

## ☞ Finmere at the Millennium ☞

It is nearly one hundred and fifty years since William Jocelyn Palmer died at Finmere Rectory. He would recognise some similarities between the Finmere of his day and our village at the Millennium. St Michael's church, although larger and more ornate than in Palmer's time, retains its modest character. The village accommodates a similar number of people now as then but overcrowding has ended, and houses now form a continuous village street from Little Tingewick to the village pond. Palmer and his Vestry restricted new building in an attempt to relieve the burden of poverty on the parish. Today, the village attracts wealthier residents and new building is constrained to preserve its character.

The greatest change since the nineteenth century has been the withdrawal of the church from the day-to-day running of the parish, a task that began with the first Parish Meeting in 1894. The Rector no longer has the same authority over the parish; neither has the Parish Council, the successor to Palmer's Vestry. Major decisions are now taken at district, county and national level.

The next national census of population will be held in April 2001, shortly after this book is published. It is expected that the parish will then have grown to around 400 people, the same number as in Palmer's time but Finmere in the new Millennium is economically and socially a very different village. Oxfordshire County Council recognised in 1974 that the village was on the verge of change.

*In many respects, Finmere appears to be a traditional rural village structure with a relatively high proportion of the population employed locally and in agriculture. There is not a significant long distance commuting population element (say travel distances greater than 13 km, 8 mls) and thus a newfound local squirearchy. [But] the commuting element in Finmere is likely to grow significantly, as well as the proportion of people engaged in professional/managerial/teaching and service occupations. These newcomers will have a relatively high degree of mobility, many will be two car families and new roles will be adopted leading possibly to greater polarisation of society within the village. (Finmere Village Plan, Oxfordshire County Council 1974)*

The County Council's view that the arrival of commuters could lead to greater divisions within can be challenged. Finmere is a village used to change and comfortable with incomers working with established residents. Life in the village is not free of friction—planning and traffic matters, for example, are frequently contentious. But this Millennium History could not have been written without the collaboration of those who have lived here for decades and those who have arrived recently. Established villagers have

At the last census in 1991, Finmere had 364 residents, 178 men and 186 women. There were 274 adults, 194 of whom were married. Most employees were in the manufacturing, construction, catering, distribution and financial industries; only a few worked on the land; nearly three-quarters owned their houses. Just 13% worked at home and 6% walked to work.

worked with new arrivals to create a legacy for those who live in Finmere and Little Tingewick now and through the third Millennium.

I am myself such a new arrival, having moved to Finmere in 1995. In writing and editing the Millennium History and newsletters, I have learnt much about this outwardly quiet, inwardly bustling village. I extend my personal thanks to everyone who has helped in this work and particularly to Anita Bilbo who kept the project going at the times when my own pace flagged.

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March 2001