

Finstock News 143

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

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“Winter, a lingering season, is a time to gather golden moments, embark upon a sentimental journey, and enjoy every idle hour.” — John Boswell

The Festive Season is upon us, the winter is closing in and the cycles of the year are taking another turn, albeit appearing quite dormant. The world sustains itself in this way and for millennia humankind has found ways to revere and/or celebrate this ability to regenerate. Even the humble Mummers Play – that will of course be enacted outside The Plough on the Sunday before Christmas – is based on the idea of the cyclical nature of all life. As cycles go, there are also articles, including this front page “popup”, that focus on the input of local people into the life of the community in different ways, helping to bring a buzz to the village. Despite the temptation to hunker down in a warm spot, this period of the year does tend toward being quite busy for so many. Whatever is in store for you, the Editorial group wish you an enjoyable Festive Season and a productive year ahead.



Profiling local enterprise – Nuak! Thai - Finstock's Own Street Food Popup

Nuak! Thai is an authentic Thai street food pop up kitchen that has its origins right here in Finstock. Noah and Chris both live in Finstock and have worked together to create something exciting for the community. Both Noah and Chris spent significant time travelling in South East Asia and especially Thailand, exploring and taking a keen interest in Thai food and street food culture. In Thailand there is an incredible variety of food everywhere you turn. The punchy, fresh, vibrant, fragrant, sweet, sour and often spicy cuisine is without doubt some of the most exciting in the world. Returning to the UK both have spent much time cooking and perfecting a huge variety of Thai dishes, sharing with friends and family over the years. When they met in Finstock as neighbours, they quickly discovered a shared passion and also a shared dream

of one day serving this style of food to the public. An impossible challenge for one person becomes a reality as a team and that has included many other people from Finstock who have helped run the events. 2023 has been the first year of Nuak! and after a number of very successful events, three in Finstock, the proof of concept phase is complete. Running open street food events at Finstock Village Hall with a range of dishes to eat in or takeaway drew in a large number of locals and many more from surrounding villages. Providing the food for the Friday night of the Finstock Ale made for a brilliant night for everyone who attended. The events are much more than just a takeaway. With music, a fantastic bar with local ales from Little Ox Brewery, bespoke Nuak! Thai cocktails and a buzzing atmosphere, they're a real street food

experience which brings the community together. Next year, Nuak! will be back with a truly exciting schedule of events in Finstock and the surrounding area. There will be a combination of takeaway sessions, a stunning sit down 10 course tasting menu banquet and street food pop-ups at pubs and local venues in the surrounding villages. There are always a range of dishes, some mild, some authentically spicy, vegan options, kids' meals and everything on the menu is always gluten and dairy free. Noah and Chris would like to thank the community of Finstock for their support and look forward to providing vibrant food and exciting social events for the community going forward. Follow Nuak! Thai on Facebook and Instagram or join the mailing list! nuak.popup@gmail.com

Noah Derrington – Nuak! Thai

Finstock Community Projects

The Annual General Meeting for Finstock Community Projects was held at the Plough Inn on the 7th November. As with most AGMs, there wasn't a huge turnout, but it was quite respectable with several new participants coming along and joining in. Most significantly, there was a change at the top!

After thirteen years in the role, Colin Stringfellow has stepped down as Chair and the position has now been taken up by Rupert Welply. Julie Stringfellow continues as Treasurer, as does Pete Welply as Secretary.

Rupert grew up in the village, attending the village school and becoming involved in several local groups and activities. As well as helping with the original playground build back in 2005, he has been actively involved in the organisation and delivery of the Finstock Fun Day and subsequent Finstock Festival every year since. He's certainly well versed with community activity and will fill Colin's shoes in the role of Chair with no problems, hopefully leaving his own, individual mark on it as his predecessors have.

Finstock Community Projects (FCP) evolved after the building of the playground, as a fund raiser to support future playground maintenance as well as giving support to other village groups and activities. Previous beneficiaries include the school, via Friends of Finstock School; the annual beer festival; and the former shop. Support can be financial or through the provision of infrastructure – FCP has eight marquees in different sizes that have often appeared for village functions, as well as equipment for bars, lighting, etc.

If you feel that you'd like to join in with any activities keep an eye out on the village Facebook page and come along to one of our meetings – next one is Wednesday, 17th January in The Plough Inn at 8.00 pm. Further information about meetings, donations and the festival can be found at <https://finstockcp.co.uk>

Pete Welply

DURING THESE MONTHS

1st December, 1990 - England was connected to mainland Europe for the first time since the Ice Age as engineers digging a railway tunnel under the English Channel broke through the last rock layer.

5th December, 1901 - Walt Disney (1901-1966) was born in Chicago, Illinois. As a little boy, he liked to draw farm animals and eventually got a job as an artist. He moved to Hollywood and in 1928 produced *Steamboat Willie*, starring Mickey Mouse, in the first cartoon with synchronized sound.

7th December, 1761 - Wax modeler Marie Tussaud (1761-1850) was born in Bern, Switzerland. She established Madame Tussaud's waxworks in London in 1802 and later added a Chamber of Horrors.

7th January, 1714 - A patent was issued for the first typewriter designed by British inventor Henry Mill "for the impressing or transcribing of letters singly or progressively one after another, as in writing."

10th January, 1946 - The first meeting of the United Nations General Assembly took place in London with delegates from 51 countries. The U.N. superseded its predecessor, the League of Nations.

26th January, 1788 - The British established a settlement at Sydney Harbor in Australia as 11 ships with 778 convicts arrived, setting up a penal colony to relieve overcrowded prisons in England.

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REMEMBRANCE DAY SERVICE

12th November 2023

We held our normal Remembrance Day Service at our War Memorial on Sunday 12th November - It was the normal very moving service, led by Vicar Paul Mansell, with The Last Post, two-minute Silence, Reveille and Exhortation.

The Brownies and Rainbows read out the names of the Fallen from both Finstock and Fawler in both Wars - and did it beautifully! Wreaths were laid as usual, and it was a well-attended and poignant Service.

Viv Wightman

A Huge Resource

The British Library has the entire collection of Geoffrey Chaucer's works now online. Chaucer was a 14th century poet, courtier, soldier, diplomat and MP. His most famous work is The Canterbury Tales. https://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do should get you to the main search facility, from where you have access to the whole collection of works.



School News

This term we have been focused on fairy tales and nursery rhymes in our project 'Stories and Rhymes' and have had fun retelling our favourite stories. We have enjoyed all the celebrations, and have been creating Diwa lamps and learning a special dance for Diwali, as well as creating firework art and poetry for Guy Fawkes night. We have thoroughly enjoyed forest school; building dens, making fires and roasting popcorn. We are now looking forward to Christmas and are working very hard practising our whole school Nativity - we can't wait for everyone to see us perform! Keep an eye out for further details.

Cedar class have been ploughing through their learning this term. They have shown a lot of resilience over their assessment week and real interest in their Art and Design and Technology. We are continuing to focus on Human Geography, exploring relative distance and looking at statistics from other countries; in History we have been wrapping up our work on the Shang dynasty; and in Science we have been putting into practice what we know about mechanisms. A busy term but lots of fun and learning!



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STOP PRESS:

Within the past few days the 20mph scheme for Finstock has been approved. For updates on the progress of the scheme:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/traffic/20mph-scheme/20-limit-project-progress>



News from The Plough

We are going to be closed over the Christmas period – closing on December 25th, 26th and 27th. Open as usual after December 27th!

Upcoming Event – Local band Vodka Shots will be performing at The Plough in February next year. The date has still to be confirmed but watch out for future notices on what will be a great evening of music!

Death Cleaning

After my father died, I sorted through his belongings and his personal paperwork. Mom was still with us then, therefore much of what was kept was needed by her. Trying to make those decisions was not easy; it took time and reflection on his life. This massive life sorting exercise was repeated again and again. Now I am doing it for myself rather than leave the majority of the work for others.

One thing that becomes apparent as you begin to decide what you keep and what you throw away is how important something is to you that means absolutely nothing to anyone else. My small treasures retain my memories and mean nothing to anyone else. Why have I kept a restaurant menu from the 1960s? Who would want pictures of people they do not know?

The perspective to take is - You are not your stuff.

"Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river". Jorge Luis Borges

Ref: *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning: How to Make Your Loved Ones' Lives Easier and Your Own Life More Pleasant.* Margareta Magnusson
Joy Murphy





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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.

The Winter Solstice

I moved to Charlbury from Oxford in 1998 and soon after began leading community singing workshops under the name of Charlbury Worldsong. The music, as you can guess from the name, was from many different world traditions which was interesting and fun but increasingly the question of finding music that was meaningful to our own experiences and rooted in our own lands, nagged.

Finding what to sing and when to sing it became something of a mission – the search for folk music that spoke to the soul and that wasn't too mired in farmers, boys and love gone wrong, and connecting that music with a sense of purpose.

The Celtic Wheel of the Year became my guide. And the words and music arrived too, to settle into the wheel – found or written.

The Celts based their seasonal calendar around the two Equinoxes - Autumn and Spring, the two Solstices – Winter and Summer – and between the four of these lay the four fire festivals of Beltane (May Day), Lammastide (Aug 2nd), Samhain (Oct 31st) and Imbolc (Feb 2nd) – all happily adding up to 8 festivals at 6 weekly intervals that saw the year round – marking the change points.

Of course, there is a heap of things to say about all of this but the point for now is: The Winter Solstice – for at least 20 and more like 25 years we have been holding an event to celebrate this moment in the calendar. Sometimes held in Finstock, but this year in Charlbury – singers and musicians gather to travel into the dark together, to explore being there and to hint at the light to come. The audience is with us too in terms of joining in many of the songs which have become something of a tradition now. Happiest moments are when I hear our now adult young folks talking about their memories of Solstices past when they too would have contributed.

How many times do you need to repeat a thing for it to become culture I wonder? Hats off to the Morris dancers of our pub forecourts and roadside verges for their role as maintainers of culture as they step those ancient patterns onto our land. What it is that survives is surely testament to our need for it.

Kath Lucas

The Wilderness Bursary



As a thank you for your support in allowing us to hold Wilderness 2023 in your beautiful home, we are pleased to announce the return of the Wilderness Local Bursary, designed to contribute towards causes and projects that you, the local community, believe will best benefit Finstock, Charlbury and Leafield.

If you know a local cause, charity or organisation within these areas that could benefit from this, please scan the QR code below and fill out the form before Thursday 7th December.

We will review and respond to all applicants by Friday, 22nd December 2023.



We are continuing to work with individuals who know these areas well to ensure funds are allocated with local consideration and knowledge. If you are not already part of the Bursary Committee but would like to nominate yourself or someone else to sit on the Bursary Committee, please email info@wildernessfestival.com

The Wilderness Team x



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Air Quality

"A new Oxfordshire air quality website was launched providing guidance and resources for West Oxfordshire and the rest of the county. The website <https://www.oxonair.uk/> - aims to integrate all relevant air-quality related information under one single platform. It features air pollution forecasts up to five days in advance, air pollution alerts for Oxfordshire, an air quality footprint calculator, air quality pledges for individuals and information on individual council air quality projects."

Joy



Hedgelaying with the Wychwood Forest Trust



At this time of the year, we are deep into hedgelaying season.

Hedgelaying involves cutting the stems of trees and shrubs almost, but not quite, all the way through. The resulting 'pleacher' is laid over at about 30 to 40 degrees and held in place with stakes and binding along the top. As it is still attached to its root stock, the pleacher continues to grow and throws up new shoots from along the stem

and from the stump.

The resulting hedges are thick and wide, providing habitats for insects, nesting birds and small mammals, and acting as wildlife corridors across the countryside. But sadly, over 200,000 miles of hedgerow have been lost in England since the end of WWII which has had a detrimental effect on biodiversity.

The Wychwood Forest Trust runs regular hedgelaying training days through the autumn and winter. Beginners are especially welcome - all equipment is provided. To find out more, check out the What's On page of our website at <https://www.wychwoodforesttrust.co.uk/whats-on>

Our volunteer hedgelaying group meets every second Sunday of the month during the season to help create or restore traditional hedges all over the Wychwood area. The team welcomes new members, especially those with some experience or recent course attendees. To find out more, email toby@wychwoodforesttrust.org.uk.

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UK mega wind farm produces first power

- A single rotation of this wind turbine - twice as tall as the London Eye - can power a home for two days.

The world's largest offshore wind farm under construction has produced its first power.

Dogger Bank wind farm, located in the North Sea off the UK's Yorkshire coast, has installed the first of a planned 277 turbines.

As of 7 October, it is connected to the UK's national grid and is providing renewable power to homes and businesses. When complete and at full capacity, the wind farm will supply 5 per cent of the UK's electricity demand. Each rotation of the first turbine's 107-metre-long blades can produce enough **clean energy** to power an average home for two days.

From Euro News



Oxford Wood Recycling were approached by the team at Harwell Campus to build a boardwalk to improve accessibility for The European Space Agency's exhibition **Spacescapes: postcards from our solar system**.

The boardwalk runs through the middle of the exhibition with offshoots to each plinth and viewing platforms allowing all of the panels to be read.

They used 2000 reclaimed pallet bearers to make the boardwalk and the beautiful end result opens up the exhibition for all!

If you haven't come across Oxford Wood Recycling, take a look online <https://www.oxfordwoodrecycling.org.uk/>

A new community on Finstock Heath



community? Probably not, but it does stand out and gives the impression of a very private, exclusive site.



As you travel past the new development on Finstock Heath, where holiday makers will soon be trying out the 'Tree Dwellers' treehouses and soaking up the forest experience, you may wonder at the changes taking place. Some new roadways are in, trees and bushes cut back and a rather handsome stone wall with gates put in place. Is this Finstock's first gated

Interestingly, one of the military brick buildings has appeared as you drive past near the new entrance and one hopes it won't suddenly disappear! Perhaps Tree Dwellers could use it as a guard post to keep out unwelcome visitors.

Of course, this isn't the first time that this particular part of the old heath has seen change. It changed with the deforestation in 1857 when the common rights of the local community

were lost. The custom of free-grazing your animals was gone and with it went a way of life for the many who had, perhaps, enjoyed this right for generations. The heathland was to disappear as well and with it all of the species that thrived on that habitat.

The second change came in the 1940's when first the British army arrived and began to set up the military camp. There is an excellent account of this in our 'Two Villages' history book, which is still available from the village local history society.

Exactly 80 years ago, in November 1943, the Americans arrived at the camp and for villagers it must have been a huge change. A new community on your doorstep. It brought new music, entertainment, cigarettes and chocolate and perhaps opportunities for trade at our local pubs. Maybe The Plough can benefit once again with the arrival of the Tree Dwellers. As a village are we taking full advantage of this new development or are we ignoring it as an unwelcome intrusion into village life?

Changes to the land once again! The fir trees that replaced the military camp are not exactly easy on the eye and it will be interesting to see how the landscape looks when the first of the tree dwellers arrive for their holiday. Perhaps some new tree planting of native varieties will take place. The promise of a helicopter pad on site isn't welcome and will hardly provide the background to the solace that is promised. We look on with interest.

Vicus



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DISTRICT COUNCIL NEWS

A District Year in Review

As your Liberal Democrat district councillor and leader of the district council, I thought I would do a review - a kind of progress report on what I and my team have been carrying out on your behalf in the last year.

The achievements of this West Oxfordshire Alliance can be summarised as follows:

Climate Change

The West Oxfordshire executive have brought forward a comprehensive Biodiversity Action Plan for actioning in 2024.

We've launched the Greenlight platform – for residents and communities looking for more ways to live a green life, by exchanging ideas and working together to tackle climate and nature issues in West Oxfordshire.

Proposals to fit solar panels on council buildings to be put forward in 2024.

More EV charging points are planned in West Oxfordshire including in Charlbury in the 2nd roll out phase in 2024.

Regeneration of our town centres, markets, and capital investment in Marriot's Walk.

The acquisition of Marriott's Walk has led to a flurry of retailers in this part of town with Sports Direct taking over the space previously let to Debenhams and more food and café outlets in the process of setting up. Added to which, several enhancements including a public performing space and additional outdoor seating areas makes this an ideal investment - with options for a boutique hotel that will enliven the retail offer in Witney.

A large Christmas Market is also planned in this area this Christmas!

Improving Customer Service and Community Engagement and Provision

The decaying, underused council chamber at Wood Green, as well as a poorly used Reception area - and a town centre shop that was falling apart have been given a necessary new lease of life. Now refitted and redecorated, local residents feel justly proud of their town centre shop, updated with confidential rooms and security screens, with improved staff facilities as well.

A Community Space was a priority in modernising the Council chamber and this now adds best value to generating

income to support local services. The chamber of years gone by is currently being replaced to ensure the community can hire the space, with updated technology for their special events - as well as the council having the use of a modern up to date chamber to ensure meetings are live streamed and accessible, more cost effective to run and an added income stream to support local services.

Leisure Strategy and the current GLL providers of pools, gyms and pitch provision in the district

Improving the leisure buildings and the maintenance of them – for example the Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney and the Chipping Norton leisure centre have significant roofing repair needs.

Work will commence at the end of November in Chipping Norton. The support to retain the current providers in a volatile leisure market is being underpinned with a new marketing plan to promote their use.

Positive support has been put into the Carterton Football Club to address the football pitch deficit left by the previous administration.

Strategic Housing Strategy

This is an emerging partnership with Cotswold District (CD) and Oxford City Council, to take a proactive role in using the city housing company to develop the building of social rented units in West Oxfordshire on land owned by the council and CD. The plan in 2025 is to stop using hotels as short-term accommodation and to build more sustainable accommodation. West Oxfordshire and CD have agreed to the recruitment of a Strategic Housing Director to meet the capacity needs of fulfilling this goal which currently is not there in the Publica model.

Environmental Milestones

We have worked with Thames Water to prevent building housing developments in areas with insufficient sewer network and sewage treatment facilities in place.

Also negotiated with Thames Water to mitigate sewage spills in various hot-spots in West Oxfordshire, particularly in Eynsham, Bampton and Brize Norton. Influencing Thames Water to set up a "fix my sewer" App.

Engaged with Blenheim to develop a feasibility study for the installation and operation of underground waste and recycling systems in new housing developments (part of circular economy).

Local Plan

Local Plan consultations are under way with improved engagements with community groups and "residents' events" held in Milton under Wychwood, Chipping Norton and Witney with significant online engagements.

We have also reviewed current planning policies. The Infrastructure Funding Statement is in progress. We have responded to the government's plan-making reforms.

Work is underway to develop a Carterton master plan that will potentially reshape and regenerate the town over the next 10 years.

Increased grant making grant capacity

We have attracted £1.75 million of support through the Rural Prosperity Fund and the UK Prosperity fund to support business initiative and community and environmental projects in West Oxfordshire. In addition, we have set up the new Westhive crowd funding platform to support community and youth initiatives with a £120,000 grant support pot and additional support for the Citizens Advice Bureau to support advice offered to our residents in the cost-of-living crisis, as well as funding food banks across the district.

Look out for more news as the council looks to bring back council control of services with a reduced role for Publica.

Festive greetings to you all.

Cllr Andy Graham

Parish Council News

At the most recent Parish Council meeting (October 23rd), as well as the usual round of business - such as paying the bills for grass cutting, administration costs and running expenses etc - we were able to celebrate the completion of the first phase of refurbishment of the playground at the Church Rise end of the playing field. The splendid work done has created a cosy corner for families to sit and play and it's pleasing to see that it has already gained an enthusiastic group of users - if you've not seen it do pop along and have a look at what's been done!

A major task for the PC this autumn will be to analyse the survey questionnaire recently distributed to all households, local businesses and those working in the village. It will update the information we collected in 2012, 2016 and 2020 - see finstockpc.org.uk/village-survey/. We are conscious that time does not stand still and concerns evolve so these periodic surveys keep us updated as to your views and needs. What you've told us will help us reflect your preferences when we set the PC's budget. It will also provide some of the information Parish Councils are encouraged to collect for local planning purposes. This most recent survey will be particularly important if we are to accurately convey to WODC the hopes and fears of the Village for consideration in their work developing the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.

Mike Woodfield



Forest Edge Benefice Services in Finstock and Wilcote during December

Wednesday, 6th December	9.00 am	Christingle – with Finstock School
Friday, 8th December	6.30 pm	at Wilcote – Evening Prayer
Friday 15th December	6.30 pm	at Wilcote – Evening Prayer
Sunday 17th December	10.30 am	at Finstock – Holy Communion CW
Friday, 22nd December	6.30 pm	at Wilcote – Evening Prayer
Sunday 24th December	4.00 pm	at Finstock – Family Carol Service
	11.30 pm	at Wilcote – Midnight Mass
Monday, 25th December	10.30 am	at Finstock – Holy Communion CW
Friday, 29th December	6.30 pm	at Wilcote – Evening Prayer
Sunday, 31st December	10.30 am	at Wilcote – Holy Communion BCP



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News from The Royal Oak

HONKY TONK PIANO EVENING Friday, 15th December 7.00pm

The brilliant Eugene Portman returns to the Oak for another honkin-tonkin sing song in the bar. Just rock up and join in!

CHRISTMS QUIZ

Monday, 17th December 6:30pm
- Practise your trivial pursuit knowledge with our very merry Christmas Quiz. Our festive Small Plate menu will be available.

NEW YEAR'S MURDER MYSTERY

New Year's Eve - 7.00pm

Lord Ramsden invites you to his high society birthday bash! However, there's something sinister in the air about this year's celebrations. Whether you consider yourself a bit of a Poirot or more of a Johnny English, don your finest garb and see in the New Year with a murder mystery. Canapés & 3 courses.

In the bar, we will have a selection of old-fashioned board games to while away the hours until the bells toll!

Check out our up and coming events!

<https://www.royaloakramsden.com/events>

*A huge Happy Birthday greeting
to two village stalwarts –*

Viv Wightman and Roy Townsend.

*A hundred and seventy-six years
recently completed between you
– Many Happy Returns!"*

COUNTY COUNCIL NEWS

Liz Leffman Finstock News October 2023

For the past two and a half years, the administration at Oxfordshire County Council has been an alliance between the Lib Dems, Green Party and Labour. However, at the end of September that changed, when the Labour group at the County Council decided to terminate the Alliance. This followed a very poor report from Ofsted on the Council's services for children with special educational needs and disabilities and demands from parents for the Cabinet member for Children's Services, who is also the Labour group leader, to resign. Sadly, the Labour Group decided that they preferred to end the Alliance rather than re-shuffle Cabinet roles. The new administration is an alliance between the Lib Dems and the Green party.

This gives us an opportunity to review our priorities as we work on the budget for the next year and beyond. We know that we have to significantly improve our children's services, but we also have to make savings as, like all councils, we have to cope with increased costs and demand for our services. We have to improve our roads, even though we are unlikely to get any more money from government to do this. How we do this over the eighteen months is the challenge that we face.

Locally, I am very pleased to say that I have now got the road in Charlbury from Fiveways to the North Lodge at Cornbury onto the schedule for repair in the next cycle. Several Finstock residents have complained to me about this piece of road! If you want to find out what is scheduled for repair you can use this link: https://oxfordshire.highway-iams.uk/Live/PBLC_ANON/PIP/?cg=scheme. Once on this page, click on the box next to Location Search, and tick the box for Schemes 2024-25.

I am also very pleased that we have had white lines painted throughout the village which are there to remind people not to park in places that can be inconvenient or dangerous to pedestrians or to other cars. Most recently there have been issues with people parking at the corner of Walker's Height which has blocked access to the bin lorries and we are looking at painting some more lines there to deter parking. The introduction of the 20mph speed limit, which will be happening shortly, will also help to improve safety in the village.

And finally, I'd like to remind everyone that since the X9 has been taken over by the Oxford Bus Company, you can now take advantage of the £2 bus fare, making it an inexpensive and convenient way to travel to Charlbury, Chipping Norton or Witney.

Wishing everyone in Finstock a merry Christmas, and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Email: liz.leffman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Liz Leffman.

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Liz.leffman@oxfordshire.gov.uk*

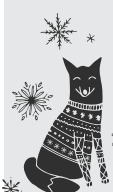
On at the Oak

Fri 15th Dec, 7pm:
Honky Tonk Piano Evening  ROYAL OAK
The brilliant Eugene Portman returns. Rock up & join in!

Mon 17th Dec, 6.30pm: Christmas Quiz
Testing trivia & our Festive Small Plate menu
Sun 31st Dec, New Year's Eve, 7pm: New Year's Murder Mystery

Lord Ramsden invites you to his high society birthday bash, where murder is most foul! Don your finest garb & see in the New Year in style with sleuthing, canapés & 3 courses. Or while away the hours until the bells toll in the bar with our selection of old fashioned board games.

Info, bookings & upcoming Events:
www.royaloakramsden.com/events
01993 868213
info@royaloakramsden.com

 Britons are spending
33 billion fewer minutes
on the phone now than
they did in 2012 (down
from 235 billion to 202
billion). 84% of mobile phone
users say they prefer either
messaging apps, or texting, to
making phone calls.



*"Life's too short
to stuff a mushroom"*

*– Shirley Conran,
quoted in the Daily Mail*

**RAMSDEN
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teas, cakes,
produce, mulled
wine and
seasonal music.



Finstock Unplugged

The October *Unplugged* meeting at the Plough was fun! It was one of those lovely evenings when everybody seemed to turn up and be in great form. Craig McLearnie, Dave Oakley, Colin Greenway as well as Colin Pitts, Gordon McKay from Witney AND Gordon Raitt of Scarecrow and Brackley Folk; Kim Hobday, Pete Joshua, Heather Niness and Von from Adderbury Folk, Ricky of the notorious music hall jokes and rather good songs, Braham from Finstock, Richard and Cathy, who entertained us with a very funny poem about turning 70, besides Claire and Anabel and Steve-from-Combe, who gave us his version of Chuck Berry's 'No Particular Place . . .' In due time I'll put up examples and provide further details on the Finstock Unplugged FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/590308302389899>.

The final Finstock-at-Wilcote Studios concert of the 2023 season took place

on Friday, October 20th. The Owl Light trio was in superb form, as were Larkspur, who opened for them. It was the first time we had hosted The Owl Lights since December 2021 and we were thrilled to hear them again. They were brilliant and attracted an audience which was both local and from far off regions of the shire. I have posted their encore, in which the Owls and Larkspur performed as a temporary supergroup, on the FB Finstock Unplugged group page, so don't take my word for it, if you wish you can listen for yourselves. (You don't have to be on FB to access this page, as it works more like a website.)

Forward planning: there will be no Finstock Unplugged meet in December, as the final Monday in December happens to be Christmas Day! But we'll be back, ever grateful for Guy's support, at the Plough Inn at 7.30 for 7.45 pm on Monday, January 29th 2024.

Ginnie



A traveller tells or, Travels with an Ass(istant)

I think it is wonderful that we can all still travel on local buses for two pounds per journey. If we had Sunday buses in Finstock we could have even gone for just one pound before Christmas. Hopefully we may get evening buses and a Sunday service some day, especially if we ask for them. It is not so easy to get more rail services from the halt although the Charlbury services are getting better with a lively refreshment outlet, and importantly the station is currently seeking a new booking clerk. Of course, more public travellers mean less traffic chaos in Charlbury or Witney or en route to Oxford all of which are likely to get more difficult in the future as more cars materialise and new homes are built in this region.

We are all getting older and transport gets more difficult for most of us. To their credit Pulhams (now part of the Go Ahead group) continue to provide a wonderful local and mainly hourly service to and from Witney and Chipping Norton. Their drivers are helpful to the many elderly and disabled passengers who use the service and wheelchairs too are accommodated. One learns how considerate bus drivers are; this also works when catching the various Oxford buses from Witney, although rush hours and traffic conditions are often a problem for them. If you need assistance then ask the bus or rail operators for help. If you make a trip to Bicester village (which I seldom do) you can be offered a mobility scooter to help with shopping but do try to practise handling it before you enter Emma Bridgewater's crockery shop. My attempts at reversing were positively dangerous there. And of course, travel assistance works further afield, if you choose to go by rail, air or sea. In fact, it can be exciting and adventurous when checking in or dealing with customs queues and even enjoying the long journey to the aircraft itself with a buggy driver. All aircraft and airports are different of course and it was quite amusing trying to board an aircraft at Dubrovnik from a sophisticated shed on the back of a truck, which involved someone knocking for attention on the aircraft door to gain access. And to be extracted from a lengthy queue boarding a cruise liner as someone in need of more speedy attention! All a novel and exciting new approach to travel to me.

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GARDEN CORNER - WINTER DELIGHTS

A plant I find a perfect choice for a late winter display is **Helleborus sternii** 'Silver Dollar'. The blooms are a unique stunning icy green colour with a rosy tinge, set off by bright lemon-yellow anthers. The silver-green holly-like foliage of this hardy evergreen perennial has a frosted appearance which makes it a firm favourite for something special to flower in late winter. Early-emerging bumblebees love the nectar-rich blooms.



The Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) with its pure white flowers, yellow anthers and dark green leaves is a beautiful addition to a container combined with the red berried eastern teaberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*) or a winter flowering heather. A variety of *H. niger* such as Christmas Carol is a very good cultivar, and *H. niger* Snowdrift even has an extra white ring of small white petals in the centre formed from some of the nectaries. These all grow well in heavy neutral or alkaline soils with added humus, and planted with the crown higher than the surrounding soil so that the crown is not sitting in water. The addition of Epsom salts provides magnesium and with a sprinkle of Q4 produces healthy dark green leaves. Yellowing leaves indicates they are too wet as the soil needs to be moist but well drained.



Snow Roses are crosses between the Christmas Rose and other *Helleborus* species from the Mediterranean such as the Corsican hellebore (***Helleborus argutifolius***) and the Balearic or blue-grey hellebore (***Helleborus lividus***). Snow roses produce a wealth of beautiful flowers at a time when nature seems asleep. Some varieties start to flower as early as November, and will withstand severe cold and snow. Others bloom in late winter and continue flowering well into spring. 'Shooting Star' has dark red stems and deep green leaves which set off the gorgeous white flowers, with a hint of pink; 'Snow dance' has marbled foliage and maroon stems with creamy flowers from December. 'Merlin' has light pink flowers which darken to deep cranberry. They are hardy, low-maintenance perennials that have an upright habit. Other hellebores to look for are named 'Anna's Red', 'Bob's Best', 'Ivory Prince', 'Penny's Pink', 'Pink Frost' and 'Ruby Glow'.



Native to Eurasia, Hellebores are part of the buttercup family (*Ranunculaceae*) and are not in fact related to roses. A big bonus is that deer avoid them. In the past, hellebores were also referred to as 'Oracle Roses' because they were used to forecast the weather of the coming year. Often in the countryside, it was tradition to put twelve hellebore flower buds in a glass of water before Christmas, each representing a month of the year. If a bud opened to a flower by Christmas Eve, good weather was predicted for that month or poor weather if it did not open.

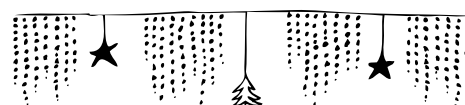
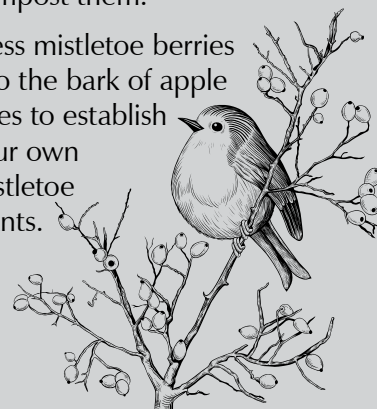
Here is hoping that all the buds open for next year!

Happy gardening

Robert.

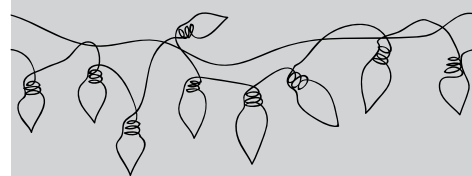
Garden Tasks for October/ November

- Protect terracotta pots from cracking in freezing weather by bringing them indoors or wrapping in bubble polythene.
- Rake up accumulated fallen leaves in borders that could be harbouring slugs and other pests.
- Pile straw or bracken around the base of tender shrubs and climbers to protect them from falling temperatures.
- Hard prune **overgrown shrubs** and hedges while they're dormant.
- Clear away soggy, collapsed stems of perennials and compost them.
- Press mistletoe berries into the bark of apple trees to establish your own mistletoe plants.



"There are two kinds of people in the world: those who love chocolate, and communists"

– Leslie Moak Murray, quoted in *Forbes*



You can tell a lot about a person by the way they handle three things: a rainy day, lost luggage and tangled Christmas tree lights." — Maya Angelou