

Finstock News 144

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

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“While it is February, one can taste the full joys of anticipation. Spring stands at the gate with her finger on the latch.”

Patience Strong

Many people have pointedly remarked on the fact that the days are getting longer now and it seems that there's an almost primaevial and collective sigh of relief – that we can hope and plan for the year ahead, with more light and greater clarity. From planning new plantings outdoors; thinking about short breaks and holidays; or maybe preparing for new careers or other major changes, one way or another, we'll all be looking forward. We won't be able to avoid the impact of changes that will come about in the wider world, which could be quite profound this year - but planning the vegetable patch or thinking about a few days away from our routines may at least help us to keep some sense of perspective and calm in our worlds!

Profiling local enterprise – The Organised Pod Are you overwhelmed with clutter?



I founded my business, The Organised Pod in 2021. As a member of APDO, The Association of Professional Declutterers and Organisers, I'm passionate about helping people reduce their clutter and create a calmer environment in their homes. Having three grown-up children means that my home is a lot tidier than it used to be when they were little, but I still remember those days of being overwhelmed with clutter. Over the years I have learned many ways to get things back in order, which inspired me to want to help others facing similar challenges with maintaining an organised home.

Spring is a season of renewal and rejuvenation, and for many of us, it signals the time for spring cleaning. As we say goodbye to winter, we feel the urge to refresh our surroundings, to spring clean, declutter and reorganise. More often than not, after the initial enthusiasm, when we are faced with the enormity of the task, we become overwhelmed and give up midway. The clutter returns to its original place, and we promise ourselves to try again later.

But what if there was a different way? What if decluttering didn't have to be such an overwhelming task? What if it could become a manageable, even enjoyable, part of your routine?

I work on a one-to-one basis, offering practical advice on decluttering effectively and creating sustainable systems of organisation that fit in with lifestyles and preferences. I share strategies and tips for maintaining a clutter-free home long after our sessions. Just as clutter accumulates over time, decluttering is a continuous journey. My approach involves working with individuals to make it a natural part of that daily routine, rather than a daunting yearly task!

For more information or to book a free consultation, please visit my website www.theorganisedpod.co.uk, or email me, nina@theorganisedpod.co.uk



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FINSTOCK FOLK

I meet John Owen Edwards, Finstock's own leading International Conductor, at his converted Church 'in the bottom' to talk music and Finstock.

JS Wow! - What a fantastic space, tall windows and ceilings...

JOE I bought the old Methodist Church in 1993 from a builder. The wooden ceiling is actually the original pews. I think the tall windows were to stop the congregation looking outside!

JS There's loads of musical artefacts here - was that an early interest?

JOE My grandfather was a music lover who nurtured my interest – through Gilbert and Sullivan. Except for three black years at a prep school in North Wales, my childhood in the Lake District was very happy. I won a music scholarship to Oxford and my three years at Worcester College put me in touch with many more musicians than had been the case at school. I was keen to throw myself into all sorts of music-making, mostly as a pianist, but with some composing and conducting thrown in. So enthusiastically did I apply myself to performing that the academic side of my studies suffered somewhat!

By the early 70's I knew that conducting was what I wanted to do and my first big break was conducting at the Royal Command performance at the London Palladium in 1975 – or Royal Variety Show as it's now known. At the same time, I was working on 'Billy' at Drury Lane with Michael Crawford. Fun times!

JS You've worked with the National Symphony Orchestra on numerous productions such as Oliver, Guys & Dolls, My Fair Lady, Cabaret and West Side Story – which one stands out?

JOE Probably working on Chess with Benny and Bjorn from Abba. Tim Rice wrote the lyrics and Elaine Paige sang. (See photo)

JS What made you pick Finstock?

JOE I was working in Birmingham for a time and a friend at the John Radcliffe recommended West Oxfordshire, with easy access to both Birmingham and London. I thought an empty church was an interesting project. By the time I'd had lunch in the Plough the builder had accepted my offer. As the work was being done, I lived for a few weeks where Jordan now lives at the Plough.

JS What's your impression of the village?

JOE I've lived here longer now than anywhere else. It's a friendly village with life. It has a heart. The pub has always been very welcoming. Short of the interregnum with the owners after Nigel and Keith and before Guy and Jordan, it really is the hub of the Village.



John Owen Edwards was talking to Julian Stewart

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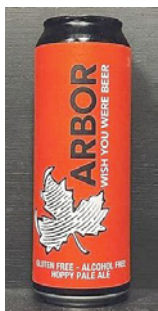
The Finstock Ale – the team are nothing if not dedicated. November saw no fewer than three trips to Bristol, with several goals in mind. The first was to present Arbor Brewery with a certificate for winning the Champion Beer at the 2023 festival. ZZ Hop, a delicious New England style Pale Ale amassed twice as many votes as any other beer, so in addition to presenting

a delighted Jamie Cansdale, their Sales and Marketing Director, with the award, team members were able to return with plenty of shopping for home consumption. ZZ Hop will return to Finstock to defend its title at the 2024 Ale, which by now must be in your diary for 6th and 7th September.

Finstock has certain limitations as a beer destination for the drinking

man or woman, with infrequent buses and distant train stations, and very few friends are happy being the driver when all their chums are pouring back the pints. Unless, of course, we can find a drink for that driver that's just as good but without the alcohol. Easier said than done,

because the process which extracts the alcohol from ales or lagers to make them alcohol-free (AF) tends to leave them in many cases with very little mouthfeel; while it can be suitably chilled and look the right colour, the end product can feel watery and low on taste. The team took on the challenge of finding something that would prove the exception. We want to feature an AF beer or lager in 2024 that will satisfy those passionate about drinking great beers. To this end, we explored in one day fourteen Bristol pubs and sampled nine different offerings. Even though these AF beers were brewed at some of our favourite breweries, the results were decidedly mixed. We



won't name names of those who disappointed (beer tasting is a notoriously subjective business) but we are delighted to tell you that we've found one which we agree offers real body and terrific hop influence. "Wish You Were Beer" is brewed by our friends at Arbor Brewery, so now that's at least two of their beers that will grace our Hall come September.

Bristol is an absolute treat for the discerning beer drinker. King

Street alone must contain ten establishments each offering ten to twenty different beers on cask or keg. But more gems lie further from the centre. Our travels took us to Hotwells, Clifton and Redlands; to pubs like the Bag of Nails with several cats sleeping along the bar and notices warning of dire consequences should they be disturbed; to the exquisite Good Measure, housed in an old clothes shop but offering rare gems from Howling Hops and Amity; to the Portcullis, high on the Clifton terraces with its walls festooned with photos of show business guests. Now, thanks to your hard-working team, you can be confident that 2024 will showcase even more exciting beers, all with our seal of approval.

Cheers!

Rod Ireland



Finstock Baby and Toddler Group

It's now been 10 years since I moved to this lovely part of the country, but without knowing a single person in the village it was somewhat daunting. On our first week here I took my little 18-month-old along to the village toddler group (in the old hall) and we were warmly welcomed in, quickly making lots of new friends for both myself and my toddler. These friends have stuck together over the years at toddler group, primary school and we've recently watched them start secondary school!

I now co-run the group with Tammy (and our Judd's Juniors Childcare little 'uns!) and strive to continue the warm welcome to all our members. We love meeting people from the village and surrounding areas and seeing their babies or children grow, play and interact with others. If you're new to the area, or to parenthood, it's a great place to come and get to know others in a friendly setting, share stories or parenting tips, or let your child try out some different toys/activities while you have a drink and yummy cake!

We meet **alternate** Wednesdays in Finstock Village Hall, 10-11.30 a.m. (term-time only) - follow us on Facebook for more details and upcoming dates. It's £3 per session (or 3 sessions for £7.50) which includes snack for the children as well as a variety of activities and cake and a hot drink for adults!

We look forward to seeing you there soon,

Helen Fallows



VILLAGE HALL

www.finstock.org.uk/village-hall • villagehallfinstock@gmail.com

Finstock Village Hall

The AGM of the Village Hall took place on 20th November last year. The trustees were happy that the Hall is in such good condition after all of the repairs and investment in new equipment over the past two years. But the business model that has served us so well since the opening of the new hall in 2016 is beginning to look shaky. The Hall operates by aiming to break even financially every year. It relies heavily on regular income from users and the reward from running the Finstock Ale, which until now has allowed it to keep hire charges at just £5 an hour for local hirers. That's been the rate, not only since the opening

of the new hall nearly eight years ago, but in fact that rate also applied back in the days of the old hall as well. What else in life has stayed unchanged for well over a decade?

Certainly not utilities costs, that's for sure. In 2023, we paid two and a half times more than we did in 2022 – and we negotiated a special preferential contract with our supplier. Staff costs also rose significantly, and so together with all of the planned investment and additional repairs, the Hall ended the year with a deficit of over £6,000! So, sadly, the hire charges for residents from Finstock and Fawler will increase to £10 an hour

from the beginning of this year. As I say, this is the first increase in our recent history, and still compares very well with halls in neighbouring villages. We are confident that we can redress the financial balance over time, and continue to fund programmes such as the Seniors' Christmas Lunch – which was a huge success again early in December.

So please continue to support your hall. We do urgently need new trustees to join our team to carry on the legacy. Typically takes just four meetings of your time in a year. Could you spare that for your community?

Rod Ireland

Friends of Finstock School – Winter Updates

A very Happy New Year to all our local community and many supporters! We are very grateful for your generosity in 2023 – attending events we've organised, donating gifts or prizes, or your time in helping to run an event – it means a lot to us and we couldn't do it without that support. Through this fundraising we've been able to make contributions towards school resources, forest school sessions and trips, including our annual Christmas panto visit to Chipping Norton Theatre – this time to see Cinderella which was a brilliant experience for all and much fun was had!

We're currently busy behind the scenes planning our next fundraising events so please watch this space and come along! All of our up-to-date information will be shared via our Facebook group and publicity around Finstock. Also, at any time you can support us

via easyfundraising.org.uk when shopping online – raise donations for free when you buy from one of the retailers, anything from your weekly online shop, new clothes or your next holiday! Every little really does help.

Our Summer Fete and Raffle are our biggest fundraisers during the year so please join us there – along with the Finstock Festival, over the weekend of 21st and 22nd June there's so much fun to be had on your doorstep! We would love donations towards our stalls and raffle, for example unwanted Christmas gifts, bottles, books and toys. We will share details on Facebook and in the next Finstock News edition or you can contact us via email fofsfinstock@gmail.com.

Thank you for your ongoing support,

FoFS

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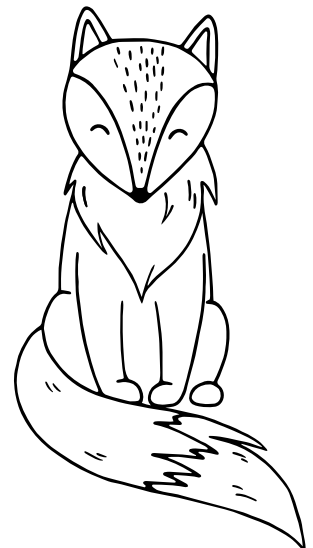
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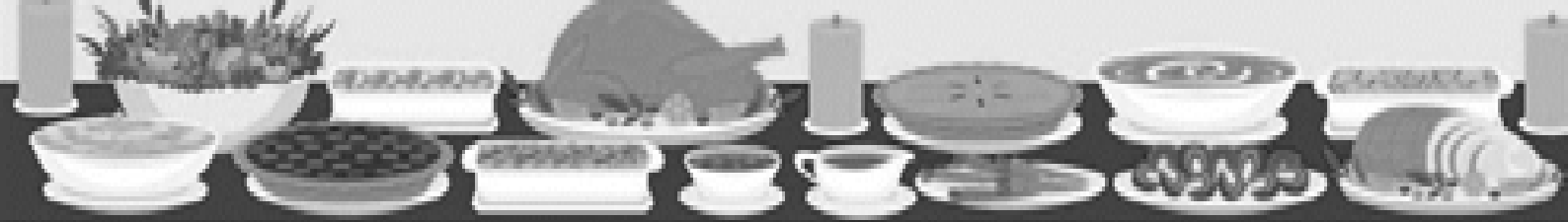
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Plan ahead – Know the deadlines

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.





KITCHEN CORNER

Marmalade!



Do you, or have you ever made your own marmalade? If so, then I'm sure that you will have recently been scouring the fruit stalls or supermarkets for fresh Seville oranges to form the basis of your own creation and keep you going for another year. But why Seville? Having, for the first time, researched this in a bit more detail, I've discovered that the name of this fruit preserve is attributed to the Portuguese, "marmelada", meaning "made of quince". Apparently, the Romans learned from the Greeks that quinces slowly cooked with honey would "set" when cool. The "Apicius" (a fifth century Roman cookery collection) contains such a recipe which includes whole quinces, with stems and leaves attached! Marmalade can be, and often is, made from other fruits as well - for example pear, plum, grapefruit and lime. Lemons are normally incorporated into most recipes to increase the pectin content and hence aid the final set. Ultimately, Seville oranges became the preferred fruit in marmalade making because of their naturally high pectin content, together with the strong bitter taste in the peel.

One of the earliest orange marmalade recipes is traced to a book by Eliza Cholmondeley back in 1677, while the Scots are further credited with developing marmalade as a spread (rather than a paste or gel, e.g. what

we now call quince cheese), with 18th century recipes using more water to produce a less solid preserve.

At a recent gathering I was part of, there were no less than six different homemade marmalades on offer, and they covered the spectrum of the types that you can also buy in the shops. Many people prefer their breakfast spread to be a lighter golden colour with very thin peel while others prefer a darker creation with thicker peel and a more bitter flavour - these differences being due to the types of sugar used, the possible addition of molasses and the relative volumes of peel and water. It can also have different types of alcohol added to it, such as whiskey, although I do feel this dilutes the pleasure of the real thing.

My own annual supplies are made up from a recipe I've developed and tweaked over the years and is very much in the darker colour and thicker peel camp. I have to add that it did get a very favourable thumbs up from the tasting of the six marmalades described above!

Three interesting questions arise though when thinking about marmalade:

1. Who makes it in the home? Five of the six sampled were male made. Is there some gender stereotyping going on similar to barbeque cooking?
2. Is it the preserve (excuse the pun) of an older generation or is it widely consumed by younger families as well? (Answers to this would be very welcome).
3. Does it mix well? I've heard it goes well with peanut butter and also in a bacon butty! My own favourite is together on toast with marmite - alongside fresh coffee, it's the ultimate taste bud sensation!

Pete Welply

If you've got a recipe or any other culinary snippets that you'd love to share in this column, send it in to the Editor – details on page four.



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COUNTRYSIDE – CONSERVATION – ENVIRONMENT

"Nature has introduced great variety into the landscape, but man has displayed a passion for simplifying it. Thus, he undoes the built-in checks and balances by which nature holds the species within bounds."

- Rachel Carson, Silent Spring

Garden birds

Every week we record an average of 22 different species of bird in our garden. The count is reported weekly to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). As spring comes the birds declare their territory by singing. What a wonderful way to say this land is my land. The nest building will soon be underway followed not long after by fledglings coming to the various feeding stations around the garden.

The bees and butterflies will soon begin to flutter about as early hellebores, crocus, daffodils and violets open. Everything will be growing with the highlight of flowering shrubs and trees. Our gardens support more wildlife now than they ever have. Our gardens play a more significant role in keeping the birds, bees, invertebrates and small mammals alive.

Most often seen in our garden is the robin, then the blackbird. We also enjoy blue tit and great tit, long-tailed tits, various finches, house sparrows, jackdaws and magpies. Woodpigeons are also present and they are the bane of many a small garden as they waddle about pushing smaller birds aside.

We also have several raptors that can be seen flying over our garden including the red kite and the buzzard. The sparrow hawk visits periodically and takes sparrows, blackbirds and starlings. At certain times of the year, you can hear the tawny owl calling. Rare visitors include the ring-necked parakeet and the green woodpecker. Enjoy your garden. Visit bto.org – a world inspired by birds and informed by science.

Joy Murphy



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DURING THESE MONTHS

1st February, 1587 – Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, was beheaded at Fotheringhay, England, after 19 years as a prisoner of Queen Elizabeth I.

20th February, 1988 – The singer Rihanna was born in St. Michael, Barbados.

28th February, 1986 – Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (1927-1986) was assassinated in Stockholm while exiting a cinema with his wife.

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, 1913 – A women's suffrage march in Washington D.C. was attacked by angry onlookers while police stood by. Many of the 5,000 women participating were spat upon and struck in the face as a near riot ensued.

11th March, 2020 - The **World Health Organization** declared that the **COVID-19** outbreak was a pandemic.

UK Christmas statistics

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CORVID, NOT COVID!



There's nothing like a late afternoon winter walk on one of those crisp cold days when the sun has been out and is now starting to set. The sky is clear and there is hardly any wind. It feels good to be out, even if the daylight will soon disappear

as it does during the dark midwinter days. It's an excellent time to watch out for some of the local deer coming out to graze or maybe even a white barn owl beginning its hunt.

I experienced an afternoon just like this some weeks before Christmas and was enjoying the cold air and clear views. I was well wrapped up and just stood and waited in the cover of the hedge for what I hoped would happen.

Across the large field came a huge flock of rooks. They were forming a lively trail across the field and making their distinctive 'kaah, kaah' call as they headed for their roost. Their number grew as other rooks joined the throng and very soon there were at least a hundred birds gathering in the air, calling noisily. I couldn't really count them as they moved rapidly but my estimate won't be far out. They had gathered in their rook community and were now about to fall into their communal roost. A flood of black pitched from the clear sky to the treetops.

The flock quickly circled the small wood on the far side of the field and set themselves down for the night. The noise continued for a short while but really the performance was over. There was no encore. If you do get a chance to get out into the fields this winter, keep a lookout for this gathering. They are our local birds.

At some stage the rain must stop and the field margins begin to dry. I'm looking forward to that moment. The paths are clogged and it's hard to find a dog walk that doesn't send you slipping and sliding.

This encounter made me re-read 'Crow Country' by Mark Cocker. It is a splendid account of his wanderings in his local patch to see corvids in their different habitats. It's very well composed and even if birds aren't your thing, I recommend it.

Vicus

Finstock for Nature

We are close to finalising a plan for the Community Orchard to be submitted to the Parish Council (hoping that everyone was enthusiastic about the benefits of planting trees in the Village Survey!). Certainly, the results from our own consultation at the Finstock Festival (anyone remember the cardboard apple tree?) were positive. To the question, 'Would you like to see a community orchard in the parish field?', of the eighteen people who completed a form, sixteen said 'yes', one said 'no' and one didn't answer this question. There is also a wonderful opportunity to apply for funds from the WODC Coronation Fund for Community Orchards to buy trees and guards.

Many of you will remember that we are also working on a project to improve the verge along the High Street with the removal of some (not all) of the scrub and restoring the open nature of the grassland to encourage wildflowers. Part of the plan will also involve repairing the drystone wall, a characteristic feature of the High Street that deserves to be more prominent and is also good for all sorts of insects and small mammals. The success of this project will depend critically upon consultation with residents, especially those living along the High Street. Based on some recent drone imagery, we will develop a plan for the High Street verge for consultation in early Spring.

Geoff Griffiths



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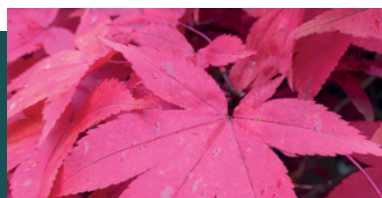
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North Leigh Roman Villa

From the 10th January we have a new web page that is going live for new volunteers to get involved at North Leigh Roman Villa, to support English Heritage with some of the most important work at the site since the mid-1970s.

The conservation of the villa ruins will start in April and English Heritage will be holding a series of open days to showcase the conservation work to the public. There is an exciting opportunity for you to be involved, as English Heritage will be looking for individuals to join our friendly existing team of volunteers to help explain the conservation works to our visitors. Become a Conservation in Action Explainer Volunteer and you will play a vital role in helping us preserve this iconic landmark, by explaining the conservation process, history of the site and sharing the area's unique history with our visitors. To find out full details and to make an application please follow the link - <http://tinyurl.com/2p8bbad9>

Please note the **closing date for applications is Friday 23 February.**
Matthew Lee,
North Leigh Roman Villa Volunteer

"If I were two-faced, would I be showing you this one?"
– Abraham Lincoln,
quoted in the Gloucester Daily Times



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Soldiers of
Oxfordshire
Museum

Drawing the Waterloo Cartoon

Running alongside the popular war comics exhibition, *Into Battle!*, the Waterloo Cartoon by Shaun Maloney is now on display at the county's military history museum until 30th April 2024. The incredibly detailed sketch depicts scenes from the 1815 Battle of Waterloo and is based on the 19th century original by Daniel Maclise, on display in the House of Lords. Alongside the artwork itself, the museum has dipped into its own archives to display a range of objects and artwork of the Waterloo era, many rarely seen on public display.

These include items of the 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry who fought in the historic battle. Supporting panels from the National Army Museum provide visitors with the context behind the battle itself. Artist Shaun is a veteran himself, having served a long and varied career in the British Army, including the Falkland Islands, mainland Europe, Bosnia and Kosovo, Northern Ireland and the Far East.

With a strong sense of social responsibility, he now uses art alongside his coaching experience, to help others overcome trauma, physical pain and damaging thinking patterns. Drawing is a tool Shaun often uses.

Shaun explains, "Drawing has been a constant in my life for as long as I can remember. In recent years I have used mindful drawing to steady my own mental health as well as helping others. There is a special gift that drawing gives us and for me it's being able to focus on just one thing at that one moment in time".

Alongside the exhibition Shaun is running two art workshops for visitors looking to build their own confidence in drawing or develop their skills, the first on 17th February, and the second on 13th April, 2024.

Open to all ages from children aged ten up to adults, the workshops will encourage attendees to both express their own creativity while casting an analytical eye over historical visual sources such as the original Waterloo Cartoon. While visitors can drop in to see the exhibition any time the museum is open, spaces on the workshops are limited, with tickets available now from the museum's website and via Eventbrite.

Following the exhibition, Shaun is also kindly donating his Waterloo Cartoon as the grand prize in Soldiers of Oxfordshire Trust's 10th Anniversary raffle, with proceeds supporting the charity's continued work at the museum in Woodstock, preserving the county's military heritage and sharing Oxfordshire people's stories of conflict and peace.



COUNTY COUNCIL NEWS

Finstock News January 2024

I would like to wish everyone in Finstock a very happy New Year: the coming year will almost certainly see a General Election, and we will have to wait and see how that affects us locally.

The cost-of-living crisis continues to make life difficult for so many people in our area. The grants that councils receive from government have not been increased to cope with the rising cost of delivering services, and we will have to make significant savings in the budget for 2024-2025 which will be coming to Full Council for consideration on 20th February. In the government's Autumn Statement, the National Living Wage was increased by about 10%, which I welcome as this will be a help to those who are struggling. But the government has not given councils any more money to cope with this and is expecting them to find this money by making savings. Consequently, our budget for next year is quite constrained, but happily we are not in the position that some councils find themselves in and we will survive!

Oxfordshire has for many years led the way when it comes to recycling and now we have topped the table again, this time for the measures we are taking to tackle climate change. Climate Emergency UK is a not-for-profit cooperative which has been working with councils and residents since 2019 to share best practice about what councils can do to tackle the climate and ecological emergency and to encourage effective action, and they rated Oxfordshire the best county council in the country.

OCC is currently participating in a nationwide survey about our roads and transport, on behalf of the National Highways Transport Network, which will help us to make better decisions regarding future transport needs. You can participate in this survey through this link:

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/national-highways-transport-network>

The survey will be available until 28th February.

Finally, I was very pleased to be able to support Finstock Primary School from my Councillor Priority Fund with a small grant which will ensure that the Forest School, which makes the school so special, is able to continue. In return the children and teachers have sent me a beautiful hand painted and signed Christmas card, which I will treasure.

Liz Jeffman. 01608 81153, 07741 073088 Liz.jeffman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Finstock Local History Society

16th February – Marie-Louise Kerr : The Romans of Oxfordshire

15th March – Bill King : Yesterday's Childhood

19th April – Katherine Bradley : Creative Women – Arts and Crafts in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds

17th May – Meet the Detectorists, a second chance to inspect local finds and discuss how, why and where!

18th May – A Celebration of 50 Years

Meetings at Finstock Village Hall – Doors and Bar open at 19.30 and the talks start at 20.00.

£20 for joint membership and £15 for single membership for the year, or £2.50 on the door for individual events

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INFORMATION OR MISINFORMATION - TRUE OR FALSE?

BOOK CORNER

Recommendations for your late winter reading

Eowyn Ivey – *The Snow Child* 2012
– Alaska in the 1920's.

Janina Ramirez, (2022), *Femina – A new history of the Middle Ages, through the women written out of it.*

Priya Parmar, (2014), *Vanessa and Her Sister – A novel about Virginia and her sister Vanessa.*

Jonathan Coe, (2001), *The Rotter's Club – Set in the 1970's and very evocative of this time.*

Alan Buckingham, (2019), *Allotment month by month – Useful guide to growing those important veggies.*

Benedict MacDonald, (2020), *Orchard: A year in England's Eden – A delightful natural history book.*

Paul Murray, (2023), *The Bee Sting – A magnificent depiction of a family slowly disintegrating as they lose their money and status in a small Irish Community. On the 2023 Booker shortlist.*

J L Carr, (1980) – *A Month in the Country – Set in the 1920's. A very enjoyable read.*

Nan Shepherd, (1977), *The Living Mountain - A celebration of the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland*

Ben MacIntyre, (2022), *Colditz – Prisoners of the Castle.* Any book by this author is worth reading. An astonishing story.

Please support your local bookshop if you are buying books – Jaffe & Neale in Chipping Norton and Waterstone's in Witney. Try your local Oxfam bookshop as well – Chipping Norton & Witney.

Tony Cooper

Just a few thoughts on this topic as we leave the season of myth and reality behind. Father Christmas has moved on after visiting The Plough at Finstock and King George and the Turkish knight have been revived by Doctors real and unreal. The Queen of Egypt's daughter has returned to the Nile whilst the devil is back to playing the organ and Christmas and New Year have long since evaporated. But some mysteries may still remain - like the temporary myriad of road signs that appeared long before Christmas to warn of mythical traffic dangers on the highway before Finstock Halt. Amazingly the signs implied that all was clear before one reached the dangerous curve at the railway bridge and the regular flooding that appears across half the carriageway by Fawler Mill. Maybe Thames Water has the answer somewhere in a filing system?

Tis true, for example, that rail passenger numbers using the halt have declined from 1300 to 706 in just one year which gives Finstock the dubious title of least used station in Oxfordshire. Hard to change though with just one train a day in each direction and more folks working irregular hours or working from home these days.

'Tis also true that thanks to our diligent local postman we all received our Christmas mail pretty perfectly this year whilst mystery parcels inevitably got left at wrong addresses by harassed or confused private couriers. Mind you the Post Box collection service is more of a mystery now we have no postmistress in Finstock. There is apparently one collection most mornings from the School Road box. And in small print should you seek further advice it says there is a later collection from The Cross. Maybe that means the crossroads but that box says there is a later collection from The Green. Then if you head down to the Bottom you will see that there is a later collection from The Cross. So maybe it is not information for Finstock after all!

Mind you, as I have said before the bus service here works pretty well, as do the milk deliveries and those from the Charlbury chemist - whilst local tradesmen like builders, roofers, electricians, plumbers, plasterers, carpenters, mechanics, farmers, foresters and gardeners work wonderfully hard, often in difficult conditions to maintain village life and they all deserve more individual appreciation.

Such a pity that the bigger problems never seem to get sorted. Or is it just me that thinks like this in an election year?

Mike Breakell

On at the Oak



14th - 17th February

THE ROYAL OAK

Our **VALENTINE'S DAY** specials are running alongside our main menu, with scallops, Beef Wellington, confit duck leg & more!

28th February

VINTAGE BRITAIN: our chefs take us on a tour of the culinary delights of decades gone by. Book between 6pm & 8.30pm. Feast on jellied eels, Duchess Soup, Spotted Dick & more!

10th March

MOTHER'S DAY

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*"Our thoughts are often
worse than we are"*

*George Eliot,
quoted on Elevate Society*

*"If one can't command
attention by one's admirable
qualities, one can at least
be a nuisance"*

*Margery Allingham,
quoted in The Knowledge*

NEWS FROM WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council unveils vibrant vision for local markets

West Oxfordshire District Council is set to breathe new life into local markets, to help boost prosperity and footfall in town centres following an external review.

Cllr Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, said, "Our markets have been a big part of the community over the years but in recent years there has been a decline in the number of stalls and people visiting them.

"We commissioned Wild Property Consultants to conduct a thorough review and they offered valuable recommendations on ways we can improve the market experience at Carterton, Witney, and Chipping Norton.

"We want to reinvigorate our town centres and entice visitors back by providing a wider variety of stalls and creating a vibrant atmosphere. This is a collaborative process and so working together with town partnerships and existing stallholders will be crucial to achieving this shared vision.

"With the success of this year's Witney Christmas Market at Marriotts Walk, which drew a fantastic number of visitors and left many eager to see it return next year, we've witnessed the immense popularity and positive impact that special events can make to our town centres. Our mission is to extend this to all our local markets throughout the year, so that residents can feel proud of their much-loved towns."

In a resounding success, the Witney Christmas Market drove a 59% surge in footfall compared to the same weekend the previous year and made a remarkable 70% increase in town centre footfall from the previous week. Overall, this translated to an additional 15,000 visitors over the three-day period.

The Wild Report set out a series of recommendations for how the weekly markets could be improved and managed, including through town partnerships. The Council is already working on forging these partnerships in each of the towns and among other measures, they are reviewing town centre signage and wayfinding to improve the visitor experience.

The vision for West Oxfordshire, as laid out in the 2023-2027 Council plan, is to build a district with thriving local economies and vibrant town centres. The Council recognises the crucial role its outdoor markets play in this, and hopes that by improving its markets and attracting more visitors, it will boost financial growth for town centres, create more job opportunities, and ensure stronger, happier communities.

The full market review report can be viewed at

<https://meetings.westoxon.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=321>.



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GARDEN CORNER

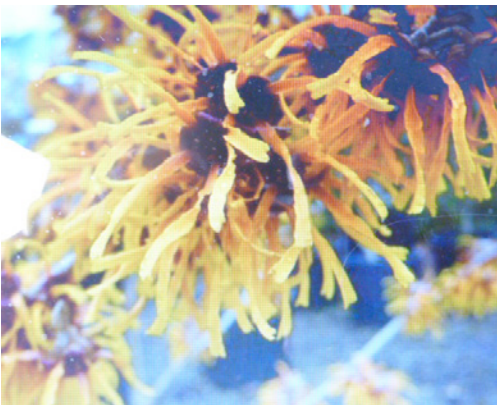
Tempting delights to welcome you into the Winter Garden.



To be greeted by the scent and sight of the hanging white bells of the Winter flowering **Clematis cirrhosa** helps to turn a garden from a bleakness into a pleasure to enjoy. These useful evergreen climbers are perfect for growing up trees, fences, pergolas or obelisks. They are hardy, scented and provide insect-friendly flowers throughout the coldest months of

the year.

Early-flowering plants help add a whole new layer of enjoyment to the winter garden with fragrance. The rich yellow-orange tassel like flowers of the Witch hazel (**Hamamelis** × **intermedia** 'Vesna'), redder at the base of the petals, feature an unusually strong scent from December through to March and have the bonus of fiery autumn leaf colour. A few lengths can be cut and put in a vase to perfume rooms in winter.



Winter is a season packed with some sublime scents, from the heady fragrance of **Daphne bholua** 'Jacqueline Postill', to the delicious wafts of the winter honeysuckle, **Lonicera purpusii**, which, in full flower, has a strong citrus smell that is really lovely. Other fragrant shrubs are **Sarcococca hookeriana** 'Winter Gem', Mahonia, Daphne, and Wintersweet.

One of winter's most intoxicating scents, comes from Wintersweet (**Chimonanthus praecox** 'Luteus'), with its sweetly scented and highly fragrant, creamy yellow, bell-shaped flowers that appear on bare light brown stems in the middle of winter. Wintersweet is a medium sized (2m. tall) shrub, ideal for winter borders and looks stunning against a natural wall or even in a large pot on the patio. It is best to keep it close to a path or entrance of the house for you to fully appreciate its strong fragrance! Trained against a south or west facing wall, where the sun-ripened shoots will bloom most prolifically, the sweet scent of the clusters of unmarked yellow flowers wafts around the garden in late winter. It appreciates planting in a well-drained soil, and is happy on chalk. Prune immediately after flowering and apply a generous 5-7cm (2-3in) mulch of well-rotted garden compost or manure around the base of the plant. The glossy, deep green lanceolate leaves release an aromatic scent of a mixture of cinnamon and cloves, on hot summer days.

Plants use floral scents to attract pollinators or to repel harmful insects. Floral scents begin as oils that are produced by the petals in most plants. The aroma of a flower may contain seven to ten different oils. Generally speaking, flowers with a spicy or fruity smell tend to attract beetles, while sweet smelling flowers attract bees, moths and flies.

Robert

Garden Tasks for February/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.
- Cut back *wisteria* side shoots to three buds from the base, to encourage abundant flowers in spring.
- Wait until the soil dries some and warms up before planting *summer bulbs* such as dahlias.
- Give the lawn a good scratch with a wire rake to get at all the overwintering thatch and moss, and let light and water get to the soil and to the roots of the grass.

What's On at The Plough Inn



Mon 5th Feb, 7pm:
Quiz Night

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