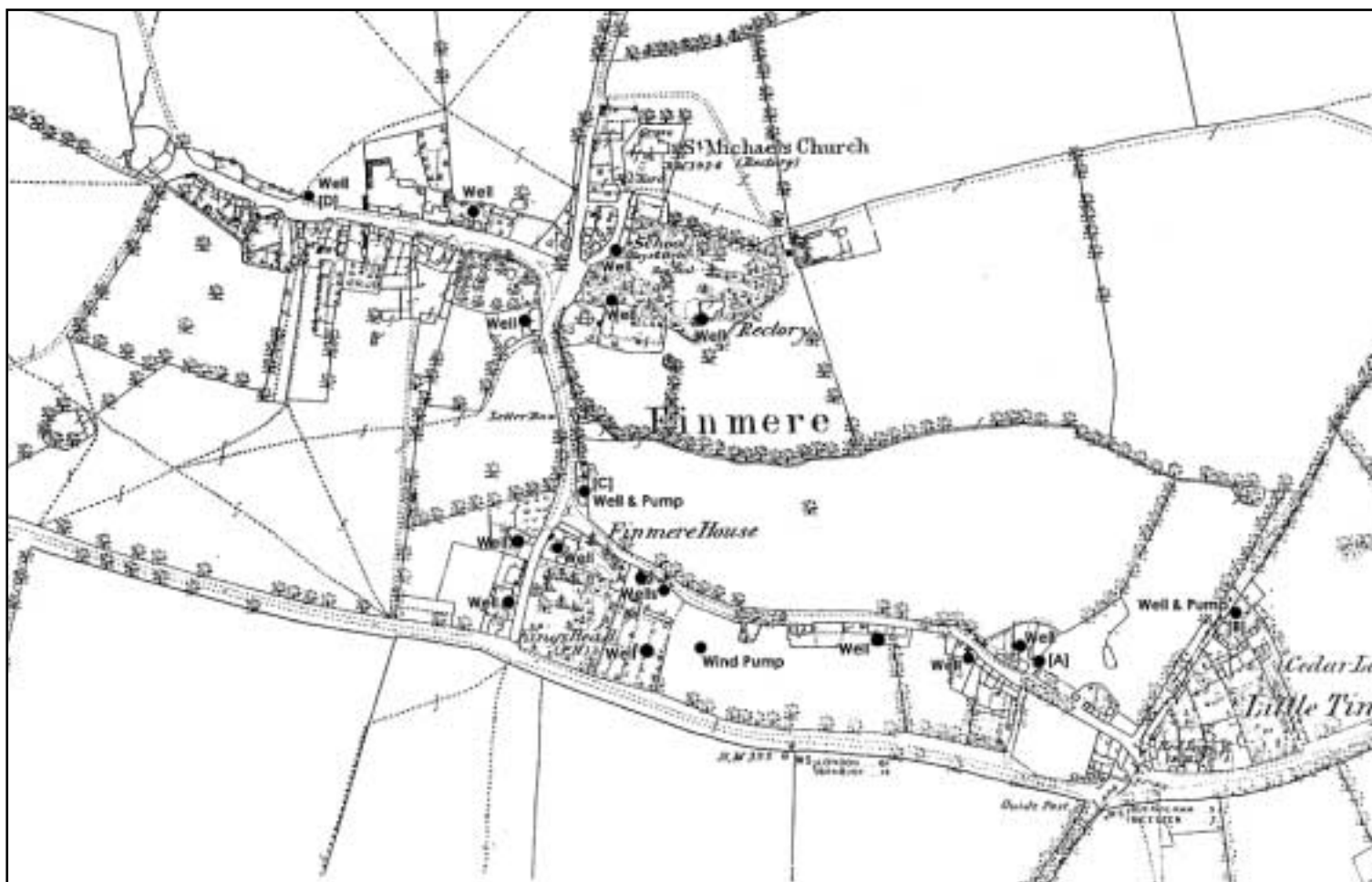
In the 1930s, the Sanitary Inspector raised concerns that the wells were being polluted with dust from traffic. The Parish Meeting in 1934 agreed that the well on Fulwell Road should be cleaned out, covered and a pump erected. The estimates for the work, £5-£6, were too expensive and a year later it was proposed that the Sanitary Inspector cover the well at a cost not exceeding £2 5s—a one penny rate. The 1935 Meeting also proposed to cover the Church Well by the school but, the next year, the Meeting heard that the Sanitary Inspector did not favour this, as the well was off the main road and not exposed to so much dust. The Fulwell Road well, however, had by then been covered by doors.

The brook ran along Fulwell Road to Valley Road and the wind pump was on the site of the present school.



**The well on Mere Road shortly before  
it was destroyed**

1935	2000
£5	£190



## Finmere's Wells and Pumps

The map is based on the 1881 Ordnance Survey map

## The Village Pumps

**T**wo pumps survive in the village, both installed in Seymour Ashwell's time. One is on Mere Lane in Little Tingewick [B]. The second is in Valley Road and has been carefully restored by Tim Killeen [C]. Both pumps were manufactured by E&H Roberts at the Britannia Ironworks in Deanshanger. Edwin and Henry Roberts ran a family business founded by Edwin's grandfather, Richard, in 1821. Despite being gutted by fire in 1912, the business survived but went bankrupt in 1927.

The pump on Valley Road is the older of the two. The pump on Mere Lane was manufactured after the Roberts had established a limited company in 1890. The Roberts also made drain covers; an example can still be seen inside the Church gate.



**Flood in Valley Road, 1998**

Fulwell and Valley Roads flooded on 9 April 1998, the wettest April since 1818.

Frank Hitchcock remembers an old ram pump on Mere Lane. 'It thumped away all day long,' and delivered water to Finmere Grounds.

On 20 December 1899, a Parish Meeting was held to consider an application from London County Council to supply water to Finmere from Wales. There was dissention at the meeting as no plans or particulars of the proposals were available.

## Sewage and Refuse

In the nineteenth century, human and animal waste was dumped on the fields and into ditches. This created health dangers. Dr James Clark of Finmere House took action in 1872, when he removed cesspools and covered over the brook. It was a century later, in 1970, that installation of a mains sewage scheme for the village began. Sewage was pumped to Tingewick, where the capacity of the station was 22,000 gallons (100,000 litres) a day, enough for about 550 people.

Refuse was initially dumped in yards and corners of fields. One dump was behind Lark Rise on Mere Road, where fragments of old bottles are still unearthed. With increased concerns about hygiene, and the more frequent use of metal cans and other slow degrading materials, it was deemed necessary to provide official dumping areas. In 1932, the Sanitary Inspector instructed the Parish Meeting to provide a location for dumping refuse and this was in place by 1933. Villagers remember refuse being taken by horse and cart to be dumped in a place known as the 'Swallow Hole' down Mere Lane beyond the pumping station. Another tip was to the west of the village behind the Poor's Plot.

Because of the scarcities of the Second World War, it was essential that rubbish was recycled rather than dumped. On 8 November 1942, Miss Ashwell and Miss Logan of Finmere attended a meeting of parish salvage organisers at Kirtlington Park. The organisers agreed that a house-to-house collection of rubbish, including paper, bones, rubber, string and rags, should be made at least monthly and Ploughley Council would remove the collection for recycling.

From 1946, refuse was collected fortnightly by the RDC and later it was collected weekly. In the year 2000, door-to-door collection of recyclable refuse has been arranged in many nearby districts. Villagers of Finmere and Little Tingewick, however, must take their papers, bottles and cans to recycling banks behind the village hall or at Buckingham.

## ☞ My Poor People, They Be Well Instructed ☞

The rectors and parishioners of Finmere have long supported school education and there has been a school in Finmere since the eighteenth century. In 1739, Rector Thomas Long told his Bishop that Finmere did not have a 'Free School' but there was 'a small school in my parish where a few poor children are taught to read at my Expense.'

William Malins is the first recorded teacher. He was master of a school at Finmere from 1779 or earlier and taught seventy children. This seems a large number for a parish of about three hundred people, but Malins had ten children himself. The school was financed by subscription, with major contributions from the Rector and the landowners, the Grenville-Temples of Stowe. Finmere lacked a school building at that time. In 1808, the parish clerk, John Fox, was teaching twenty-four children reading and the catechism in a house provided rent free by the Marquess of Buckingham. The school had twenty-five pupils, the Rector paying for eight pupils in 1815 and thirty in 1817.

The Rector William Jocelyn Palmer considered these arrangements unsatisfactory. In 1824, he persuaded Richard Temple—the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos and landowner of Finmere—that a new school should be built.

The new school was built to be 'for the use and benefit of the poor children of the parish, under the direction of the Church and its ministers.' At first, the churchwardens agreed to erect a lean-to against the church but there was a change of mind and the school was built as a freestanding building in the grounds of the Rectory.

### The School

The school, now a house, immediately catches the eye of people walking towards the church. It housed up to twenty-five pupils in the 'school room' and twenty-three infants in the 'class room.' To ensure that the children were constantly aware of Palmer's strict approach to schooling, he had four plaques carved with lines from the Bible. The present owners have restored the three external plaques; a fourth plaque is preserved inside the building.

The School Mistress initially lived opposite the school in a cottage rented from the Duke of Buckingham. From the early 1840s, Rector William Jocelyn Palmer leased the house now known as Glebe House, initially for a curate. It was later known as School House and accommodated Mrs Catley between 1932 and 1935 and probably other teachers.

The Duke of Buckingham was passionate about schools, as revealed by this letter written in 1824 to an unknown recipient.

*I send you a letter on the eternal subject of Schools. If half the Schools to which I subscribe are effectively administered, my poor people they be well instructed. I do not grudge the money...*

We have no evidence that the Duke complained about Finmere school and it would be surprising if he had done so as it was strictly administered by the Rectors of the parish.

#### West wall

'Whoso loveth  
instruction loveth  
knowledge: but he  
that hateth reproof  
is brutish'

PROV:XII:1

#### West wall

'He that spareth  
his rod hateth his  
son: but he that  
loveth him  
chasteneth him  
betimes'

PROV:XIII:24

#### Over entrance

MDCCCXXIV  
'For as much as ye  
have done it unto  
one of the least of  
these my brethren,  
ye have done it  
unto me'

MATT:XXV:40

#### In school room

'Apply thine heart  
unto instruction;  
and thine ears to  
the words of  
knowledge'

PROV:XXIII:12

### The school plaques



**Church House (left) and School House early in the twentieth century**



**Children leaving the school in the 1880s**  
The watercolour was painted by Louisa Ashwell.

Quotes in this chapter are from the School Log Book unless stated otherwise.

## Day, Night and Sunday Schools

The new schoolroom was used for weekday lessons and as a Sunday school. The children were taught in two classes, infants and children over six. In the mid-nineteenth century, the school experimented with evening classes. Rector Frederick Walker reported in 1854 that:

*Evening schools for boys were tried in the spring of the year. The success was not very great, writing was the great attraction. A Sunday evening class for girls is now being tried with better success.*

Most children attended Sunday school until their Confirmation.

*Resolved at vestry that Benjamin Elkeston be appointed to supervise the conduct of the children upon the Sabbath day and that he is to receive the sum of ten shillings and sixpence for his trouble. (Churchwardens Account Book 1806)*

Elkeston was employed until 1817. Stephen Painter bequeathed £100 to endow the Sunday school in 1834; this produced interest of £4 10s from 1840. In 1854, the Sunday school had a roll of sixty boys and girls.

A few children were taught privately. In 1851, sixty-year-old spinster Ann Molder had three girls resident as visitors. They were all from the Knibbs family and aged four, seven and nine, and were probably attending a small 'dame's school' run by Ann.

## The Thirty-Nine Teachers

The school employed thirty-nine head teachers in the seventy-four years from 1874, when detailed records begin, to its closure in 1948. The longest-serving teachers were Annie Hubbard, who taught for ten years and three months from 1886 and Miss King, who taught for nine years and ten months from 1897. Just seven of the thirty-nine teachers taught for two years or more, and government Inspectors' reports reveal that the rapid turnover of teachers was often detrimental to the children's progress.

The teachers were supported by an assistant, who taught the infants class. The longest-serving assistant was Mrs Sarah Davis, who taught for more than twenty-six years. She was unqualified as a teacher and was permitted to teach subject to the Inspector's annual approval. He was invariably pleased with her work.

*8 July 1898. The long association of the Infants teacher with the school and her patient persevering work in it must be reckoned amongst its good influences.*

In November 1901, Miss King recorded in the log book that Sarah, then eighty-five years of age, was ill. She did not return to the school.

*6 January 1902. Mrs S. Davis has resigned her duties owing to old age.*

Sarah died at Tingewick aged ninety-three years and was buried at Finmere on 29 August 1910.

## Ashwell's School

In 1874, the newly appointed teacher, Miss Barbara Stephen commenced a log book to record the daily events in the school. Rector Seymour Ashwell was formally responsible for finance, attendance, discipline and religious education. He viewed his responsibilities seriously and every aspect in the school came under his careful scrutiny.

### Funding and Performance Pay

From the accounts for 1874, we learn that the school spent £43 1s that year, mostly on salaries for the teacher, Miss Stephen, and her successor, Ann Berry. Other costs included £4 6s 9p for two-and-a-half tons of coal, 3s for a new broom and 2s for a bottle of ink. This expenditure was covered by donations of £46 8s from villagers and the Rector, who paid £11 15s, nearly a quarter of the total. Parents also paid 'school pence,' a few pence a week for each child.

Not all parents could afford to pay for their children's education, or were willing to do so. Initially, these children were excluded for a short period. From about 1884, the Relieving Officer acting for the Brackley Board of Guardians, which managed poor relief for the area, paid the fees for poorer families. A typical entry in the log book reads:

*17 January 1887. The Brackley Relieving Officer called this morning and paid the School Fees for the Paxtons, W. Knibbs and Edwin Windsor.*

In 1875, the school was awarded a government grant of £11 15s for the second half of the year. A full year's grant of £33 11s was paid in 1876 and thereafter the government paid about half the school's budget. Half of this grant was added as performance pay to the teacher's basic annual salary of £10. The annual grant depended upon the number of children, their regular attendance and their performance at the annual inspections by Her Majesty's Inspector. In 1877, the Inspector described the children's mathematical work as 'very defective' and fined the school.

*My Lords are compelled to deduct one tenth of the Grant for faults of instruction in arithmetic.*



The infants' classroom in 1906

1874	2000
£43	£2,600
£4 6s 9d	£260
2s	£6
1d	24p



The school exterior viewed from near the Cross Tree in 1906

1891	2000
1d	27p

The government grant was cut from £85 15s 10d to £77 6s 7½ d the following year. School pence were not popular with parents or the teachers who had to collect them. In 1891, they were finally abolished and Annie Hubbard celebrated the occasion in the log book.

16 October 1891. Commencement of 'Free Education' this week.

## The Rector in School

Seymour Ashwell worked hard to maintain standards. Ashwell took classes when the teacher was ill and examined the children to prepare them for the Inspector's annual visit.

1 January 1876. The Reverend Seymour Ashwell examined classes 3 and 4 in the Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. The Reading and Writing was very fair but the Arithmetic was not so satisfactory.

8 February 1876. The Reverend Seymour Ashwell examined Classes 1 and 2 the results of which showed Arithmetic to be the weak point.

6 March 1876. Arithmetic much better.

6 April 1876. Arithmetic better throughout.

His wife and daughters helped with needlework and singing.

3 February 1875. Mrs and Misses Ashwell visited this afternoon and heard the children sing, examined needlework and were pleased with both. Oranges were distributed among the children by Misses Ashwell.

Some teachers may have resented Seymour Ashwell's close involvement in school affairs but Miss King became dependent on his support. His death in 1902 had a serious impact on the school.

*The death of the late Rector and manager, who took a personal interest in the school, has been severely felt. Arithmetic is a very weak subject. Writing is only fair & Reading is barely good. The Head Teacher is most hardworking, earnest and capable & will no doubt effect improvement in the coming year. (Report of His Majesty's Inspector, 11 July 1902)*

After Ashwell, Finmere Rectors took a more limited role in the school. In 1902, the school was placed under the jurisdiction of Oxfordshire County Council, and thereafter secular school managers were appointed, the first being Corbett Barrett, then living at Warren Farm.

## The Battle for Attendance

Whether or not children enjoyed attending school, there were many distractions. Helping their parents on the land, particularly during the harvest, always took precedence, as did the variety of feasts and clubs throughout the year. Absenteeism troubled the school managers but they could not compel children to attend. This changed in 1876, when the Education Act laid down that children aged five to ten must attend school. Older children were obliged to attend for a minimum of 250 half-days a year until they were twelve and for 150 half-days until they were fourteen. They could leave earlier if they passed the 'labour certificate'—an examination in the three Rs. This was a desired option for many Finmere children but many were not successful.

*9 July 1888. Joseph Paxton and Edwin Windsor [both aged 10] went to an Examination held at Westbury on June 28th to try and pass for a Labour Certificate. Received notice today of their failure in Arithmetic.*

*20 June 1889. Four boys went to Shalstone to be examined for a labour certificate and were refused.*

A major cause of absence was illness, which was aggravated by a low resistance to infection resulting from poor housing conditions and a meagre diet. Perennial colds were compounded by outbreaks of chicken pox, influenza, measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough.

The other major distraction from schoolwork was the need to work in the fields. Before the harvest holidays, haymaking kept many of the children from school and, if the harvest was late, attendance after the holidays was often poor. Annie Hubbard recorded the difficulties.

*24 August 1888. School closes.*

*2 October 1888. Reopened the school after the Harvest Vacation.*

*5 October 1888. A great many children absent from school this week, the harvest not being quite over. School was closed yesterday and again today (afternoon) on that account... School fees were returned to the children on account of the school being open only half the week.*

The government was unhappy with the sporadic attendance in rural schools. Attendance Committees were introduced in 1876 and these appointed part-time Attendance Officers to enforce attendance. The first mentioned in Finmere is Mr Heath who visited on 16 January 1880. Thereafter, there were visits whenever attendance was bad.

School treats organised by landowners became commonplace in Oxfordshire during the nineteenth century. They were a way of rewarding the children and their teachers, of alleviating some of the tedium of day-to-day instruction, and of improving nutrition. The landowners of Finmere lived at Stowe and did not host school treats but many were organised by Rector Seymour Ashwell and his wife.

*23 May 1878. Mrs Ashwell visited the school this morning and kindly proposed giving the children a tea on the lawn the following day.*

*24 May 1878. The children assembled at 1 o'clock and were dismissed shortly after 3. Reassembling in the School room at 3.50, the children proceeded thence to the Glebe barn, where tea had been nicely arranged, the heavy thunder showers which fell during the afternoon rendering the grass too damp to hold it out of doors. After tea, the weather clearing up, the children were taken to a field adjoining the Rectory Grounds; where amusement had been provided for them, such as cricket balls &c. with which together with different games suggested by some young ladies present who joined in them—they seemed greatly to enjoy themselves.*

### Minimum school leaving age, years

1893	11
1899	12
1918	14
1947	15
1971	16

Another popular distraction was the fox hunt. In 1889, Annie Hubbard found that the hounds were a greater attraction than the first day of school after the Christmas break.

*1 January 1889. A great many children stayed away from school today expecting to see the hounds.*

She recognised that the school could not compete with this attraction and holidays were given for subsequent hunts.

*22 January 1889. Children assembled at a few minutes before 9 and dismissed at 10.55 to allow them to go and see the hounds which met in the village at 11.*

Nine years later, the hunt came closer to the school.

*28 November 1898. Fox was killed outside the classroom consequently [afternoon] work was not begun until 1.50 pm.*

*12 October 1891. Reopened school after Harvest Holidays. 39 children present, several absent.*

*13 October 1891. School Attendance Officer called this afternoon and strictly ordered the children to attend school regularly.*

Attendance improved but the Attendance Officer remained a regular feature of school life until the end of the nineteenth century.

## The Struggle for Standards

The government introduced school inspection in 1839 but it was twenty years before there were enough inspectors to regularly visit schools. Many were not popular. From 1864, the inspector for Finmere was a clergyman, Reverend H. A. Pickard, aged thirty-two. He was the son of an army officer and educated at Rugby school and Christ Church, Oxford. In common with many inspectors, he had little knowledge of life in poor, rural villages. Pickard inspected Finmere school just six months after teacher Barbara Stephen arrived. On 30 July 1874, she dutifully copied his Inspector's damning report into the school log book.

*The infants can read and spell fairly, but their writing and arithmetic is very moderate. Among the elder children reading and writing is tolerable; spelling is bad, and arithmetic very bad. I am directed to inform you that their Lordships have considerable hesitation in allowing Miss Stephen to sit for [her teacher's] examination after Her Majesty's Inspector's report.*

Teachers received little formal training and were awarded their teaching certificate after a year or so in the classroom—if the Inspector was satisfied. He was not satisfied with Miss Stephen and she resigned or was dismissed after his condemnation of her teaching.

Until 1897, the government grant depended upon the results of the Inspection. The examinations for children over six were arranged in Standards and children were expected to move up a Standard each year. Payment by results ensured that all children received attention in class, not just the brightest. While reading and writing were often good, poor arithmetic was always a problem at Finmere. From 1874 to 1890, the pass rates of the 7–13 year old children were:

reading: 93%  
writing: 82%  
arithmetic: 60%.

The children were taught religious knowledge, poetry and songs alongside reading, writing, grammar and arithmetic. Needlework was compulsory for

the girls. Geography is first mentioned in the log book in 1880 and history in 1890. Drawing became compulsory for boys in 1890, and from 1892 to 1897 the school received a supplementary grant from the Department of Science and Art to teach it. This was at first 16s 6d and rose to £1 5s; as usual, payment depended on the children's success in an annual examination.

1897	2000
£1 5s	£87

From 1886, the Infants were taught 'Object Lessons,' each of which focused on a single subject. The intention was, in an age before television and films, to stimulate the children's powers of observation and expression with basic science. Sometimes, the objects were brought into the classroom but more often pictures were used.

*13 May 1887. The following is a list of 'Object Lessons' which have been given during the year. Tea. Sugar. Coal. Dog. Sheep. Cow. Elephant.*



**The main classroom in 1906**

These pictures show how pictures and maps were used to support lessons.

### Poetry and songs taught in 1885

From the school log book.

1885. Poetry for Standard Class  
Standard IV. Scott's 'Lady of the Lake.' Canto fifth.  
Stanzas XXI XXII XXIII  
Standard III. 'The May Queen.' First and Second  
part. By Tennyson.  
Standard II. 'The Beggar-man.' (Aitken)  
Standard I. 'The child and the bird.'

Songs for 1885

[Older children]

'O happy English children'  
'I'm a merry little fellow'  
'O Christmas Bells'  
'Won't you buy my pretty flowers'  
'Cherry Ripe. Cherry Ripe.'  
'Come follow - follow &c. (Round)'  
'The Skater's song'  
'Stitch, Stitch, Stitch'

Infants

'Mary's little lamb'  
'I will not hurt my little dog'  
'Let us go to and fro'  
'Little daisy frail and fair'

In 1891, Inspector Pickard was not satisfied with the number of Object Lessons taught. He wrote a list of fifteen lessons to be taught in the next year in blue pencil in the log book.

1891. Object Lessons for Infants

Horse	Camel	Elephant	Ostrich	
Coal	Wheat	Tiger	Leopard	
Bees	Cow	Rice	Sugar	Sheep
A Bed	Cocoa	Nut		

No allowance seems to have been made for children living in the countryside and many will have had a better understanding of farm animals and crops than the Government Inspectors.

After the Armistice, King George V conferred a treat.

2 July 1919. Mr Ladley has just brought in the letter stating that by the King's wish, the schools are to have summer holidays extended. It has been decided to give a week extra [at the end of the Harvest Holidays.]

## Through Two Wars to Closure

The school became the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council in 1902 at a time when the population of Finmere was shrinking. There were few new families with children and the government Inspector saw advantages for the school.

*8 February 1912. The rapid decline of the school population in the village is a disquieting feature, but it has enabled greater individual attention to be paid to the children who remain with gratifying results.*

The 1914–18 War initially had little effect on Finmere school days, although the fathers of many pupils would have enlisted to fight in France. On 4 August 1914, the Germans invaded Belgium where they organised massacres of the civilian population. Many civilians fled and refugees began to arrive in Britain. Three families were housed in Hethe and others in Finmere. A few months later, the first of two Belgians arrived at Finmere school.

*11 January 1915. School re-opened [after Christmas]. Admitted a little Belgian refugee. Elodie Struff 8 years old.*

Elodie may have arrived with her family or have been an orphan, and would have been sheltered by the Rector or one of the wealthier families in the village. She had left the school by 15 March. In the autumn, a second refugee was taken in from October 1915 to October 1916. Later in the war, supply and economic difficulties led to problems in obtaining stationery.

*26 January 1916. Notice has been received about economy in school material—oral lessons to take the place of some of the written work.*

Bomb raids in London also had their effect. The first Zeppelin bomb raid on London took place on 31st May 1915 and raids continued until June 1917. The Howell family moved to Finmere to escape the destruction.

*22 October 1917. Admitted Kathleen and George Howell who have come to live in Finmere, the family having moved from London owing to the air raids.*

The Side family also moved here, though we do not know when they arrived or from where.

*25 November 1918. Lillian and Dora Side have left the village owing to their Father having been discharged from duty.*

During the Second World War, evacuees doubled the school roll. An 'evacuee teacher' supported the teacher, Bethel Hardy. This was initially Miss Ventura, succeeded by Miss Cudmore in 1940. Food was scarce and the children were often ill; measles and impetigo were frequent afflictions. Blackouts were put in place over the windows in October 1942 and Miss Logan visited to inspect the children's gas masks from March 1943. Nevertheless, school business continued much as usual, including the inspections.

## The Closure of the School

In February 1926, pupils over eleven years old were transferred to Fringford school. After the temporary increase during the Second World War, the school roll had fallen to around twenty children. It proved very difficult to recruit and retain teachers and there were seven teachers during the three years following the war, none lasting longer than six months.

On 23 July 1948, the school closed for the summer holidays. Due to the problems in recruiting teachers, it did not reopen in the autumn. The juniors were transferred to Fringford and the infants to Mixbury. In 1950, Oxfordshire Education Committee declared that the school would be permanently closed.

*16 July 1941. Ron Wakelin, infants, commended by the Diocesan Inspector.*

Although the Rectors played a smaller role in school affairs than in Victorian times, they remained involved in religious education.

*17 June 1934. It is with great regret that I have to record the death of Rev. Dangerfield, Rector of this Parish. He will be sadly missed by the children and also in connection with the Scripture Teaching of the school. He came for 15 years to help with scripture.*

George Dangerfield is buried in Mixbury churchyard, where Fred Tew dug his grave.



**Top row** (left to right)

Mrs Catley Garth Catley Doug Bull Ted Horwood Jim Bartholemew Charlie Beale Reg Judd

**Second row** (left to right)

David Hancock Betty Radford Joy Cumnady Janet Beale Esther Horwood John Bartholemew

**First Row** (left to right)

Ray Davis Jim Smith Barbara Hitchcock Roy Barnes Kathleen Newman T Jordan

**Bottom row** (left to right)

Unknown Jeff Hancock John Horwood Jim Judd

**The children of Finmere School in 1936**



**Top row** (left to right)

Donald White Jim Smith John Horwood Ray Davis Fred Barnes

**Middle row** (left to right)

Frank Hitchcock Barabara Hitchcock Joan Haynes June Horwood Jean Hitchcock Lawrence Radford Ron Moncreffe

**Bottom row** (left to right)

Terry Aris Dennis Horwood Majorie White Ron Wakelin Neville Aris

**The children of Finmere School in 1938**

## ☞ A Unique and Boldly Revolutionary School ☞

Villagers were unhappy with the loss of the school but there were no resources available to build new village schools. After the Second World War, the priority for the government was to rebuild and replace war-damaged schools in the cities. During the 1950s, the demand was for new schools to service mushrooming housing estates, burgeoning suburbs and the New Towns. These priorities led to rural schools being neglected.

### A New School

#### A School for Finmere House Paddock

A new school for Finmere had been in discussion since at least 1955, when the Parish Council sent a letter of protest about the proposed site to Oxfordshire Education Authority. The Council objected to building the school in Finmere House Paddock, because children played there and it was used for village events and fetes. These concerns were rejected and on 14 April 1958, Caroline Symes-Thompson of Finmere House sold the 1.25 acres of land in the Paddock for £800 2s 10p.

1958	2000
£800	£10,400

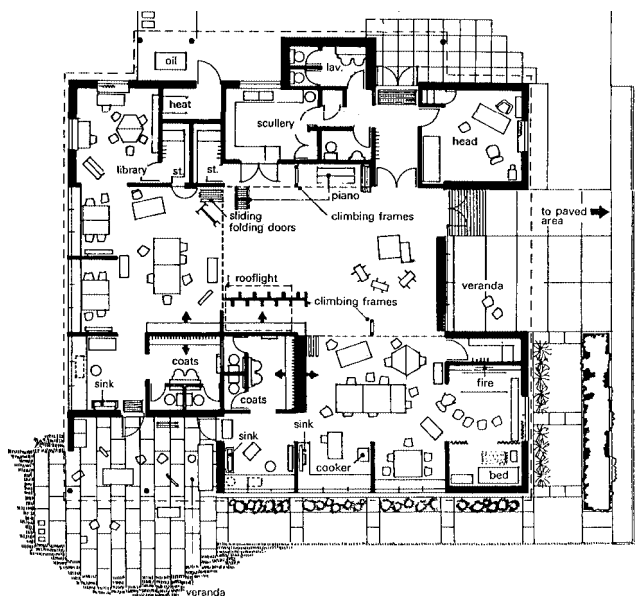
Funding for school building was held by central government at the Ministry of Education and, in 1958, the Ministry's Architects and Building Branch was asked to tackle the problem of rural schools. One solution considered was to promote refurbishment of schools but this option was rejected in favour of building new schools more suited to contemporary teaching needs. The idea was that once modern design principles were established, they could be extended to other schools or, where possible, to converting existing buildings.

There were no spare funds available in the Ministry's annual building programme for major schools. Instead, funds were found for just two new schools from its Minor Works programme, in which the cost of projects were limited to £10,000. One school was built at Great Ponton, Lincolnshire, and the other here in Finmere.

1959	2000
£10,000	£130,000

#### Pioneering Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire was an ideal location to develop a groundbreaking school. Village school teachers had a high morale and were supported by a pioneering programme of visiting teachers and courses. Their enthusiasm inspired the architects to design a school that met teachers' and pupils' needs. This included rethinking the conventional classroom.



**The School in 1959**

### Hello Finmere

Eleven years after the school opened, BBC broadcaster John Simpson interviewed headmistress Olive Bates.

*[The school] doesn't really look [old], does it? Its kept very well and people think that it's still the latest thing ... It has many corners and bays where the children go off to work on various projects. We never shut ourselves off ... We all work together as one family, although it's getting a rather large family now. We should have a family of 50 children but it's got to 68, it's a bit of a job to find enough corners to put them in nowadays. (Hello Finmere, 13 June 1971)*

During the 1950s, classrooms in schools had become crowded with the furniture and equipment needed to teach the growing curriculum. The problem was at its worst in rural schools, like Finmere, where fifty pupils aged 5–11 had been taught in just two classrooms in the old school. Space was needed for small groups of pupils, as well as for the collective work of classes of twenty-five pupils.

The school design was the outcome of a close collaboration between the architects and Oxfordshire Education Authority. It was designed and furnished by architects in the Architects and Building Branch of the Ministry of Education—David and Mary Medd, with Pat Tindale.

### A Novel Design

The architects designed a school that reflected the small, closely knit community of its village setting. The new school was conceived as two independent classroom spaces with a third shared area for activities, including music, meals and physical education (PE). Traditional classrooms had been extended to become a linked series of learning areas. To aid PE, the columns in the shared area were designed as ladders for children to climb. The spaces could be separated or merged using sliding partitions. Other smaller areas included a library, workshop, study, kitchen, restroom and veranda. Children worked in small groups, regrouping according to age, ability and interests. The flexible internal partitions allowed different sized spaces to be created for teaching, group work or assembly. Outside the school, a pond was reconstructed as an educational feature.

### The Opening

The opening of the new school on 9 September 1959 was recorded by headmistress, Olive Bates, in the new school Log Book.

*September 9th 1959 first pupil on this present site.*

*Miss O. Bates headmistress.*

*Miss G. Broughton infant teacher.*

*Number of children on roll 46.*

She also noted the novel character of the school.

*The layout is of an experimental nature for the development of group work and study of a rural environment.*

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Education, Mr Kenneth Thompson, officially opened the school nearly a year later, on 25 June 1960. A marquee was erected for refreshments and programmes were printed. There were eighty visitors including the Archdeacon of Buckingham, the Rector of Finmere and the Director of Education for Oxfordshire.

## Critical Acclaim

The architectural and educational importance of the school was quickly recognised and it received a steady stream of visitors. In 1960/61, there were over eighty visiting school inspectors and architects, coming from as far away as America, Australia, and Zanzibar. 'Few schools can have received so many visitors in so short a life,' noted the Inspectors in 1962. But, far from the visitors being a distraction:

*It might almost be said that they have become a means through which the children learn. Boys and girls will discuss the pedigree of their guinea pigs, or the colour a particular plant will dye the wool they have spun, or the rate of motor traffic on the main road nearby, or the Georgian architecture of Finmere with an almost adult assurance and a frank search for knowledge.*

Through these visits, and admiring academic articles, the school had a notable influence on the design of village schools.

*The new school at Finmere set the whole trend of primary school design for the 1960s ... [providing] a greater measure of learning opportunity for fifty children than had ever been achieved before (Eric Pearson writing in Trends in School Design, 1972).*

## The Pleasure of School Life

### Her Majesty's Inspectors' Pleasure

On 25 and 26 June 1962, Her Majesty's Inspector descended on the school. In a refreshing contrast to the often terrifying inspections of the Victorian era, the Inspector could not be more pleased with what he observed. Declaring, 'it is a privilege to inspect education conceived in this way,' he warmly described the three year old school as a:

*Unique and boldly revolutionary building... designed with such a deep understanding of the nature and needs of young children and the ways in which they learn.*

He paid tribute to the headmistress Olive Bates and to infants teacher Grace Broughton.

*From the start, the headmistress and her colleague accepted their task of welding three very groups different of children [from Finmere, Mixbury and Newton Purcell] into a whole and of building up a new tradition ... with an admirable sense of adventure and with great calm and equanimity. Their tolerance, good sense and easy relationships, their belief in the potentialities of ordinary country children, and their vision of what rural education might become, are at the root of the great success of this enterprise.*



**Children shopping at the school on  
27 November 1959**

(left to right)

Nigel Horwood John Hancock Michael Groves (Mixbury)  
Josephine Deathe Barbara Beachy (Newton Purcell)

Jonathan Harris attended Finmere school between 1964 and 1996. Writing from San Jose, California, he remembers his schooldays.

Miss Bates and Miss Young had the place running like clock work, we didn't get away with much, especially as my Dad was the village Policeman. I thought that they had a direct line to my Dads office. Miss Bates always got upset with me for playing music by ear, rather than reading it from the sheet. We all had to learn to write in italic style. We had to write in the subjects then Miss Bates would fill it out.

Finmere	School	Colours for
Name Jonathan	Harris	New Term
Age 8		Sept 1
Group F		
English		
Creating writing	Good	
Selfish Spelling	Fair	
Hand writing	Improving	
poetry & Reading	Good	
Literature	Good memory	
Arithmetic		
practical	Good	
Tables	Fair	
Every day problems	Fair	
Practical Work		
Finding information & Drawing		Things for
Part and craft	Good	
Music	Good	
Be with Movement	Very good	
		Bates

Report Card for Jonathan Harris

The report continues its eulogy in a style long abandoned by inspectors and concludes.

*Life for these children is unusually rich. There can be no doubt that an environment as imaginatively planned as theirs, and used by teachers as creatively and fully, becomes a tremendous force in their whole development. Its influence is spent in every aspect of their growth. It is a privilege to inspect education conceived in this way.*

Nevertheless, like the Victorian Inspectors, the HMIs of 1962 seemed unfamiliar with rural life.

*There are children here with far greater experience [of animals] than is generally expected, and they understand and accept the knowledge and hazards of birth, life and death with unusual poise... With few exceptions they read well, though speech is earthy, and may even strike a visitor as rough.*

## School Life in 1962

Almost submerged in the Inspector's lavish praise is a description of daily life in the school. There were eighteen infants, taught by Grace Broughton, and twenty-seven juniors, taught by Olive Bates.

The infants worked in a series of bays: a life size kitchen, a sitting room, a display space for their work and an area for working with clay and nature studies. At the close of day, the children gathered round their teacher for a story.

The juniors had a library and three work bays. They spent the greater part of the day in individual assignments of study, in four groups arranged by age.

*At all times—except when the children gather as a class for discussion or a necessary piece of instruction, or for music, radio, talks, a story or physical education—there is work in progress in reading, writing, mathematics, local history, geography and nature study, art and craft.*

The children reared pets on the veranda. Movement and physical education were “enjoyed each day,” either in the communal space, where the climbing frames were built into the roof supports, or out of doors. At dinner time, there was a “delightful family atmosphere... with nicely laid tables and arrangements of flowers.”

## Grass

**F**inmere children retained easy access to the countryside. This essay is by a ten-year-old boy at Finmere School and is dated 1 July 1962. It so pleased the school inspectors that they submitted a copy to the Ministry of Education with their report on the school. The author is not known.

*In grass fields most of the grass is all mixed. I love it like that – not all of the same kind. When it is about two feet high and the wind blows over it like a kind of slippery silk, grey more green and sometimes only the colour and movement which I suppose you would say isn't any colour at all, it quivers and goes in straight slanting ripples; and even if the wind blows hard it won't hurt it. It only twists the blade. If you break the grass stem at the joint a tube-like pipe is running through it, and if you chew the end it is very hard. If you run your finger up the blade of a cocksfoot grass it cuts your finger, and I should think that's how the word "blade" for grass originated. If you cut it along the side and suck it is very juicy but bitter. Yet I keep doing it. It is silly, I suppose, but I still go on. I expect I shall always go on doing it, even when I am grown up.*

*There are kinds of grasses. The kind called "soft meadow" has so many hairs on the blade and is so dry the cows don't like it. A meadow full of "cut grass" looks like sea foam or even detergent, and nearly white too: well, a greeny-white. "Cocksfoot" has flattened shoots and dull green to real deep blue leaves. And that is the truth. And a head of spikelets arranged in one-sided clusters on little wiry branches. "Cocksfoot" belongs like all the others to the family Gramineae and its botanical name is *Dactylis glomerata*.*

*Oh, we have a wonderful mower. It goes along as smooth as the wind does, and leaves the grass flat and straight in rows, and in a line just like the parting in my dad's hair.*

## A Critical Inspection and Recovery

**T**he school was successful for its first thirty-five years but, during the 1990s, teaching quality declined. In 1995, a critical report by OFSTED (Office of Standards in Education) Inspectors led to the school being placed on 'special measures.' These were targeted at improving the school's management, the quality of teaching, children's attainment and behaviour, and their attitudes to learning. After much hard work by staff, governors, County Education Advisors, parents and—most of all, pupils—the school was given a clean bill of health. After an inspection in 1998, OFSTED applauded the progress and declared the school to be above national average. This was just in time, as pupil numbers had fallen and the County Council was suggesting that school should be closed. The school is now striving to expand numbers and to further improve standards.

### Expansion

The school was designed for a maximum of fifty pupils from Newton Purcell, Mixbury and Finmere but, by the early 1970s, it had become very crowded. In 1973, the school was extended to accommodate an additional twenty-five pupils.



School nanny goat, 1983



School Fayre, about 1990

The annual School Fayre is organised by the Friends of Finmere School Association (FOFSA).



School Fayre, 2000



School Fayre, 2000

## 🌿 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**

## 🌀 Villagers and Their Houses 🌀

Finmere is a village of modest houses, with a few larger houses, including Finmere House, the Old Rectory, Stone House, Glebe House and Little Tingewick House. The building styles are mixed, with only a few buildings of architectural note, and relatively few old cottages remain between the twentieth century houses.

### Houses of Rubble and Thatch

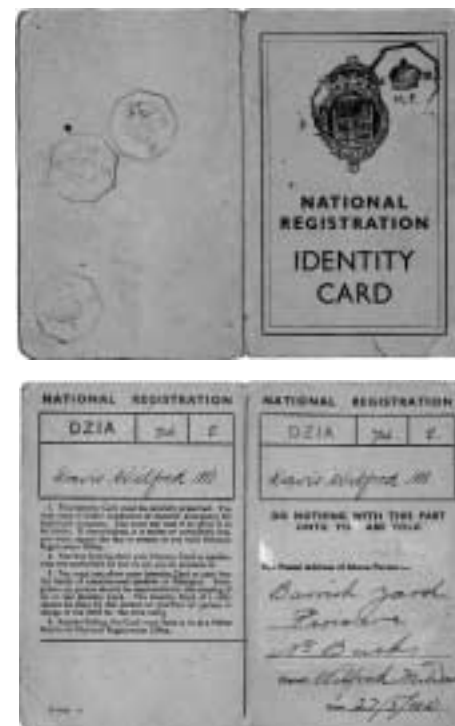
In 1955, historians writing about Finmere in the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire noted that 'many of the old cottages still have thatched roofs... some are [built] of red or vitreous brick, timber and rubbled [undressed stone], others of brick and rubble only.' Many of these houses were in poor condition and some had been so since the nineteenth century. Most have since been swept away and replaced with modern housing.

Houses and cottages were very crowded in the nineteenth century. The 1840 Tithe Map records five tenants in a house on the site of Titch's Cottage and eight in the cottages on the site of Cross Tree House. Another crowded area was Barrack Yard on the south side of Fulwell Road. This was probably built between 1813 and 1840. Before the Second World War, there were thirteen houses there; only two now remain. It is unlikely that there were barracks in Finmere and the origin of the name 'Barrack Yard' is not known. Wilfred Davis was born in the house nearest the road and his identity card has the name 'Barrick Yard.' This may be an error or may suggest that the name does not refer to a barracks but to a [hay] rick yard, possibly the 'back rick yard.'

### Twentieth Century Developments

After eighty years of decline, the population of Finmere began to grow again after the Second World War. Many houses were in a poor state of repair before the war and, on 2 April 1935, the Parish Meeting proposed to write to the Rural District Council (RDC) to request new houses. Nothing resulted and the matter was again raised at the 1936 and 1937 meetings. In 1938, the Meeting was informed that RDC awaited the decision of the Ministry of Health. Finally, in 1939, the Meeting was informed that two houses were ready for occupation; these became Nos. 1 and 2 White Houses. A second pair of house (Nos. 3 and 4) were built in 1945.

After the Second World War, housing shortages in the area were acute. In 1946, the Parish Meeting heard that two new council houses might be built. At the 1947 Meeting, questions were asked about the method the RDC used to allocate houses and why so few houses had been built. The Meeting resolved to request that twelve prefabricated Airey Houses should be built immediately. Agricultural workers were to be given first priority as tenants,



**Identify Card for Wilfred Davis, 27 May 1940**  
Wilfred was then two years old and he did not sign the card.  
Note the address 'Barrick Yard'

followed by ex-servicemen resident in Finmere. These houses were not built but two further pairs of council houses were erected (Nos. 5 to 8 White Houses).

Although there was a housing shortage, many of the old stone cottages in Finmere were in a poor condition and were due for demolition. In 1950, the Parish Council heard that a number of the condemned cottages had been partly demolished and the sites left in an untidy condition. The RDC was asked to complete the demolition as soon as possible and leave the site in good order. This was delayed for at least two years, while the RDC waited for the last remaining tenant to move. At last, in 1952, the RDC informed the Parish Council that new council houses would be built. Numbers 9 to 16 Town Close were built in early 1952 and numbers 17 to 24 later that year. It was agreed that the new houses would be called 'Town Close,' after the name of field in which they were built.

Chinalls Close, built in 1973, is named after the field on which the houses were built. The field was named after its early owners, the Chennell family (also spelt Chenels, Cheynell, Channel), which is mentioned in parish records from 1663 to 1776.

## Village Views



**The old Post Office and the Cross Tree in 1909**

Alfred [possibly Alf Lepper] sent this postcard to Miss Collingridge at Finmere Grounds on 18 March 1909.



**The old Post Office and the Cross Tree probably in the in 1920s**  
The Post Office is the second thatched building to the right.



**Stone House and Cross Tree Cottage in the early twentieth century**



**Fulwell Road in the late 1940s**  
The House now known as Thatched House is to the right. A thatched cottage, now demolished, stands between it and the brick built Merton Cottage.



**Valley Road looking towards Stone House in the 1920s**  
Note the thatched cottage on the right where Debdale now stands



**Mere Road in the 1920s**



**Mere Road in the 1950s**



**Mere Road in the 1920s**



**Finnere Garage and the Red Lion in 1971**  
The house in the background, Coldharbour, was demolished in 1997 for new housing.



**Mrs Zilpha Parrott outside Vine Cottage, then the Post Office,  
in the 1930s**



**Mrs Rhoda Wootton at Hawthorne Cottage, Mere Road, in the  
early 1930s**



**Percy Clifford outside the Long House in the mid-1930s**



**Roy, age 4, and Fred Barnes, age 1, with their mother Rose  
Barnes outside Cross Tree Cottage in 1931**



**Members of the Barnes family outside School House (now Glebe House)**  
Mr Hitchcock, Mr Ayris, Arthur Horwood, Fred Barnes (age 5), Mrs Rose Barnes, Louie Davis

## Larger Houses

### Glebe House

1792	2000
£126	£9,500

Glebe House was built by Reverend Robert Holt for his father. The work was paid for by the Stowe estate and the Steward's account books show the building cost at least £126. On 20 September 1792, Parrott inspected the work. He was obviously pleased with progress as he bought the masons, John Inns and Rick Wilson, a drink at the cost of three shillings. The masons worked throughout the winter and had completed their work by the following March. The house was then whitewashed, painted, plumbed glazed and thatched. The majority of work was complete by the end of 1793, though sporadic work continued into 1794.

In May 1841, William Jocelyn Palmer wrote to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos requesting use of the house for a curate. Palmer let the house to tenants in 1844. At that time, considerable carpentry was done, probably by William Bayliss, including repairing the entrance doorways and cellar windows.

## Stone House

The Yates family erected Stone House, formerly called Mr Lepper's House, in 1638. It was sold by two women named Harding to Mr Baldwin in 1810. Thomas Ceates owned it in 1840. When purchased by Alfred Lepper from Mr Kendall, it was one storey high and thatched. He raised the walls in 1879, at the same time as the Seymour Ashwell's Rectory was extended. The original building is commemorated by a date stone on the south wall and Alf Lepper's rebuilding by a date stone on the east porch with the monogram A.T.L.

## Cedar Lawn

Little Tingewick House was known as Cedar Lawn until it was sold at auction in 1928. The house was built before 1881. Corbett Barrett, Overseer of the poor, was born at Finmere Grounds and moved to Cedar Lawn with his wife Ellen between 1915 and 1920. Corbett took an active part in village life and he assumed the post of Overseer of the poor on his father's death. He held the post until his own death in 1928. Between 1903 and 1918, he was appointed by the Parish Meeting to represent it as a School Manager. In 1926, he was elected a trustee of the Poor's Plot, Ells Charity and Keat's Crowns. The couple had three daughters. He died aged 68 at Cedar Lawn and his wife, Ellen, died ten years later.



The daughters of Corbett and Ellen Barrett in the 1920s



Corbett Charles Barrett pictured at Cedar Lawn in the 1920s

*Centre of the Bicester Hunt  
Cedar Lawn  
Tingewick  
for sale by Auction at the  
White Hart Hotel, Buckingham  
on Saturday, September 22nd 1928 3 pm*

*Situated on the outskirts of the pleasant village of  
Finmere, in a healthy good Sports and Social part of the  
Country. Five miles from the Bicester Hunt Kennels and  
within an easy reach of the Grafton, Whaddon Chase  
and Warwickshire Hunts.*

*[The house] is placed well back from the Road and  
approached by a Carriage Drive. It is substantially built  
of Brick with Slated Roof, of pleasing elevation, creeper  
clad and comfortably planned.*

*4 bedrooms  
Work House  
Cleaning room  
Coal and wood houses  
Saddle and harness room  
Stabling*

*The Pleasure Grounds are very attractive and secluded,  
the timbering being exceptionally fine and includes  
grandly grown Oak, Beech, Cedar, Acacia, Tulip, Laburnum  
and other Trees and ornamental Shrubs.*

*Two highly productive fruit and vegetable gardens  
Water supply from well  
Telephone Finmere no 18  
Gardener's cottage  
Three pasture closes  
Building site ripe for early development*

After Corbett's death, Cedar Lawn was put up for auction at the White Hart Hotel, Buckingham. Hoping to attract a country gentleman, the auctioneers made much of it being a convenient location for the local fox hunts. The auction catalogue set out the details.

Major Francis Wilfred Gore-Langton OBE purchased the house and changed its name to Little Tingewick House.

## 🌀 Finnmere House 🌀

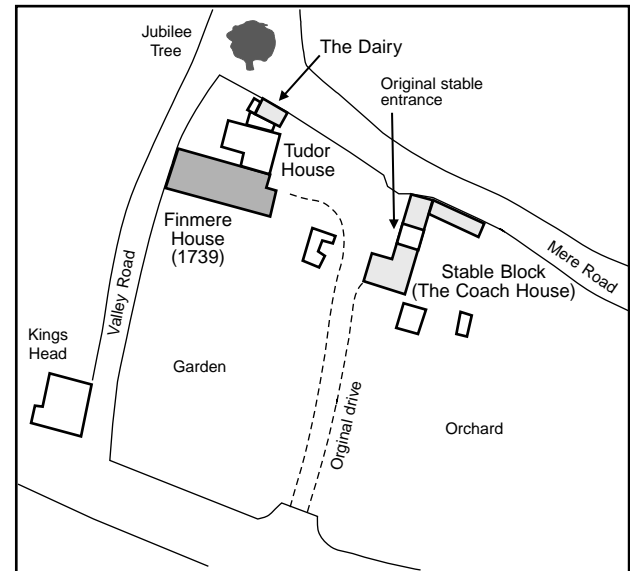
Oxfordshire still has a rich stock of fine country houses, although many outstanding examples have fallen into decay and social changes over the years have brought about major changes in the function and use of others. Finnmere House, now a listed building, is one of Finnmere's main links with the past, and its history provides a classic example of the roller-coaster fortunes of a great house over the centuries.

### Origins

The Manor of Finnmere was royal property for much of the Middle Ages, and Henry VIII granted Finnmere to four of his queens: to Catherine of Aragon in 1509, to Jane Seymour in 1536, to Anne of Cleves in 1540, and to Catherine Howard in 1541. The name Finnmere House dates from the latter part of the seventeenth century, when Elizabeth and Dorothy Waller, two daughters of a London barrister, Sergeant Thomas Waller, married and settled in Finnmere. Sergeant Waller's estate, approximately a fifth of the medieval Manor of Finnmere, was divided among his three daughters. Elizabeth married Francis Bacon and settled in what had been known as the Manor House, or Court House and became Bacon's House. Dorothy married a barrister, John James of Felstead, Essex, and the newly-weds came to live in the village itself, in the Tudor building which was part of Waller's estate. From that time, to distinguish between the two grand houses in the area, the first has been referred to as Bacon's House and the second as Finnmere House.

There are no surviving records to show what the building was like when John and Dorothy took up residence. It is clear that, although it must have been a substantial dwelling, it was a great deal less imposing than Finnmere House today. It probably included the oak-framed Tudor structure referred to now as the Dairy, of which a part still stands in good condition on the south side of Mere Road, and the larger stone building facing east at right angles to it, with its inglenook fireplace, stone flags, oak beams and mullioned windows. This stone house is now known as the Tudor House and it is probable that John and Dorothy James made the first structural additions to this part of the house.

Dorothy James died in 1712; her husband died six years later. Both were buried in Finnmere church, as was their son Hogan. But Hogan's early death in 1725 at the age of thirty-two meant that his share of the Manor passed to his aunt Frances, who was the last in line of this branch of the James family. On her death in 1739, the bulk of the inheritance fell to Nathaniel Bacon, but Finnmere House was sold off separately, and a major period of its development began.



**Site of Finnmere House**



**The Tudor House in the early years of the twentieth century, with the Dairy on the right**

The Manor was a source of income rather than a potential place of residence for Henry's wives. It would seem that the occasional reported appearance of Anne Boleyn in the grounds of Finmere House, with her head tucked underneath her arm, must await verification. While stories of phantoms in and around the building abound, Anne has no known connection with the village and is not a prime candidate for a ghostly appearance. Myth and a modicum of fact have become interwoven with the passage of time. In 1971, George Barnes teased John Simpson of the BBC with a similar story.

*GB: [Finmere House is] supposed to have been the home at some time of one of Henry VIII's wives, Jane Seymour. The room that she was supposed to occupy, I was doing a little job for the owner then, in the room. It was a bright hot day. I got my jacket off, all at once it came over cold, and I had to put my jacket on. And I passed a remark about it to Mrs Symes-Thompson, the owner, and she laughed and said probably it was Jane Seymour's ghost.*

*JS: Is it renowned for being haunted?*

*GB: Well, they do say it was haunted, but Mrs Symes-Thompson told me she'd never seen nor heard anything, and she'd live there for a good many year.*

*JS: Do you believe in ghosts?*

*GB: No, that I don't. No.*

## John Pollard

The purchaser was John Pollard of Leckhampstead, a former Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, who immediately set about a major modernisation project. This involved the construction of a south-facing extension, attached at right angles to the existing Tudor House, which brought the building up to the proportions and standards expected of an eighteenth-century gentleman's residence. The new south wing boasted a handsome brick facade in the style of Queen Anne (country architects were often conservative), and the rainwater heads still bear his crest—a grazing stag—and the date 1739.

Pollard's new wing, with its seven bays and its entrance doorway with Tuscan pilasters and a pediment, still stands and has inherited the name Finmere House. It is likely that at this time, or soon after, a stable block was added. This outbuilding has been a private residence since the late 1970s and is now known as the Coach House. The construction of the south wing changed the orientation of the building. The oldest part had looked north towards the village centre. The main part of the house now faced south and, later in the century, a driveway was laid to provide access to the new turnpike road built in 1744 to link Banbury and Buckingham. The house had in a sense turned its back on the historical centre of the village.

Land-tax assessments demonstrate that throughout the eighteenth century the Pollards were the only family of standing in Finmere, although after the death of John Pollard in 1761 and his wife two years later the family chose not to live in the village, and let the house to a succession of tenants.



Pollard's rainwater heads

## The Clark Brothers

The best known tenants are the brothers Dr Charles and Dr James Clark, who took up residence after 1830. James, an Edinburgh-trained doctor, by no means turned his back on the village and devoted himself to his rented house and to village affairs. He cared for and enhanced the gardens of Finmere House and set to work determinedly to improve sanitary conditions for the villagers. Unhealthy and evil-smelling cesspools at the doors of the cottages were removed, and James oversaw the covering of the open brook that ran along Fulwell Road. He shared the Victorian passion for mechanical devices and, with the aid of the village carpenter William Bayliss, constructed a windmill for pumping water and other ingenious contrivances in the grounds of Finmere House. In 1858–59, he was responsible for the repair and improvement of the clock in St Michael's, adding a minute hand and new escapement. Apart from the aid of a £7 grant voted by the Vestry, he met the costs of its removal and replacement in the south wall of the tower from his own pocket.

James Clark died in 1869, his brother Charles four years later, and both are buried in the crypt, in recent years badly overgrown, at Barton Hartshorn. Charles's widow Elizabeth then briefly occupied the house before the Symes-Thompson family purchased the freehold in 1898.



Finmere House, about 1855



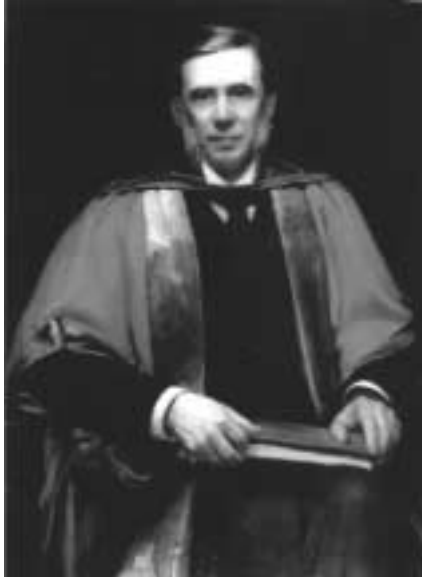
**Elizabeth, James and Charles Clark**

These pictures were painted in Vienna and are photographed hanging in Water Stratford House. Elizabeth was wife of Charles Clark.



Dr James Clark

## The Symes-Thompsons



Edmund Symes-Thompson



The staff pictured at Number 33 Cavendish Square

Edmund Symes-Thompson, of Cavendish Square, was a prominent London physician and academic. No doubt impressed by the improved sanitary conditions achieved by his predecessor in the village, he regarded Finmere as a healthy place and bought the house in 1898 as a country residence. He was in the habit of bringing his wife Elizabeth (Lilla) and his entire London staff of twelve with him to Finmere during the summer, and was responsible for the construction in 1902 of the last major extension to the house. This was the Edwardian billiard room, with additional bedrooms above, added to the west end of Pollard's south wing and now known, curiously, as the music room. This addition extended the house to the boundary of Valley Road, and completed the external configuration of Finmere House as we know it today.

The house remained the property of the Symes-Thompson family throughout the first half of the twentieth century, although their time was initially divided between London and Finmere. Edmund's son Henry Edmund (Harry) Symes-Thompson married Caroline Tacon, and like his father practised medicine in London, where he became a consultant to the Brompton hospital. In those days it was usual for families to base themselves in London for the season (particularly if they had young marriageable daughters), and Finmere house was often let to friends, patients, and on more than occasion to the royal family. In the 1890s The Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) used the house for week-end parties, at times riotous affairs of which valuable Symes-Thompson crystal suffered the consequences. During the tenancy of the Count Rodolph Fane de Salis and his wife Edith in the twenties and thirties, the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) and the Dukes of Kent and Gloucester all came to visit and spent leisure time in Finmere with their families.

The second World War claimed the life of Harry Symes-Thompson's son (Richard) Edmund in a London air raid of 1941, and soon afterwards the family, concerned for the safety of the two surviving children, came to live permanently in Finmere. Before and after the death of her husband in 1952 Caroline Symes-Thompson was a prominent figure in the local community. She founded and managed the finances of Finmere Sports Club, providing the field and the equipment for both the cricket and the football team. A licentiate of the Royal College of Music, she was a regular attender at and honorary organist of Finmere Parish Church, and became very much a central figure in village life, loved and respected for her concern for local people and local matters. But the end of hostilities in 1945 was to bring with it a difficult period of social change and adaptation. Domestic servants were becoming a rare breed, and the upkeep of the house and extensive grounds proved increasingly impossible to manage. Parts of the grounds, including

the land on which the new village school was built, were sold off. In 1959 Caroline Symes-Thompson finally decided to leave Finmere House, but not the village. She moved with her son George to Finmere Cottage in Mere Road, where she continued to be cared for by Ena Davies, who had served the family with such dedication during happier days at Finmere House. She died in 1967, aged eighty four, and had been organist at St. Michael's Church for over twenty seven years.

## The Flowers

These events brought about the last great resurgence in the fortunes of Finmere House. Jean and Jack Flower owned Fleuront, a flourishing London antique business based in Brompton Road and specialising in fine eighteenth-century French and English furniture. They fell in love with the old house and bought it, leaving their home in Hampstead to live in Finmere, bringing their business with them. A hectic period of restoration, including the installation of central heating and new domestic arrangements, brought the house into line with post-war living. The Flowers, needing a new main staircase, constructed the hall that now joins the eighteenth-century wing to the older Tudor part of the building. The Red Hall, nineteen feet high, with its elegant balustraded staircase and crystal chandelier, has proved to be the major contribution to the style and form of Finmere House during the twentieth century. The stable block, which had fallen into severe disrepair, was repaired and used as a workshop and furniture repository, and the garden was tended, restored and replanted in traditional style.

Jean and Jack Flower became very much a part of village life in the relatively short period that they spent in the village. Those who were children at the school still speak warmly of their generosity and hospitality. All Finmere schoolchildren were invited to a party at Christmas time, in the stone-flagged sitting room with its open fire in the original Tudor building and is still the source of happy memories for many villagers. This late surge in the fortunes of Finmere House was not to last. Jack Flower died suddenly in 1968, and Jean left Finmere for Woburn and then Cheltenham.

## After the Flowers

The house passed through a quick succession of owners and in the late 1970s, house and grounds were divided into three plots, known as Finmere House, the Tudor House, and the Coach House. While the latter two have been well cared for and substantially restored, the eighteenth-century wing, now Finmere House, has been allowed to fall into serious decay by its London owner.

In recent years, Finmere House has been left unoccupied. Despite internal damage from burst pipes, particularly to the ceiling of the Red Hall,



Jean and Jack Flower in the 1960s



Finmere House in winter, early 1960s

Jon Harris, now resident of San Jose, California, recalls Finmere House during the 1960s.

*There used to be a great big barn owl in the stable block, we used to dare each other to go up the ladder to the loft area to see it! The Flowers who occupied Finmere house used to buy all the children at the school a Christmas gift, we would all go over to the house for mince pies and a presentation of a paper mache boar's head to the Flowers.*



**Village children enjoying a swimming lesson at Finmere House in the 1960s**

the structure remains sound and a local gardener is now maintaining the grounds. The architectural details of the 1739 facade are in a very poor state and the rate of decay has notably increased in the past few years. Without urgent action, there may soon be little of interest from John Pollard's handsome extension worth preserving into the twenty-first century.



**Finmere House at the end of the Millennium**

## ☞ The Public Houses ☞

Until recently, there were two public houses in the village: the Red Lion at Little Tingewick and the Kings Head near Finmere House. Most of the larger houses also had had their own brewery. At the death of Rector Robert Holt in 1802, the Rectory is described as having a '100 gallon (455 litre) Brewing Copper, a smaller ditto, Mash Vat, Brewing Tubs [and] Beer Casks.' Later, Rector William Jocelyn Palmer rewarded his labourers with his home brew. Warren Farm also had a brewery and employed jobbing brewers, George Paxton of Brackley in 1848 and William Adkins in 1851. Many of the larger houses probably used such jobbing brewers, as may have the public houses.

### The Kings Head

We do not know when an alehouse first stood on the site of the Kings Head, or for that matter when it was first given that name. The earliest certain reference is a map of 1813 (page 10), when it was owned by the Duke of Buckingham. On 30 July 1848, the Duke sold the pub at an auction at the Cobham Arms in Buckingham. It was then generating a rent of £18 a year and was purchased by the tenant for £370. That tenant was Robert Greaves, also a brickmaker and farmer.

1848	2000
£370	£23,300

### A Victorian Village Scandal

In the mid-nineteenth century, nearly all adults attended church at least once a week. Kings Head landlord, Robert Greaves, was among them. Finmere Rector, William Jocelyn Palmer, appreciated his devotion and described him as:

*A respectable and sober housekeeper, a constant attendant at church and a frequent Communicant. (Rectors' Book)*

Unfortunately, Palmer's admiration did not last. Robert was twenty-three when he married eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Petty in St Michael's Church in 1828. They had five children before Elizabeth's early death in July 1847. Robert's actions ten months after Elizabeth's death drew Palmer's anger. On 16 May 1848, Robert, aged forty-three, married Emma Northover, just twenty years of age. But they were not married in Finmere; the wedding was held in St Pancras Old Church, Camden, to avoid Palmer's scrutiny. The truth was, however, soon discovered.

Emma was not Emma Northover at all. She was Emma Petty, the niece of Robert's late wife. It was then illegal for a man to marry a relative of his deceased wife. Palmer acerbically condemned the marriage.

Even before Elizabeth's death, Palmer and Greaves were at odds. In 1844, Palmer wrote to Thomas Beards, Steward of the Stowe Estate.

*Dear Sir*

*Hope for the pleasure of seeing you at the Vestry on Monday. I take the liberty of informing you that I trust we shall be able to proceed to business at 3 o'clock and considering the time of year and the coldness of the church that I shall first propose to adjourn the meeting to the Clerk's house where there will be a fire, and that I hope such a proposition will be agreeable to you. It has frequently been moved to the Kings Head but particular incumbencies just now render an adjournment there highly objectionable to me.*

*I remain*

*Yours truly*

*William Jocelyn Palmer*

*Finmere December 20 1844*

*[This] was in fact no marriage at all, either by the Ecclesiastical or by the Civil Law... the impediments were well known, but were intended to be got the better of by the form of marriage obtained under the disgraceful circumstance of fraud and perjury. (Rectors' Book)*

Palmer refused the couple Communion, a symbolic gesture as the Greaves no longer attended church. They did not wish to suffer Palmer's 'repeated admonitions' on the legality of their marriage. Palmer's anger grew as Robert and Emma had children. He could not morally or legally refuse to christen a child, but his ire spilled over into his records of their christenings.

*There has been issue [children] of this connection, which may be seen in the Parish Register in various forms. The last entry (1852) is supposed to be the most correct. (Rectors' Book)*



**A relaxed party at the Kings Head in the 1960s**  
From left to right: Wilfred Davis, Nellie Jones, Alice Banfield,  
Trevor Banfield, Anna Banfield, Bill Banfield.

The Register entries show Palmer's difficulty in recognising the marriage.

1 March 1849. Thomas Henry Petty, son of Emma Petty, alias Northover, alias Neville, alias Greaves, single.

18 May 1851. Charles Frances Petty, otherwise Greaves, son of Emma Petty.

~~17 October 1852. Mary Emma Petty, illegitimate daughter of Emma Petty, living as wife with Robert Greaves, victualler.~~

17 October 1852. Mary Emma Greaves, illegitimate daughter of Robert and Emma.

In 1851, Robert's children by his first marriage were being taught at home—perhaps another reflection of Palmer's wrath, as he was school manager.

William Jocelyn Palmer died in 1853 and thereafter Emma and Robert's lives proved easier. Frederick Walker, who succeeded Palmer, made no adverse comment on the birth of the Greaves fourth child, Edward, in 1854. Emma died three years later, aged just 29. She is buried in the churchyard and her gravestone at last recognises her marriage.

*In memory of Emma  
Wife of Robert Greaves*

## The Death of a Landlord

Robert Greaves was succeeded by George Everett, who was replaced a year later by James Shaw, who was born in Blackthorn, near Bicester. In the 1881 census, James is recorded as a butcher and innkeeper at the Kings Head, where he lived with his twenty-two-year-old wife, Emily of Bletchington, their son George, aged two months, and Sarah King, a servant from Luggershall. His stay at the Kings Head proved rather unluckier than that of Robert Greaves.

On 15 September 1899, Mrs Freeman of Little Tingewick heard a cart coming along the road and then a sound as though the horse had stumbled. She went towards the cottage door and saw the horse starting at a gallop. Just as she reached the door, the horse fell and she saw James Shaw fall head first out of the cart.

Forty-six-year-old James was a large man, weighing fifteen or sixteen stones. He was thrown over the horse's shoulders and crashed onto the road, with his head towards the horse. As he lay on his left side, the horse ran away and the right wheel of his cart ran over the lower part of his stomach. Shaw was doubled up with pain but he managed to creep on hands and knees into Mrs Freeman's cottage. She found him to be in dreadful pain and exhibiting symptoms of internal injuries. A bedside chair was brought down to the door of the cottage and neighbours lifted the injured man into it, where he remained for nearly an hour in great pain. A wagonette was fetched and he was taken to his home at the Kings Head.

James remained ill for ten weeks and in great pain despite frequent doses of opium. He died on 24 November.

*We have to record the death of Mr James Shaw, innkeeper and butcher of Finmere. It appears that ten weeks back, he was out on business, when his horse stumbled, throwing him out of the cart. The horse recovered itself before Mr Shaw could do so, and most unfortunately one of the wheels of the cart passed over his body. He was taken home and attended by Dr Cheeseman, who found that he had severe internal injuries, and no hope was held out of his recovery... he died a few minutes to midnight on Thursday. (Buckingham Advertiser, 28 November 1898)*

An inquest, held in the Council Chamber in Buckingham, heard evidence from Dr Cheeseman and Dr Duke. They agreed that death was caused by a mass of coagulated blood, weighing upwards of 1lb (0.5kg), which had obstructed passage from the bowel and the bladder. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

James had taken out accident insurance for £500 with the Railway Passengers' Assurance Society. The Society challenged the jury's verdict and refused the claim from his widow, arguing that the death had been caused by disease. A panel of three distinguished medical arbitrators in London heard the dispute in December 1899, a year after James's death. It was a lengthy hearing and the expert witnesses argued about the coagulated blood: was this the result of disease or the accident? The arbiters ruled that the accident was the cause and James' wife, Emily, received her compensation.



**The Kings Head in 1984**

The Kings Head was extended in 1983, when a room was added to the side. During the late 1990s, the pub was in need of investment and refurbishment. This was not forthcoming and, on 8 April 1999, the Kings Head closed and is unlikely to be reopened.

1899	2000
£500	£34,000



### Customers leave the Red Lion in 1960

From left to right: Wilfred Davis, June Anderson and Bob Sikes. The name 'Albert Horwood' can be seen over the door. Albert's name has been fixed over that of his father, John.



Oxford Drag Hunt outside the Red Lion in 2000

## The Red Lion

In common with many rural pubs, the Red Lion began in a small cottage, little different from others in the village. Before its modernisation from 1960 onwards, the pub had two rooms and beer was brought from the cellar in handled pots. The men's toilets were across the yard and pigs were kept in the paddock across the main road. The Red Lion dates from at least 1816:

*James Terry applied for relief on account of his family when it appeared by complaint of the overseer that the said James Terry had idly spent his time and his money at Hugh Davis, at the Red Lion. (Vestry Minute Book, 1816)*

John Horwood was landlord from 1907 to 1939, when his son, Bert, took over the licence. He was interviewed by John Simpson for the Hello Finmere broadcast on BBC local radio in 1971 (opposite). Bert Horwood was landlord until to 1981.



The Red Lion the early 1980s

JS: Well Bert, how long have you been here?

BH: 59 years

JS: You were born here?

BH: I was born here, yes

JS: In this pub?

BH: That's right, yes.

JS: It's not very often that you find a publican who was born in the pub he now looks after.

BH: Not very often. I dare say there is some about [but] I've never heard of them being in their own house all the while.

JS: It's the first one I've come across.

BH: Yes.

JS: Have you seen many changes here in Finmere?

BH: Oh yes, quite a lot. Different things... When the old horse and cart used to come up the village instead of motorcars now.

JS: Because you're sitting here on the junction of the main road and the road going into the village and the traffic's actually stopped at the moment but just a few moments ago it really was busy.

BH: That's right. Yes, we get quite a lot, quite a lot of traffic through now. It's quite a busy road. Even in the village itself, there's quite a lot of traffic up and down.

JS: I suppose this wasn't so in days gone by?

BH: No, no. One car a day perhaps, something like that.

JS: What sort of trade do you do here? The locals or do you get many visitors in?

BH: Well, we rely more on passing trade, you know. That's our business more or less.

JS: Does this mean you're busier in the summer?

BH: In the summer, yes. Summer months... Winter's very quiet...

JS: When I came just now you were out on your garden. Does that mean you're a keen gardener?

BH: Oh, I like doing the garden, yes. We got quite a bit. I grow my own potatoes... I used to keep a lot of pigs at one time.

JS: Did you? What sort of pigs?

BH: Sows and that, breeding... About a dozen sows, keep them for breeding. Sell the little ones, eight or nine weeks old.

JS: Do you need much expertise to do this?

BH: Well, I was brought up with it. Father used to do it... when they were eight or nine weeks old we used to take them to market... and sell them at Banbury or Aylesbury.

JS: What do you feed your pigs on?

BH: Well, we used to have steamer boil up, boil the food up, which was the best I think. Better than a lot of this dry stuff today. The pigs used to do better, I think, than what they do now...

JS: Of course, the idea of keeping pigs and taking them to market has disappeared these days, hasn't it?

BH: Yes. You've got to go at it in a big way you see. Well, hundreds, thousands really.

JS: You said that you were born here, in the pub, and that you've lived in the pub all your life. Do you find pub work very hard?

BH: Well, no. I don't mind it... I think it's a very good job... What I like best is when there's plenty of people about... everybody comes in and when the sun's shining everybody seems happy. In the winter's the worst part, dull nights, quiet, no-one around much. Time drags then more.

JS: But you much prefer the summer?

BH: Well the summer's the best time. You get different holiday people in, from all parts of the country, coming in on the way to having their holidays and it makes an enjoyable time of it.

JS: I've always heard it said that if you are going to be a publican you have got to be able to stand and listen to other people talking.

BH: That is so, yes. You've got to listen to them and have all their aches and pains. Whether you're in aches and pains yourself, you have to put up with that.

JS: But you don't mind

BH: Well, no, no. Not if they're happy. That's it, you like to see everybody happy.

# FINMERE,

NEAR BUCKINGHAM.

---

24 ACRES OF

# OATS,

6 $\frac{1}{2}$  Acres of Barley, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  of Wheat & 3 of Pulse,  
Now standing and Growing on Stone's Farm, Finmere.  
*To be Sold by Auction, by*

## MR. JONAS PAXTON

At the Red Lion Inn, Finmere, on Thursday, August 15th, 1861, at 4 o'clock,  
*By direction of Mr. Stansbridge, who is selling.*

### CATALOGUE.

<p><b>Lot</b></p> <p>1 A piece of mixed Wheat, about 40 acres, in the Long Ground, with Barley of the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p> <p>2 A piece of Mixed Wheat, about 4 acres, in the Long Ground, with Barley of the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p> <p>3 A piece of Barley, in the Long Ground, 14 acres, with Wheat, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p> <p>4 Piece of Mixed Wheat, about 4 acres, in the Long Ground, with Barley of the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p>	<p><b>Lot</b></p> <p>5 A piece of Wheat, about 4 acres, in the Long Ground, with Barley, from the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p> <p>6 A piece of Mixed Wheat, about 4 acres, in the Long Ground, with Barley, from the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p> <p>7 A piece of Barley, about 4 acres, in the Long Ground, with Wheat, from the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p> <p>8 Piece of Mixed Wheat, about 4 acres, in the Long Ground, with Barley, from the same size, 100 lbs. 1st October.</p>
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Mr. Stansbridge will show the lots at any time previous to the Auction, and Catalogues may be had at  
the place of Sale, or of Mr. Stansbridge, Farmer.

Two months Cattle will be allowed, subject to the customary conditions of deposit and security, if required.

A. J. PAXTON, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

Auction Poster 1861



Delivery Van outside Finmere village store and Post Office  
(now Furthering Hobbs) in 1983

## 🌀 Finmere at Work 🌀

Many villagers had to try their hands at a variety of occupations during their lives. The majority of men worked on the land, while others were tradesmen, craftsmen or labourers. In the early nineteenth century, most women worked as lacemakers but by the end of the century this craft had died out in Finmere. Other women worked in domestic service. Finmere has remained free of factory units. Its artisans generally practised from their houses or sheds.

### Working the Land

Finmere remains an agricultural parish but, in the twenty-first century, very few people are needed to farm the land. In the nineteenth century, it was very different. In 1826, ninety-four men and fifty-five boys aged ten and over were dependent on agriculture for 'employment and support.' In 1851, the parish had five farmers, a cattle dealer, two shepherds and eighty-two men labouring on the land. Children also helped their parents especially during the summer break from school, which was originally known as the Harvest Holidays. After the holiday, the main tasks were potato picking and gleaning, when children assisted their parents in gathering remnants of the crop missed during the harvest. These gleanings—also called leasing in Finmere—often provided a family's supply of flour for the winter. The teacher regularly noted the disruptions to the daily routine in the school log books.

*11 September 1876. A whole day holiday was given for the children to help their parents finish leasing.*

*17 September 1897. M. Hitchcock away 4 days for potato picking.*

*24 September 1897. A. Holyoake away to pick potatoes and T. Paxton and B. Horwood for the same reason.*

*19 September 1902. School reopened [on 14th]. It was closed on Friday (19th) because so many children went gleaning.*

### Rural Dissenters at Finmere

During the nineteenth century, rural workers often faced unemployment, the most aggravating of several causes of dissension along with lack of voting rights. Men in towns gained the right to vote in 1867 but this right did not extend to men in the countryside. Rural unrest grew as economic growth slowed during the 1860s and unemployment increased.



**Agricultural workers, possibly at  
Finmere Grounds about 1920**

The dates are those recorded in directories, census records and other sources.

### **Brickmakers**

Robert Greaves 1851  
John Cleaver 1899

### **Blacksmiths**

Joseph Cozens 1847–74  
John and William Cozens 1851  
Joseph Aris 1852–83  
Maria Cozens 1876–1887  
Elijah Beckett 1891–1915  
William Richard Jackman 1924  
Frederick Barrett 1924

### **Boot and shoe makers**

James Rouse 1847–1851  
Joseph Aris 1847–1851  
James Cook 1864–1895  
John Hunt 1851  
Thomas Dewett 1854

### **Brewer**

William Adkins 1851 (Warren Farm)

### **Carmen**

Emmanuel Horwood 1899–1911  
Hannah Meusey 1911–1915  
Alfred Horwood 1924–39

### **Carpenters**

Isaac and Isaac Jones 1851 (father and son)  
John Tapping 1851  
William Baylis 1847–1877  
William Jackson 1891 (Little Tingewick)  
James Windsor 1924–28  
Henry Wooton 1924–39

### **Cooper**

Benjamin Godfrey 1851

### **Gardener**

James Holland 1851

### **Machine Owners**

John Higgins 1891–1911

In 1872 Joseph Arch, a Warwickshire hedge cutter and lay preacher, formed the National Agricultural Labours Union. A branch was formed at Tingewick in 1873 and Arch spoke there at a meeting on Tuesday 29 September 1874. The occasion was a general holiday and large numbers of people attended from surrounding villages. In the afternoon, the crowd marched to Finmere; they did so again in the evening by torchlight. The dissent continued and, in August 1879, a meeting of labourers in Finmere passed a motion in favour of wider rights to vote and for land nationalisation.

The National Agricultural Labours Union gained wage increases but its influence was short-lived. Bad harvests throughout the 1870s, opposition from farmers who blacklisted union members, strike breaking by the military, and imports from North America put many of the protesters out of work.

## **Trades and Crafts**

The tradesmen and craftsmen of the parish were boot and shoe makers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and more recently, carmen (mechanics and drivers). The smithy was in a thatched cottage, later known as 'Forge Cottage,' opposite the Red Lion. It became part of Finmere Garage and was demolished in 1975. On Mere Road, James Windsor worked from Hawthorne Cottage, and described himself as a carpenter, builder and undertaker.



**The smithy about 1900**

## Lacemaking and Service

Lacemaking was well established in England by the seventeenth century. Finmere is at the west edge of one of its lacemaking areas, which was concentrated in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, East Anglia, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire. This cottage industry was the major employment for Finmere women by the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1826, the Vestry recorded that ninety-eight women and forty-eight girls aged ten or older were engaged in lacemaking. The women traded their lace through a dealer; local directories record that Charles Tyrell was a lace manufacturer and dealer at Little Tingewick from 1863 to 1871.

Not everyone approved of lacemaking. Rector William Jocelyn Palmer owned a number of houses in the village and he forbade his tenants from engaging in the craft. His curate, John Burgon wrote that 'lacemaking had been discouraged for the girls and, having been discontinued by them, was at last prohibited.' J.C. Blomfield recorded the prevailing view of many of the men of his day.

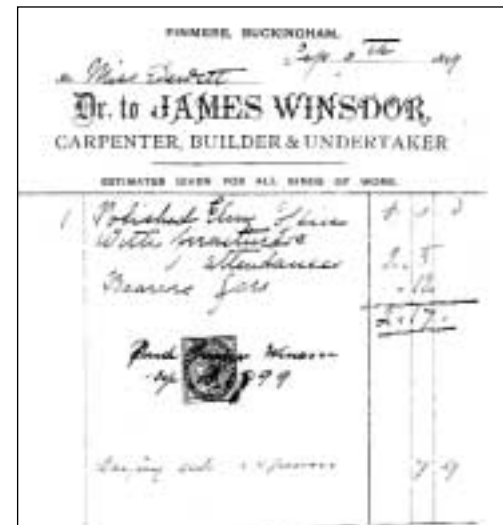
*This lacemaking is very injurious to health. The small rooms, into which numbers of young girls were gathered; the length of time they had to sit, with heads inclined and chests contracted, before their pillows, especially during the apprenticeships... sowed the seeds of decline in many, while the languor and debility and sallow complexion of others showed too plainly the pernicious nature of their employment. (History of Bicester 1884)*

Mechanisation and imports, and the requirement for children to attend school, exacerbated the decline in lacemaking. By 1851, just nineteen Finmere women were lacemakers. Thirty years later, just two old ladies, Mary Cox aged 63 and Ann Clifford aged 78, practised the craft.

Women also worked in various forms of domestic service. In 1851, three women worked as charwomen, one as a cook and six as housekeepers or servants.



**Milkman Alfred Horwood outside the church gates**



**James Windsor's bill for a coffin for Robert Dewett**

Dewett was a labourer, then shopkeeper and gardener. He lived next to Forge Cottage and died in 1899.

In recent decades, villagers have worked further away, including in London and Milton Keynes. Only a small number of people now work within the parish.

In 1889, couriers brought goods and parcels from Buckingham three times a week. Mr Trafford collected from the Three Cups on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday; Mr Tarman from the Swan and Castle and Butchers Arms on Saturday.

## Shops, Garages and Markets

Local shops were central to village life before the days of mass car ownership. They provided provisions and a place to meet and gossip. The Post Office played a major role in communication before telephones and computers, and was the 'local bank' dispensing money orders and benefits. Since 1973, Little Tingewick has also hosted the area's largest Sunday market.

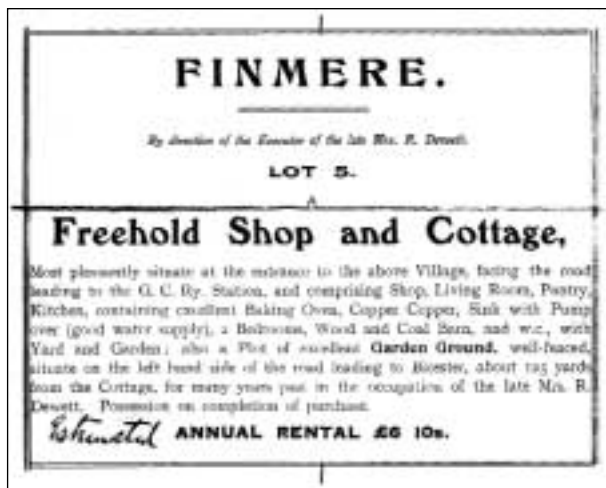
In 1851, Finmere had a butcher and a grocer. While the census taken that year did not record a village baker, local directories record Joseph Yates as a baker in 1876, James Barrett in 1887 and Frederic Augustus Cottrell from 1891 to 1928. There was a shop in Little Tingewick from at least 1863 when William Cross was shopkeeper, until at least 1911. It was quite usual to double up occupations. James Shaw at the Kings Head was also a butcher. There was a bakery next door to the pub until at least the 1920s, in the house that is now King's Cote.

As the population in the parish fell, the towns grew, and the motorcar and bus became more common, people began to shop further away. This meant that villagers could take advantage of larger shops. Between the Wars, villagers shopped at the Co-op in Tingewick and, in bad weather, sledges were used to drag purchases up the hill. People helped their elderly neighbours by shopping for food and paraffin. Coal was purchased from the Station Yard at Finmere Station and Mr Coles at Gravel Farm delivered milk.

There was still a demand for local shops. Mr and Mrs Hollyoaks ran a sweet shop at Well End, Mere Road, in the 1930s until the Second World War. At Little Tingewick, Herbert Denny's Tea Rooms proved popular; Frank Hitchcock remembers 'the cyclists used to come out and park their cycles up outside on Sunday afternoon.' General provisions were supplied by Vine Stores (now Furthering Hobbs) on Valley Road and then by Yew Tree Garage, followed by Finmere Garage. Unfortunately, this last small shop closed in 1998, no longer able to support the cost of staff. Many villagers now shop at the Tesco store in Buckingham or at supermarkets further away, while home deliveries are beginning to enjoy a resurgence though Internet shopping.

## The Post Office

The Post Office at Buckingham was established about 1686, when John Muskett was postmaster. At that time, postage costs depended on distance. Packages were posted unpaid to be collected and paid for by the recipient at the Post Office or a 'receiving house.' Rowland Hill introduced the Penny Post in 1840 and created an efficient uniform rate postal service in which the sender paid the costs.



Sale of the shop on the site of Finmere Garage,  
October 1899

Post was being delivered to Finmere from before 1884 and daily deliveries were established in 1889. The service was extended beyond the village to Warren Farm in 1893 and to Widmore Farm in 1898. Post was delivered to Widmore three days a week, and perhaps on the same days to Warren Farm, which received daily deliveries from 1904. In 1920, the postman for Finmere and Chetwode was supplied with a bicycle and an allowance for cleaning it.

The earliest record of a Post Office in Finmere is for 1891 when Rachel Paxton was the village sub-postmistress, a post she held until at least 1915. The Post Office was located on the lane that runs from the Cross Tree to the church. Letters through Buckingham arrived at 8 am and were dispatched at 1.10 pm and 5 pm. By 1895 there was a second post with a delivery of letters at 1.00 pm.

In the first of five moves, the Post Office was relocated to Mere Road, in the house now known as Teversal, where it was run by Charles Andrews. On 22 January 1959, it was gutted by fire.



**The Post Office about 1900**

The woman is probably Rachel Paxton, sub-postmistress

### **Finmere Post Office Gutted**

*Finmere's picturesque village Post Office and adjoining thatched cottage were gutted by fire late on Friday afternoon.*

*Flames, fanned by a strong wind, took a rapid hold along the roof of the single storey Post Office.*

*Although the Bicester and Buckingham Brigades were soon on the scene, the fire spread so quickly and got such a hold that nothing could be done to save the property.*

*The Finmere postmistress, Mrs J Andrews said that she had just finished serving a customer when she smelt smoke and wondered what was burning... Then a neighbour rushed in to tell her that the roof was alight...*

*The fire was first seen by Mrs R Radford, whose husband is the local garage proprietor. She was serving at the pumps when she saw thick smoke. After calling the fire brigade, she ran for help.*

Buckingham Advertiser, 23 January 1959

### Finmere Raises £80 for Fire Victims

Comedian George Formby used to sing a ditty about 'When the lads of the village get cracking. That's what the friendly village folk of Finmere did—got cracking—when fire destroyed the homes of two families earlier this month... Post mistress Mrs Julia Andrews and her husband, Charles, and two elderly sisters, Miss Mary Paxton and Miss Margaret Paxton, who lived in the cottage, lost most of their personal possessions and furniture as well as their homes.

Finmere folk quickly launched a good-neighbour campaign to raise funds to help their unfortunate fellow villagers.

**They got cracking** and raised £20 4s at a dance and social in the village hall.

**They got cracking** and ran a successful whist drive which brought in £19 12s.

**They got cracking** and collected £14 3s 6d in donations from villagers and others who were only too willing to give.

**The result?** A total of £80 19s 6d has been raised for the two families who lost almost everything in the fire.

Buckingham Advertiser, 30 January 1959

1959	2000
£81	£1,050

The Post Office was moved to Finmere Garage, opening at 11 am on 4 October 1972. Later it moved to Vine Stores on Valley Road, where it was most recently run by Carol and Barry Cranfield. In 1987, it moved again to Yew Tree Garage and in 1989 to the village hall, where it opened only on Thursday afternoons. In 1999, this last remnant of Finmere's Post Office closed.

### The Garages

From the 1930s, or before, a garage stood on the main road in Little Tingewick; it was known as Freeman's Garage after its owners. In 1935, the property was auctioned.

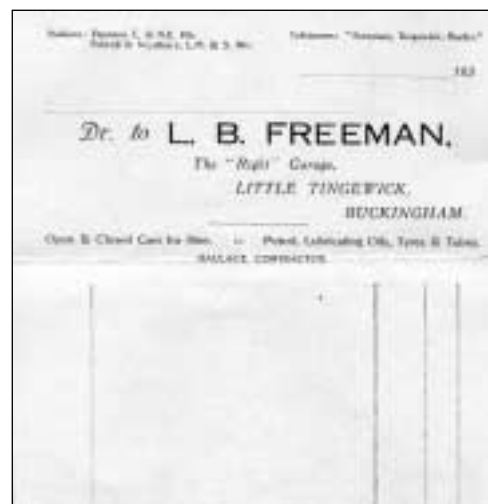
*Auction. Osborne & Son, White Hart Hotel, Buckingham.  
Tuesday, 30th July 1935. 3.30.*

#### Lot 5

*The well situated Business Premises at Little Tingewick having a frontage of 70 feet to the main Buckingham, Bicester and Oxford Road, being brick-built, slated and tiled comprising*

*Dwelling House, Shop Premises and Garage*

*Accommodation – 2 reception rooms, 4 bedrooms and Box room, Kitchen and Scullery, Double-fronted SHOP with show windows (well fitted throughout with Counters, Nests of Drawers and partitioned Shelving), spacious storage rooms over. LARGE GARAGE with double doors, Oil Store. Together with Outbuildings – Wash house with furnace and Stack Wood and Coal Store, etc. Piggeries and Garden.*



A 1930s billhead for Freeman's Garage

There were another two garages in Finmere—Finmere Garage opposite the Red Lion and Yew Tree Garage. Zaccheus Radford was a coal merchant at Forge Cottage from 1924 to 1931 and by 1939 is described as Proprietor, Finmere Garage, from where he operated a small bus. After the opening of the bypass, the garages no longer serve petrol and Finmere Garage is being developed for housing.



Freeman's Garage can be seen in the distance in this photograph of people waiting for the bus in the 1950s

## Finmere Market

Many people know Finmere only for its Sunday market, which is held on the former airfield in Little Tingewick. Wendy and Kenneth Hobday established the market in 1973, despite strong opposition from Buckinghamshire County Council, which believed that it contravened Sunday trading laws. The proprietors argued that they could circumvent these laws by charging customers ten pence to join the 'Wendy Fair Market Club.' The public supported them and between twenty and thirty thousand people attended its opening on 13 May.

*Thousands of people went to the first Sunday market at Finmere to be met by a howling wind that threatened to end the trading where Bucks County Council could not. Over 140 stalls were set up in spite of the stormy weather and an edict from the planners that the airport land should not be used for the purposes of a market... Each of the people running the stalls was given a warning by officers of Bucks County Council... The pleasure of the occasion was spoiled a little by the wind, which blew dust from the chippings—laid to make roadways for market customers—all over the stalls and shoppers' faces. (Buckingham Advertiser, 18 May 1973)*



THAMES 5/7 cwt. VAN



This van enjoys a high level of acceptance with commercial operators, combining as it does the attributes of the extremely successful Anglia car, and excellent load carrying capacity.

Price from £387.0.0

Extra for 1200 c.c. engine, 4 speed synchromesh, larger brakes £20.

Four inspection points at

**Douglas Hull Limited**

FINMERE, NR. BUCKINGHAM

Tel. Finmere 361

Hours—8.30 to 4.30 p.m. or by appointment

Terms and part exchanges

An advertisement for Yew Tree Garage

1973	2000
10p	70p

1973	2000
£1,545	£10,700



**Advertisement for the Sunday market, Buckingham  
Advertiser, September 1973**

Earlier, Finmere had been a site of another market: Paxton's and Holiday's Cattle Market.

*The opening of the Great Central Railway for Finmere has created a capital centre for an agricultural sale—a want long felt in this district. The trains bring purchasers from London, starting at 8.15 am... [arriving at] Finmere at 9.52; while trains from the north arrive about the same time. A good sale ground has been secured, and a commodious house [the Shelswell Inn], well adapted for the trade, is in the course of erection. Stables, upwards of 100 feet in length, are already built. (Bicester Advertiser, 14 September 1900)*

The strong wind and low clouds led to the cancellation of a sky diving display. Insensitive to the market's popularity and the good-humoured atmosphere on the opening day, the County Council was determined to stop it. On 1 July, the operators and twenty-five traders were fined £1,545 at Buckingham Magistrates Court for breaching Sunday trading laws. Despite the fines, the market continued and on 8 July attracted nine thousand people. In August, the Hobdays and seven stallholders were back in the Magistrates Court. Anthony Scrivener QC, later a Chairman of the Bar, represented the Council. He condemned the Market Club.

*On this occasion, a most sinister scheme was operated. Members of the public who came to the market were induced to join a so-called club... What is most sinister is that they were all paying 10p for the privilege of buying goods. How many people would pay 10p to go into Marks and Spencers? There are a great many people who do not realise they have been taken in by a useless piece of paper. (Buckingham Advertiser, 3 August 1973)*

The defendants were fined £1,400 in fines and costs, but this did not lessen their determination to succeed. The Christmas market on 9 December 1973 drew an estimated thirty to thirty-five thousand people between 10 am and 1 pm.

In 1974, Aylesbury Vale District Council assumed responsibility for planning matters from the County Council. It recognised the success of the market and took a more conciliatory approach. A year later, it granted planning approval for the market to be held for three years.

*We are very pleased with the committee's decision... We have taken a lot of knocks over the market, but we have taken expensive legal advice to make sure that we are within the law in respect of Sunday trading. (Wendy Hobday, speaking to the Buckingham Advertiser, June 1975)*

In 1976, planning permission was extended to March 1981. The market continues today, though it has not been as busy since Sunday trading laws were relaxed in 1994 to allow supermarkets and other stores to trade legally on Sundays. The old airfield is also now the site of the annual Bicester Sheep Fair.

## 🌀 In Hall and Field 🌀

Initially lacking a dedicated meeting space, villagers held their meetings in the Kings Head or the school, where lessons often ended early to allow preparations for events. These meetings were frequently cramped and, in the 1930s, the village resolved to build a dedicated hall.

### Finmere's Red Letter Day: The First Village Hall

In 1933, the villagers built a hall on Mere Road, on the now vacant and overgrown plot between Town Close and White Houses. Mr Alfred Lepper donated the land on a twenty-one year lease at a peppercorn rent of one shilling a year. Under the headline 'Finmere's Red Letter Day,' the local newspaper applauded the opening of Finmere's first village hall.

*Seven thousand bricks were laid by voluntary labour and a great deal of carpentering and other manual work was performed by the residents of Finmere in the erection, by subscription, for their village, of an excellently situated village hall, which was declared open, on Friday afternoon, by Miss Ashwell. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)*

The new hall, fifty by twenty feet (15 by 6m), was built with a wood frame and asbestos panels on a brick plinth. The cost was more than £153 and funding was raised by social events and subscriptions. This included a competition to guess the name of a 'beautiful doll' dressed in yellow, which raised £9, and two performances of an operetta, 'The Wishing Cap,' by the school children.

### A Charming Operetta: 'The Wishing Cap'

The Buckingham Advertiser recorded that the operetta was well received.

*On Easter Tuesday, in aid of the above fund, the village children and friends under the conductorship of Mrs L. Catley [school teacher], rendered their musical operetta entitled 'The Wishing Cap'...*

*Like most children, Finmere children show themselves to best advantage on a stage. Many of them won their way to the hearts of a splendid audience at Finmere School on Tuesday. Little distinction can be made between the principals, for all did their work well. A few parts need special mention, one being Violet Freeman as 'Elsa.' She spoke very distinctly, while her singing was very sweet... Next comes Katisha (Gipsy Queen). This part was taken by Edna Freeman. She pleased the audience so much that she was encored...*

*Mrs Catley is to be complimented upon her work with the children... They were well taught and hence did their parts well... The entire proceeds of this effort are to be handed to the Village Hall fund. (22 April 1933)*

Feet	Metres
50	15.3
20	6.1

1933	2000
£153	£5,850
£9	£347

*The success of the venture was largely due to the energetic work of the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Z. Radford, to the secretary and treasurer, the Reverend G. Dangerfield, and to the members of the enthusiastic Committee which was composed of Messrs. Z. Radford, jun., L. Catley, H. Beale, C. Andrews, M.B. Jordan, A. Horwood and Mesdames Paxton, Parrott, Davis and Harris. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)*



### Wishing Cap actors with Floss Clifford

**Back row** (left to right)

Hollyoaks granddaughter Edna Freeman Florence 'Floss' Clifford  
Hollyoaks granddaughter Violet 'Vidy' Freeman

**Front row** (left to right)

Joyce Freeman Phyllis Freestone

1953 2000

£2 10s £40

The photograph above shows four of the actors in 'The Wishing Cap,' two years before their performance. Edna Freeman played 'Katisha,' the Gipsy Queen; Violet Freeman played 'Elsa'; Phyllis Freestone played 'Phoebe,' a dairymaid; Joyce Freeman played 'Fairy Goodwill.' They are shown with Florence Clifford and two granddaughters of Mr and Mrs Hollyoaks.

## The Opening

Most of the village attended the opening on Friday afternoon, 28 April 1933. The Hall Committee had considered who should perform the ceremony and:

*Everybody had said, 'we will ask Miss Ashwell'... because Miss Ashwell and her sister were very closely concerned with the welfare of the village. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)*

Miss Alice Ashwell, then sixty-four years of age, was a daughter of the late Rector, Seymour Ashwell. After declaring the hall open and wishing it every possible success, she was presented with a spring bouquet of daffodils and double narcissi by 'little Miss Betty Radford.' The hall formally opened, Rector George Dangerfield offered a prayer for:

*God's blessing upon the work that it might be for God's glory and for the true good of the village and a means of keeping them together in the spirit of true fellowship and brotherly love. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)*

The celebrations continued into the evening with a whist drive and dance, the music performed by a five-piece band from Bucknell. The prizes were presented by Miss Emily Ashwell, Alice's sister.

In 1953, a new lease for the hall was agreed with John Lepper, Alfred's son, for fifteen years at a yearly rent of £2 10s.



### Villagers prepare for a sponsored walk

In 1971, the village hall was short of funds. A sponsored walk and other fund raising events raised over two hundred pounds.

## A Prize Winning New Village Hall

By the 1970s, the hall on Mere Road was considered too small and was becoming dilapidated. There was also concern about the asbestos used in its construction. Fundraising began for a new hall. In 1983, the site for the new building was marked out at the north edge of the playing fields and the footings dug. A contractor erected the stanchions and roof. Over the next year, the brickwork was laid by a professional bricklayer working at weekends with helpers from the village. The hall was completed in 1985 and used for the first time for refreshments for sponsored walkers and for the August Horticultural Show. On 12 April 1986, Councillor Prestidge, Chairman of Cherwell District Council, officially opened the new hall.

*The present village hall is in a pre-war wooden building, and is in urgent need of improvement. A new village hall should be sought after to give a larger meeting hall area and full kitchen and toilet facilities. (Finnere Village Plan 1974, Oxfordshire County Council)*

A year earlier, the hall had been entered in the Oxfordshire Village Ventures Competition. Out of thirty-seven entries, the village was awarded the second prize of £150, in recognition of the high community involvement in the project. The judges' report read:

*Not only have they designed and built their own village hall; they have paid for it as they built it. Apart from using professional help in the basic structure, the villagers themselves have provided all the labour and skills needed to build this very fine hall.*

The Grapevine Newsletter produced by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council in the summer of 1986 reported: 'the new Hall houses a Keep-fit Class, Guides, Youth Club and a newly-formed Historical Society.'

1986	2000
£150	£250



**Back row** (left to right)  
Bill Banfield Anita Bilbo Brian Pankhurst Roger Davis

**Front row** (left to right)  
Cyril Winchester Marjorie Winchester Judy Poore  
Philip Willison David Purves

### Villagers celebrate winning second prize in the 1985 Oxfordshire Village Ventures Awards

Roger Davis was Field Officer for Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. Judy Poore was the Final Round Judge. Mr David Purves was Regional Public Affairs Officer for Shell (UK) Ltd, sponsors of the competition. The others pictured are villagers.

## The Playing Fields

The first sports field was located in the field behind Town Farm and the Kings Head, adjacent to the old B4031. The Sports Pavilion was built on land belonging to the Kings Head. The lease, between Chesham and Brackley Breweries Ltd and Finmere Sports Club, was signed on 30 October 1957 for a peppercorn annual rent of two shillings.

1957	2000
2s	£1.34

In 1972, the Parish Council learnt that the sports field was to be lost. It agreed to approach Merton College to lease approximately five acres in Water Stratford Road but by 1974 the matter had not been resolved.

*Within the village, there is an urgent need to secure a village playing field area... from which the Sports Club will operate, together with a clubhouse building and small children's play area which would serve the village as a whole. (Finmere Village Plan 1974, Oxfordshire County Council)*

The problem was solved that year, when the Parish Council agreed a lease with the Mixbury Charity for a plot of twelve acres (5 hectares) for ninety-nine years. The next year, an estimate for levelling and seeding of £700–800 was agreed and an estimate for the pavilion sought. This was not built and the village hall still serves as an improvised pavilion. The revived Sports Club is now seeking funds for new facilities.

## The Play Area and Trees

In 1980, it was agreed that a sloping area of about a third of an acre (0.1 hectare) at the south end of the playing field should be used as a children's play area and for planting a spinney. The trees would act as a windbreak and enhance the sports pitches. The scheme was entered in a Council for the Protection of Rural England competition in 1981 against thirty-nine other village entries. It was awarded a certificate of merit and won £125, which was used to buy more trees to add to those already donated or purchased.

1981	2000
£125	£270

A hundred whips of various species were purchased to provide blossom, berries for the birds and varied coloured bark and foliage. With the help of a local farmer, holes were dug with a mechanical auger and the planting carried out in December. In 1982, a £50 grant was received from the Council for the Protection of Rural England for tree planting in the northwest corner of the playing field and in 1983 trees were donated for planting in the same area. Three years later, a grant of £35 was awarded from the Monument Trust of the CPRE for the planting of trees around the village hall and the Austrian pines in the northeast corner. On 8 May 1995, Tony How, Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee, officially opened the new children's play area during village celebrations of the 50th anniversary of VE Day.



**Tony How receiving the key for the play area from John Cunningham, 1995**

## ☞ Making Our Own Entertainment ☞

Finmere is too small to merit a cinema or commercial bingo hall and villagers have always made their own entertainment. Before radio, television and the motorcar, they looked forward to the annual Village Feast and the occasional play or operetta. Royal weddings and coronations also provided occasions for celebration. This tradition has continued in our modern, entertainment-rich world; recent parties have included commemorations of Victory in Europe (VE) day in May 1995 and FMMMM in May 2000.



**Children dress as evacuees for VE Day, May 1995**

The photograph above shows the children in the playing field.  
The photograph below shows Josh Lepper in the parade to the playing field.



**A gurner and joustier at FMMMM, May 2000**

Finmere's Mad May Millennium Mayhem (FMMMM), the most light-hearted of the village's Millennium celebrations, recreated a medieval jousting tournament with wheelbarrows, toilet seats, poets, tea bags and much more.

## Finmere Feast

It is not known whether Finmere Feast was sponsored by a Friendly Society.

Alf Lepper recalled Finmere Feast in 1971:

*We used to have a good do... Finmere Feast, the first Sunday after the 11th of October, when there was a fair [that] used to call and we had all sorts of celebrations like the greasy pole and the leg of mutton on the top... At the [Kings Head] pub now, when they dig the garden, they still dig up... some of the old coins that were lost during the fair. (Hello Finmere, BBC, 13 June 1971)*

Shortly after the Second World War, a local newspaper bemoaned the disappearance of 'feast days':

*The age-old custom of the 'club' or 'feast day' in village life is fast becoming extinct and there are now few villages which observe these occasions. Older people can remember when such annual celebrations were held in almost every village in the neighbourhood, but one by one in the last half-century they have disappeared. (Bicester Advertiser, 6 June 1947)*

A hundred years earlier, every village in the neighbourhood held an annual feast. Most were held after the harvest, though some were held in the summer months. Many feasts had their origins in village 'friendly societies,' which supported members in times of hardship or illness; these societies, or 'clubs,' would periodically share out any surpluses and sponsor an annual feast or club day. In Tingewick, the Crown Union Friendly Society, founded in 1845, and White Hart Union Friendly Society, founded in 1874, sponsored the club days; both were named after the public houses at which they were based. Finmere school children were given full or half-day holidays to attend Tingewick Club in June and the more commercial Tingewick Feast in August.

Finmere Feast was initially held on the second Monday and Tuesday of October. School pupils were given two days holiday for the Feast until 1898, and a single or a half-day holiday was given until 1915.

*Finmere. The Annual Feast was held on Monday last and the attendance of holidayists surpassed that of previous years. There was an abundance of stalls, etc., and the dancing booths especially appeared to do a good trade. The weather was fine, thereby considerably enhancing the enjoyment of the villagers. (Buckingham Advertiser, 18 October 1879)*

In 1893, the Cricket Club provided the impetus for the event.

*The Annual Feast of this village was celebrated on Monday October 16, and thanks chiefly to the Committee of the Cricket Club, the day was of a very enjoyable description. Though somewhat late in the season, it was decided to play the closing game on the Feast Day, which took the form of Eleven v. Twenty-two... After a very pleasant game, which was witnessed by a large number of spectators, the twenty two scored an easy victory... At the conclusion of the game, the players retired to a large granary kindly let by Mr Keen, where a capital spread was provided by Mr and Mrs J. Shaw [of the Kings Head]. Nearly 40 sat down...*

*Later in the evening, a successful smoking concert was held in the same room... There was a large attendance, and a plentiful supply of good songs and singers... The following evening, Tuesday, a dance was held on behalf of the club... It is mainly owing to [the energy of Mr Keen] that the match, concert and dance proved so successful in all ways. The usual feast accompaniments were present in large numbers, and the feast was one of the best held for some years. (Buckingham Advertiser, 21 October 1893)*

Sometimes, the villagers enjoyed themselves too much. In 1899, Finmere labourer William Venstone was fined 1 shilling with 8 shillings costs for being drunk and disorderly outside the Kings Head on the night of the Feast.

Finmere Village Feast continued until 1915, when the pressures and shortages of the First World War led to it being suspended. It was not resumed after the war.

In 1857, the Buckingham Advertiser moaned:

*On the occasion of those annual affairs called 'Feasts' but are in reality times when drunkenness and all the sensual passions are allowed unlimited scope, there is almost invariably something for the magistrates to do...*

1899	2000
9s	£31

## Garlands at May Day

**M**ay Day, one of the oldest rural festivals, celebrates the coming of spring and the passing of winter. Originally a pagan festival, services were held at St Michael's church to celebrate May Day until 1929. The festival was a school holiday and lessons the previous day were often disrupted by preparations.

*30 May 1877. The elder girls assisted alternately with the infants, Mrs Davis being required to dress the May Garland.*

*1 May 1896. A holiday was given yesterday afternoon to decorate the May Garland. The usual May Day Holiday was given today. (School log book)*



**A May Day parade under the Cross Tree in the mid-1930s**

The elaborate garlands, woven with flowers and foliage from fields and gardens, were paraded around the village where the children's work was rewarded with cash gifts from villagers.

*5 May 1884. Reverend Seymour Ashwell visited and divided the money got by the children on May Day.*

*1 May 1897. The children handed in a sovereign having been round with the Garland.*

1898	2000
£1 4s	£87

*3 May 1898. Result of May Day collection £1 4/- was distributed amongst the children. (School log book)*

A May King and May Queen were crowned each year. The last May Day holiday recorded in the school log was in 1914, though May Day was regularly celebrated in Finmere until the Second World War. During the War, evacuees joined in the celebrations—for many May Day 1940 will have been their first experience of this country custom.



**Villagers did not need an excuse to make entertainment: Four musical boys on Valley Road, about 1935**

**Back row** (left to right)  
John Horwood Ray Davis

**Front row** (left to right)  
Frank Hitchcock Fred Barnes



**May Day 1940**

The left photograph shows the May King, Fred Barnes, and May Queen, Joan Gibson (then Joan Davis). A number of evacuees are also pictured.

## Celebrating Royal Coronations

For the residents of Finmere, the crowning of a new King or Queen provided welcome opportunities for sports, dances, beef and plum pudding, and plenty of ale.

### King Edward VII

Following the death of Victoria in 1901, the coronation of Edward VII was an occasion for prayer and an excuse for fun, though the Coronation was delayed for three weeks due to the King's ill health. Seymour Ashwell described the events.

*19 August 1902. This being the Coronation Day of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, the event was duly celebrated in the village. The fixture [planned for] June 27th had to be abandoned as it was found necessary for the King to undergo a serious surgical operation before and Sunday June 29 was a day of special prayer for the King's recovery. That recovery was so satisfactory that it was considered the King could undergo the strain of a Coronation Service at this early date.*

*We began our observance of the day with a special service in the Church at 11 am—after that a cricket match was begun in Mr Lepper's field—at 3.30 a dinner of Beef and Plum Pudding and ale was given to all adults and a tea to the Children in Mr Lepper's barn—after which the health of the King and Queen was drunk with enthusiasm. Then races and sports with Prizes for the winners took place—these were followed by dancing in Mr Lepper's barn till 11 o'clock. All the children received a medal in commemoration of the event. (Rectors' Book)*

### King George V

Edward VII was King for just nine years and died after a series of heart attacks in 1910. Finmere residents were soon celebrating the Coronation of his son. Rector Henry Trower recorded the details.

*22 June 1911. The Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary was observed as a day of rejoicing in the parish. The Church Bells were rung in the early morning and throughout the day. At midday there was a special service in the Church ...*

*A tent was erected in Barn Meadow and at 3 all the Parish was entertained to a substantial meal, tea and ale with Cakes and strawberries and the health of the King and Queen was loyally and heartily drunk by all. A band was provided and the rest of the day was spent in games and races—prizes being given to all the winners—dancing was enjoyed by some.*

*Commemoration Plates were given to all the children. Those who from sickness or infirmity were unable to be present had their share of good things sent to them and the day was happily spent by all. (Rectors' Book)*

*While some Oxfordshire villages cancelled their June celebrations, including Finmere, a greater number went ahead 'to comply with the expressed desire of his Majesty that the country festivities should be proceeded with, especially the children's treats.' (Jackson's Oxford Journal, 5 July 1902)*

## King George VI

George V died of pneumonia in 1936 and was succeeded by Edward VIII. After just eleven months, Edward abdicated to marry American divorcee, Mrs Wallis Simpson. All the villages and towns of the area celebrated the Coronation of his successor, George VI, on 12 May 1937. By this date, Finmere Rectors were only making occasional entries in the Rectors' Book and we turn to the Buckingham Advertiser for a description of the day's events.

*The bells were pealed at 6 am on Coronation Day by Finmere ringers. Changes were also rung later in the morning by the Rev. A. Wheeler (Rector) at the Parish Church at 1.30 pm. Sports were organised for children in the field near the 'Kings Head' kindly lent by Mr Coles. After the children's tea the 54 Coronation mugs, given by Mr C Tredwell , Bacon's House, were distributed by Miss Tredwell to the children.*

*The adults' tea was held at 5.30 pm, after which their sports were completed. At a social held in the Village Hall music was supplied by Mrs Turner, Mr Garinge and Mr Hinson; M.C. Mr C. Andrews. (Buckingham Advertiser 22 May 1937)*

In Finmere, villagers posed outside the village hall for photographs (opposite).

## A Golden Wedding

Villagers did not need the excuse of a national event to have a party. The entire parish joined in the golden wedding celebrations for William and Anne Barrett of Finmere Grounds in 1903. A correspondent to a local newspaper described the events.

William Barrett was ten months old when he arrived in Finmere seventy-nine years earlier accompanied by his two-year-old sister Elizabeth. His parents had previously lived at Preston Capes in Northamptonshire and in Finmere became tenant farmers for the Duke of Buckingham at Finmere Grounds House.

*[Thursday] March 29th was the fiftieth anniversary of the wedding day of Mr and Mrs Barrett of Finmere Grounds. Mr Barrett having spent all his life there, and as Mrs Barrett came as a bride, there is naturally a closer relationship between them and the village than is often the case in these changeable times... On Sunday, the church bells rang out merrily both before and after the services, which Mr and Mrs Barrett attended and received many congratulations from their friends and villagers. At the church-yard gate, their pony trap was awaiting them, which they found had been gaily decorated by some enthusiastic friends with flowers and ribbons.*

The golden wedding celebrated William's marriage to Anne Sharp<None>. They were married at St Peter's Church, Brackley; William was then thirty and Anne thirty-two. They lived at Finmere Grounds throughout their married years and took a close interest in village life. William also combined his duties as Overseer of the Poor with those of a churchwarden. In 1897, in a typically generous gesture, the couple entertained the children from the village school. Teacher Mary Rae recorded the treat in the school log book.



**Back row** (left to right)

Mr Parrot Mr Wakelin Bert Davis Arthur Horwood  
Percy Davis Eddy Cumnady Phoebe Davis

**Front row** (left to right)

Walter Aris Unknown Louie Davis



**Back row** (left to right)

Harry Beale Percy Davis A Davis C Andrews

**Front row** (left to right)

Maggie Cumnady Agnes Davis Miss Paxton  
Mrs Andrews Harriet Horwood Mrs H Beale  
Mrs Frank Bull

**Celebrating the Coronation of George VI at the old village hall**



**Anne Barrett in 1903**

*18 May 1897. Work began earlier this afternoon in order to dismiss early as Mr and Mrs Barrett had kindly invited scholars & teacher to tea at their home.*

*19 May 1897. Children enjoyed their 'treat' very much. After tea, they played different games, ran races, etc. & went home very happy.*

Six years later, when William and Anne celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary, a local newspaper noted that they took a pragmatic view on England's temperamental weather.

*Mr and Mrs Barrett wished to celebrate their golden wedding by entertaining the whole parish, but the weather at this time of year being so unreliable, instead of doing this they decided to present each family in the village with a golden gift in the shape of a half sovereign of 1903, especially procured for the occasion together with a card in gold lettering giving the original announcement of their wedding and asking acceptance of the gift with all good wishes. Mr and Mrs Barrett drove around each house and delivered them on Saturday evening.*

*All the members of the family met at Finmere Grounds [on the Monday evening] and found Mr and Mrs Barrett in excellent health. Earlier in the day, Mr Leonard Varney took a photo of Mr and Mrs Barrett and family.*



**William and Anne Barrett at Finmere Grounds, possibly in 1903**

## 🌀 Sports and Shows 🌀

The earliest record of a sports club at Finmere is Tingewick and Finmere Cricket Club; this was established on 20 August 1856. The Buckingham Advertiser described the closing game of the 1858 season.

*The game was a remarkably good one, witnessed by a reasonable company. At the close of the game, the party adjourned to the Crown Inn [Tingewick], where a dinner of first rate quality was provided by the host. 25 September 1858.*

In 1905, there was a rather different cricket match. On 17 August, Finmere Ladies Cricket team beat the Tingewick Ladies team.

### Finmere Sports Club

The Symes-Thompsons of Finmere House actively promoted sports. In 1947, Mrs Caroline Ada Chute Symes-Thompson founded the Finmere Sports Club. George Barnes recorded the details in a letter to the Bicester Advertiser, on 25 April 1952.

*Sir:- According to the programme on sale at the Bicester Sports Ground on Easter Monday, Bicester Town Football Club claim that they may be the only club to have a lady as Honorary Treasurer...*

*Finmere Sports Club have Mrs Symes-Thompson of Finmere House as Treasurer, she having held office since the formation of the club in 1947... Mrs Symes-Thompson was in fact the founder of the club, having formed a young boy's football team and provided them with their first ball. Finmere Sports Club includes both football and cricket, and have recently been presented with Finmere School as a club room.*

*Mrs Symes-Thompson has missed only four monthly committee meetings during the past five years and with her late husband, Dr Symes-Thompson, was in frequent attendance at all our games...*

George Barnes  
Honorary Secretary  
Finmere Sports Club

That year, the Club showed its merits by winning the Buckingham Advertiser Cup. The Final was held at the Bourton Road Ground.



#### Finmere Cricket Team in 1905

This photograph appeared in the Buckingham Advertiser  
on 14 June 1952.

##### Back row (left to right)

Mr Cotterel (scorer) Miss E. Horwood Mrs Hitcock  
Miss E. Lepper Miss Davis Mrs Horwood Mrs Hollyoak  
Mr Parrott (umpire)

##### Front row (left to right)

Miss K. Lepper Mrs Percival (captain) Mrs Beckett  
Two unidentified

##### Right side

Mrs Cotterel Mr A. Lepper

*On Thursday evening, before a large and enthusiastic crowd, Finmere Sports Club won the Buckingham Advertiser Knock-Out Cricket Cup by defeating North Marston by 130 runs to 73. This is the first time that Finmere has won a cricket cup. Finmere's win came as something of a surprise, but they fully deserved their victory, the Marston side giving many runs away by their poor fielding and dropped catches proving very costly. (Buckingham Advertiser, 12 July 1952)*



**Winners of the Buckingham Advertiser Cup 1952**

W. Barnes (Umpire), Mrs Symes-Thompson, D. Makin, L. Newby, J. Dickenson, H. Claridge, R. Wyatt, K. Uptone, G. Barnes (Secretary), Mrs Horwood (Scorer), T. Bartlett, J. Gough, D. Hancock (Captain), H. Hawes, A. Newby.

In the summer of 2000, the Finmere Sports Club was reformed with the aim of improving facilities in the village, including providing changing rooms, a hard surface training area and an all weather cricket strip. The first meeting, chaired by Charles Grimston, was held on 3 July in Dennis East's chicken shed.

## The Finmere Show

The Finmere Show, now the Finmere and Bicester Show, was established as a benefit to Sally Haynes, injured in a riding accident. The first show was held in August 1959, while Sally was a patient at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

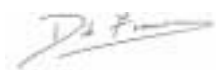
*National Jockeys Rode in Finmere Donkey Derby. Large crowds rolled up at Finmere on Tuesday for the pony show and gymkhana for the Sally Haynes Benefit fund... The highlight of Tuesday's show was a Donkey Derby in which a dozen National Hunt jockeys took part. They included local jockey Derek Ancil, Fred Winter, Bryan Marshall, Mike Scudamore, Dick Francis and Johnny Bullock. Fred Winter won the Donkey Derby, with Bryan Marshall second and Dick Francis third. (Bicester Advertiser, 21 August 1959)*

The show was initially held at Hill Leys and moved to Finmere airfield in 1976 and later to a field on the A4421 near Bicester. Former jockey Dick Francis described how the show began in the programme for 1989.

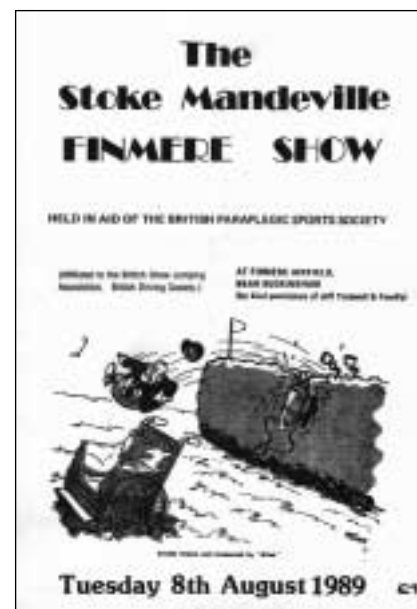
*Thirty years ago, in 1959, when Sally Haynes broke her back in a point to point, it was decided to stage a Sally Haynes Horse Show to help raise funds for her and for Sports in general for the similarly injured. Lionel Vick was there, a jockey paralysed by a racing fall, and other national Hunt jockeys turned up in force to make fools of themselves on horses generously lent by the show-jumping fraternity. In addition, several patients from Stoke Mandeville Hospital gave an exhibition of table tennis, and everyone voted the day a Good Thing.*

*The following year, renamed The Stoke Mandeville Finmere Show, the event took wings and became an annual fixture; so very successfully that next year, 1990, we celebrate Thirty Years of watching many of the country's top horses and riders again taking part...*

With very best wishes



Dick Francis was champion jockey. In 1957, he gave up professional riding and joined *The Sunday Express* as their racing correspondent. He is best known for his novels; he published his first thriller in 1962.



The cartoon was presented to the Show by Giles  
Giles drew for the Daily Express from 1943 until his death in 1995.

## The Horticultural Show

The Horticultural Show was originally staged in the old village hall, including a Christmas show on 30 November 1983. This show included competitive classes and local crafts, including spinning, weaving, corn dollies, brass rubbings and a display of old photographs. The competitive classes were well supported and Mr Lester Jarvis took three first prizes, heralding the local newspaper's headline of 'Man Made Best Christmas Pud.'

On 31 August 1985, the show was held in the new village hall for the first time and the next Christmas show was held there on 9 December 1989. In 1987, the show was expanded to include outdoor events, bike scrambling, wellington boot throwing and clock golf. The following year, Finmere's first dog show was added to the event. In 1990, the cubs joined the show and held a 'shoe shine' to raise funds for their pack. Each year, profits from the show have been donated to the Village Hall fund.

The show has not been held since 1998. Although the number of entries had not fallen, fewer families were taking part and little new interest and support was being shown.



Finmere Horticultural Show, 1985

## 🌀 Guides and Scouts 🌀

As the village grew in the 1970s and 1980s, demand increased for out of school activities for children and teenagers. Brownies, Guides and Fox Ranger troops were formed for the girls and Cubs for the boys.

### Finmere Brownies

Finmere Brownies pack was established in 1980. Tessa Hollingshead recalls the details.

*One day I was reminiscing with Rose Sasser, an American whose husband was with the American Air Force at Croughton. We remembered the wonderful times we had in our youth as members of Girl Guides—Rose had travelled all over the world as a guide and I had spent many happy hours at Foxlease, Lyndhurst, where I then lived, with guides from every nation. We decided that we would start up a guiding unit in Finmere and, as our children were then of Brownie age, we chose a Brownie Pack. The District Commissioner, Mrs Gray, a wonderful lady from Souldern, who gave us every encouragement and told us how to go about it. We also visited the Guide shop in Oxford to research whether there had been a Brownie Pack in Finmere before—there had not, so we were able to call ourselves the 1st Finmere Brownies.*

*Our uniforms were quite different from the sweatshirt and casual culottes of today. We wore little brown dresses and in the winter, we had to wear them over piles of jumpers and tights to keep warm. Instead of the sash, we had a Brownie tie and many hours were spent learning how to tie this correctly, and use it as a sling if someone hurt their arm!*

*We spread the word that Brownies was to start in the village school on Monday nights from 4.00 to 5.30 pm and we found 12 eager girls waiting for us on the first night. Most were pupils at Finmere School, just two came from other schools. After a few weeks, our first recruits were ready to make their Promises. Mrs Gray came to enrol them and reinstate Rose and me as adult leaders. One of our most exciting events in the first year was a trip to the Brownie Revels at Tusmore Park where we met Brownies from many other packs and took part in games and races. After a while we moved into the village hall and we were joined by a wonderful helper Pat White who quickly became a qualified leader and has led the pack through 20 exciting years from strength to strength.*

*In March 2000, we celebrated our 20th official birthday, together with Brown Owl, Pat White, having also completed 20 years service. Over the years, uniform and programmes have changed dramatically. The pack is now drawn from many local villages and occasionally Buckingham, with an average pack size of 22 girls. Activities have involved the programme, supporting various charities, going on over 20 pack holidays and generally having fun together.*



**Finmere Brownies in November 1999**



**Eric the Fox on the Eiffel Tower, 1997**

It was a tradition that Rangers made their promises in an unusual place; these included the Bell Tower of the church, on the roof of Delta Gray, in a Jacuzzi and, best of all, at the top of the Eiffel Tower.



**The founding Finmere Cubs, 1988**

In 2000, only the Brownies and Guides remain active.

## Finmere Guides

The 1st Finmere Guides Company was formed in May 1985. In the ensuing years, the girls have obtained many badges and trefoils and their continued aim is for fun, learning and entertainment. They regularly attend camps, both at home and abroad, and their activities have included abseiling, bell ringing and night hiking. Within the community, the girls undertake the litter blitz in the spring and the postal service at Christmas.

## Fox Rangers

Fox Rangers, for girls aged 14-25, are the next step up from Guides and started at Finmere in September 1993. Two Guiders, Bev Mallion and Di Davis, ran the unit. They had a varied programme and did many activities, including starting up the recycling in the village. Money raised from this was used to sponsor an Indian boy, Ramlal Uiky. One member was fortunate to go on an international trip to Russia, another to an international camp in Wales. Other activities have included quad biking, raft racing and a night out at the ballet. Unfortunately, the unit closed in late 1998 due to lack of numbers; it is in abeyance, ready to start again, once demand allows.

## Finmere Cubs

At the beginning of 1988, plans were put into action to start a Cub Pack in Finmere by Ann Smith, Carol Cooper, and an enthusiastic committee of parents. It thrived with boys taking part in scouting activities locally and further afield. By the end of 1991, however, numbers had declined to seven and were due to drop to five after Christmas. The decision was made to amalgamate the Finmere and Tingewick packs, which had a new leader. Village children must now attend cubs at Tingewick, which is a sad loss for Finmere. Finmere has not hosted a Scout troop.

## 🌀 The Women's Institute 🌀

**F**inmere WI was formed on 20 February 1957, before which a coach travelled around villages, including Finmere, to transport members to Tusmore for meetings. After the initial meeting, a committee of ten was formed, consisting of a President, Secretary, Treasurer and two Vice-Presidents, Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer. The first monthly meeting was held on Wednesday 13 March in the old village hall at 2.30 pm. Originally, meetings were held on the second Wednesday of every month, in the afternoons in the winter months, and in the evenings in the summer. The annual meeting was held in November and changed to May in 1968 and to March in 1984. Membership has fluctuated from thirty-three at the initial meetings to a high of forty-seven. Current membership is now struggling at thirteen. A byelaw changed the WI name on 13 February 1974 to Finmere & Mixbury WI.

In its early years, the WI organised the children's party and harvest lunch. Current events include refreshments for the annual carol service and helping with the senior citizens' annual party. Finmere & Mixbury WI has won the silver cup in group competitions on the last four occasions. Other activities have included glove making, country dancing, square dancing and more recently line dancing. Drama classes led to a successful pantomime, written and produced by Mrs Mildred Tredwell. The WI has designed and made a collage of the village for the new village hall, presented a bench and helped with the cost of the Kissing Gate in the churchyard. As the WI moves into the next century, Finmere looks forward to increasing its membership and continuing to keep the WI movement flourishing in this part of Oxfordshire. Finmere and Mixbury WI is planning an entertaining programme based on its main interests: good food, good wine and good company.

### Inaugural committee members of Finmere WI.

President	Mrs T. (Mildred) Tredwell
Vice-President	Mrs Sheldon
Vice-President	Mrs V. P. (Nora) English
Honorary Secretary	Mrs C. Symes-Thompson
Assistant Secretary	Mrs J. Hemsworth
Honorary Treasurer	Mrs J. Treadwell
Assistant Treasurer	Mrs Hemsworth
Members	Miss Wyatt, Miss L. Haycock and Mrs Radford.



**The Finmere and Mixbury WI collage**

## The WI Pancake Race



### Pancake Day 1971

Mrs Kath Sheppard (President of Finmere WI 1970/71) presents a plate to Joy Stanbrook. Fringford were second, Evenley third. The photograph was taken outside the old village hall.

For centuries, villagers made their confessions on Shrove Tuesday before Lent, a period of penance, but by the Victorian era penance was giving way to pancakes. The historian James Blomfield faithfully records that in the 1880s Finmere church still rang the 'Pancake Bell' at 11.30 am. But he gloomily noted that by then its religious function had declined and it had become a signal for food.

*On Shrove Tide, or Tuesday, it was usual to ring one of the Church bells to summon the people to the confession of their sins (shrive or shrift, meaning confession) preparatory to Lent. This, in later times, degenerated into a signal for preparing the pancakes, which were commonly eaten on that day. (History of Finmere, 1887)*

From 1959 or before, Shrove Tuesday has been commemorated by the Women's Institute Pancake Race. In 1959, Mrs Ena Davis won and was presented with a copy of the WI Cookery Book by Mrs Mildred Tredwell, WI President. The race later became a competition between north Oxfordshire villages. In 1971, the race was held here and Finmere's Joy Stanbrook won.

In 1973, Finmere lost to Bucknell for the first time in six years. The next year, the rivalry intensified and Bucknell and Finmere WIs purchased a shield to be presented to the winning village. The race that year was in Bucknell. Four villages took part: Ambrosden, Bucknell, Finmere and Stoke Lyne. The race was run over 100 yards along Bainton Road and pancakes were tossed twice. Valerie Bennett won the new shield for Finmere and a new frying pan for herself. In 1977, the race was in Finmere from the Jubilee Tree to the school. Valerie Bennett won again. In 1978 and in 1979 Finmere preferred to hold a Pancake Party in the evening, instead of a race, and the Pancake race tradition in Finmere ended.

## ☞ Finmere During the Second World War ☞

This book has been written and edited as Britain remembers the horrors and sacrifice of the Second World War. It is sixty years since the remarkable rescue of men retreating at Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. Only a few villagers now remember those years; their memories tell of a village where danger, hardship and poverty was endured with a strengthened community spirit.

During the Second World War, prisoners were held at Shalstone Camp (at the Water Stratford A422 crossroads). Many laboured at Finmere Grounds. Some prisoners remained after the war. On Easter Monday, 1949, former prisoner Joseph Thoenes married Betty Radford, daughter of Zaccheus Radford of Finmere Garage, at St Michael's Church.

### The Evacuees from Edmonton

After the outbreak of war, it became a priority to move children from the vulnerable southeast, especially from London. An unprecedented evacuation began and the first wave of evacuees arrived in September 1939; 1,900 were settled in the Ploughley District but we have no record of any being billeted in Finmere.

This was the period of 'phoney war,' an uneasy peace in northwest Europe while Hitler's troops attacked Poland. Many refugees began to drift back to London. In April 1940, German troops invaded Norway and in May they marched on Belgium, Holland and France. After the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk between 26 May and 4 June 1940, the stage was set for the Battle of Britain. After Dunkirk, the second wave of evacuees was mobilised. On Sunday afternoon, 15 June 1940, 800 evacuees arrived at the Great Western Railway station in Bicester (now Bicester North).

*The Ploughley contingent of about 600 were marshalled at Mr Kelley's stables in Buckingham Road, and from there conveyed by bus and coach to the billets allocated to them in surrounding villages. On Tuesday, a further 800 evacuees arrived at Bicester, and all but 50 were distributed in the rural areas... Thus Ploughley received few short of a their quota of 1,850 children. (Bicester Advertiser, 23 June 1945)*

The roll of Finmere school was just fifteen children in November 1939. That number, however, was soon to be doubled by evacuees. On 4 March 1940, a Mr Woods called at the school about the refugees but it was not until June that any were admitted.

Ena Davis remembers evacuees from Edmonton being billeted in Finmere House. Two evacuees lived with the Hitchcock family at a cottage, now demolished, beside the church. Evacuees were also billeted in seven cottages in the village on the south side of Fulwell Road.

In 1941, the Medical Officer of Health for Oxford, Dr G. C. Williams, noted that the health of children evacuated from London to Oxfordshire had improved. He suggested that, after the war, it might be a good thing to have official billeting and to evacuate children from the big cities to the country for their health.

*19 June 1940. School closed owing to evacuation.*

*21 June 1940. School reopened today, 30 evacuated children being enrolled. (School log book)*

'Evacuee teacher,' Miss Ventura, who lived with the Misses Logan, two sisters who lived in the Rectory (now the Old Rectory), supported the teacher, Bethel Hardy. She was succeeded by Miss Cudmore in 1940.

Food was scarce and the children were often ill. Measles and impetigo were frequent afflictions. Blackouts were put in place over the windows in October 1942 and Miss Logan visited to inspect the children's gas masks from March 1943. Nevertheless, school business continued much as usual. Extra holidays compensated for the shortage of men to work in the fields. In 1943, the school closed from 30 July to 23 August for the summer holidays and for a fortnight from 24 September for the potato harvest.

In 1945, the war was at last over and the evacuees were able to return home.

*8 & 9 March 1945. The school was closed for two days owing to VE day and the day following.*

*25 June 1945. Terence Pirie and Harry Challis are returning to their London homes this week. There are now 26 on the roll and no official refugees in the school.*

There remained a few 'unofficial' refugees who had arrived to stay with relatives or friends.

*19 February 1946. Peter and Fred Manners have returned to London. 18 on roll.*

## Memories of a Village at War

In 1995, Ian Hudson interviewed Fred Tew, Mildred Tredwell, Ena Davis and Nellie Jones to record their memories for Finmere's VE Day celebrations.

### Fred Tew

Fred was called up and had to attend a medical in Bedford. He stood in the cubicle number five when the commanding officer called out 'Hide,' Fred misheard him and came out and signed Hide's medical report. The commanding officer was not amused when Fred explained that he had heard someone shout 'five.' He was later told that he was not fit enough to join the forces, and yet to this day he has never had an injection or been to hospital.

As the war developed, Fred secured employment in the construction of Finmere aerodrome during the early 1940s. Upon completion, the aerodrome was officially opened by Squadron Leader Hull, who later became Fred's next door neighbour. With the construction of the aerodrome complete, Fred was unemployed, until a conversation with the Squadron Leader led to an offer of civilian employment as a boiler stoker. Before taking up his duties, Fred was medically examined by two RAF doctors who found him to be fitter than many of their own officers. This put his mind to rest, having not understood why he failed his medical.

Fred remembers wartime activity on the aerodrome. When the Germans were raiding other airfields, it was common to see 40–50 aircraft at Finmere. These included Spitfires, Hurricanes, Wellingtons and Mosquitos. Fred was also involved in clearing trees in a wood at Shelswell Park to store new aircraft awaiting their duty. When the land had been cleared, it was covered with cinders, which from the air gave the impression of treetops once the grass had germinated. The village also benefited from the services of the Home Guard—based in the Saddle Room of the Kings Head—a fire fighter and Air Raid Wardens.

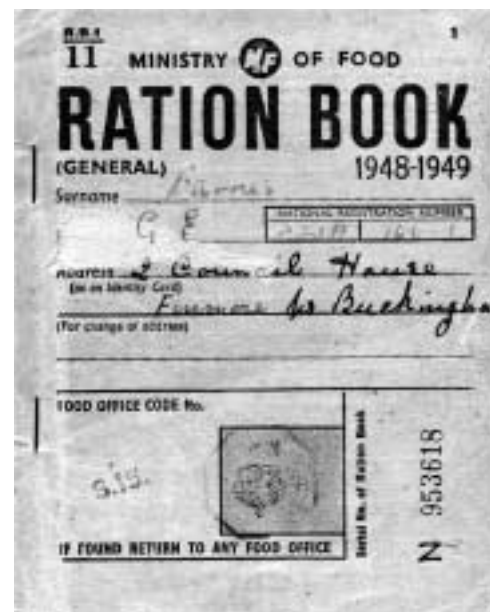
On the day it was announced that the war in Europe was over, celebrations began in earnest at the aerodrome, but before the celebrations got too excited, Fred left for home. He was greeted by the sight of the village being decked out in bunting and flags, and villagers enjoying spontaneous parties.

### Mildred Tredwell and Ena Davis

In wartime, rationing provided only meagre quantities of food. Everyone grew their own vegetables, supporting the campaign to 'Dig for Victory.' Most people also kept poultry and their own pig—what was not eaten was salted down. The roads were not cluttered up with cars or lorries; villagers walked, cycled or drove in a pony and trap.

Milk was transported around the village in large churns by pony and float, and measured into jugs or basins at each door. Children enjoyed a ride on the float, especially the evacuees who came from Edmonton, London. Many of these took up residence here after the War.

Finmere's air-raid wardens were strict about the blackout but there were still many stray bombs. At 9.30 pm on Valentines Day 1940, three bombs were dropped at the top of the village. One exploded on the hard court at Little Tingewick House; another landed on the greenhouse but did not explode. The third landed in Mere Lane and exploded twenty-four hours later. Charlie Andrew and Tommy Paxton paraded and warned residents about the unexploded bomb. Shortly afterwards, two bombs were dropped at the other end of the village on Lepper's farm (Tile House Farm on Fulwell Road).



### Post-war ration book

Food rationing began in 1940 and ended when meat rationing ended in 1954.

VE Day was celebrated with an enormous bonfire at the Cross Tree. Alf Lepper Senior kept piling on branches, so eventually all the wires above were burnt, cutting the telephone and electricity.

## Nellie Jones

Nellie's memories of peace in Europe being announced also include the bonfire lit on the village green. The fire burnt so fiercely that it set light to the telephone wires. Children were presented with commemorative mugs. Celebrations lasted through the night with everyone having a 'whale of a time' at the street parties. Nellie remembers that families were closer knit in the war years and more sociable. Villagers would place their gramophones near their front doors and sit in groups, listening to whatever could be heard. Her late husband, Arthur, and Mr. Cox and his brothers, were members of the Finmere Home Guard. Despite what is portrayed in 'Dads Army' on the BBC, the men of Finmere were provided with ammunition and tin hats that were kept in the stables at the Kings Head. Whenever Arthur was called for duty either Mr. Cox or one of his brothers would ensure that Nellie had company.

When walking a very young Alan Jones in his pram, Nellie recalls memories of seeing German bomber planes flying over Finmere and launching their incendiary bombs on their target, Coventry. When out on these walks, she had to wear a gas mask, as did baby Alan. Apparently it was not comfortable for him to wear, as his complete body was encapsulated and she had to supply oxygen into his mask. When the mask was removed, Alan's face was blue.

The Women's Land Army was formed in 1939 to free men farm workers for war duty. It was a vital part of Britain's drive to be self-sufficient in food. Little Tingewick House was a Land Army Hostel during the Second World War and the Red Lion became a meeting place for Land Army Women and airmen.

Nellie's husband Arthur was employed on Mr Tredwell's farm, which sent one hundred fowls a day to London from Finmere station. When war broke out Arthur was called up along with other men from the village, including the late George Davis, Bert Horwood and Bill Deathe. As a result, Nellie either had to surrender her farming accommodation or take five young women of the Land Army into her home. Bringing up a young family Nellie had little choice but to move out and into another property. The young women of the Land Army were employed to manage a large piggery, which supplied many areas of the country with meat rations. The Jones family moved to their present house in the early 1940s, before the back door had even been fitted, when the weekly rent was 16s 5d.

1940 2000  
16s 5d £24

Although German bombers frequently attacked the village, Nellie does not recall any serious damage being inflicted. Nellie's aunt was hospitalised in Buckingham, where she would walk to visit her, passing through Tingewick which at that time had, amongst other things, two bake houses, two butchers and five public houses.

One of Nellie's final employers before the war ended was Squadron Leader Hull, whose house still stands today at the bottom of Captain's Lane. There she cleaned the silverware and when the Squadron Leader's wife asked how much she owed, Nellie replied '£1 please' to which the reply came 'don't be so silly'—away went the lady to fetch her purse and to Nellie's surprise she was given £10.

## RAF Finmere

**B**efore 1938, the skies in the triangle with Bicester, Banbury and Buckingham at its corners were comparatively free of military aircraft. With the advent of the Second World War in September 1939, that was about to change.

In 1941, there was an abundance of new airfields within or close to that triangle; nearly all were Operational Training Units (OTUs). The OTUs job was to transform airmen into battle-ready aircrew for Bomber Command's war machine. Some airfields remain and many travellers have paused to view the long evacuated, disintegrating sites, their decaying steel and concrete now hidden by the time-encroaching woodland and brambles. These mysterious sites conjure up images of bombers, droning into the night on missions over enemy territory, never to return, or so badly damaged they return on a 'wing and a prayer.'

Aerodromes in or near the triangle include Upper Heyford, Weston-on-the-Green, Bicester, Mixbury Landing Ground (Shelswell), Barton Abbey (Hopcroft's Holt), Turweston, Hinton-in-the-Hedges, Great Horwood, Silverstone, Croughton, Barford St John, Enstone and RAF Finmere.

Relics of Finmere's former operational status are still evident. The most recognisable are the short span of main east/west runway (10/28) and two aircraft maintenance hangars, both in good repair. The most poignant reminder is the dilapidated control tower; a very sorry sight situated in the middle of the aerodrome.

## Training at Finmere

**B**ut what of its past? To find the answer, we go back to RAF Bicester, 6 km (4 miles) south of Finmere. Bicester RAF camp was established in 1916. By April 1940, it was home for a newly formed 13 OTU operating Bristol Blenheim Mk 1 & Mk 1V twin engine medium bombers, following the amalgamation of No. 104 & No. 108 squadrons. The new OTU was created to supply aircrew, following crippling losses sustained by Blenheim squadrons during early action assisting British Expeditionary Forces during the French campaign before Dunkirk. Unfortunately, RAF Bicester had one major problem that could not be easily overcome—it was an all grass airfield and proved unserviceable during wet winter periods.

1940	2000
£10	£225

Tony O'Gorman, the author of our text on Finmere Airfield, remembers life in this area as a boy:

*Living as we did, 3 miles west of RAF Finmere, at the 'Pump' house Juniper Hill, I'm proud to say that I can remember seeing the Finmere training sorties first hand. As the low flying aircraft swept across the open farmland surrounding our house, known as 'Larkrise', the urge to flatten one's self to the ground was ever present; be they Blenheim, Boston, Mitchell or Mosquito: something never to be forgotten.*

The two surviving hangars house Countrywide (formerly MSF) and Dalgety. The bracketed numbers refer to the magnetic compass heading of the runway; vital information for landing approaches.

Later the concrete surfaces were modified. Pete Reeve, now living at Fritwell and then 15–16 years old, recalls

*In 1942–3, I worked for the contractors, Audbry Watson Ltd. We were contracted at Finmere to coat the main runways with wood chipping—something like match sticks. They were rolled into hot tar, ending up in a layer, about a quarter of an inch [6mm] thick. My job was to sweep surplus chips up for further use, using an old sweeping lorry. They were super soft to walk on and saved aircraft tyre life no end. I liked working at Finmere, I was paid 6d per hour, the cookhouse dinners were smashing and cost 3d.*

1942	2000
6d	£1

Also, two exciting new American bombers were due to come into service and would replace the ageing Blenheims: the Douglas Boston and, later, the North American Mitchell. Both were fast twin engine medium bombers. They were wholly unsuitable for grass airfields because of their tricycle undercarriage and weight. They had a nose wheel instead of tail wheel, the later being a feature of nearly all British aircraft during the Second World War. Their fully loaded weight was nearly double that of the 14,500 pound (6,500 kg) Blenheim bomber.

A building programme of satellite airfields became a top priority to relieve the pressure of aircrew training on the premier stations. At Finmere, the first priority was runway lay out. This differed from most wartime airfields, in that all three concrete runways radiate from the northern tip of the 'drome' (where the Finmere Sunday Market is held). The airfield configuration was almost 'shoe-horned' into an area surrounded by the local roadways. The Tingewick to Newton Purcell by-road was closed at the airfield for the duration of the war.

Apart from the runway layout, the rest of the airfield was similar to other satellite airfields, except for the position of the control tower, which was close to the end of all three runways. Such was the urgency of training that by late 1941 and even before the contractors had finished their work the aircraft of 13 OTU Bicester were using the newly constructed runways.

By the end of July 1942, when the airfield was declared officially operational, residents of Finmere and Little Tingewick had grown accustomed to the sight and sound of Blenheim Mk I planes, their short Perspex noses, and Blenheim Mk IV planes, with long perspex noses, taking off and landing over their homes. An area once festooned with wild life, ponds, ditches, and cattle grazing pastures was now forbidden territory to locals who were warned to 'KEEP OUT.'

Quiet rarely prevailed. Aircraft movement only ceased when the planes were grounded due to very bad weather, on which occasions their eerie form was just discernable through the gloom, while anchored to their hard standing pans, twenty-seven of which were scattered around the airfield perimeter track, or taxi-way.

Despite Finmere being classified as a satellite of RAF Bicester, it soon assumed a much greater role because of its ability to cater for heavier and faster aircraft. Thanks to its concrete runways, it became an important source of pilot training for 2 Group Bomber Command, especially with its Drem electric runway lighting essential for night exercises. RAF Bicester still used 'goose neck flares,' which were rather like watering cans stuffed full of oily rag, the flame coming out of the spout.

Blenheim bombers were withdrawn from operations with Bomber Command by August 1942 but training continued at Finmere using both marks of aircraft: with No 307 Ferry Training Unit, (FTU) formed at RAF Bicester in late 1942, later moving to Finmere in 1943. Their task was to ferry aircraft to northwest Africa. The move also assisted Blenheim crews to convert to the new Bostons and Havocs.

Occasional fighter aircraft frequented Finmere, including the famous Spitfire and Tempest. They were from the Fighter Affiliation Flight at RAF Bicester, which trained bomber crews in retaliation and avoidance of enemy fighters; training that proved invaluable over the battle zone.

Of 7,781 de Havilland Mosquitos built throughout the UK, Canada and Australia between 1941 and 1950, not one flying example exists today. Known as the 'Wooden Wonder' its versatility was unique and, besides photo reconnaissance, it provided the fastest and most potent operational twin engine fighter-bomber of its era. 13 OTU at RAF Finmere was due to receive them by mid 1943 but they did not come into use until January 1944.

By March 1945, the end of the war in Europe was in sight, but the war in the Far East seemed destined to continue. Finmere had become a 'hot-bed' for Mosquito aircrew training with almost fifty aircraft available, turning out thirty trained crews per month for the Far East. The war was hastened to an end by the detonation of two atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945. Already, by July 1945, the runways of RAF Finmere had fallen silent.

After the war, Finmere airfield became a storage area for 38 Group (Transport Command). Amongst other equipment stored were many tons of surplus ammunition.

## Air Crashes

**D**avid Saunders, Commanding Officer of Mixbury Landing Grounds (MLG), lived in Finmere village for a while, after marrying a local girl in 1943. David recalls:

*I was posted to Shelswell Park in April 1941 and stayed until 1944. Although not directly involved with Finmere Drome, which was only two miles off our eastern runway, we did at times receive aircraft from there in severe trouble.*

He recalls two accidents in particular. One fine summer evening a crashing Blenheim had scraped across a nearby field; for about 1000 yards (900m) and then crumpled up. The crew of three were Canadians stationed at Finmere; all were killed. David was distressed by the trail of debris, which included

Leslie Valentine, now living in Hethe, recalls:

*In 1943, I was a sergeant pilot stationed at RAF Bicester with 13 OTU. We had converted from the Bristol Blenheim Mk IVs, to the Boston Mk III, a wonderful aircraft. Although not billeted at RAF Finmere, all of our flying training was based from there.*

*Training consisted mainly of low level formation flying, daylight low level attacks, and formation daylight bombing practice on the bombing range at nearby Otmoor. We were 'bombed up' at Finmere—nearly always with ten pound (4.5 kg) practice bombs. That left a trail of white smoke to identify accuracy. Our operational height varied from fifty feet (15m) above the ground level to 10,000 feet (3000m). The practice bombs were stored in bomb dumps situated at the Barton Hartshorne end of the 'drome', where remains can still be seen.*



**Leslie Valentine at Finmere Airfield in 1995**

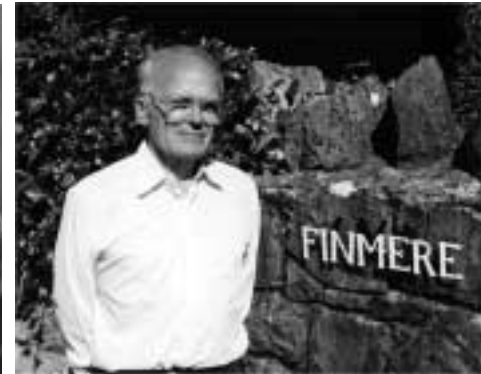
The four engine Handley Page Halifax bomber and the twin engine De Havilland Mosquito were used for electronic jamming exercises from Finmere.

Mosquito aircraft made many low level attacks during the Second World War. One of the most famous is the Amiens prison raid in February 1944, during which the walls of the prison, holding many Resistance prisoners, were burst open by accurate bombing. The raid was carried out in blinding snow at a height of just 10 feet; evidence, if any were needed, of the importance of the low level training provided by units like the 13 OTU.

Eight thousand airmen lost their lives in training accidents during the Second World War. The last plane to crash onto Finmere airfield (close to Barton Hartshorn) was an USAF electronic jamming EF-111A, from RAF Upper Heyford, in April 1992.

personal letters and a wristwatch ticking away, its strap still fastened. He also remembers the speed with which peace and tranquillity returned to the countryside, broken only by the song of the skylark.

The second crash was similar, with the Blenheim finally hitting a tree. The pilot and observer in the front were so badly injured they died later. The only words the pilot could say in broken English were to ask if the gunner was all right. He was and had survived by crouching in the wing well. They were Free French, stationed at Finmere.



**David Saunders during the war and in 1994**

David Saunders now lives in Banwell, Avon; his house, aptly, named 'Finmere.'

## RAF Finmere at Play

**L**ife at the airfield was not all work without play. Betty Baker (nee Musker) recalls her time at RAF Finmere where she was a Leading Aircraft Woman (LACW) in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF).

*I came there via RAF Bicester in 1944. I had been trained for aerial photographic reconnaissance analysis at RAF Farnborough. Our unit covered all aspects of aerial photography, which meant that part of my job was to load the F24 and K20 cameras into the Mitchell & Boston bombers. I found this very difficult, they were large and heavy, my height of only 4 feet 10 inches (1.5m), approx, never helped either. I also taught aircrew how to interpret the results of their aerial work.*

*All the same, Finmere for me still holds many happy memories. Because prior to service life, I had been a full time musician at concert level, on both the Grand piano and piano accordion; so I soon became a member of a concert quartet; we toured around the area, Buckingham, Finmere, Upper Heyford, Brackley, in fact all over the place, besides entertaining at the 'drome' as well.*

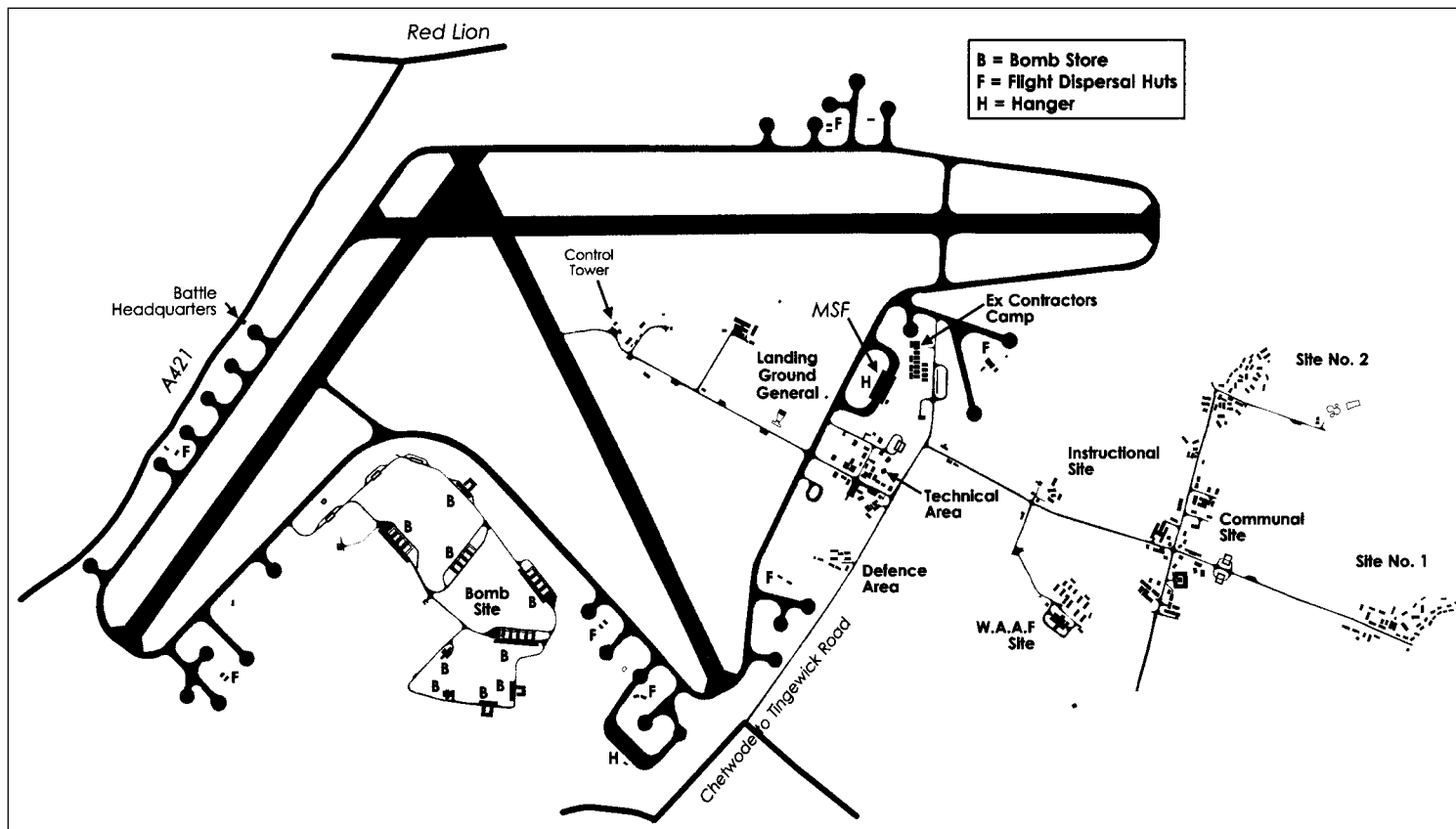
Betty's days at Finmere, are still treasured in her memories, while there she became engaged to a Dutch Air Gunner instructor on the Mitchell bombers (Chief Petty Officer, Henk Harsevoort). Their off duty hours were spent together cycling or walking to explore the local countryside, often going to the cinema in Buckingham.

Having returned to his squadron (320 Dutch) at Dunsfold (RAF) 2nd Tactical Air Force, Henk continued active duty. Their engagement was brought to a tragic end just 3 months before the end of the war when Henk was killed in an air collision fifteen minutes into a bombing mission

The unpredictable future that surrounds people's lives during prolonged warfare will always make for a more closely knit social community. RAF Finmere was no exception, and with such a wealth of multinationals at the airfield it is not a surprise that recreational activity ran rife. Besides the British, there were Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Free French, Dutch, Poles, Czechs and a few Americans. The station's football and cricket teams regularly beat local teams, unsurprising since most village and town men were away at war. Service personnel would also pack local pubs and village dances. Finmere village was not an exception, a piano or a wind up gramophone being the only musical requirement.



**Betty Baker during the war. Betty Baker at Finmere Airfield in 1995.**



Finmere Airfield based on Air Ministry plan of June 1945

## ☞ Their Name Liveth for Evermore ☞

**O**n the day that the Armistice was signed to end the First World War, the Reverend Henry Trower was terminally ill. It was his successor, George Dangerfield, who recorded the declaration of peace.

*On November 11th at 11am an Armistice was concluded and the Great European War 1914-1918 came to an end. (Rectors' Book)*

### The War Memorial

**T**wo years after the Armistice, the parish erected a war memorial in the churchyard to commemorate those who gave their lives. Again, George Dangerfield recorded the details.

*On July 13th a Memorial Cross erected in the Churchyard... in memory of the men of Finmere Parish who fell in the Great War was dedicated by the Reverend T. H. Archer Houblon. There were a large number present at the Service and the Last Post and Reveille were sounded by boy buglers from Magdalen College School, Brackley. The Cross is of Hornton Stone and the work was done by Messrs Coles of Brackley at a cost of £80, the money being willingly subscribed by parishioners and others connected with the Parish. (Rectors' Book)*

1916	2000
£80	£3,700



**George Dangerfield's record of the end of war in the Rectors' Book**

The War Memorial also pays tribute to the men of Finmere who fell during the Second World War. The Reverend Percy Parrott recorded the unveiling of a new panel on the cross in 1954.

*On Remembrance Day, 11th November, a panel of the War Memorial Cross recording the names of the men who gave their lives in the 1939-1945 war was unveiled. The local branch of the British Legion attended the service and laid a tribute at the Memorial. The Cross was cleaned and the additional work done by means of a house-to-house collection in the parish and a small sum from the Barrett War Memorial bequest. (Rectors' Book)*



**The War Memorial photographed between the Wars**

## First World War Commemorations

The First World War was fought by 65 million men and claimed more lives than any war before—8.5 million. The conflict also led to as many as 13 million civilian deaths through starvation, disease, military action and massacres. Britain and its Empire mobilized nearly nine million troops: more than 900,000 were killed and more than two million injured.

Seven Finmere men were killed in the War. The list below is in the order of inscriptions on the Memorial. Such were the terrible conditions during the war, it is not known where five of the seven men are buried.

### Cholmeley Symes-Thompson

Cholmeley was son of Dr Edmund Symes-Thompson (died 1906) and Elizabeth Symes-Thompson (died 1920). Both parents are buried in Finmere churchyard behind the church tower. Cholmeley married Grace E.J. Symes-Thompson (nee Churchill) in January 1912 and they had one daughter. They lived at 33 Cavendish Square, Kensington, London.

Cholmeley served in South Africa in 1901 in the 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. He was made a Captain in 1910, and transferred to the 2nd Battalion in August 1914 on its being ordered into active service. Cholmeley died at Zillebeke, Ypres, Belgium and was buried in Zillebeke churchyard, on 17 November 1914, aged 33. He left £3,865 in his will.

1914	2000
£3,865	£240,000

### Wilfred Paxton

The Paxtons were a long established Finmere family, but we do not know Wilfred's connection to the family. He was killed on 15 February 1918 and he is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial at Zonnebeke, Wets-Vlaanderen, Belgium. The Memorial commemorates the 34,888 men who died in the Ypres Salient from 16th August 1917 to the end of the war and whose graves are not known.

### Frank Clifford

Frank was the son of Harry and Elizabeth Clifford of Finmere. He was a Private in the 2nd Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment and his death is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial in the Somme, France. The panels of the arched memorial are inscribed with over 73,000 names of British and French soldiers killed in the Somme battlefield between 1916 and 1917, and who have no known graves. Frank was killed on 1 July 1916, aged 21. On that day, the British Army suffered 57,470 casualties in the Somme, the heaviest loss of life in a single day during the war.

## Herbert Bignell

**H**erbert Bignell was born in Paulerspury, Northamptonshire, and enlisted as a Private in the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was killed in action on 14 March 1915 at the fateful battle of Neuve Chapelle, during which 17,000 British men died. He is commemorated at the Le Touret Memorial, Pas de Calais, France, which records more than 13,000 men who died in the Calais area and who have no known grave.

## William Clifford

**T**he son of Thomas 'Tommy-Dodd' and Margaret Clifford of Finmere, Will was the eldest of eleven children. He was a Private in the 11th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment and was killed on the Somme on 3 September 1916, aged 26. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

## Archibald Clifford

**A**rchibald Clifford was the son of John and Ann Clifford of Lower End, Finmere. He was married to Elizabeth Clifford of Leeds. Archibald enlisted as a Private in the 2nd Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He was killed in action, along with 395 members of his regiment, at Festubert on 16 May 1915, aged 34. Archibald is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial, Calais, France.

## George Frederick Davis

**G**eorge lived in Finmere and was son of Thomas and Louisa Davis of Shoreditch, London. He was a private in the 1st/4th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. George died on 12 October 1916, aged 36, at Rouen, France, probably in one of the numerous field hospitals on the southern outskirts of the town.

## Second World War Commemorations

**T**he Second World War was even more destructive of life than its predecessor. Estimates vary but between 35 and 60 million civilians died, along with 19 million men in the armed forces. Britain and its Commonwealth lost more than 700,000 men in action, 264,000 from Britain alone. The war claimed the lives of four Finmere men, two in Europe, one in North Africa and one in Japan. They are listed below in the order of their names on the War Memorial.

## Benjamin Robert Buck

**B**enjamin was the son of Albert and Hannah Buck and was married to Olive Alice Buck. He was a gunner in the Royal Artillery (H.Q. 6 H.A.A. Regiment). He died on 29 November 1942, aged 27, and is



Arthur, 'Tommy-Dodd' and Will Clifford about 1914

commemorated at the only Commonwealth war cemetery in Japan. Commonwealth prisoners of war captured in the Pacific region were taken to Yokohama before captivity in Japan. Many died in captivity, especially from pneumonia in the severe winters, and most were cremated. Benjamin died in a camp in the prisoner of war centre at Fukuoka. After the war his ashes, and those of his British colleagues, were collected and laid to rest in the Yokohama Urn. His name is inscribed on the walls of the shrine raised over the urn, the Yokohama Cremation Memorial.

### **Douglas John Bull**

**D**ouglas was the son of Frank and Sophia Bull of Finmere. He was a Private in the 2nd Battalion of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment. The location of Douglas's grave is not known. He died in Algeria or Tunisia on 6 May 1943, aged 20 and his death is commemorated at the Medjez-el-Bab War Cemetery in Tunisia.

### **George Horwood**

**G**eorge was the son of John and Alice Horwood of Little Tingewick. He was a Gunner in the 80th Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery. George was killed on 25 April 1945, age 35, just seven days before the cessation of fighting on 2 May. He is buried at the Becklington War Cemetery in Germany, which overlooks Luneberg Heath where the German surrender was taken on 4 May 1945. At midnight on May 8, the war in Europe was finally over.

### **Richard Edmund Symes-Thompson**

**E**dmund had followed the family tradition and had qualified as a doctor. He was the son of Dr and Mrs H. E. Symes-Thompson who lived at Finmere House. Richard was wounded as a result of enemy action—an air raid—and died at St Luke's Hospital in Chelsea, London on 11 May 1941. He is the only man on the War Memorial to be buried at Finmere.

## ☞ Finmere at the Millennium ☞

It is nearly one hundred and fifty years since William Jocelyn Palmer died at Finmere Rectory. He would recognise some similarities between the Finmere of his day and our village at the Millennium. St Michael's church, although larger and more ornate than in Palmer's time, retains its modest character. The village accommodates a similar number of people now as then but overcrowding has ended, and houses now form a continuous village street from Little Tingewick to the village pond. Palmer and his Vestry restricted new building in an attempt to relieve the burden of poverty on the parish. Today, the village attracts wealthier residents and new building is constrained to preserve its character.

The greatest change since the nineteenth century has been the withdrawal of the church from the day-to-day running of the parish, a task that began with the first Parish Meeting in 1894. The Rector no longer has the same authority over the parish; neither has the Parish Council, the successor to Palmer's Vestry. Major decisions are now taken at district, county and national level.

The next national census of population will be held in April 2001, shortly after this book is published. It is expected that the parish will then have grown to around 400 people, the same number as in Palmer's time but Finmere in the new Millennium is economically and socially a very different village. Oxfordshire County Council recognised in 1974 that the village was on the verge of change.

*In many respects, Finmere appears to be a traditional rural village structure with a relatively high proportion of the population employed locally and in agriculture. There is not a significant long distance commuting population element (say travel distances greater than 13 km, 8 mls) and thus a newfound local squirearchy. [But] the commuting element in Finmere is likely to grow significantly, as well as the proportion of people engaged in professional/managerial/teaching and service occupations. These newcomers will have a relatively high degree of mobility, many will be two car families and new roles will be adopted leading possibly to greater polarisation of society within the village. (Finmere Village Plan, Oxfordshire County Council 1974)*

The County Council's view that the arrival of commuters could lead to greater divisions within can be challenged. Finmere is a village used to change and comfortable with incomers working with established residents. Life in the village is not free of friction—planning and traffic matters, for example, are frequently contentious. But this Millennium History could not have been written without the collaboration of those who have lived here for decades and those who have arrived recently. Established villagers have

At the last census in 1991, Finmere had 364 residents, 178 men and 186 women. There were 274 adults, 194 of whom were married. Most employees were in the manufacturing, construction, catering, distribution and financial industries; only a few worked on the land; nearly three-quarters owned their houses. Just 13% worked at home and 6% walked to work.

worked with new arrivals to create a legacy for those who live in Finmere and Little Tingewick now and through the third Millennium.

I am myself such a new arrival, having moved to Finmere in 1995. In writing and editing the Millennium History and newsletters, I have learnt much about this outwardly quiet, inwardly bustling village. I extend my personal thanks to everyone who has helped in this work and particularly to Anita Bilbo who kept the project going at the times when my own pace flagged.

Andy Boddington  
The Coach House Annex, Finmere  
March 2001

## Notes and Sources

We have used numerous sources in compiling the Millennium History, including villagers' memories. Wherever possible, we have acknowledged all the sources below and we apologise if any acknowledgements and references are missing. Some copies of photographs were passed to the late Phillip Willison and then to Anita Bilbo; we no longer know who supplied them. We will gladly add acknowledgements and amend any errors on our website ([finmere.history/virgin.net](http://finmere.history/virgin.net)), in Newsletters and in subsequent editions of this book. Copyright of photographs remains with their owners.

### Notes

**Prices.** Our estimates of the current value of historic prices is based on the Price Index in *Inflation: the Value of the Pound 1750–1998*, House of Commons Library Research Paper 99/20, London 1999.

**Permissions.** Our thanks to the following organisations for permission to reproduce documents: Huntington Library; Centre for Oxfordshire Studies; Oxfordshire Record Office; BBC; Royal Commission on Historic Monuments; Colour Rail; Lens of Sutton; Buckingham Advertiser; Oxford Times; Bicester Advertiser.

**Abbreviations.** BRO: Buckinghamshire Record Office. COS: Centre for Oxfordshire Studies. HL: Huntington Library. ORO: Oxfordshire Record Office. VCH: Victoria County History.

### Main Sources

Many sources survive for Finmere's history. The most important used in compiling the Millennium History are described below. Local memories have also been very important.

**Rectors' Book.** This notebook was begun by Thomas Long about 1750 and maintained by Finmere Rectors until 1956. The book begins with a lengthy record of the inclosure of the open fields. The Rectors later developed the book into an occasional diary in which they recorded the major events in the parish; ORO, PAR/105/9/MS/1.

**Parish Registers.** The Registers begin in 1560. The earlier registers contain many notes by the Rectors about local matters, with some references to national events. Causes of death are given by William Jocelyn Palmer for 1826–53 and Henry Trower for 1904–18; ORO, PAR/105/1. The register has been transcribed by Oxfordshire Family History Society and a copy is in COS.

**Vestry Minute Books.** These survive from 1815; ORO, PAR/105/2. The most detailed minutes are for the years 1815–27.

**School Log Books.** The log books run from 1874 to 1948; ORO, T/SL25. Log books for the 1959 school are in possession of the current school.

**Stowe Estate Records.** The Huntington Library in San Marino, California holds an extensive set of letters, accounts and maps relating to the period where Finmere was part of the Stowe Estate—from the beginning of the seventeenth century to its sale in 1848–53.

**Blomfield.** James Charles Blomfield's history of the village is an essential source for our history and includes many details not included in our text, especially for pre-1800. *History of Finmere, Oxon*, J. C. Blomfield MA, Walford, Buckingham, 1887. Republished in 1998 by Finmere and Little Tingewick Historical Society with a short biography of Blomfield by Andy Boddington, ISBN 0 9533253 0 X.

**Burton.** Dean Burton's character sketch of William Jocelyn Palmer and Finmere in the early 1850s is one of the more interesting sections of Blomfield's *History of Finmere*: 1887 edition: 58–68; 1998 edition: 71–81.

**Victoria County History.** The VCH was established was founded in 1899 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Finmere's history is described in detail in *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, V6, pages 116–125. The compilers did not, however, draw on the material in the Huntington Library.

**National Census.** The first national census was held in 1801 but this was little more than a headcount by category of employment. We have made extensive use of the detailed 1851 census, transcribed by Oxfordshire Family History Society, and some use of later surveys to 1891.

**Directories.** Directories for Oxfordshire, including Finmere, begin with the *Post Office Directory of Berkshire and Oxfordshire* 1847 and continue under various publishers until Kelly's *Directory of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxon*, 1939. The three post-War directories are: *Oxfordshire Directory*, 1958; *Blair Directory of the County of Oxfordshire*, 1967; *The County of Oxfordshire Directory*, 1969.

**1840 Tithe Commutation.** The tithe map is the first complete map of Finmere. The accompanying Award gives a list of tenants of farms and tenements. The map has been redrawn by Andy Boddington from ORO, PAR/105/15/M/1 and a microfiche copy in COS.

**Hello Finmere.** This 29½ minute recording was aired on BBC local radio, 13 June 1971. John Simpson interviewed Bert Horwood, Olive Bates, Dorothy Carter, Cecily Carmichael, Alf Lepper and George Barnes. Transcripts by Andy Boddington reproduced with permission. © BBC.

**Finnmere Village Plan.** In 1974, Oxfordshire County Council wrote a discussion document about Finnmere, a copy of which is in COS. It provides a sketch of the village at that date and a number of recommendations, including that ‘village expansion should be resisted.’

## References and Acknowledgements

The references and acknowledgements below add to those in the text.

### The Millennium History

**A Millennium of Village History.** Research on archaeological remains by Barry Cranfield and Andy Boddington. See also, *An Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief on the Finnere B4031 Diversion, Oxfordshire*, AOC Archaeology 1998. Finnmere’s early history is largely based on Blomfield and VCH. Graph drawn by Keith Rogers.

### Finnmere and Little Tingewick

The interpretation of Finnmere placename is from *The Concise History of English Placenames*, ed. Eilbert Ekwall, Oxford 1960 and *The Placenames of Oxfordshire*, M. Gelling, English Placename Society 1960. The interpretation of Little Tingewick is from *The Place Names of Buckinghamshire*, A. Maver and F. M. Stenton, Cambridge 1969. Village map drawn by Andy Boddington.

### The Village in the Nineteenth Century

**Palmer’s Finnmere.** The text draws extensively on Blomfield, Burgon, the Rectors’ Book and documents in HL and ORO. Louise Ashwell’s watercolours are in private possession. Emigration of Robert Paxton recorded in VCH. 1813 map is in HL, ST Map 138. Diversion of Water Stratford Road in 1809 described in letter from WH Barnard to Stowe Steward, Mr Parrot: HL, STG Box 480. Palmer’s rules for tenants are from Burgon. Ashwell’s pictures are from photographs of paintings once in the village.

**The 1851 Census.** Based on the 1851 census, transcribed by Oxfordshire Family History Society.

**Palmer’s Later Years.** Palmer’s biography is based on an anonymous text in *The History of Mixbury*, J. C. Blomfield 1890, 38–41 (the unnamed author is undoubtedly Palmer’s son, Roundell as the text is similar to *Memorials. Part 2: Personal and Political*, R. Palmer, Edinburgh 1892.) Our thanks also to Edwin Sparrow for his help. The faculty to remove cottages is in ORO, PAR/105/10/A1/1. Houses and tenants map drawn by Andy Boddington.

### St Michael’s Church

**Palmer’s Legacy.** William Jocelyn Palmer’s returns for the ecclesiastical census are noted in *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851*, ed. Kate Tiller, Oxfordshire Record Society, 1987.

**Frederick Walker’s Rebuilding.** The picture of St Michael’s Church in 1824 is from VCH.

**Seymour Ashwell’s Woodcarving.** Blomfield dates the font cover to 1878, the Reredos to 1883 and the west window to 1886. Our dates of 1879, 1881 and 1884 are based on Seymour Ashwell’s notes in the Rectors’ Book. Blomfield’s text might be read as implying that Ashwell carved the corbels that support the roof; the Rectors’ Book makes clear that he paid for them to be carved. Photographs of Ashwell’s font by Andy Boddington.

**Frederick Walker’s Rebuilding.** A plan of George Street’s north aisle is in Lambeth Palace Library. Donations and costs are recorded in the Rectors’ Book.

**After Ashwell.** The signatures are drawn from a wide range of documents in ORU and at the Rectory. The text is based on notes by Ricky Yates.

**Church Attendance.** Walker’s attendance figures are from *Bishop Wilberforce’s Visitation Returns for the Archdeaconry of Oxford in the Year 1854*, ed. E.P. Baker, Oxfordshire Record Society XXXV, 1954. The Registers of Services 1919–89 are in ORO, PAR/105/1/R7. Graphs drawn by Keith Rogers. Current registers are held by St Michael’s Church. Photograph of the Millennium Service by Andy Boddington. Photograph of grave of Elizabeth Sikes supplied by Alan Tunks.

**The Churchyard.** The decision to apply for a faculty to level mounds is recorded in the Parochial Church Council Minutes; ORO, PAR/105/3/A1/4.

**Catholics and Nonconformists.** The Vestry petition is copied in the Vestry Minute Book, ORO, PAR/105/2/A1/1. Details of Lady Gifford’s chapel based on local memories. Information on Quakers and dissenters from VCH.

### The Rectories

The introduction, including the reference to Capability Brown, is based on Blomfield.

**Seymour Ashwell’s Rectory.** The plans of the Rectory are in ORO, PAR/105/10/7/1–2.

### The Parish Land

The seventeenth century map of the Warren is in HL, ST Map Box 4 (1). The changing landscape 1840–2000 is based on a wide range of maps, plans and personal observations; drawn by Andy Boddington.

**The Landowners and their Farms.** Details of landowners before 1547 can be found in Blomfield. The 1820s map of land purchased for the Stowe Estate is in HL, ST Map 139. Richard Grenville's statement 'I am very unwilling...' is quoted in *The Rise and Fall of the Grenvilles*, John Beckett, Manchester 1994. This informative volume sets Finmere in the broader context of the Grenville-Temple family's fortunes, including many details of the sale of Finmere. William Treadwell's death is recorded in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 1 December 1849. The auction of Finmere and other estates at Garroway's Coffee House is noted in the diary of Richard Grenville, 3rd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos in HL, ST124. Information on the Merton College land holdings was provided by Dr Steven Gunn, Archivist, Merton College. The proposed sale of Finmere Grounds and cottages to West at Silverstone is detailed in letters in HL, ST22. The sale map of the Glebe land is in ORO, PAR/105/10/3D/1.

**Ewes Make History.** Mrs Gladys Allen provided a copy of the article from *Farmers Weekly*.

**Finmere Quarry.** Ian Hudson provided the protest poster.

## The Roads and Railways

Details of turnpike based on 'Turnpike Roads of Buckinghamshire,' K. Edmonds and others, *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 35, 1995, 31–44. The toll income is from an advertisement to let the tolls of Dropsheet and Finmere in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 26 March 1785.

**The Stowe Road.** The map, drawn by Andy Boddington, is based on a sketch in HL, ST Map 142.

**The Buckinghamshire Railway.** The text is based on *Oxford to Cambridge Railway*, B. Simpson 1981 and *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. Aylesbury Reference Library holds a photocopy of Charles Whitehall's memoir. Map by Andy Boddington.

**The Great Central Railway.** The text is based on *The Great Central: Then and Now*, M. Hawkins, Newton Abbott, 1991, *The Banbury to Verney Junction Branch*, B. Simpson, Oxford 1978 and the local newspapers cited. The picture of the Station Master in 1910 was provided by Mrs Jan Woodworth, the station in 1961 by Lens of Sutton, the Station in its final years by ColourRail, and the Station Master in 1904 by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments. Our thanks to Lens of Sutton, ColourRail and RCHM for permission to reproduce the photographs.

## A Well Regulated Parish

**The Vestry.** Main sources are the Churchwardens Account Book, ORO, PAR/105/4/F1/1, and the Vestry Minute Book. William Jocelyn Palmer invited Stowe Steward, Thomas Beards, to the Vestry in December 1844; the letter is in HL, STG Box 35 (28).

**The Parish Meetings and Council.** Sources are Parish Meeting and Council minutes in possession of the Parish Council, the Rectors' Book and the *Bicester Advertiser*.

**Poor Relief.** The poor relief distributed in 1765 is recorded in a document in HL, STG 48 (60). Details of relief schemes after 1817 are from the Vestry Minute Book. Migrations in 1831 and 1832 noted in VCH. The fate of emigrant Thomas Smith is recorded in letters from Palmer in HL, STG 35 (25 & 27)

**Charities for the Poor.** The 1843 note of charity payments is from the Finmere Charity Book, currently in private hands. Blomfield gives the location of Keat's land as Bread Furlong but the name is Breech on the 1840 Tithe map. Other charity details are from Blomfield, Vestry Minutes, the Rectors' Book and Parish Council minutes. Finmere Friendly Society details located by Ian Hudson.

**Health and Medicine.** Data on age and causes of death is from the Parish Registers. Graph drawn by Keith Rogers. The letter from Dyson Wood is copied into the School log book. Palmer's letter to the Radcliffe is noted in *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851*, ed. Kate Tiller, Oxfordshire Record Society, 1987. Dr Clark's medical kit is in possession of Clementina Sikes, whom we thank for use of the photograph.

**Crime and Policing.** Crime details are drawn from the *Buckingham Advertiser*, *Bicester Advertiser* and *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. Tony O'Gorman helped with the text on Neville Heath.

## Water and Services

Many details are based on Parish Meeting and Council minutes and local memories. Research on the wells and village pumps by Tim Killeen. For further information on Roberts Ltd, see *Deanshanger: Images of a Village*, Deanshanger Village Heritage Society, 2000. The photograph of the flood was taken Andy Boddington and the photograph of Mere Road well by Phil & Jackie Hodgkinson. Details of sewage and refuse from Parish Council minutes and *Bicester Advertiser*.

## My Poor People, They Be Well Instructed

The main source is the school log books, which also contain copies of the Inspectors' reports. The Duke's letter on schools is in HL, STG Box 202 (63). Rev. Walker's notes on the schools are from *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns for the Archdeaconry of Oxford in the Year 1854*, ed. E. P. Baker, Oxfordshire Record Society XXXV, 1954. Ann Molder and the children are recorded in the 1851 census. The school account books are in ORO, PAR/105/14/F1/1. The pass rates are drawn from duplicate examination schedules in ORO, PAR/105/14/A1/1–7. The picture of pupils in 1936 was provided by Wilfred Davis and the 1938 picture by Ron Wakelin. COS supplied the photographs taken in 1906 and gave

permission to publish. Background information is from several sources, including *Village Education in Nineteenth Century Oxfordshire*, P. Horn, Oxford Record Society LI, 1979.

## A Unique and Boldly Revolutionary School

Our text was compiled with the extensive help of architects David and Mary Medd. They discovered the essay on grass in the files of the former Department of Education accompanying the 1962 Inspection report. Information on the sale of Finmere House Paddock is from a deed owned by Alison Plant. The picture of children shopping was provided by COS and is reproduced with its permission. Transcripts of *Hello Finmere* are reproduced with the permission of the BBC. Our thanks to Jonathan Harris for his recollections and report card. The OFSTED reports are available through its website. Photographs on page 78 by Anita Bilbo (1983 and 1990) and Andy Boddington (2000).

## The Village Landscape

**The Village Pond.** Sources are Parish Meeting and Council minutes. Photograph of the pond by Andy Boddington.

**The Commemorative Trees.** Main sources are Parish Meeting and Council minutes. The alterations to the road at the Cross Tree about 1809 are mentioned in a letter in HL, STG Box 480. Photographs of the planting of the Millennium Tree by Andy Boddington. Photograph of planting of Silver Jubilee tree supplied by Rosemary Crabtree. Other photographs through Anita Bilbo.

## Villagers and Their Houses

**Houses of Rubble and Thatch.** Our thanks to Wilfred Davis for loan of his identity card.

**Twentieth Century Developments.** The text is based on Parish Meeting and Council minutes and local memories.

**Village Views.** Photographs provided by: Joan Chritchely, Mere Road in the 1920s; James Allingham, Finmere Garage and Red Lion in 1921. Other photographs through Anita Bilbo.

**Villagers at Home.** Photographs provided by: Joan Chritchely: Percy Clifford; Fred and Sylvia Barnes, Barnes family. Other photographs through Anita Bilbo.

**Larger Houses.** The accounts for the building of Glebe House are in the HL, Parrott Estate Day Books, ST 197–9. Information on Stone House from Blomfield. The 1928 auction catalogue for Cedar Lawn is in Buckinghamshire Record Office, D/WIG/2/6/444. Our thanks to Mrs Shirley for information about the Barrett family and the photographs.

## Finmere House

Our thanks to Paul Woodfield, Towcester, for help with dating the buildings.

**Origins.** Text largely based on Blomfield. Plan drawn by Andy Boddington, who took the photograph of the rainwater heads. Photograph of Tudor House provided by Caroline Walker.

**John Pollard.** Interview with George Barnes from Hello Finmere. Text largely based on Blomfield.

**The Clark Brothers.** Text largely based on Blomfield. Photographs provided by Clementina Sikes.

**The Symes-Thompsons.** Our thanks to Mr C. Stephen Dehn, Mr Edmund Dehn and Mr William L. Weber for a wealth of material about the Symes-Thompson family. Photograph of Edmund Symes-Thompson provided by Mr C. Stephen Dehn.

**The Flowers.** Based on information from Mrs Jean Flowers who also provided the photograph of Jean and Jack and the House in the 1960s and Finmere House in the early 1960s. The swimming pool photograph was supplied by Rosemary Crabtree.

**After the Flowers.** The photograph of the House at the Millennium by Ian Macpherson.

## The Public Houses

Robert Holt's brewing equipment is described in an auction advertisement in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*.

**Kings Head.** William Jocelyn Palmer's opinions about the Greaves family are set out in the *Rectors' Book*. The letter to Thomas Beards is in HL, STG Box 35 (28). Picture of customers provided by Wilfred Davis. The story of James Shaw is from the *Bicester Advertiser* and *Buckingham Advertiser*.

**Red Lion.** Photograph of customers provided by Wilfred Davis and the photograph of the Drag Hunt by Andy Boddington.

## Finmere at Work

Jonas Paxton poster is in COS. We do not know the location of Stone's Cottage. Delivery Van photographed by Anita Bilbo.

**Working the Land.** Picture of agriculture workers provided by Mrs Shirley. Photograph of Cookie Coach provided by Anita Bilbo. Auction poster is in COS.

**Rural Dissenters.** The events in 1873 and 1874 are recorded in the Buckingham Advertiser. The 1879 meeting in Fimmere is noted in Oxfordshire Record Society XLVIII 1974, ed Pamela Horn.

**Lacemaking and Service.** 1851 and 1881 details from the census.

**Shops, Garages and Markets.** Details of postal deliveries to Fimmere, Warren Farm and Widmore Farm are from minutes held by Post Office Heritage—Post 35: 1889, 1447; 1884, 903; 1893, 2123; 1898; 19058; 1903, 7822; 1904, 3893; 1906, 8952. The bill head for Freeman’s Garage was supplied by Mrs Hilda Martin (nee Freeman) of Tintagel, Cornwall. Details of Robert Dewett are partly based on documents rescued by Jon How from Hearn and Hearn, formerly solicitors in Buckingham, supplied by Ian Hudson. Freeman’s Garage photograph supplied by Joan Chritchley. Douglas Hull poster from *Buckingham Advertiser*. Alfred Horwood and post office photographs through Anita Bilbo.

## In Hall and Field

**The First Village Hall.** Text largely based on *Buckingham Advertiser* and Parish meeting Minutes. Photograph of actors supplied by Joan Chritchley and of walkers by Rosemary Crabtree.

**A Prize Winning Hall.** Picture of celebrating villagers © Don Williams Photography Ltd; we have been unable to locate this company to obtain copyright permission. Original appeared in *Grapevine Newsletter* 13, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, 1986.

**The Playing Fields.** Sources are Parish Council minutes and local memories.

## Making Our Own Entertainment

VE Day 1995 photographs by Ian Hudson. FMMMM photographs by Andy Boddington.

**Garlands at May Day.** May Day parade photograph provided by Wilfred Davis. May Day 1940 photographs provided by Fred and Sylvia Barnes.

**Celebrating Royal Coronations.** Coronation photographs provided by Ron Wakelin.

**A Golden Wedding.** Photographs of Barretts provided by Mrs Shirley. Photographs of four boys provided by Frank Hitchcock.

## Sports and Shows

**Fimmere Sports Club.** 1952 winners photograph hangs in the village hall; several people have noted that J. Dickenson is pictured with an exceptionally large head, suggesting it was substituted in the photographer’s dark room for reasons now unknown. The Ladies Cricket

Team photograph is from the *Buckingham Advertiser*, 14 June 1952; our thanks to Jake McNulty for providing a copy.

**Fimmere Show.** Based on information provided by Mrs Gladys Allen.

**Horticultural Show.** Text by Anita Bilbo, who also provided the photograph.

**Guides, Cubs and Rangers.** Photograph of Eric the Fox supplied by Bev. Mallion. The photograph of the Cubs in 1988 is possibly from Oxford Times. The Brownies in 1999 were photographed by Karen Hudson. Our thanks to Dawn Aris and others for correcting errors in FHS Newsletter 9 relating to this photograph.

## The Women’s Institute

Photograph of collage by Ian Hudson. We do not know who supplied the Pancake Day photograph.

## Fimmere During the Second World War

**The Evacuees from Edmonton.** Ration book supplied by Fred and Sylvia Barnes. Airfield plan redrawn by Andy Boddington. Photographs of Leslie Valentine, David Saunders in 1994 and Betty Baker in 1995, supplied by Tony O’Gorman.

**The War Memorial.** The photographs of the War Memorial and the Clifford family were supplied by Joan Chritchley, Tingewick. Information on those killed and their graves is from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). Information from the Clifford family suggests that Arthur and Will Clifford joined the South Nottinghamshire Hussars. CWGC records show that Will was in the Royal Sussex Regiment at his death.



Finmere's Mad May Millennium Mayhem, May 2000

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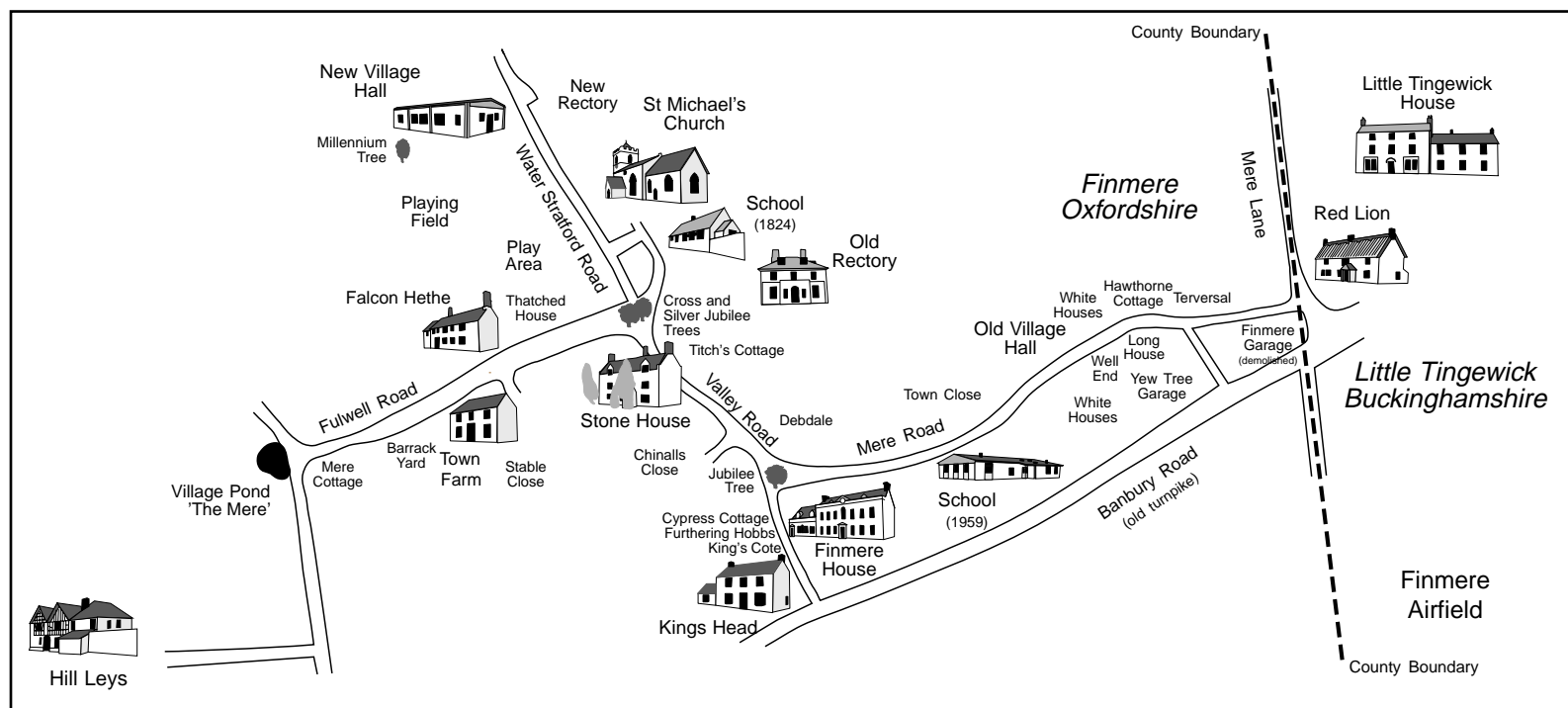
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