

# The Finmere Record

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FREE

## OF MONARCHS AND TREES

Queen Elizabeth II has thankfully lived long enough to celebrate her Golden Jubilee. She is faring better than many of her predecessors, including King John who died of dysentery on the night of 18th October 1216. This complex man might just have been part of Finmere's history...

In 1998, I was planning a history newsletter to tell how a Finmere hermit was evicted to make way for a new hunting lodge for King John. I scrapped the story at the last moment after a chance conversation with Tim Killeen over a pint in the Kings Head.

Tim recalled a footnote in Blomfield's *History of Finmere* that noted that the name Finmere was also 'given to some land in the parish of Quainton, Bucks, and is still retained in 'Fenemore Hill' there.' Further research showed that King John had ordered wine for his Lodge from Brill, much nearer to Quainton than Finmere. Perhaps King John and the hermit were never in our Finmere at all...

This newsletter has a tree theme. We look at Finmere Park and suggest a Jubilee walk through green fields to explore it. And we tell the story of two of Finmere's commemorative trees.

Andy Boddington, June 2002



### Ancient Oak and Young Plant

*This oak tree stands on the Finmere and Mixbury parish boundary at Park Thorns. It is one of the oldest in Finmere. The girth of the trees ranges from 2.25m to 5.5m. Assuming a growth in girth of 2.5 cm a year, these trees are probably about 150 years old. Hannah Plant provides a scale.*

## THE DERELICT HOUSE

One of the reference works for Oxfordshire history is the weighty *Victoria County History*. The authors of the Finmere chapter cite another mammoth reference work, the *History of the King's Works*, which describes a deer park in Finmere. The *King's Works* was written by three eminent historians and systematically describes the historical evidence for the majority of royal buildings in six weighty tomes. Page 939 of Volume 2 has a short note on Finmere, Oxfordshire:

*Finmere was for a few years the site of a house belonging to King John... It was no doubt as a hunting lodge that the house was built in 1207... It was ready for occupation by January 1208, when the keeper of Brill was ordered to send a cask of wine 'to our new house at Finmere.'*

Just as intriguing, the hunting lodge had been built on property belonging to a hermit who served in a parish chapel. In compensation, John ordered that the hermit be paid one penny a day for the rest of his life. This was easily one of the most interesting stories I had encountered since beginning to research Finmere's history. Unfortunately, the story does not belong to our Finmere at all.

The clue to the real location of King John's Finmere is to be found in the medieval documents misunderstood by the authors of the *Kings Works*—who were historians not geographers. The documents describe Finmere as being 'in the forest of Bernwood.' The Royal Forest of Bernwood covered about 100 square kilometres across south Buckinghamshire near Quainton. It was an area of woodland and pasture governed by the Norman Forest Law, legislation designed to preserve red and fallow deer for royal hunting. Brill had been the administrative centre of Bernwood since Norman times.

I turned to Ordnance Survey maps to discover the real location of King John's Finmere. Three kilometres northwest of Quainton is Finemere Wood and Finemerehill House (also called Fine Moor Hill House).

This is just ten kilometres from Brill, from where an innkeeper sent the cask of wine to his King in Finmere in 1208. It is much more likely that the wine was sent to Quainton not our Finmere—especially as Quainton has records of a hermit and we do not.

So this story has nothing to do with our village at all and there is no known connection between King John and our Finmere. But when I visited Fine Moor Hill House, a pleasant twentieth century house of no particular architectural merit, I felt strangely at home. The house is derelict, just like our own Finmere House.

## HISTORY OF FINMERE PARK

One reason the King John story seemed so convincing is that we do have a deer park in the parish.

In 1667, the landowners of Finmere signed a deed to sweep away the last of the medieval open fields and replace them with more efficient, rectangular fields. The Deed of Inclosure for this mentions the 'Wood called Finmere Park,' owned by a London barrister, Thomas Waller. The park area was 25 hectares (99 acres). The Deed locates the Park as south of the village. When walking past Widmore a few years ago, I saw an earth bank about one metre high and crowned by trees. This seems to delineate the west and south sides of the Park, though there is little trace of the north and most of the east side, probably due to disturbance during construction of the Great Central Railway in 1899. The area shaded on the map is 24 hectares, close enough to suggest that this location for the park is correct. It is probable that the bank was initially topped with oak paling, replaced in time by trees and hedging.

We do not yet know when Finmere Park was created or when it went out of use, though this was before 1840. Deer hunting in parks enclosed by oak paling was one of the most fashionable sports in the 15th and 16th centuries. The fashion for hunting declined and later many parks were established near country houses mainly for visual effect.

### FINMERE ON THE INTERNET

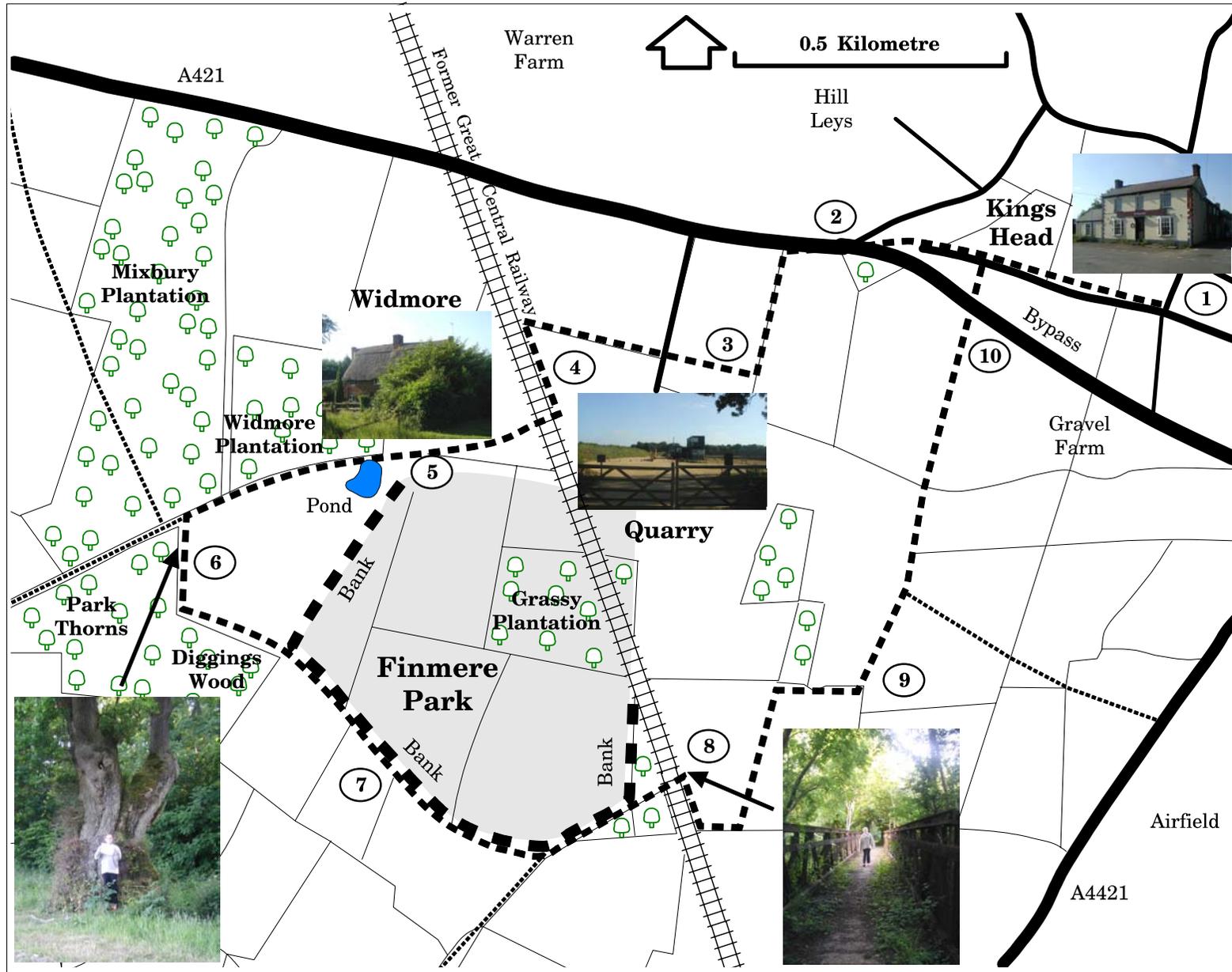
We have begun to move the Finmere history web site to a new location to allow it to grow and to provide a more reliable service. The site generates more than 100 enquiries a year from visitors to the site, most researching their ancestors. Our new site will host all the history newsletters; Blomfield's History; the Millennium History; transcriptions of original documents; and directories of former residents. The site also has space for other village organisations too.

[www.finmere.org.uk](http://www.finmere.org.uk)

## A WALK AROUND FINMERE PARK

Distance: 5½ kilometres (3½ miles).

1. From the former Kings Head (now demolished), walk west along the old road past the gate.
2. Cross the bypass and join the way-marked footpath to the right of the copse.
3. Follow the diverted and uninteresting footpath past the quarry entrance.
4. Walk alongside the former Great Central Railway and cross it at a section where the cutting is backfilled with quarry spoil. Head straight across the field to Widmore. The footpath here is not always clear; head for the barns in front of you.
5. Widmore was previously agricultural cottages and a brickyard. The bank of Finmere Park begins here and cuts off to the south but the footpath continues west. Follow the path with the house on your right and, a short while after, the pond on your left. Then keep the wood to your right.
6. At the end of the field, turn left. The trees here at Park Thorn mark the parish boundary and are among the oldest in the parish.
7. Still keeping the wood to your right, return east alongside Diggings Wood (digging for the brickmakers?) to walk alongside the bank that marks the south edge of the Park. This is the best view of the bank. Keep walking with the hedge on your left: this stroll across three fields feels a little longer than it looks on the map.
8. The Park bank runs off into the wood. Follow the path to cross the railway again on the 1899 footbridge and bear right then left and left around the quarry. At the bottom of a large field bear right past the pond, keeping the hedge on your left.
9. Turn left to follow a broad green track towards the farm buildings. Then follow the well-made track.
10. At the bypass, cross to the old road and return to the Kings Head.



## THE JUBILEE TREES OF FINMERE

Finmere has four named 'village' trees:

- ◆ the Cross Tree, in the centre of the village: it was planted around 1809 and replaced in 1975
- ◆ the Jubilee Tree by Finmere House was planted in 1887 for the Golden Jubilee of Victoria and Albert
- ◆ the Silver Jubilee Tree by the Cross Tree was planted in 1977 for Queen Elizabeth
- ◆ the Millennium Tree planted two years ago at the village hall.

A new tree is to be planted to mark this Golden Jubilee. The following extracts on the Jubilee Trees are based on the Millennium History of Finmere.

### The Jubilee Tree



**The Jubilee Tree in the 1920s**

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 died in 1861). The schoolmistress, 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 not removed and were again discussed by the Parish Meeting in 1952. Unfortunately, it was found that the tree had grown around the guard and it could not be removed. The railing is still there.

### The Silver Jubilee Tree



**Silver Jubilee in 1977**

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.

A barbecue supper had been held to celebrate the Jubilee the previous month.



### Finmere Barbecue Supper

Tuesday, June 7th  
commencing 7 p.m.

to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee

Bring your own knife and fork