

☞ 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.