

Finstock News 132

Serving Finstock, Fowler, Wilcote, Mt. Skippett and Finstock Heath

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“The Polar Inuit of northwest Greenland, the northernmost people, call February ‘seqinniaq’, ‘the month when the sun appears.’”

This quote from the Canadian nature photographer, Fred Bruemmer, really jumped out when I was looking for something suitable to head up the front page because of its positive message. Even when living in a freezing, dark and inhospitable environment, the good things can be relished. I daresay that recent weeks have seemed cold, gloomy grey and inhospitable for many of us too but this issue of Finstock News also covers the start of spring. It may be a time that we consider making a Worm Farm (page six), get out in the garden some more (page twelve) or find time to visit local attractions (page eight). With the shorter month of February, whether you see the sun or not, enjoy the longer days and all that they may bring.

During these months

February 2nd 1882 - Irish novelist and poet James Joyce (1882-1941) was born in Dublin, Ireland.

February 7th 1812 - British novelist Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was born in Portsmouth, England.

February 11th 1990 - In South Africa, Nelson Mandela, at age 71, was released from prison after serving 27 years of a life sentence on charges of attempting to overthrow the apartheid government.

March 19th 1834 - Six farm labourers from Tolpuddle, Dorset, were sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia for forming a trade union.

March 25th 1807 - The British Parliament abolished the slave trade following a long campaign against it by Quakers and others.

March 28th 1912 - Both the Oxford and the Cambridge boats sank in the annual Varsity boat race.

THE PLOUGH INN

This Valentine's Day, we've put together an extra special menu to enjoy with your loved one. On Monday 14th February, you can indulge in our three-course menu, for only £39.50 per person! Booking is essential, and we highly recommend booking as soon as you can to avoid disappointment (and an unhappy other half!). As always, you can find our menus on our website (theploUGH-inn.co.uk) or on our Facebook page (@finstockploughinn).

Valentine's Day isn't the only special treat we have on offer. Throughout January and February, you can save £10 when two main courses are ordered. These vouchers can be used Tuesday to Thursday and cannot be used in conjunction with any other deal or themed evening. Want to get your hands on a voucher? Simply either pop into the pub and pick one up, or print off our Facebook post about the vouchers (it's pinned to the top of our profile, so you should be able to spot it easily).

As always, we are still offering our two-for-one Tempura Battered Fish and Chips on Tuesdays, and our Steak House Special - which includes two 8oz sirloins and a bottle of house red or white wine - on Thursdays.



Are you thinking of selling your home?

You might already have a buyer!

We are two young professionals who are getting married this year and looking to permanently move to the area to be closer to family, alongside starting a family of our own.

If your property fits our wish list or if you know of anyone who might be looking to sell, please do get in touch as we would love to chat to you.

- 3+ bedrooms
- Garden / outside space
- Off-road parking

Thank you so much! **Amelia and Bill:**

Mobile: 07743 612799 Email: amelia@partridge@hotmail.com

OBITUARY

PETER GARTH VICK 1928-2021

Peter was born in Oxford at the maternity hospital on 25 November 1928. His parents, Arthur and Dorothy, moved to Finstock from Bampton in 1932 and settled into Home Farm on School Road along with his older sister Jean.

He attended Finstock school and was there during the first year of the Second World War before he moved onto the Grammar School in Chipping Norton. Peter was passionate about sport and he is pictured in the Finstock football team (second from right, front row) and looks quite young compared to his teammates. He also played cricket and one of his great pleasures was to listen to the commentary in the Home Farm kitchen.

Peter and friends would travel to Chipping Norton to play cricket and football, and the preferred method of transport was by bicycle. The only problem was there was only one so a sensible method was introduced whereby Peter would cycle hundreds of yards and then lay the bicycle down whilst his mate would follow on foot, pick up the bicycle and ride ahead of Peter for some distance and in turn lay the bicycle down. The routine was carried out until the cricket pitch was reached! Other games were played on the road outside The Plough.

After the war, he attended the prestigious Cirencester Agricultural College in order to gain grounding in farming methods and techniques. There would also have been opportunities for playing sport whilst there, and going to dances (something else he very much enjoyed). He found the academic work rather less enjoyable, but nevertheless managed to graduate.

The National Service Act was brought in during 1947 and Peter was duly called upon to serve for eighteen months: he was posted first to Scotland (in the shocking winter of 1947), then Germany and Northern Ireland before returning to Finstock and taking on Home Farm from his ageing parents.

He purchased the fields on Wilcote Riding at this time and began to keep cows and pigs. He had a keen interest in the Organic Movement and he and his sister Jean became members of the Soil Association which from its beginnings in 1946 had concerns about intensive farming and the effects on soil erosion and the countryside and wildlife.

Peter took on a teaching role with the Youth Opportunities Scheme and Community Programme covering walling, ditching and hedging and later

village in the past and he was very patient with a newcomer and constant questions. I really appreciated Peter's sense of humour, often about village life and what folk got up to and his quiet approach to life. He always seemed to be working; such is farming life and perhaps my interruptions were welcome.

Peter was an avid chess player and for some time ran the club at the school. No doubt there are still many youngsters from the village who continue to play. I understand he was very good.

One of Peter's many skills, which perhaps went unseen, was his skill and sheer love of working with wood. The best examples I have are the doors at The Home Farm House which are made of Oak and handmade by Peter. They are skilfully made and will see years of use. One Christmas he took the time to make some excellent wooden toys and co-opted all the boys to assist and they all came home with

something that they had made under Peter's excellent tutelage.

I remember Peter offering me a Walnut from his jacket pocket which had come from one of the trees that he had planted in the farm orchard. It was not even Christmas. They were an easy snack to carry around and had been avidly collected by Finstock villagers for decades. Peter's orchard with some thirty-two different varieties of apples stands today and provides food for the family table.

Peter spent most of his working life on the land and knew his patch of the countryside very well. There can be no doubt that he was a true villager with a noticeable local accent, able to help and offer advice when needed, always tanned from his outdoor work, patient and caring. For those who never had the opportunity to talk to Peter I suggest that you have missed a great opportunity.

Tony Cooper



worked at the Warren Farm campus near Witney with students who were studying agriculture.

The story of how he met Nicola, his future wife, began when a pig escaped from the farm on Wilcote Riding in 1978 and she helped with its recapture. It was a Gloucester Old Spot and no doubt Peter thanked that pig many times for helping him to begin his romance with Nicola. From this moment it was off to local dances and it seems that Peter was a very good quickstep teacher. He also had a grand singing voice.

In his later life, Peter allowed my boys alongside his own sons, Reuben and Elliot, to enjoy the freedom of the fields on The Riding and whilst no doubt keeping an eye on them, he was very trusting. He often appeared on the seat of his workhorse tractor and would always be willing to turn off the engine and chat. I enjoyed many conversations about life in the

Having used the lockdown period to give some tender loving care to our hall (new flooring, doors fixed, redecoration etc.), the trustees have been looking at other things to further improve your experience when you hire the hall. We know that some hirers, particularly for private events, have had problems with being able to use the audio-visual facilities in the way they would like, so improvements to the equipment, the connectivity and the functionality are all being considered.

The increased focus on health and safety of everyone, brought on by the detailed requirements of pandemic control, have also led us to purchase a new defibrillator, which will be fixed to the outside of the hall. This means Finstock will now have two defibrillators, increasing the chances of survival and recovery should they need to be used. We have worked with our friends on the Parish Council, and while the original intention had always been to move the existing kit from its current spot in Hill Crescent, we all agreed it made much more sense to buy a second set of equipment for the village. This will be funded by the Village Hall charity.

Rod Ireland

Finstock Craft Club

It's with a certain sense of relief that we returned to the village hall on 10th January following the Christmas and New Year break.

Going forward, the subject of using old to make new is frequently talked about at our weekly crafting sessions, with some of us putting this into practice. There are many ways we can all help to stop polluting our precious planet and at the same time reduce the massive financial burden of disposing of all our rubbish (and save a few pennies for ourselves). I'm sure many of us are aware of the phrase, "Make-do-and-Mend", which originated when rationing was introduced following WWII. Today we hear much more about the three R's, "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle". We can all do our bit,

however small, by throwing away a lot less. On that note, take a good look for instance, at the clothes you don't wear any more but can't bear to throw away. You'd be surprised at the possibilities of upcycling or repurposing many of those items. You can start by taking a look at www.wikihow.com/Reuse-Old-Clothes and the many other websites on this subject. Alternatively, come along for a free session at the village hall and pick the brains of our crafters. Also, we'd love to hear if you have any suggestions or tips regarding the three R's which works for you.

Our wish for 2022 is for everyone to stay safe and well and we look forward to welcoming you to the village hall, on any Monday, except Bank Holidays. Sessions start at 7.30pm until 9.30pm. £2.00 per session. Taster session is free. Drop-In is welcomed if you're unable to attend every week.

You can contact me at: rosacharlesworth@icloud.com if you have any questions.

Kind Regards, Rosa

Finstock Short Mat Bowls

Our regular Monday and Thursday sessions continue and we have room for three or four more members if you wish to try the sport. All you need is a pair of clean flat-soled shoes like trainers to change into and we have the rest. Just turn up before 2pm Monday or 1pm Thursday or call Shaun on 868134.

At year end Finstock Woodpeckers stand second in the 13-team Witney Triples League played on Wednesday mornings. Two of our members, Shaun and Bev Morley, have reached the finals of the National Mixed Fours competition for the second time with two other Charlbury bowlers. They finished second in the Oxfordshire qualifiers and the finals will be played at Solihull in early March.

Shaun Morley



HELP YOUR VILLAGE HALL

Since the November edition, a number of people have asked for more detail on how to support the Village Hall through the Amazon Smile project, where every time you buy from Amazon, they make a donation to the Village Hall charity. Just log onto the website smile.amazon.co.uk and you'll be instantly prompted to select a charity to support. Just enter "Finstock Village Hall" or our charity number 279171. Make all your purchases from now on through this site (prices and offerings are identical to the normal site), and you'll benefit your Hall **at no cost to you**. We realise there are many wonderful charities out there, but if you **do** shop with Amazon and you **don't** currently support a charity through Smile, and you'd like to help the Hall thrive, then please consider giving your support to us.

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– headline in Australia's Daily Telegraph

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Dear deer:

Walking back from Wilcote along the field path, through the small copse and out into the flat bird-less fields, my dog immediately froze and I followed her gaze to the herd of fallow deer grazing in the field. A quick count and there were at least thirty-five heads all looking our way wondering if we were a threat or could just be ignored. A scout was nearer us than the main herd and didn't drop its head to feed. My path would take us past them and we were no threat as my dog was close and had been taught to stay so.

For the deer though it was too much and they moved slowly away and formed a column of mixed ages and headed towards the Longcut and safety amongst the trees. I continued to take a parallel course and could see them gradually forming up on the other side of a hedge with the Longcut in view. Then I saw the fallow buck with a fine set of antlers. This was the tail end of the rut and no doubt what I was seeing was his harem of breeding does and younger first year offspring. Quite a catch.

We are fortunate to have this herd in our neighbourhood and they number well over two hundred in total. No doubt gardeners and foresters might disagree due to the overgrazing that they can do but I think they bring a great deal to our local fields and woods. They can be quite difficult to spot, even in large groups as their coats blend in with stubble, bushes and trees. Of the three local deer species they are the most prolific although sightings of Muntjac on roadside verges are common and at the right season you can see Roe deer. There was one grazing on the village playing field back in the Autumn; no doubt straying in from Cornbury.

My herd that day crossed through the Longcut and were further disturbed by more walkers with dogs. Disturbance of the herd must be a constant problem with dog walking such a popular pastime and the deer must always be on their guard.

Top tip: if a deer crosses the road in front of you when you are driving do slow down as there will almost certainly be another following in its path, and another and another.

Vicus

Finstock Local History Society

A quick reminder that there will be no meetings until at least March now. Confirmed for the spring calendar is the talk and song evening relating to the Cotswold Arts and Craft movement to be given by Martin and Shan Graebe from Cirencester on Friday, May 21st. This will also serve as a warm up to the Finstock Music Day on Saturday May 22nd. Who knows, we may have a new Bower in place on Well Hill by then too!



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Pete Welply	868140	Editor
petewelply@btinternet.com		

Photographs thanks to team members and others.

Contact us as above, e-mail the Editor, or write to us at 53 High Street, Finstock, Oxon OX7 3DA.

Plan ahead – Know the deadlines

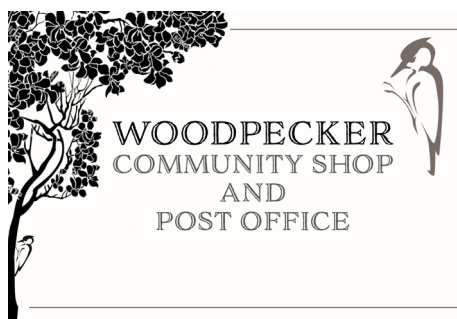
Issue	Deadline
Feb/Mar	First of January
April/May	First of March
June/July	First of May
August/September	First of July
October/November	First of September
December/January	First of November

Please keep articles short. As space is limited, the Editors reserve the right to shorten long pieces in the interest of balance. *Finstock News* does not necessarily share the views expressed in readers' letters.

The Playground Build

In the last issue, we mentioned the possibility of a slide show presentation about the Playground build being held at the Village Hall. But just to drip feed some images, for now, here's one of the build in progress on one cool, misty morning in March 2005





The Annual General Meeting for the shop took place in the Village Hall at the end of November and, once again, it was very well attended, indicating the support for the shop within the community. Dissection of the accounts revealed that the shop made an operating loss of just over £4,700 in the fiscal year to June 2021.

Not enough to threaten imminent closure, but the outcome of the declining trend in revenues described in depth in previous editions of Finstock News. An enthusiastic debate resulted in several ideas for exploration being agreed. Janette Reed was formally elected to the board of directors, which now comprises Rod Ireland (Chair), Ed Grant, Carol Scott and Janette. And we are delighted to announce that Alison Retter has volunteered her services as Finance Director, a position which has been vacant for the past year.

The directors expressed their thanks to the few but extremely valuable volunteers who help us keep to the current opening schedule (if you are reading this, have recently retired and want to help your community, we need you!), the loyal members of the community who continue to value the need for a shop and post office, and in particular the indefatigable Karen Williams, who continues to pour heart and soul into this much-needed community venture. We look forward to serving you in 2022.

Rod Ireland

Christmas was an interesting one in 2021!

I was in Witney and saw the huge lines of people laden with their Christmas parcels queuing for the post office in WHSmith thinking if only they went to other post offices in the smaller villages around Witney it would not only make their experience a little better but would also take the pressure off those post office staff in WHSmith! It also obviously benefits all those other smaller post offices.

Here in Finstock we did become busier as is usual for that time of year and of course we do all the same parcel options as any other post office.

Aside from the normal sending of mail we can also attend to your banking needs. You can deposit cash and cheques into your account, withdraw cash or check your balance. This is important with so many Banks now not doing much banking!

You can pay your bills for council tax, gas, electricity at the post office, and also buy top ups, including for mobile phones.

Stuck for a present? Buy a One4All gift card, accepted with over 130 High Street brands.

Our Post Office is open Monday to Friday 9am-1pm with the last acceptance for mail at 12 noon as the post is collected soon after.

Oh, and while you're using our little post office, don't forget to buy something from the shop, which is not being used as much as it needs to be! The post office cannot support the shop so if the shop closes, the post office does as well. Don't let our village lose these valuable amenities.

Karen Williams

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-Aldo Leopold.

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"Destroying rainforest for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal."

– E O Wilson, Naturalist

FROM "POSITIVE.NEWS"

Wanted: 1,000 worm-loving food waste alchemists

Community groups and households in the UK can request to be sent free worms in the post, as part of a project by Nottingham-based The Urban Worm CIC

Nottingham-based initiative The Urban Worm Community Interest Company is on a mission to #wormup the UK – and it needs your help.

The social enterprise has received a grant from the National Lottery to send out 1,000 packs of composting tiger worms to UK schools, community groups and households. There's just one requirement: groups need to create a DIY worm farm to house them in first.

Anna de la Vega, managing director, hopes the two-year **1,000 Worm Farmers project** will empower people to create a worm farm, manage their organic waste responsibly, and make their own worm poo – all for free – from home.

"Food waste emits greenhouse gases methane and nitrous oxide,

which are 31 and 310 times stronger than carbon dioxide," said de la Vega. "We hate to think of valuable worm food being thrown in the bin, when there are millions of hungry worm mouths to feed. Not only do the mighty worms help us to manage our organic waste responsibly, they provide us with a steady supply of the world's finest fertiliser and compost, for free, helping us to grow in harmony with the Earth."

To take part, people need to upload a photograph of their worm farm via the application form, which you can access on <http://theurbanworm.co.uk/wormup/> - and you'll then receive 100g of tiger worms in the post! "All we ask in return is that you love and care for your worms as if your life depended upon it," said de la Vega. She and her team have uploaded videos showing **how to make a DIY worm farm** (hint: plastic containers, sets of drawers, swing bins and even 'bags for life' can be used), with more videos planned on how to harvest the worm poo and how best to use it for "magical results in the garden".

Lucy Purdy



From the Ground Up: 20 Stories of Climate Action

This project was a huge part of our work in 2021 and we loved working with groups new and old, artists and other local partners. Thank you to everyone that funded, took part and got involved in the project in any way.

Read the project report here - <https://tinyurl.com/yckjzdwv>

EVENTS:

The network runs over 4,000 events per year, attended by over 80,000 residents, and contributes over 50,000 volunteer hours to the county. Events range from repair cafes and seedling swaps to talks by leading activists and environmentalists. Everyone is welcome to join events, volunteer with a group or apply to join the network.

There are lots of amazing events going on, take a look at our calendar to find one near you - <https://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/events-1>

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**“Half my life is spent acquiring packaging.
The other half is spent disposing of it.”**

Packaging used to be something that only shops and businesses used to handle. It is nearly two years since the start of the pandemic; and very many people are now accustomed to ordering goods online. That means a lot of packaging arriving on our doorsteps. And the problem is not going to go away. What do we do with it all?

If you have a garden, you can reuse a lot of it. Cardboard will rot down; it can be applied to the compost heap or used as mulch. But there is often a lot of tape around the cardboard, and it can be difficult to separate it. I find myself letting the cardboard get wet in the open air, and then the tape comes off more easily.

For more information see <https://tinyurl.com/2p82ee5b>

But often worse is lurking. You may find plastic in the packaging, which can only be put out for recycling. Some deliveries use bubbles made of plastic, where at least the volume is low, provided you burst the bubbles first.

The very worst in my experience is plastic chips; I recently had a load of them in an Amazon delivery of drink bottles – they cannot be put in the recycling bin and so have to be put in the household waste bin (if they are not first discovered by young children and animals!).

Sustainable packaging is slowly emerging. Some Dell products, for example, contain mushroom-based packaging: –

Raw waste products like cotton hulls and old corn husks are mixed with mycelium, the root structure of mushrooms, and placed in a mould. The mycelium feeds on the agricultural waste, which grows into the shape of the mould. The result is a mushroom-soft material that's better than polystyrene in every imaginable way - it's more flexible, sturdier, and completely biodegradable.

See blog.remesh.ai/innovative-sustainable-packaging-ideas for this and other examples. So here is a test: do you buy products that amount to instant waste? Dare I mention teabags, which often contain plastic, and are twice the cost of loose tea? (There are plenty of sustainable choices! See moralfibres.co.uk/the-teabags-without-plastic/. I prefer loose tea – half the price – using a muslin strainer, the Teenetz.) I have to confess to buying nut milk, which often comes in Tetrapaks; they are made of three different materials which cannot be composted without separating them. However, I can buy the nuts and do the operation myself!

Tony Hirtenstein

Oxfordshire Tops Nation

For the eighth year running, Oxfordshire households top the nationwide table for recycling, reusing and composting. Oxfordshire is the best performing County Council in England for waste disposal.

We can be proud of our general awareness of waste. But what comes in your front door will eventually be going out the back. That product, food or item can be recycled, reused or composted. Better yet, stop before you buy anything and ask yourself if you need it or only want it. Wanting things has meant a waste disposal mountain of things we had to have, which were abandoned a short time later. Think about what comes in your front door before you buy.

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North Leigh Roman Villa

It's been a very encouraging start to the New Year for English Heritage as the charity announced a £1m donation from the Michael Bishop Foundation to secure the future of four of this country's most important historic sites, including North Leigh Roman Villa!

Lord Glendonbrook, Chair of Trustees for the Foundation, said "The Foundation's policy is to give support to heritage projects where urgent and important restorations are required to safeguard buildings of significant historical interest but which are not in the mainstream of fundraising". The grant will support the repair of the rusting tin roof over the surviving mosaics, the cleaning of the Roman mosaics, and converting the 19th-century custodian cottage into an education and interpretation space.

North Leigh Roman Villa Volunteers are thrilled, one reaction being "This is really great news to start the year, and demonstrates how all the "marketing" of the NLRVV site that has been done over the past couple of years - from open days to radio interviews, school visits and newspaper articles - has really paid off."

Set within a peaceful landscape on the banks of the River Evenlode, North Leigh Roman Villa is considered to be one of the largest villas in Roman Britain with a history of occupation spanning 5 centuries. At its most extensive in the early 4th century AD it included 3 bath suites, 16 mosaic floors and 11 rooms with under-floor heating.

Today visitors can imagine the villa's former richness as they walk through the rectangular footprint of its walls – but the mosaic house hides the real gem of a near complete mosaic floor. The mosaics form the floor of the villa's winter dining room and, as the only example in Oxfordshire still found in their original location, they give a powerful sense of the Villa's original opulence.

The mosaics were not on display to the public from the early 1990s for almost 30 years. North Leigh Roman Villa Volunteers [NLRVV] are a local group working with English Heritage, who first opened the mosaics in September 2019. Since then, 3,200 visitors have seen the mosaics in spite of covid restrictions in 2020 and 2021.

Let's keep those numbers coming!

District Council News

The new year brings new challenges and the one I wanted to address with residents is the needs of housing for local people particularly those who wish to downsize or want to get on the ladder of owning or renting their own home. There seem to be fewer one or two-bedroom properties being built as developers seem to want to maximise their profits with larger four and five-bedroom properties, which are not affordable and attract investors or second home owners to the area with no intent to settle. This leads to higher property prices and/or rents. To me, this is not sustainable for our villages and although we have had some development interest in the past, this has never come about. Perhaps it is time we took this on ourselves and thought of more creative ways of addressing the needs of our communities by direct intervention?

What is your view? Are you in favour of the district council building houses specifically to address the needs of the village so that it can grow in the right way, addressing local needs, built in an environmentally sustainable way? Email me and perhaps we can set up a working group to move this forward.

Future generations need to be supported if our villages are to be sustained!

Cllr Andy Graham, District Councillor Finstock, Fawler and Charlbury
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Volunteer Link Up is based in Witney. We offer three services for vulnerable people of any age and ability living in West Oxfordshire: community transport, befriending and help with practical tasks.

Community transport If you aren't able to drive yourself or if public transport is difficult for you, our volunteer drivers will take you to your important appointments. We prioritise medical and dental appointments, but we can also assist you to visit loved ones in care homes and to go shopping.

Befriending If you are feeling isolated or lonely our befrienders will visit you for company and conversation. Befrienders can also help you with sorting post and other small administrative tasks. If you prefer, they can just talk with you over the phone. We'll match you with a volunteer based on the kind of support you'd like, taking into account where you both live and your common interests.

Practical tasks We can also offer support with practical tasks. Our volunteers will help you with those jobs around the house and garden that can make all the difference to your day-to-day life. It might be changing a light bulb, re-tuning the television, lawn mowing, weeding, general tidying in the garden or small DIY jobs that don't take long but make life a lot easier.

All our volunteers have a current Disclosure and Barring Service check. We also take up two personal references. Volunteers follow our procedures to ensure, as far as possible, the safety of the people they help.

If you, or someone you know, could use our services, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact Volunteer Link Up on 01993 776277 or send an email to us at office@vlu.org.uk

From our Member of Parliament

Happy New Year to everybody in West Oxfordshire! As we enter the new year, the Prime Minister has confirmed that tighter COVID-19 measures will not be introduced. Instead, the Government is committed to a balanced approach which protects both public health and the economy. It is confirmed that Plan B will continue for at least a further three weeks, meaning people should:

Continue to work from home wherever they can

Wear face coverings on public transport and most indoor public places

It is also advised that people take a lateral flow test before going to high-risk settings or meeting with the elderly or vulnerable.

Lateral flow tests are very good at detecting people who are infectious at the moment because the prevalence of the virus is high and there are lots of cases to be spotted. This means that they can be used confidently to indicate COVID-19 infection.

Therefore, from January 11th, if you get a positive LFD result:

- You will no longer need to take a follow-up PCR test. You will still need to register your positive LFD result.
- You should still self-isolate immediately if you receive a positive result

Please also note that COVID self-isolation has been cut from ten days to seven, **provided you have a negative LFD result on days six and seven.**


I am very pleased we have now removed the temporary extra testing measures we introduced last year at the border to slow the spread of the Omicron variant. I am very glad that these measures will support the safe reopening of international travel.

Thames Water Update
I absolutely share the concerns

of constituents, following reports that Thames Water have been conducting sewage releases from Witney STW on a very regular basis. The river levels in West Oxfordshire are all currently at or within their normal levels. Therefore, rather than this being an 'exceptional measure', it appears that Thames Water are treating 'storming' as a routine process. This is clearly unacceptable. We must urgently see investment in the infrastructure upgrades our area needs to reduce storm overflows, particularly, but not exclusively, at Witney STW. I am absolutely determined to ensure that sewage releases are not allowed to become a matter of routine for Thames Water. I have therefore written to the Chief Executive of Thames Water to have an urgent meeting for an explanation of these sewage releases. I am also following up with the Environment Agency to ask them to investigate whether these spills breach Thames Water's permit conditions. I have been clear that illegal spills which harm our environment must be punished in the strongest possible terms. The people of West Oxfordshire are clear that we want to see far greater investment in better infrastructure to ensure clean and healthy waterways. I will continue to wholeheartedly support you and hold Thames Water to account.

Robert Courts, MP

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— George Eliot

News from Finstock School

In Oak Class we have thoroughly enjoyed our topic 'Magnificent Monarchs' this term. We started off by having a royal tea party. The children dressed up as their favourite Kings and Queens and had an amazing day learning about our history and eating tea and scones! We really enjoyed writing stories inspired by the story 'The Queen's Hat'.

In art, we recreated royal portraits and learnt about different sewing patterns to make a sewn tea bag!



Cedar Class returned after Christmas to an exciting start to our project 'Sow, Grow and Farm'. Our memorable experience was a trip to the village allotments... to visit our very own allotment that one of our families has very kindly lent to us! We now have our own bed to cultivate, and once the ground has warmed up in the summer term, we can get our seedlings in. We hope to grow a variety of fruit and vegetables, and we are excited to see the results - we are having to be very patient in the meantime! We have learnt about different climate zones in the world which affect growing; potato farming in Jersey; and even about growing coffee in Peru.

Alongside our main project, we also learnt about 'Nature's Art', and looked at art forms created from natural materials. We started by exploring the field and playground to see what materials could be found in the local area, and we made

sculptures from what we found. From an insect hotel to 'Autumn Starlight', we were proud of what our friends achieved. We hope you like the photographs of some of our creations, and the sketches we made.

Our daily reading sessions this term have been focussed on the book 'Charlotte's Web' by E B White. We have read the whole book and enjoyed discussing the book together, as well as answering comprehension questions about the text. Each day we also read the story 'The Secret Garden' by Frances Hodgson Burnett. In our writing lessons we wrote our own adventure stories, and also a biography based on David Attenborough.



Remembrance of Finstock in my past

Now that I have moved away, these memories, which I enjoyed then, still remain sharply in my mind:

I marvelled each month as the full moon squeezed herself up from behind the roof of *The Plough*, or, on moonless nights, at the brilliance of stars, undimmed by streetlights.

Next day as I set out for an early morning walk with my dog, I would greet the morning with Guy standing at his door, mug in hand and phone under his chin, as I anticipated the flavoursome crispness of Jordan's fish and chips! The sight of Simon's sheep grazing serenely in the fields beside Dark Lane was also a great comfort in dark times. They seemed to munch with sublime confidence, or was it indifference to the worries of our world.

I miss the fraternity of dogs and

their humans as we trudged round the Town Field, greeting each other with a smile or a sniff, as appropriate, or stopping to discuss the weather or the state of the world.

Walking to the shop always raised my spirits too, as I listened to the joyful shouts and squawks of the excited children at break time. Often, I returned from the shop by way of the churchyard, where it was good to sit quietly and reflect on the changing community of Finstock and to remember the bygone villagers who lie there and who created the foundation of the community which you enjoy today.

It is people who still create the clubs, classes and societies which offer the opportunity to know each other; people who strengthen the village, who defied the doubters to rebuild the Village Hall, and work hard to run fêtes, bazaars, festivals and other celebrations.

You recently will have shared the delicious silliness of the Mummers' Play at Christmas-time outside *The Plough* and before long the Morris dancing season will begin.

Enjoy yourselves and make your own happy memories to share!

With the warmest of wishes to all Finstock.

Barbara Pensom

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You might remember that back in the August-September issue of the *Finstock News* we featured an open letter sent in by Chris Turner, along with images of the Treehouse development up on Finstock Heath. Here's an update from the Founder Director of Treedwellers, Tim Rees.



Dear Finstock community, as the founder and director of Treedwellers, I am very pleased to share with you news of our progress. The seven treehouses - five sleeping two people and two sleeping four people are progressing well. Despite international supply issues, covid delays and the inflationary cost of HS2 which have all posed major challenges and delays to the project, our current plan is to open in July of this

Treedwellers development

year, all being well. Our vision for Treedwellers is based on observing best practice in the treehouse accommodation market over the last twelve years. We know that these will attract low volume, high value guests, with above average disposable income who also tend to show an interest and appreciation for local food, drink and activities.



We are expecting 810 bookings across all seven units per year with an average of two and a half guests per trip, totalling just over 2000 visitors to the woodlands each year, or 39 guests per week. We expect most will come in one car given that five of the treehouses are designed for couples. Working with our partners at Cornbury Park Estate, we may host a limited number of weddings each year to compliment other existing estate

activities. If, on average, each guest spends £15 - £25 in the local shop and or pub, that would contribute £30,000 - £50,000 to the village in direct spend annually.

The feedback we have received regarding the design of the treehouses is incredibly rewarding, and something we hope the community of Finstock will be proud to have on its doorstep. To our knowledge, no one in the world has delivered structures like this, certainly not in the UK.

We will have **an open day for the community**, date tbc in the next publication of *Finstock News*. We would love to welcome you along and show you the treehouses.

Engaging with our community is very important to us, and as such we would like to seek applications to join the Treedwellers team from May this year. We are seeking a site manager and front of house staff, caretakers and cleaners. For more information and to apply please email tim@treedwellers.co.uk

Postscript: the Open Day will be a great opportunity to directly ask questions about the development, but if you feel moved to air anything in the meantime, just write in to "Letters for the Editor".

Finstock Unplugged (Ffolk) – Micro-concert and December Zoom

What a wonderful evening on December 10th, with the Owl Light Trio and Steph West, held at the Wilcote Art Studios. The musicianship of all the performers was both stunning and delightfully unpretentious, laced with plenty of good humour that they shared with their listeners.

Steph West, besides playing a splendidly eclectic set that ranged from classical, through traditional folk and some funky swing to her own original songs, entertained us with insights into the quirks of playing and tuning a harp, and she took us on a beautiful musical journey to the interval.

The Owl Lights are justifiably celebrated for their highly skilled musical craftsmanship, but I also love their musical wit! Time and again during their set, they seemed to good-naturedly challenge each other as they took turns in winding up a tune to a new level of rhythmic or melodic

complexity before handing it over to one of their fellows as though to say 'now, what will you do with this music?'

The encore was a treat - Steph returned to the stage to join the Owls in some light-hearted Christmas music, musically decking the halls with boughs and holly to end the evening. A huge thank you to all four musicians for a lovely concert, and also heartfelt thanks to a relaxed and cheerful audience who really appreciated the music.

If Covid doesn't stop us, we'll hope to put on our next micro-gig on Friday 4th February 2022. This time we are going for some Americana provided by The Holy Fools.

December 27th Zoom - It was the holiday period, Covid was rampant, many of our regulars were either away or poorly, and it was certainly a disappointment that we were back to Zooming after a whole 6 months of live meetings. Fortunately, those

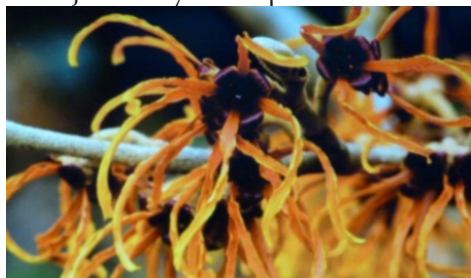
who attended were in good voice and much fine music was heard. It was also great to be reminded that a benefit of Zooming is that geographical location is no problem; it was delightful to hear from Nancy and Lara, our excellent American singer-songwriters, who joined us from different corners of Texas, where it was still early afternoon! Although some other local folk/acoustic clubs have regretfully cancelled all sessions until the spring, when outdoor meetings may again be possible, at 'Ffolk' we intend to continue via Zoom.

Ginnie



Early flowering delights

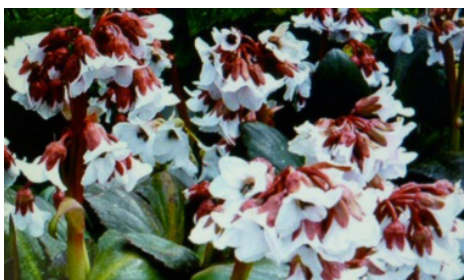
The first snowdrops herald the return of a new gardening year, and these are soon joined by other plants.



One shrub lighting up the winter, with its colourful, fragrant flowers, is the Witch hazel, *Hamamelis*, performing best in sun or filtered shade, its yellow, orange or red flowers glowing like fiery embers in the backlight of the low winter sun. Witch hazels need free-draining soil that doesn't dry out in summer. A light soil with plenty of organic matter, such as well-rotted manure or compost, dug in is best. They will grow on heavier clay soils that are also improved by digging in organic matter, and ensuring good drainage by planting on a slight mound. Witch hazels are virtually maintenance-free and resistant to most pests and diseases. Extracts of Witch hazel applied directly to the skin, helps to reduce swelling, repairs broken skin and fights bacteria.

I find that *Bergenias* make good ground cover, tolerating a wide range of soils, including dry soils and clay. They make lovely edging plants, their huge leaves ("elephant's ears") contrasting with the delicate fronds of ferns, in shade, or the tiny leaves of thymes

when in sun. The variety "Overture" is a particularly attractive cultivar with striking magenta-red flowers that are held high on scarlet stems above the foliage in mid spring. A cold snap in winter will turn the leaves from deep green to rich claret. "Pink ice" is another excellent choice, starting with white flowers going pale pink with age. A great plant at this time is *Pulmonaria* ("soldiers and sailors") with its stunning red and blue flowers, set off by white spotted leaves covering the ground suppressing weeds.



Hellebores are another star attraction at this time, with flowers to grace any garden. I remove old leaves in late November, so that the flowers can be easily seen as they open. This practice also removes any hellebore aphids, which may carry viruses that could damage or even kill your plants. A welcome favourite of mine is the Spring Snowflake *Leucojum vernum* - a hardy, frost-tolerant plant, the same size as a large snowdrop, but with lampshade-like white bells, made up of six pointed petals held open wide, showing green or yellow tips, and large yellow anthers. *Hepatica nobilis* is a

little gem with its bright blue, pink or white flowers and three-lobed leaves, spreading gradually, if not disturbed. Native primroses can also flower early in sheltered sunny spots. All these plants are excellent early nectar and pollen sources for bees, bringing colour and making the garden hum on sunny days.

Robert



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A few jobs for the garden during February and March

- Cut down deciduous ornamental grasses left standing over winter, before fresh shoots appear
- Divide large clumps of snowdrops and winter aconites after flowering and replant to start new colonies
- Trim back ivy, Virginia creeper and other climbers if they have outgrown their space, before birds start nesting
- Plant new roses and other shrubs and climbers
- Sow native wildflower seeds in trays or modules, to produce plants for your own mini-meadow
- Finish pruning roses early in the month



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