

🌀 In Hall and Field 🌀

Initially lacking a dedicated meeting space, villagers held their meetings in the Kings Head or the school, where lessons often ended early to allow preparations for events. These meetings were frequently cramped and, in the 1930s, the village resolved to build a dedicated hall.

Finmere's Red Letter Day: The First Village Hall

In 1933, the villagers built a hall on Mere Road, on the now vacant and overgrown plot between Town Close and White Houses. Mr Alfred Lepper donated the land on a twenty-one year lease at a peppercorn rent of one shilling a year. Under the headline 'Finmere's Red Letter Day,' the local newspaper applauded the opening of Finmere's first village hall.

Seven thousand bricks were laid by voluntary labour and a great deal of carpentering and other manual work was performed by the residents of Finmere in the erection, by subscription, for their village, of an excellently situated village hall, which was declared open, on Friday afternoon, by Miss Ashwell. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)

The new hall, fifty by twenty feet (15 by 6m), was built with a wood frame and asbestos panels on a brick plinth. The cost was more than £153 and funding was raised by social events and subscriptions. This included a competition to guess the name of a 'beautiful doll' dressed in yellow, which raised £9, and two performances of an operetta, 'The Wishing Cap,' by the school children.

A Charming Operetta: 'The Wishing Cap'

The Buckingham Advertiser recorded that the operetta was well received.

On Easter Tuesday, in aid of the above fund, the village children and friends under the conductorship of Mrs L. Catley [school teacher], rendered their musical operetta entitled 'The Wishing Cap'...

Like most children, Finmere children show themselves to best advantage on a stage. Many of them won their way to the hearts of a splendid audience at Finmere School on Tuesday. Little distinction can be made between the principals, for all did their work well. A few parts need special mention, one being Violet Freeman as 'Elsa.' She spoke very distinctly, while her singing was very sweet... Next comes Katisha (Gipsy Queen). This part was taken by Edna Freeman. She pleased the audience so much that she was encored...

Mrs Catley is to be complimented upon her work with the children... They were well taught and hence did their parts well... The entire proceeds of this effort are to be handed to the Village Hall fund. (22 April 1933)

Feet	Metres
50	15.3
20	6.1

1933	2000
£153	£5,850
£9	£347

The success of the venture was largely due to the energetic work of the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Z. Radford, to the secretary and treasurer, the Reverend G. Dangerfield, and to the members of the enthusiastic Committee which was composed of Messrs. Z. Radford, jun., L. Catley, H. Beale, C. Andrews, M.B. Jordan, A. Horwood and Mesdames Paxton, Parrott, Davis and Harris. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)



Wishing Cap actors with Floss Clifford

Back row (left to right)

Hollyoaks granddaughter Edna Freeman Florence 'Floss' Clifford
Hollyoaks granddaughter Violet 'Vidy' Freeman

Front row (left to right)

Joyce Freeman Phyllis Freestone

1953 2000

£2 10s £40

The photograph above shows four of the actors in 'The Wishing Cap,' two years before their performance. Edna Freeman played 'Katisha,' the Gipsy Queen; Violet Freeman played 'Elsa'; Phyllis Freestone played 'Phoebe,' a dairymaid; Joyce Freeman played 'Fairy Goodwill.' They are shown with Florence Clifford and two granddaughters of Mr and Mrs Hollyoaks.

The Opening

Most of the village attended the opening on Friday afternoon, 28 April 1933. The Hall Committee had considered who should perform the ceremony and:

Everybody had said, 'we will ask Miss Ashwell'... because Miss Ashwell and her sister were very closely concerned with the welfare of the village. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)

Miss Alice Ashwell, then sixty-four years of age, was a daughter of the late Rector, Seymour Ashwell. After declaring the hall open and wishing it every possible success, she was presented with a spring bouquet of daffodils and double narcissi by 'little Miss Betty Radford.' The hall formally opened, Rector George Dangerfield offered a prayer for:

God's blessing upon the work that it might be for God's glory and for the true good of the village and a means of keeping them together in the spirit of true fellowship and brotherly love. (Buckingham Advertiser, 29 April 1933)

The celebrations continued into the evening with a whist drive and dance, the music performed by a five-piece band from Bucknell. The prizes were presented by Miss Emily Ashwell, Alice's sister.

In 1953, a new lease for the hall was agreed with John Lepper, Alfred's son, for fifteen years at a yearly rent of £2 10s.



Villagers prepare for a sponsored walk

In 1971, the village hall was short of funds. A sponsored walk and other fund raising events raised over two hundred pounds.

A Prize Winning New Village Hall

By the 1970s, the hall on Mere Road was considered too small and was becoming dilapidated. There was also concern about the asbestos used in its construction. Fundraising began for a new hall. In 1983, the site for the new building was marked out at the north edge of the playing fields and the footings dug. A contractor erected the stanchions and roof. Over the next year, the brickwork was laid by a professional bricklayer working at weekends with helpers from the village. The hall was completed in 1985 and used for the first time for refreshments for sponsored walkers and for the August Horticultural Show. On 12 April 1986, Councillor Prestidge, Chairman of Cherwell District Council, officially opened the new hall.

The present village hall is in a pre-war wooden building, and is in urgent need of improvement. A new village hall should be sought after to give a larger meeting hall area and full kitchen and toilet facilities. (Finnere Village Plan 1974, Oxfordshire County Council)

A year earlier, the hall had been entered in the Oxfordshire Village Ventures Competition. Out of thirty-seven entries, the village was awarded the second prize of £150, in recognition of the high community involvement in the project. The judges' report read:

Not only have they designed and built their own village hall; they have paid for it as they built it. Apart from using professional help in the basic structure, the villagers themselves have provided all the labour and skills needed to build this very fine hall.

The Grapevine Newsletter produced by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council in the summer of 1986 reported: 'the new Hall houses a Keep-fit Class, Guides, Youth Club and a newly-formed Historical Society.'

1986	2000
£150	£250



Back row (left to right)
Bill Banfield Anita Bilbo Brian Pankhurst Roger Davis

Front row (left to right)
Cyril Winchester Marjorie Winchester Judy Poore
Philip Willison David Purves

Villagers celebrate winning second prize in the 1985 Oxfordshire Village Ventures Awards

Roger Davis was Field Officer for Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. Judy Poore was the Final Round Judge. Mr David Purves was Regional Public Affairs Officer for Shell (UK) Ltd, sponsors of the competition. The others pictured are villagers.

The Playing Fields

The first sports field was located in the field behind Town Farm and the Kings Head, adjacent to the old B4031. The Sports Pavilion was built on land belonging to the Kings Head. The lease, between Chesham and Brackley Breweries Ltd and Finmere Sports Club, was signed on 30 October 1957 for a peppercorn annual rent of two shillings.

1957	2000
2s	£1.34

In 1972, the Parish Council learnt that the sports field was to be lost. It agreed to approach Merton College to lease approximately five acres in Water Stratford Road but by 1974 the matter had not been resolved.

Within the village, there is an urgent need to secure a village playing field area... from which the Sports Club will operate, together with a clubhouse building and small children's play area which would serve the village as a whole. (Finmere Village Plan 1974, Oxfordshire County Council)

The problem was solved that year, when the Parish Council agreed a lease with the Mixbury Charity for a plot of twelve acres (5 hectares) for ninety-nine years. The next year, an estimate for levelling and seeding of £700–800 was agreed and an estimate for the pavilion sought. This was not built and the village hall still serves as an improvised pavilion. The revived Sports Club is now seeking funds for new facilities.

The Play Area and Trees

In 1980, it was agreed that a sloping area of about a third of an acre (0.1 hectare) at the south end of the playing field should be used as a children's play area and for planting a spinney. The trees would act as a windbreak and enhance the sports pitches. The scheme was entered in a Council for the Protection of Rural England competition in 1981 against thirty-nine other village entries. It was awarded a certificate of merit and won £125, which was used to buy more trees to add to those already donated or purchased.

1981	2000
£125	£270

A hundred whips of various species were purchased to provide blossom, berries for the birds and varied coloured bark and foliage. With the help of a local farmer, holes were dug with a mechanical auger and the planting carried out in December. In 1982, a £50 grant was received from the Council for the Protection of Rural England for tree planting in the northwest corner of the playing field and in 1983 trees were donated for planting in the same area. Three years later, a grant of £35 was awarded from the Monument Trust of the CPRE for the planting of trees around the village hall and the Austrian pines in the northeast corner. On 8 May 1995, Tony How, Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee, officially opened the new children's play area during village celebrations of the 50th anniversary of VE Day.



Tony How receiving the key for the play area from John Cunningham, 1995