

## ☞ 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.

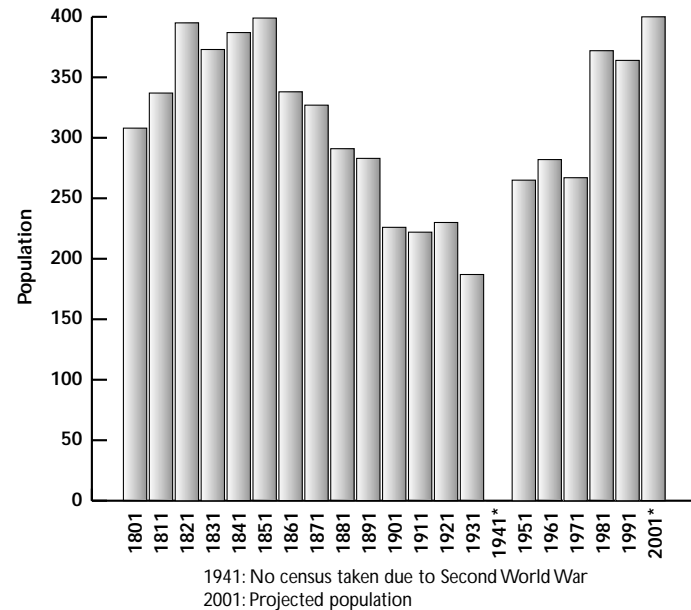
The population grew slowly through the medieval era, when villagers farmed narrow strips scattered across three open fields: South Field (to the south of the village), Mill Field (to the north) and Field next Fulwell (to the west). Their produce was eaten or bartered and would have provided a poor living—the 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

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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.