

## ☞ 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.

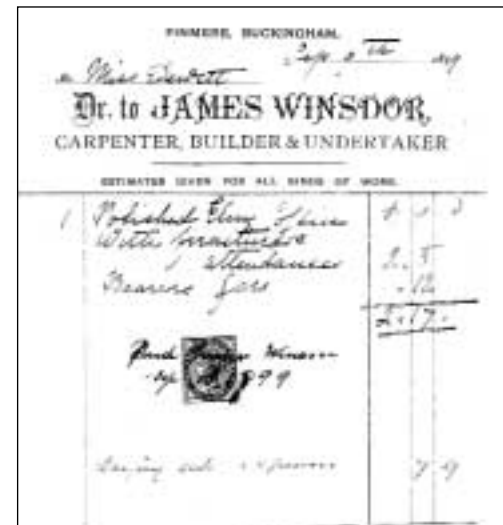
*This lacemaking is very injurious to health. The small rooms, into which numbers of young girls were gathered; the length of time they had to sit, with heads inclined and chests contracted, before their pillows, especially during the apprenticeships... sowed the seeds of decline in many, while the languor 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.

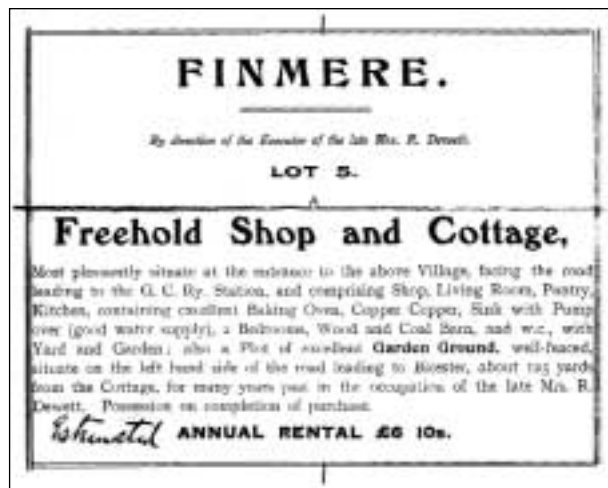
In 1851, Finmere had a butcher and a grocer. While the census taken that year did not record a village baker, local directories record Joseph Yates as a baker in 1876, James Barrett in 1887 and Frederic Augustus Cottrell from 1891 to 1928. There was a shop in Little Tingewick from at least 1863 when 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

**F**rom 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.

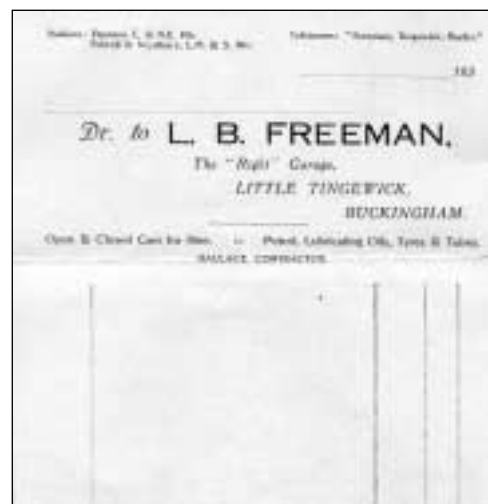
*Auction. Osborne & Son, White Hart Hotel, Buckingham.  
Tuesday, 30th July 1935. 3.30.*

#### 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)*



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.