

Finstock News 138

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

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"There is always in February some one day, at least, when one smells the yet distant, but surely coming summer." – Gertrude Jekyll

Gloom is all around us! During the current winter months especially there seems to be too much cloud cover and too little sunshine. Not so with this first issue of the *Finstock News* for the new year – the balance is the other way around! Despite the news relating to the Village Shop (see the article below), most pages include rays of sunshine and several more upbeat items. Just the recipe we need – so read on and dispel some of the gloom that you see outside - as we carry on into 2023 and some, literally, sunnier days ahead.

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It is with a heavy heart that I have to tell you the Woodpecker Shop and Post Office will cease trading at some point before the end of June 2023. I have previously written at length in these pages about the lack of customer footfall and associated revenues. Income has continued to decline, and our costs have risen to the point that we would now have to TRIPLE our daily revenue just to reach a break-even point. So, by summer, the reserves will be exhausted, and we will have no money to keep the Shop open. The directors have formally agreed to begin the winding-up process with our accountants. We expect that the 100 Club will continue until the end of April, after which we will close the bank account into which your contributions are paid.

The reality is that the traditional village shop is fast becoming outdated, as people change the way they live their lives. We are not alone in our struggles, and you will know of other villages in the region where once vibrant stores have closed down. In Finstock, we have been rescued in the past

– particularly just before the pandemic – by generous gifts from villagers. I have to tell you that any further gestures of this kind would be futile, such is the scale of our shortfall in trade.

I would like to thank those who have worked so hard over the years to maintain a shop in the village: the various directors, the stalwart volunteers who so kindly gave of their time, all of the regular customers who made a point of buying something from us on a daily or weekly basis, and of course the indefatigable Karen Williams, whose energy and commitment have been exemplary. The shop has been so much more than just a place to buy things; it displayed the artwork of generations of children, it served as a place to meet others and offer a sympathetic ear, it was an information hub, and it will leave behind a certain vacuum when the doors close for the last time – at least for awhile.

Rod Ireland

Please continue to use us over the coming months.

Our opening times are:

Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri:

8.30am – 3.30pm

(last time for posting 12 noon; P.O. shuts 1pm)

Tue: 8.30am – 1.30pm

(and P.O. as above)

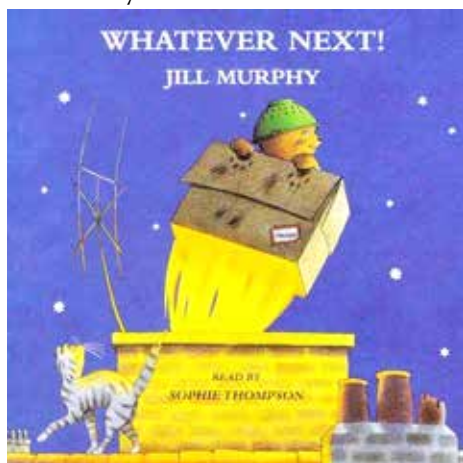
Sat: 9am – 1pm

(no P.O. services)

Sun: Closed

NEWS FROM OUR SCHOOL –

Cherry and Oak class had a wonderful walk around the beautiful Finstock village as part of their memorable experience. On the walk we visited the church, village hall, the post office and shop. We looked at where our school sits in the village and on our return to school we looked at where Finstock is on the map and where our local towns and cities are. It was a great opportunity to look around our beautiful village and greet some of the villagers on our walk. We would welcome any visitors who would like to come and talk to us about Finstock and how it has changed over the years.



Cherry class are looking forward to exploring their topic 'Starry Night' this term. They have already made some wonderful rockets after listening to the story Whatever Next by Jill Murphy. Next week they will be finding out more about nocturnal animals and exploring what happens when you mix different colours.

In Oak class they have started their topic 'Bright Lights, Big City'. They will be finding out more about our local geography and explore the human and physical features found in the United Kingdom. They are also learning about the Seasons and they look forward to starting to investigate how much rainfall we get in Finstock at this time of year.

Here are some examples of Cedar class's writing, based on the "Christmas Truce". Each paragraph is a different plot point written by a different child.

A tranquil Christmas - a weapon-free suspension

Yesterday, me and my fellow soldiers awoke to a deafening silence. Christmas time had come around. A ceasefire had come upon us. The frontline had a frosty feel to it, but I had a chilling feeling this wouldn't last. The miserable mist bloomed around and the Christmas period had been the most unique of the war so far.

That week, guns were fired, bullets exploded and people were screaming. Freezing temperatures cut through me like a razorblade. It was as cold as a frozen lake. It was Christmas Eve but it felt like I would never feel the joy of Christmas ever again.

The dreary dawn of Christmas day - a mournful sensation hung heavily in the frostbitten air. I was despairing in my cold, hard trench. I decided to make a move. Gingerly and gently, I held my hat high above my head. Even though my friend Phillip tried to persuade me not to, I stepped over the front line, hat and

hands still raised. Yells were uttered from enemy lines. Pleas from my peers echoed around. Cautiously, I approached the hostile screams with a heart set on friendship. Suddenly, someone sent an order in German: "Halt!" The same man raised his hands and emerged. "Hello, my name is Jim." I got a reply, "Hallo! Mein Name is Otto." I had made a friend.

Two seconds later and we were setting up the teams and pumping up the ball. I could hear the bombs in the background. For a second, I looked around. War was forgotten. People were sharing pictures, having a kickabout and chatting.

Football was put on hold. Football was put on hold and bullets reinstalled their place as the rulers of No Man's Land. Football was put on hold leaving us to retake our places saving our country. I shook Otto's hand knowing I wouldn't see him again as a friend after putting a toe back in the trench. I could see that he was thinking the same thing. I wished him a Merry Christmas. I couldn't get the thoughts of having an enemy, turning into a friend, turning back into an enemy. Would I see him again?

Leanne Dixon, Head of School

On at the Oak

Coming up at the Oak:

Tue 14 Feb: Valentines Day, 6-9.00pm

Treat your loved one to a romantic set sharing menu and fizz for two

Tue 7 Mar: Mexican Day, 12-3 & 6-9.00pm

We are serving a full menu of traditional Mexican tapas dishes all day. Please book to avoid disappointment!

Sun 19 Mar: Mothers' Day, 12-8.00pm

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Timelessness in Finstock!

A magnificent moonlit evening as we walked down to the Plough. A Monday evening – not the usual night out. The occasion – Plough Monday! This is a celebration that goes way back and marks the day that traditionally saw the resumption of work on the farm, after the Christmas period. The customs observed on this day vary from region to region, but a common feature was for a plough to be hauled from house to house in procession, collecting money – this focus being much in keeping with other traditions such as Mumming and Pace Egging!

They were often accompanied by musicians and someone dressed as an old woman, called the “Bessy”, and a man in the role of the fool. Rumour has it that if no money was forthcoming from a household, then the plough may be hauled away over, or through, the

front lawn!

For Plough Monday in Finstock there was no tomfoolery or vandalism, but the celebration in the Plough was spirited nevertheless. Plenty of music and song was shared around by upward of a dozen participants, along with a number of other locals joining in when they could. Lacking “Plough Pudding” – a delicacy of boiled suet, meat and onion – the gathering got by on supplies of chips and plenty of ale to wash them down. Apart from the chips, perhaps, it was a timeless event. It could have very well been 1823 or 1923 – and it’s great to see Plough Monday still being celebrated in 2023. Hats off and many thanks to The Plough for their great hospitality and support!

Pete



Coffee and Carols

Plenty of fun was had by all at School's "Coffee and Carols for the Community" event on Wednesday, 14th December, with school families and other villagers coming to the school hall to hear school's young musicians perform, be served refreshments by the Year six pupils and - of course - witness the famous Christmas Raffle Draw. The delighted crowd was treated to renditions of Christmas songs on piano and brass instruments, a solo a capella folk song and, from the younger children, a fabulous performance of one of their nativity numbers. The raffle, as ever, appeared to be fixed, with repeat winners within families (as is always the way, when randomness triumphs...!) - but at least the non-winners were able to console themselves with the mince pies and biscuits provided by Friends of Finstock School. The raffle made a grand total of £632.00 - an excellent result.

Many heartfelt thanks to everyone who bought and sold tickets and to all the wonderful local businesses that donated prizes. The money raised will go directly to funding all manner of goodies for school, from Forest School adventures to panto visits, swimming lessons, essential learning resources and more. We look forward to more events to which the local community are invited throughout 2023 (watch the calendar on the school's website or find FoFS on Facebook) and thank you once again for your kind donations and involvement.

Su Jordan, Chair, FoFS

Finstock's Got Talent!

It was during Lockdown when I was out walking with her mother that I first heard about Rowena's musical talent. She could read music from the age of 4 and at 5 blew a perfect note on the euphonium, so she joined the Witney Town Band with her mum.

From an early age she could pick up a tune and transpose it without help. Aged 7 she composed and wrote out a little piece in four parts which the rest of her family (all of whom are musical) were expected to play while she conducted.

Hearing these stories, I said to her mother Sarah that I thought she might be musically gifted. At that point she was playing the cornet, mostly self-taught with guidance from the band and her dad. I said she needed another instrument so off they went to a day put on by the county music service where you could try out a whole range of instruments. Rowena picked up a bassoon and produced a great tone on it, so that was what she chose as her second instrument. Predictably she progressed on it in leaps and bounds, while also continuing to flourish on the cornet.

On one walk I asked Sarah if she had heard of the Purcell School which is a specialist music school. The family visited it on an Open Day and decided to apply. The process was long drawn out. First a recording was sent in and written reports were required from her school and music teachers. She had to list all the pieces she had ever played. Next came the audition: she was very nervous, and shaking but got through it, thinking she would never get in. She had to play for them from music she had never seen before and they gave her an aural test and told her she had perfect pitch. This means she knows what any note is just by hearing it - a rare gift.

Then came the long wait. The Purcell School is small (only 180 pupils aged 10-18) and the competition is fierce for places. Applications come from all over the UK and beyond. Finally, she heard that she'd been offered a place and would be awarded a Bursary to pay for part of the costs. She started in September 2022 as a weekly boarder (Sunday to Thursday nights there, Friday and Saturday at home).

As she put it to me "Everything is crammed into the days:" Up at 6.20 am and then non-stop with practise before the school day starts at 8.40 am (but they do get two breakfasts!) At the end of school (3.40 pm) there's homework, games, supper, more practise until finally there's free time and a chance to use their devices 7.30 - 8.20 pm.

Demanding? Yes, but a fantastic opportunity for a great musical and all-round education in a beautiful setting with first-rate teachers. On their website they emphasise that they want to develop potential and with Rowena they are doing just that.

Ruth Nissim

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VILLAGE HALL

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Finstock Village Hall

As we look forward to another busy year at the Village Hall, we have an opportunity to share with you. Tony Cooper has served as the Caretaker for the new Hall since it opened in 2016. He has now reached the point where he would like to pass on those responsibilities, so could you be the person to take on this role? You'd need to spare between eight and ten hours over the course of a week, so could that fit with your other commitments? In addition to ensuring the Hall is a safe and healthy place for our users, you'll be asked to do light maintenance, as well as supervise the online booking system. To see a full job description, ask Karen at the Shop. This is a paid employment (currently £11 per hour) but also a great opportunity to support one of the outstanding features of the village. We reckon our Village Hall is the best in the region – will you join us to keep it as the envy of the county?

Rod Ireland

Finstock Baby and Toddler Group

We hope 2023 has started well for you - we will be back into the new term at the time of reading, continuing to meet on alternate Wednesdays (during term-time) at the Village Hall from 10 - 11.30a.m.

We set up a variety of toys for each session and organise different activities over the term such as crafts or music, with a snack for the little ones and refreshments for the adults. We are a volunteer run group so if you're able to help us out with things on the day (setting up, washing up, running an activity or bringing a cake) that would be a brilliant help to us! Please let us know at any session.

Follow us on Facebook (www.tinyurl.com/bxvf8ju4) for regular updates and reminders of when the group is meeting.

For any more details contact us on finstocktoddlergroup@hotmail.com. If you haven't joined us before, your first session is free (only £2 per family thereafter) - we would love to see you!

Helen & Tammy

Finstock Craft Club

Finstock Craft Club are looking forward, (after a month-long break in January), to continuing our weekly sessions on Monday 6th February, 2023.

New members will be welcome to join us on Monday evenings, excluding Bank Holidays, from 7.30-9.30pm at the village hall. Looking further forward, we have started planning our next Spring craft fair on a date yet to be decided.

If you have any questions, please call 01993 869283, or send an email to: rosacharlesworth@icloud.com

Finstock Local History Society 2023

Finstock Local History Society Draft Programme 2023

We have a full programme planned up to May and will be sending you regular updates as each event approaches, confirming the details.

Friday 17th February 2023

The Joys of Genealogy: how to do it and why you should. Speaker: Jessica Feinstein - Qualified Genealogist and Education Co-ordinator for Oxfordshire Family History Society

At this session we will have a chance to explore our own family history with an expert. Jessica is encouraging participants to bring along an old photo or object from their family for her to look at. She is also willing to answer questions but as they may need some research, she is asking for them to be sent to her in advance (contact Ruth Nissim 868147).

Friday 17th March 2023

The Finstock Years: Touring West Oxfordshire with Barbara Pym. Speaker: Triona Adams – Founder member and committee member of the Barbara Pym Society

Finstock's only Blue Plaque (at Barn Cottage, 2, High Street) is in honour of the writer Barbara Pym who lived and wrote in the village in the 1970s. This evening we will watch a slide show illustrating the many references to the local area in her books, particularly "A Few Green Leaves" which she wrote in Finstock.

Friday 21st April 2023

Your house in Finstock has a history Speaker: Michelle Greenwald – Local Historian

People have been living in this village since the 1100s but our houses and their uses have changed a lot in that time. Or

have they? Michelle will use examples of village houses from the old to the new to answer that question.

Friday 19th May 2023

A guided walk around the village highlighting places of historical interest, led by members of FLHS

All meetings are held in the village hall – doors open at 7.30 and a bar is available.

Talks start at 8.00pm

You do not have to be a member to come along and we look forward to welcoming you.



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Support for the new Sustainable Warmth scheme

Free loft insulation, solar panels and low-carbon heating are just some of the energy-efficiency measures that are currently on offer to West Oxfordshire's low-income households to help make their homes warmer, healthier and ultimately cheaper to run as part of a government-backed scheme.

West Oxfordshire District Council has been allocated £1,067,000 funding to support the new Sustainable Warmth scheme, which will be used to upgrade local homes with modifications that will boost energy performance, increase their comfort and lessen the impact of rising household energy bills.

The grant is being administered through City Energy on behalf of the District Council and is available for properties on mains gas as well as those in more rural areas that are off the gas grid.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Cabinet Member for Climate Change at West Oxfordshire District Council said: "People are understandably worried about how they will manage their household bills this winter with escalating energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis continuing.

"Cutting back on energy use is a priority for many of us right now, but this is a huge struggle for those living in cold homes that are difficult to heat, and particularly for those households that are on limited incomes which may not be able to afford some of the changes needed.

"The Sustainable Warmth fund goes some way to plugging that gap and will benefit those living in West Oxfordshire's least energy-efficient homes. Poor insulation, inefficient heating, and a lack of draught-proofing are just some of the problems associated with the hardest to heat homes."

Depending on the type of property

and current heating system used, and following a free home survey by City Energy, the improvements on offer could include: loft, roof and wall insulation; solar panels to generate free energy; affordable energy-efficient lighting; and low-carbon heating such as an air source heat pump.

Households are likely to be eligible for a Sustainable Warmth grant if the annual household income is under £30,000 (before tax and deductions) or under £20,000 (after rent or mortgage costs have been deducted) and if the property has an Energy Performance Certificate rating of E or lower, although some D rated properties may be considered. Upgrades to properties which are currently owner-occupied will be fully funded by the Sustainable Warmth scheme.

Landlords who have eligible low-income tenants living in their properties can also apply for the grant but will be required to contribute a third of the total cost of the works.

All works will be undertaken by TrustMark approved tradespeople so residents can be confident in the quality of the installation and the care they will receive throughout the process.

Homeowners or landlords can call City Energy's customer care team on 02921 680951 to find out if they are eligible or can apply online, with no obligation, at: www.oxfordshire-applications.co.uk

Information can also be found on West Oxfordshire District Council's website: www.westoxon.gov.uk/warmhomes

Keep feeding those birds

Whilst trudging round our local muddy footpaths it is always good to watch out for any elusive birds that might just be out and about with you. It's hard work though. On a typical

winter's day, if indeed there is now such a thing, you will see plenty of Pigeons and Magpies and if you are lucky a Kestrel and Buzzard. Don't expect much else though. Our hedgerows are sadly depleted of movement or song and you stand a better chance of seeing birds from your kitchen window, especially if you site your feeders carefully.

What a difference this is to the days of our eighteenth-century villagers who hardly passed comment on birds as there were so many around, as the fields provided excellent pickings. Just read some of John Clare's poems to have an idea of the sound of birds singing from hedgerows. Sadly, no longer.

I know that landowners are now trying to help. There is a bird feeding station at Wilcote and indeed in one of our local village pastures. This is to be commended.

John Clare heard nightingales from his cottage window. We are a long way from that although I did, many years ago, hear its amazing burst of energetic song coming up the valley along Dark Lane. It was nearly midnight and the song travelled up the hillside and was unmistakable. The rumour that I was coming home from The Plough is completely untrue.

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News from The Plough

Happy new year! A huge thank you to everyone who has supported us throughout the year, and welcomed in 2023 with a glass of Prosecco with us at The Plough Inn! We can't express enough how much it means to us that you celebrate these special occasions with us. Throughout the last few months of 2022, we've been busy with Christmas parties and a wreath making workshop (Thank you so much Hayley for organising it!), and now we're slowly adjusting to our regular routines and opening times again.

What's new, you ask? Let us tell you! We're still offering our massive (up to 2kg!) Sharing Steak, served with Peppercorn and Blue Cheese Sauce, Chips and Salad (pre-order needed). Additionally, we'll be bringing you more themed nights throughout the year - Pie night and Indian night, anyone? But that's not all - this year, we're going to be introducing more vegetarian and vegan dishes to our menus, so make sure you keep an eye out for when they arrive!

Lastly, we're hoping that our glamping pods will be up and running by the summer! Of course, we'll keep you updated on these in the *Finstock News*. Here's to 2023, everyone!



CPRE Oxfordshire

has published walking guidebooks for:

the d'Arcy Dalton Way - a 65-mile route from the north of Banbury to the south of Abingdon. The route is named after Col. W.P. d'Arcy Dalton, a notable defender of Oxfordshire's rights of way and the first chairman of CPRE Oxfordshire's Rights of Way Group.

the Oxfordshire Way - a 66-mile route across Oxfordshire, from Bourton-on-the-Water to Henley-on-Thames. This book also has 12 circular walks, ranging in length.

the Oxford Green Belt Way - a 50-mile route around Oxford, created by CPRE Oxfordshire.

For more information and details on how to buy, go to www.cpreoxon.org.uk/countryside/

THE EMERGENCY SERVICES – FIGURES FOR LAST YEAR!

673,077 calls, on average, every week - phew!

The statistics - 2022

35 million

999/112 calls a year, of which:

74%

from mobile

26%

from landline

28,000

eCalls (included in mobile %)

28,000

eCalls (included in mobile %)

Service	Percentage of calls
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Police	44%
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Ambulance	53%
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Fire	3%
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Coastguard	<1%
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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.

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DISTRICT COUNCIL NEWS...

At West Oxfordshire District Council, we are now meeting Thames Water on a regular monthly basis to work proactively in addressing the sewerage and flooding issues affecting the whole district. The need for an increase in capacity for Thames Water to address these issues is being actively encouraged alongside the need to invest more in the infrastructure.

We as a council have limited powers but our power to influence change by working in partnership with the county council and other agencies brings change through this collaborative approach. We are working with the county, the parish council and local landowners through a catchment area study we are about to embark on to address flooding in Tackley.

We cannot continue to build houses on flood plains or where the infrastructure capacity has been exhausted and the council is looking at ways to enforce obligations on developers and Thames Water to ensure infrastructure is in place before permission is given to build.

My other commitment is for our council and this new administration to build the right type of truly affordable houses that address the local need and directly help local communities to be more sustainable - plans are in the process of being drawn up for this, and for your council to intervene and directly get involved in ensuring the building of more homes for local people, particularly those wanting to get on the ladder for the first time or those wishing to downsize. More details to be announced.

As leader of the district council and your local district councillor, I and my cabinet colleagues fundamentally believe that this is your council and we are there for you. We are reaching out to our communities across the district taking the cabinet on tour - so that alternative monthly meetings where decisions are taken, take place in villages and towns rather than expecting people to always go to Wood Green in Witney. We have had successful meetings in Charlbury, Chipping Norton and Woodstock and others are planned for Carterton and Eynsham. Later this year, we will be coming to Finstock. This is a great chance for you to ask questions about the decisions that we take, put your ideas forward and meet with councillors from across the district. Of course, you can contact me anytime in the meantime - just email me on andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk.

Looking forward to meeting you either at the parish council meetings or on tour.

Cllr. Andy Graham, Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler

...and News from our MP

Following my question in the House of Commons, I was delighted to see this week the Government's announcement to make sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) mandatory to new developments. I have been campaigning for this for some time alongside the Conservative Environment Network & colleagues in Parliament. This will significantly reduce both pollution and the risk of flooding for rural areas such as West Oxfordshire by:

1. Removing developers' automatic 'right to connect' to public sewers; allowing water companies to object if their systems are not able to cope.
2. Slowing down water flow into drains; for example, by using features such as grassed areas or permeable surfaces to reduce the risk of surface water flooding and helping improve our sewer infrastructure.

I am pleased with the progress the Government is now making on this issue and I will be following its implementation closely.

Robert Courts

Startling Stats.

*Running three baths per week
is estimated to cost the average
household £1023 per year in 2023
- up from £303 per year in 2021.*



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County Council News

I would like to wish everyone in Finstock a very happy New Year: I hope that 2023 will be a happier year than 2022, though we expect the pressures on people's finances to continue, which is why in our budget for 2023/24, OCC will be including further funding to help residents with the cost of living. We will also be including among other things significant support for rural bus services, which we know are an important lifeline for people living in our villages, and we will be looking at providing funds towards improving rural roads, including money for repainting lines, cutting back vegetation, and patching road surfaces.

The Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance has taken a bold step to reduce congestion in and around Oxford with the introduction of traffic filters. These will come into effect once the work on Botley Rd by Network Rail is completed, which we expect to be in 2024. During the times they are operating, traffic filters will prohibit private cars without a pass from going through them. Everywhere you can currently reach by car in Oxford will still be reached by private car. Households outside the city will get up to 50 filter passes per year (25 per person/vehicle) to go through the filters with their private car. Exemptions will also be introduced for e.g., blue badge holders and carers. The filters will reduce traffic congestion, allowing buses to move through the city more quickly, and the intention is to encourage people to leave their cars at home and use public transport, walking or cycling wherever possible.

The administration continues to make adult social care and children's services a priority, where over half of county expenditure takes place. The Oxfordshire Way – a new approach by the council's adult social care team – aims to support people to live well and independently, within their own communities, for as long as possible. OCC is providing funding for a 'Community Catalyst' programme to support local residents to set up care companies or centres and provide care in the community. A 2022-3 Live Well Oxfordshire Care Guide has also been published with lots of great information on how to find community support and access adult social care. Free copies of the guide are available on 0345 050 7666.

I was very pleased recently to be able to support Finstock Primary School from my Councillor Priority Fund with a small grant which will ensure that the Outdoor Learning provision, which makes the school so special, will be able to continue for at least another year. Finding ways of attracting new families is a priority for the school, so that the school can continue to offer a good education locally, and special provision like this is a very important way of differentiating what Finstock School has to offer.

Liz Leffman. liz.leffman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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Finstock Unplugged Ffolk Update - Finstock Unplugged Meeting and the December Micro-gig

The week of 27th November - 2nd December 2022 was a busy one. The weather was dark, dank and chilly, and it really didn't look promising for any evening activities, musical or otherwise. Fortunately, despite everything, it turns out that folkies and other live music enthusiasts are made of stern stuff.

At the 27th November meeting it was great to have Nick H join us for the first time in ages. He was in excellent form as a soloist, entertaining us with his wonderful finger-busting Basement Rag, beside the song 'Heard the Angels Singing' and playing us out at the end, while Jim aided and abetted, with his version of the 'St James Infirmary' blues. Also, along with Jim, Nick contributed enormously to the evening by supporting other performers. Frances was also in great form: she played us two tunes on her giant accordion - Morgan Magan (by Carolan) and Meillionen (apparently Welsh for clover and first found in Walsh, Aria di Camera, c. 1727), which she blended brilliantly, and she later led us in an a cappella Welsh song, having challenged us

to sing along, in Welsh, with the chorus. I think we were *beginning* to manage quite well by the final verse!

In fact, it was an evening when everybody seemed to be on top of their game, and I loved the huge range of music and songs that were on offer. Claire played whistle, recorder and her lovely composition on the piano (good to give the piano a workout!), Craig, Colin G and Gordon all contributed great songs, as did Brock and Kim, from whom we were delighted to hear again after a hiatus of some three months. Lizzie, Mike and Steve were also present and correct and contributed ably to the mix. As usual, Jim was at the heart of things, both as soloist and as a valued supporter to other performers. (Impromptu performances by Nick and Jim can be heard if you visit our 'Unplugged' FB group page)

The concert on Friday, 2nd December with The Hex Collective supporting the brilliant Boot Band, was excellent and again drew in a good audience despite the weather. Words can't do it justice – you just had to have been there! Suffice it to say that the melodies and instrumentation from both groups was thrilling- and the musical arrangements with close harmony singing from the Boot Band were just mesmerising. I hope to get permission to put a couple of the songs up on our group page in due course.

We are delighted to report that from January 2023 Finstock Unplugged will be back home in the Plough, Finstock!

As usual, we'll be there on the final Monday of the month. Please join us and support the Plough's generosity by buying a drink - or two!

Ginnie Redston



During these Months

11th February – Celebrated in Japan as the founding date of the Japanese nation, which occurred with the accession to the throne of the first Emperor, Jimmu, in 660 BC.

15th February, 1989 – Soviet Russia completed its military withdrawal from Afghanistan after nine years of unsuccessful involvement in the civil war

28th February, 1994 – NATO conducted its first combat action in its 45 year history as four Bosnian Serb jets were shot down by American fighters in a no-fly zone.

3rd March, 1847 – Telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

6th March, 1475 – Renaissance genius Michelangelo (1475-1564) was born in Caprese, Italy.

12th March, 1994 – The Church of England ordained 32 women as its first female priests.



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- a platform for exchange of views

Hi guys, just a quick but cautious update on Charlbury station having talked to Gareth Epps, a Charlbury Town councillor, today about the recent water pipe burst that led to leakage lasting fifteen hours or so. I gather Tim King, the line Duty Station Manager at Oxford, was asked to update the Town Council recently about the station and may yet do this on the 26th January so hence my caution. Tim now speaks of asbestos being discovered following the leak and hence it may be a difficult and lengthy task to repair station facilities, etc.

Reopening the booking hall may therefore be a complex issue, in addition to the other facilities, including waiting room etc., where I think the historic fireplace and plaque refers to Sir Peter Parker, Chairman of British Rail, who was a regular user of the station. Sir Peter was of course a well-known resident of Minster Lovell but used Charlbury as his nearest station for many years and on occasions, it is said, generously offered lifts to and from the station in his limousine. Charlbury rail users, including I gather actor Freddie Jones, thought a plaque was appropriate next to the real fire that he provided to help keep passengers warm whilst awaiting trains. Of course, this all may be a matter for English Heritage too and by coincidence the Charlbury Conservation Committee Secretary is Juliet West. Juliet worked for English Heritage and was a regular user of the station for many years. The coffee shop, another recent useful addition I gather is now run by Hugo Pickering from Spelsbury who also runs Café de la Post in Chadlington, having taken over from Kookaburra Coffee based in Finstock. All rather village mafia like or perhaps it is the Big Society at work. What, I wonder, are future plans for the building?

Mike Breakell

Discovering the past in Finstock and Fawler

Do you own a field or a paddock in Finstock or Fawler? Have you ever wondered what might lie beneath the soil just waiting to be found?

I can help to reveal those artefacts that were dropped or hidden in the past with the aid of my metal detector. With your permission I would visit your garden, field or pasture and discover items that were thought lost. Any historic finds can then be logged on The Portable Antiquities Scheme as a record of their location and help future archaeologists and local historians with their research.

In the local fields that I've already checked I've found Roman and Georgian coins, Victorian and Modern coins, military badges and buttons, horse harness tack, keys, gambling tokens, horseshoes and of course less interesting items!

All finds can then be displayed in the brand new Local History Society glass display case in our village hall or kept by the landowner for their own display.

Do get in touch if you have a piece of land (however small) and are willing to let me detect it for you. Please ring me on 01993 868743 for more details.

Tony Cooper



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THE WFT FOREST FAIR, 9TH JULY 2023

VOLUNTEERS URGENTLY NEEDED!

Many thanks to all those who responded to our call for volunteers to help with the forest fair in July – we are really grateful for your support. However, there are still plenty of jobs that we need more hands for – from getting the site ready before the big day, to directing traffic and manning the entrance gate when the fair opens. Please think about whether you could spare a few hours to give us a hand – without your help, it might not be possible for the Forest Fair to go ahead in 2023. **We really need your help!** The Forest Fair attracts people in their thousands and is an important event in the local West Oxfordshire calendar. It is a great fun-filled family day out that really celebrates our rural culture and heritage. It is also our biggest fundraising event of the year and we rely on its success to keep the WFT going.

If interested, Email: info@wychwoodforesttrust.co.uk.

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- Looking to improve your outside space but stuck for ideas on how to make the most of it?
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- A space for your children to play?
- Or maybe you just need a quiet place to relax, a calming, scented corner, just for you?



I can provide a full garden design, planting plans or a simple garden report – some ideas of how you could best use your outdoor space and the types of plants that you like and would suit the environment.

CONTACT LORRAINE:

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Garden Tips

- **Plan for an early vegetable crop**
Gardeners with greenhouses or polytunnels can begin planting early carrot, broad bean and beet varieties in border soil, containers or growbags
- **Prune hardy hedges**
Straggling deciduous hedges can be rejuvenated with considered renewal pruning during January and February, before bird nesting begins from March.
- **Cut back Sedums and other perennials**

February is an ideal time to cut back the old top growth. By doing it early you avoid damaging the new growth coming through.

The gift of early flowers.

Scenes of masses of snowdrop flowers returning in February lift the spirits in winter, and anticipate the new gardening year. A sunny morning with the honey smell coming from the large snowdrop flowers of *Galanthus* "Sam Arnott", alive with buzzing bumble bees, and yellow Aconites in profusion brighten the ground under the trees.



Pulmonaria are commonly called "Soldiers and Sailors" (after the Redcoats of the early British soldiers and bright blue uniforms of the naval sailors). These plants are great ground cover with their attractive silver or silver spotted foliage lasting most of the growing season. Individual flowers on the same plant can be a different colour, depending upon the age of the flower, but you can also get some varieties with one colour such as Blue Ensign,

Sissinghurst White, Raspberry Red or Pink Dawn. Adaptable as to soil conditions, preferring a humus rich soil in part or deep shade, but will grow well in most conditions except waterlogged soil. In folk medicine extract of *Pulmonaria* is used as a remedy against various respiratory diseases including asthma, chronic bronchitis, laryngitis, and cough. A bonus is that Deer do not like the furry leaves of *Pulmonaria* and also don't eat Snowdrops as they are poisonous.



Another sparkling gem is *Epimedium* with its beautiful foliage, as well as producing a stunning display of bright lantern like flowers. Some species are fully herbaceous and will die back for the winter, others are semi-evergreen. Some have tough glossy green triangular leaves have a toothed edge, and others with smooth mottled heart shaped leaves that remain on the plant through the winter, followed by new red/champagne coloured growth and sprays of sparkling flowers. My favourites include "White Hart" with large white flowers and "Amber Queen" which produces a mass of amber-yellow flowers. Others have pink, red, violet or Champagne flowers. The fine foliage means they're prized as ground cover plants, and the flowers are beautiful and complement spring bulbs, Hellebores and other early-flowering plants of woodland origin. They grow best in a fertile soil with leaf mould in dappled shade although some are happy in sun. *Epimedium* are also deer-resistant and brighten a shady part

of the garden, looking great along the borders of paths. In addition to their use in the garden, *Epimedium* (which is also known as Horny Goat Weed) is a popular Chinese herbal supplement with a weak "male-enhancement" effect. You can grow your own Viagra® replacement! Welcome to the new gardening year.

Robert



"The shoe polish brand Kiwi has decided to stop trading in the UK because too few Britons now wear the kinds of shoes that need polishing. It blamed the shift on the rise in remote working, and the growing acceptability of trainers in offices and other formal settings".

– quoted in The Week.



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