

## 🌀 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 hog 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 10/10/18 of credit to	14	-
	the Poor's Plot - each 2/10/18	14	-
	120 Stoves for the poor	30	-
	Plot at 2/10/18	30	-
		44	1

*Signed by*  
*W. J. Palmer, Rector*  
*W. J. Palmer, Rector*  
*W. J. Palmer, Rector*

**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)*

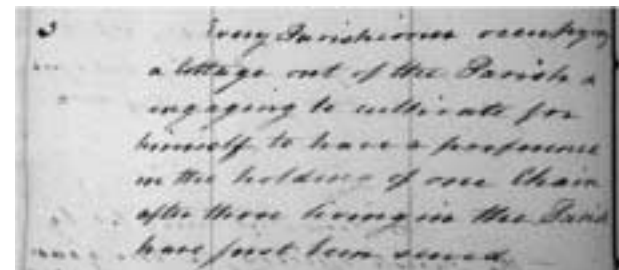
Concerned at this abuse, William Jocelyn Palmer took over the land in 1834 for £12 a year and let the land at a subsidised rent of 3 shillings a chain (20 metres) to poor parishioners. This income was paid, after expenses, to the Coal Club. The overlooker managed the land. In return, the tenants signed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

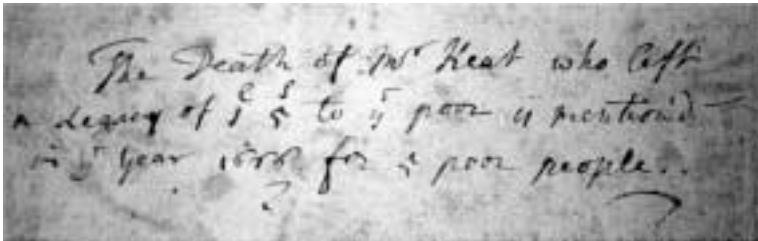
William Keat moved to Finmere from Hagbourne, then in Berkshire. He died in 1666 and is buried at St Michael's church. He was a gentleman and a Catholic and left an annuity to pay a crown (five shillings) to five poor people in Finmere each year. The annuity was from rental of land at Breech Furling 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*

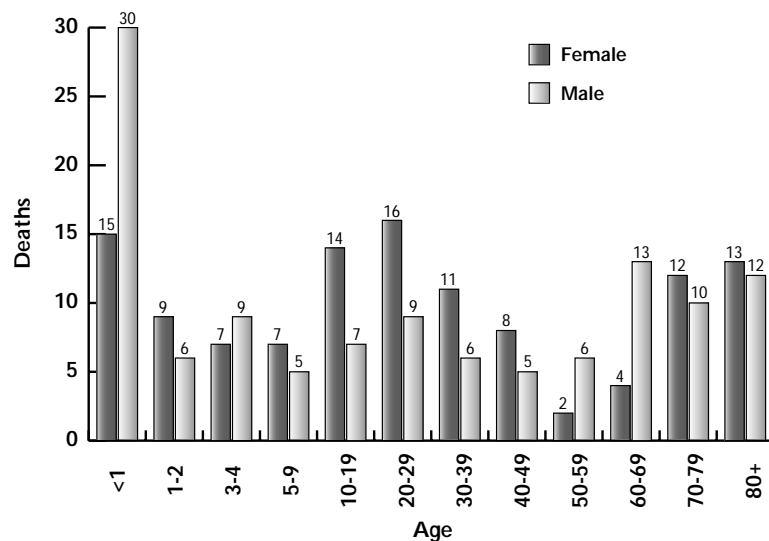


## Health and Medicine

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.

1953	2000
£12 13s	£190

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.

### Assault on Boys

1952	2000
2s 6d	£4

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.

### 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.