

Finstock News 127

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

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'There is no time like Spring, When life's alive in everything...' Christina Rossetti



Transitions are very topical at the moment. As we transition from late winter into spring and from complete lockdown through the various stages towards something resembling 'normal' there is much to look forward to. Finstock is a mixed and welcoming community and after months of social disruption there is much talk of the reopening or restarting of many of the activities that make Finstock special. Much of that anticipation is covered on these pages, together with some reflections on how things have been. Alongside this edition of Finstock News there is also the summary of the latest Village Survey, published by the Parish Council, which reflects on what is and maybe what might be. Whether you're a long-standing resident of the village, or have only moved in more recently, here's a flavour of what lies ahead more locally.

THANKS TO ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS!



The Plough

We are excited to welcome you all back into the pub garden starting on Monday 12th April when we plan to be open for lunch and dinner. Until then we will continue to offer our takeaway menu from Tuesday to Sunday with 15% off all food orders Tuesday -Thursday. We can't wait to have you all back in the pub; we love you all!

Guy and the Team

DURING THESE MONTHS

8th April - Hanamatsuri – Zen Buddhists celebrate the birth of Buddha.

15th April, 1912 - R.M.S. Titanic struck an iceberg and sank on her maiden voyage.

20th April, 2010 - Deepwater Horizon exploded in the Gulf of Mexico.

5th May, 1930 - Amy Johnson was the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia.

6th May, 1994 - Channel Tunnel was formally opened.

25th May, 1977 - First of the Star Wars Movies opened.

FINSTOCK FESTIVAL

What a time to be living through, while trying to keep family and life in some order.

With a heavy heart and after much debate, the decision has been made to cancel this year's festival. At the time the decision was made, we had no idea when lockdown would end for certain and, if we were able to go ahead, we weren't sure how many people would feel comfortable attending such an event. There are upfront costs to putting the festival together and if the footfall was low it could be a financial disaster.

All we can do now is look forward to 2022 and giving our big marquees a good airing with a rip roaring Finstock Festival. Hope you are keeping safe and happy.

Colin Stringfellow. Chairman

**Don't forget you can view the
Finstock News online at finstock.org.uk/the-finstock-news**




Thank you all for your support!

We are offering 15% off takeaway food Tuesday - Thursday until reopening on 12th April.

Takeaway opening times:

Tue - Sat 5.30-8.30pm
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VILLAGE EVENTS



I hope you are remaining safe, and as well as can be expected, while the current situation continues. Several people have asked why Finstock Church remains closed, while other churches, such as Ramsden and Leaffield, have sometimes been open. Last year, in Lockdowns 1 and 2, all churches were prevented from opening by law.

When each of these lockdowns was eased and the country entered the tier system, the government permitted local churches to open provided they could do so safely. The government and the National Church insisted measures were implemented to ensure people remain as safe as possible while attending church. If this wasn't possible the authorities insisted that they should remain closed.

Within this benefice it has been possible to implement these measures in two of our churches. St Michael's Church in Leaffield and St James' Church in Ramsden have both been open at various times over the last twelve months. Holy Trinity Church in Finstock and St Peter's Church in Wilcote have had to remain closed.

In a change to Lockdowns 1 and 2, during Lockdown 3 (currently) the government has not closed churches if the measures to help keep everyone as safe as possible remain properly and strictly enforced. Services are therefore taking place, each Sunday, alternating between Ramsden and Leaffield. We are looking forward to the time when all our churches are once again open. From the government's current roadmap, this is likely to be sometime in the summer. Our website (www.forestedgebenefice.co.uk) is kept up to date with all the latest developments.

With every blessing, Paul

*Rev'd Paul Mansell,
Vicar, Forest Edge Benefice*

*'The earth has music
for those who listen'*

— William Shakespeare

Our very own Facebook page

Finstock village has its very own Facebook page which will have been in operation for six years this year, a great achievement. It offers valuable information on what's going on in and around the village and the local area, sometimes providing local residents with instant news of accidents on the roads, or poor road conditions which members kindly post to warn others. Members post about missing or lost items, including the odd runaway dog, which, with the help of quick acting residents, we have then managed to locate and return to the owners on many occasions. The village shop often posts timing information and 'offers' that the shop has on that day, and news about kids' clubs or fitness activities can also be found on the page. The page is open to anyone with an interest in our village and to avoid spam or unwanted posts there is a simple questionnaire to complete, to prevent robots joining the site! The page is managed voluntarily by several administrators who help to ensure it stays a friendly page for all. On very rare occasions, discussion can become spirited and we are asked to bring the site back to its friendly purpose. The important thing to remember is that it is a village page and designed to promote the best of the village, generally 'policing' itself, if need be.

On average the page gets around 20 requests per week to join but sadly the majority are from spam posters who purport to live in Finstock but actually live halfway across the world. It is time consuming on occasions keeping the page safe. The page has attracted nearly 700 members including members from Spain, the United States, and Australia! So, if you would like to keep up-to-date more quickly - you can find us on Facebook - www.facebook.com/groups/644816698873495

Marc Thompson

Finstock Craft Club

At time of writing, the beautiful weather over the last few days has lifted everyone's spirits. All we need now is the news we are all anxiously waiting for, and that is the moment when it is safe to resume the life we left more than a year ago. We all want (and need), to return to doing the things we enjoy, which in our case is crafting with friends. Let's hope that is happening by the time you read this edition of The Finstock News!

For information about craft club, please contact me at: rosacharlesworth@icloud.com.

Rosa Charlesworth



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VILLAGE HALL

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

Our Village Hall is five years old! While the doors are still sadly shut, we're giving it a birthday present. It has enjoyed a full electrical inspection and service, the alarms have been tested, and we are applying some loving care to the wonderful "floating floor" (as our picture shows).



After five years of pounding from dance class, disco, pilates and parties, the boards needed resettling.

When will it reopen? At the time of writing, national guidelines

allow for some restricted opening in April, but for adults that is confined to a single household or "bubble". To justify reopening financially, we need a full array of users, including kickboxing, dance, yoga, craft club and others, and the government guidelines are indicating May 17th is the earliest we can expect. Private bookings will be allowed a few weeks after that. But as we know too well, all things can change, so we will ensure we contact our major users and post on the village websites as soon as we can be certain.

If all goes well, we can certainly look forward to full usage by summer, which means we can start planning now for major events such as The Finstock Ale in September. We'll all drink to that!

Rod Ireland

Finstock Short-Mat Bowls

We suspect that we will not be able to get back playing at the Village Hall until September, but watch out in case we can start earlier!

Charlbury Bowls Club

Drawing players from Finstock, Hailey, Leafield, the Wychwoods, Enstone, Stonesfield and beyond. Playing outdoors, we anticipate starting the season on time but with the necessary distancing and sanitation measures in place. We have a Covid compliance certificate from our sport's governing body.

Want to try out bowls?

Come along to one of our Open Days and try it for free. You can come six times before deciding if you wish to join as a member. All equipment provided.

Disability Bowls

Bowls is a game that can be enjoyed as a social and competitive game by all and, as an inclusive club we have obtained funding to purchase an extensive range of equipment to assist people with disabilities to enjoy our sport. Whether you have physical, sensory, or learning (Intellectual) disability, you are welcome to try out bowls. We have specialist bowls wheelchairs for use on the green and

various devices to assist those with physical disabilities like loss of limb or trouble with bending low. Anyone who joins is fully integrated into the club and can play alongside all members in casual roll-ups, club competitions and competitive fixtures. From May we will also be holding regular sessions for people with memory problems, including mild and moderate dementia. Contact us for more information.

Junior Bowls

Bowls is also a game that can be played by people of all ages and in May we start our own Junior Section. We have obtained funding for equipment needed to get juniors playing. We will take any age from seven years up to fifteen. Juniors will be divided into appropriate age groups, supported by trained coaches. Our weekly Junior sessions will be on Saturday mornings at 11am, commencing 1 May. We will also run a summer school – look out for details. Parents are welcome to stay, and even help out!

Challenge to the Ladies of Charlbury and nearby

We aim to recruit twelve new lady players over the next two years to support our experienced bowlers as we aim to enter a team in the West Oxfordshire Ladies League by 2023. All ages welcome. Contact us or simply turn up to one of our Open Days.

Open Days

Everyone is welcome to try out bowling for **free** – just turn up with your flat-soled shoes from 2pm on Saturday 24 April, 2pm and 6pm on Wednesday 28 April, or 2pm on Monday 31 May. email: enquiries@charlburybowls.co.uk Tel: 01993 868134 or message us on Facebook

For more information see our website www.charlburybowls.co.uk

Shaun Morley

SOTA

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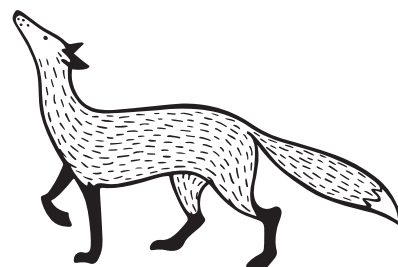
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An Update from Finstock School

2021 may have started with Finstock Church of England Primary School in lockdown but it didn't stop us providing a rich, challenging and exciting curriculum. Our team worked incredibly hard to tailor our curriculum, factoring in a reduction in screen time for some of our foundation subjects and using research-informed strategies to ensure children know more, understand more and are able to do more. We responded to feedback and worked hard to provide resource packs for all our children, ensuring they had all the equipment, books and craft materials needed to complete the wonderful learning opportunities.

The children began the spring term projects through remote learning online. The whole school had a mini-lockdown 'holiday to space' in the projects 'Stargazers' and 'Moon Zoom'. Cedar class learnt about different missions that have happened over the years, the order of the planets and even tried to launch their own rockets from the comfort of their own gardens. Oak class have learnt all about the solar system. They have designed and built their own rockets, drawn aliens and created a persuasive leaflet designing a trip to a fictional planet! The Reception and Cherry class project was 'Starry night'. They compared all the differences between day and night; role-played a bedtime routine and learnt all about nocturnal animals.

The adventures didn't stop there, Cedar class wrapped up warm as they learnt about the Arctic Regions in their project 'Frozen Kingdoms', looking carefully at the location, habitats and history of explorers. Alongside this they explored the story of the Titanic and investigated the properties of the icebergs that caused it to sink. Oak class explored how life and toys were different for children in the past, and investigated their family trees in their project 'Childhood'. Reception and Cherry class went looking for 'Puddles and Rainbows'. This exciting project allowed them to spend as much time outside as possible; exploring the different types of weather and how rainbows are created.

Finstock Church of England Primary School is extremely grateful to our families for supporting us to provide high quality education remotely. We have all been so very impressed with the commitment, dedication and resilience our children have shown during this challenging time. We have seen fantastic progress across the curriculum and cannot wait to see what the rest of the school year has in store for us!

If you would like to learn more about our school, please do get in touch via office.3040@finstock.oxon.sch.uk to arrange a conversation.

Leanne Dixon, Finstock Headteacher

Many thanks

Just to say on behalf of everyone who received a tub of chocolates for Christmas, thank you to the Village Hall Trustees and to all who delivered them. It was a nice surprise and much appreciated. Hopefully we can go ahead with the Christmas meal this year. Thank you, Eileen

Eileen Peters



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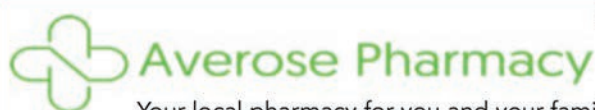
Photographs thanks to staff members and others.

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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Business for our shop and Post Office remains steady, with sales consistently meeting our goals. The shop continues to receive surprise spot checks from the local authorities to ensure we have all necessary Covid-related protections in place, and I'm delighted to tell you that their feedback is highly complimentary – we are meeting or exceeding their expectations! Now the challenge for the directors is to look ahead and ask what we need to do to ensure we keep this level of business once lockdown restrictions are lifted and peoples' lives change yet again. Any future extension of opening hours can only be achieved if we can identify and train new volunteers who are happy and willing to commit to working behind the counter on a regular basis.

We also have a more pressing need. Robin Hall has been the Financial Director for the Shop for more than twelve years, and perhaps more than any other individual has worked behind the scenes to support the shop through good times and bad. As a community, we owe him a great debt. But having reached a "significant milestone" in life, he has finally decided it's time to hand over to new blood. We are looking for a new director to join our team. The role is not as daunting as it may seem, because most of the real "financial" work is done by our bookkeeper. Our Financial Director manages our relationship with government agencies, signs cheques when required, and is responsible for explaining (in layman's terms) the progress of the shop once a year at our AGM. In good times, you can expect to attend directors' meetings no more than four times a year to steer the progress of the shop. Interested? Just let Karen know at the shop.



Easy Easter cookies

You will need:

225g butter, softened
110g caster sugar
75g mini eggs

275g plain flour
75g milk chocolate chips

Method:

1. Heat the oven to 190C/170C fan/gas 5.
2. Cream the butter in a large bowl with a wooden spoon or in a stand mixer until it is soft. Add the sugar and keep beating until the mixture is light and fluffy.
3. Sift in the flour, add the chocolate chips and mini eggs and bring the mixture together into a ball using your hands.
4. Roll the dough into walnut-sized balls and place them slightly apart from each other on a baking sheet.
5. Flatten the balls a little with the palm of your hand and bake them in the oven for around 15-20 minutes until they are golden brown.
6. Leave to cool for 10 minutes and enjoy!

This recipe was created and submitted by Leon and Finlay Young (and the cookies are very yummy! – Ed).

If you've got a recipe you'd love to share, send it to the Editor – details on page 4

Finstock Baby and Toddler Group:

As you read this, we hope that the first stage of the lifting of Lockdown is going well for you and you're all enjoying the bright colours of spring! We are really looking forward to re-opening Finstock Toddler Group when we are able to safely, and will let you know when this will be as soon as we can. We need to keep monitoring the situation and liaise with the Village Hall to plan properly, once things are a bit more settled - we hope you can appreciate that there will be a lot to take into consideration.

We will keep you updated with any news on our Facebook group so please keep an eye out. We're really excited that we should soon be able to get back to our fantastic group!

Have a very Happy Easter! All the best,

Helen and Tammy

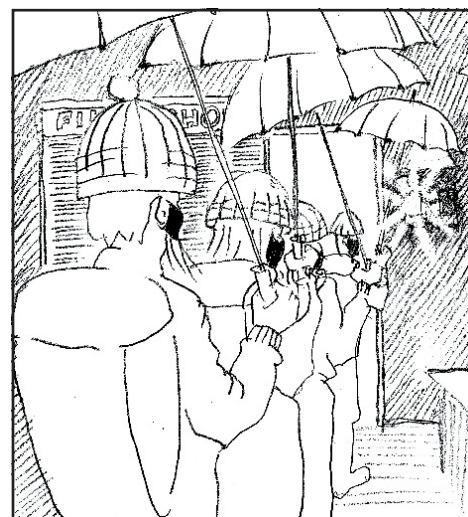
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"green light...JUMP...no, no, sorry...ENTER!"

"To achieve great things you need a plan and not quite enough time"
Leonard Bernstein

COUNTRYSIDE CONSERVATION

If conservation of natural resources goes wrong, nothing else will go right. – M. S. Swaminathan

Buying pollinator-friendly flowers and bulbs for your garden

There are lots of ways that you can make your garden friendly for wildlife. Roselle Chapman from Wild Oxfordshire shares some of her top tips here: (listen to Penny Post from 5 minutes 30 seconds).

pennypost.org.uk/2020/12/wildlife-friendly-gardening-tips/?fbclid=IwAR2Mr_n35twGCux42gX9A7TQ7DY5X2Os9ibaRbJqaOgaZ1lhguwURmp1TM0

Road building may slip down priority list for council

Oxfordshire County Council's draft Local Transport and Connectivity Plan aims to prioritise digital infrastructure over road building. With home working expected to become more permanent and unnecessary travel consequently reduced, the strategy aims to increase active travel and electric public transport and reduce car journeys for lone drivers. All this in an effort to address climate change. Although the route forward is still unclear, discussions are now underway and updated plans are expected to be published later this year.

A Tiny Forest in Finstock?

What are Tiny Forests?

Tiny Forests are dense fast-growing native woodlands, based on an established forest management method developed in the 1970's by Dr Akira Miyawaki. If your idea of a forest is based on local examples, such as the Wychwood, with large areas of widely-spaced trees, think again. In a very small area, after preparing the soil, you plant ten times as many saplings as you would normally find, look after them for the first two seasons, and then leave nature to take its course.

What is the point of these forests?

The forest will develop by itself, attracting wildlife and absorbing enormous quantities of CO₂. It has the capacity to absorb much of the rain that currently takes the soil away on steep slopes and runs into the drains.

Is this only for Japan?

Certainly not. On the 13th February 2020 Earthwatch contractors planted a Tiny Forest by the A40 in Witney.

So where could such a forest be placed?

There are so many candidates. A lot of gardens have areas where nothing is growing or which have been forgotten about. The main requirement is that the landowner is happy to have a Tiny Forest on their land.

Can anybody do this?

In theory, yes. But it is better to form a group to find the land and those willing to have a forest on their land; once that has been done the group can ask Earthwatch for expert help. They 'engage with local communities to plant, maintain and monitor their forest over time. The forests reconnect people with nature and raise awareness of climate change. Environmental and social data is collected for every forest we plant, this helps us assess the benefits they provide over time and between different forests.' See <https://earthwatch.org.uk/get-involved/tiny-forests>.

I'm interested.

In that case contact the Editor or tonyhir@gmail.com.

Tony Hirstenstein



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Rewilding morsels

Ambitious plans to rewild Britain with lost toads, frogs and lizards are afoot in Staffordshire where two teenage boys are well on their way to creating the country's largest outdoor breeding facility for reptiles and amphibians. In ponds, greenhouses and cabins in their back gardens, the two boys are working to breed lost species such as moor frogs and European pond turtles as well as declining native species such as the common toad. Now with financial backers in place and high-profile mentors, they're just steps away from making their dream a reality.

How can we sequester carbon and protect biodiversity without any additional land needs? Plant hedgerows of course! CAG network member Watlington Climate Action have produced a wonderful new film on the importance of hedgerows, a habitat that provides more ecosystem services than any other, as part of the Watlington Hedgerow Project. Its packed full of interesting information, deep-seated knowledge and a profound love for the environment that seeps through in every shot.

www.watlingtonclimateaction.org.uk/thehedgerowproject



Village Sounds

I wake up most mornings to one of two sounds; either my hens wanting to be fed or the early morning commuters on the Witney road speeding onto their place of work. The hens are soon quietened with a scoop of feed but the cars continue and build up until past nine o'clock.

I write this as the rail bridge is closed for repair and we are enjoying the peace and quiet which is similar to last year when traffic ceased during the first lockdown.

It set me thinking about the sounds of our village in the past and what might have awoken our forebears. There would have been the pleasant sound of the horses moving through the village to the fields to reap, plough or mow or perhaps being ridden to market.

The sound of a cart being pulled by horses would have been quite singular and easily recognized. Carts and wagons would rattle and rumble and the timber would creak alongside the clink of the horse's tack and chains. I doubt if the carter did much whistling.

Depending on which part of the village you lived in, you would have heard the Blacksmith's hammer and the calls of folk walking to work and the sound of their hobnails crunching on any hard ground.

The womenfolk of the village would be keen to get their daily task of gloving underway and would have used the early morning daylight in summer and would work on doorsteps as they sewed. Not a noisy task but a chance to look out and say 'gad mornen' to anyone walking past.

The sounds of birds would have been very familiar. There were hedge loads of birds quarrelling and singing for their own space and territory and the variety and types would have meant a very tuneful dawn chorus. Today we have far fewer species in our hedgerows or gardens despite our efforts to feed them. The fields are not the places they were and the dawn chorus today is far quieter. It is a huge loss to the countryside.

Those living on Gadden Hill would have heard the sound of the stream running in front of their houses as it made its way to The Bottom. No doubt they were delighted when the stream was covered and The Bottom became drier. You can still see the high-level route that folk would have taken to avoid the mud. The route leaves the High Street before Well Cottage and heads across to the Village Hall. This unofficial but necessary route was closed off in 1898.

Enjoy the peace and quiet whilst you can.

Vicus

'Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.' – Lao Tzu

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From our County Councillor

The closure of the rail bridge at Finstock station has been the cause of much concern over the past few weeks. The work obviously needed to be done, but the total closure of the road for six weeks has caused considerable inconvenience, including to Highways, as this is a route used by gritting lorries. Highways officers asked Network Rail if the closure could be postponed to the spring and also whether the road could be partially closed but were told this was not possible. Fawler residents have seen a significant increase in traffic, especially along North Leigh Lane, as people have been using that route as a way to avoid the official diversion through Woodstock and Bladon.

There was particular concern that North Leigh Lane is used by Fawler residents as a walking route, and it is also an official cycle route. I was able to get pedestrian warning signs put up almost immediately, but getting signs diverting traffic away from the lane took a lot longer as we were dependent on Network Rail for this. But thanks to a very persistent officer we finally succeeded!

I reported in the last edition of *Finstock News* that I was working with the Parish Council to improve safety on the B4022 where the footpath emerges from Cornbury and I am very pleased to report that some much more visible signs have recently replaced the pedestrian warning signs on the road. I continue to work with the Parish Council to get the speed limit lowered.

Cllr Liz Leffman, 07741 073088,
liz.leffman@oxfordshire.gov.uk



News from the Parish Council

The report that has been delivered with the Finstock News summarises the data collected from the village survey undertaken towards the end of last year. The most significant finding is that views and values that emerged in previous surveys have re-surfaced again. For example, the clear support for a modest level of affordable housing development and the importance of key village facilities such as the hall and the shop.

Overall, the village is viewed very positively as a place to live and raise a family. Convenience, friendliness and natural beauty feature very strongly in comments. Criticism centres on traffic issues, such as speeding and lack of safe parking spaces.

Why do we continue with this survey every 3-4 years when the results are similar? The major reason is to provide a solid body of up-to-date evidence that protects the village from unwanted development as is happening in many places in the country.

It provides guidance to the PC in what direction our efforts and your council tax is best spent. One of the major financial commitments is paying off the loan from the District Council for the new village hall – one of the most valued assets amongst a large majority of villagers.

Ideas were put forward by a few that are simply unaffordable or outside the specific responsibilities of the PC. This can prove a frustration to respondents who feel their voice is not being heard. Please become involved with the PC by joining our monthly meetings on Zoom. You will be given your chance to put forward your ideas. If you wish to take a more active part, the PC will be delighted to hear from those who wish to be considered for standing for the council at the next election.

Finally, complaints still continue about dog poo on the path by the pub. Frankly, the council are at their wits end of what to do next. We have installed more bins but the nuisance continues. Installing cameras is expensive and intrusive. Villagers noting miscreants, particularly with a photo of the offenders, can be used by prosecuting authorities. Fines are severe.

Hywel Davies

'To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it'
- Confucius

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The district council has passed the budget with all party agreement in light of the pandemic

and the need to continue to work together to resolve the issues which we are still facing. However, climate change is as important as the pandemic



and the need to invest in green infrastructure to ensure that environmental concerns are addressed now with timely action. We need investment in solar and wind power; retrofitting not only in new housing but existing housing cannot come soon enough. The review of the district plan has to be progressed to ensure there is a green checklist on all new developments, which effectively means more robust and enforceable policies and planning guidelines that do not let developers off the hook. Equally, Thames Water, subject of much criticism, must invest more in our waterways so that flooding is not exacerbated by poor infrastructure and inadequate pumping stations. Building on the floodplains should

not be permitted.

'Twenty is plenty' is the scheme to reduce speed in and around our villages and is running in Churchill and Fawler as well as The Bartons. Both Liz Leffman and I have been supporting residents for this to happen as it does make a difference. If residents want signs we can supply these but please let us know in advance and we will get them to you.

Whilst the challenges ahead are great, working in partnership to get the best solutions irrespective of our political difference is the way forward and I will continue to represent you with that goal in mind.

Cllr Andy Graham

West Oxfordshire District Councillor
07908 832632

Details of key dates for residents to be aware of for the upcoming local elections on 6 May.

The key pieces of information are:
Registering to vote

Anyone who wishes to vote must be registered on the electoral register. The deadline for those who are not registered to make an application is **Monday 19 April**. For more information and to register see: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Postal voting

For anyone interested in voting by post this year they just need to make

sure they apply before **20 April 2021**. They can request a postal vote application form by visiting www.westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/elections-and-voting/register-to-vote/ We would encourage people to sign up to do this sooner rather than later.

Proxy voting

If a resident is unable to make it to the polling station, then they can nominate someone to be their proxy and cast their vote for them. The proxy needs to be a registered voter and able to attend the voter's own polling station. Applications for

proxy voting need to be sent to the District Council by no later than 5pm on **Tuesday 27 April**.

More information around the local elections for 2021 can be found at our website: www.westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/elections-and-voting/current-and-future-elections/ We will be sharing information via our social media on Facebook and Twitter. We would appreciate it if you could share these messages where you are able to.

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TRAVELLER'S TALES



In March 2013 I visited Cuba, somewhere I had always wanted to visit and I decided to do it before any changes came about because of a thawing of relations with America. Our first day tour of Havana was enough to show that the city's buildings were crumbling, with what would have once been

beautiful houses in a terrible state of repair.

We travelled around the country on the very poor, potholed roads in coaches made in North Korea with little or no suspension. We travelled west to the Vinales area and then down to the Bay of Pigs where they had a museum full of exhibits and propaganda about the failed invasion. From there we went to the colourful town of Trinidad and down to Santiago de Cuba via Camaguey. Here was a lot of evidence of the Castro-led invasion that started the Revolutionary War. On our journey back to Havana we stopped at Santa Clara, where the Revolutionary war officially ended and Che Guevara is buried in a massive mausoleum. We then had a few days in Havana doing the open bus tour, at great speed, visiting the Museum of Revolution and the Hotel Nacional de Cuba where all the great and good used to stay in pre-revolution days. Drinking Mojitos in the gardens overlooking the sea was a very pleasant experience. We were taken to a cigar factory and a rum factory - each traditional tourist stops and our guide was very keen to answer questions about life under the Castros (Fidel's brother Raul was in charge then). They were understandably very proud of their literacy rate and health service but clearly the whole economy was suffering because of sanctions. Our meals mainly consisted of rice, beans and chicken virtually everywhere but there was lots of lovely fresh fruit. Customer service was more or less non-existent and in general the locals not involved in the tourist trade seemed indifferent to us.

It was interesting to visit a country that still used old steam tractors to harvest the sugar crop and whose children and teenagers weren't in the thrall of mobile phones and the internet. I wonder how much has changed in the seven years since I visited?

Deborah Jackson



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Friends of Finstock School

There's not a lot to report from FoFS this time around, other than to thank the organisers of and participants in the splendid Plough Quiz & Curry Night - which, after donations, raised a brilliant total of £140. Curry and questions were excellent and much fun was had by all thanks to the wonder of Zoom. To find out about the next one, please visit and 'like' our Facebook page to be kept in the loop: [Facebook.com/FriendsOfFinstockSchool](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfFinstockSchool). 2021 certainly looks like being a lean fundraising year for FoFS until we can get back out there and celebrate together whilst fundraising. Do please remember that donations to our TotalGiving page are gratefully received at any time: www.totalgiving.co.uk/charity/friends-of-finstock-school. Physical donations can be dropped off in the quarantine box at the school.

You can also donate when shopping online by using the Easyfundraising website or app - just search 'Friends of Finstock School'. If you fancy organising or suggesting a new digital or 'meatspace' FoFS fundraiser, we are always open to ideas from the wider community as well as from school, staff and kids. Just send us an email: fofs2020@gmail.com. Stay safe and see you soon!

Su Jordan



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Finstock Unplugged - Jan-Feb sessions

Unfortunately, we had to do without Rachel in January; there were problems with Zoom and despite our best efforts, she couldn't attend. Although we missed her, we had a good number of attendees who entertained us with a great variety of music, traditional and modern. Lara and Nancy, singer-songwriters who join us online from Texas, are now well established in our group and add authentic Americana to our musical mix. This month's earworm came from Lara, with her 'Set Me Free Waltz' <https://soundcloud.com/l-l-straughan/10-set-me-free-waltz-mp3>. Somehow, we'll have to find a way to keep Lara and Nancy on board whenever 'live' meetings return at The Plough.

This transatlantic enthusiasm mustn't be misinterpreted as any indication that we take our more local musicians for granted! Although Mandy Woods now only visits occasionally to remind us of her thoughtful, well-crafted songs, and many of our members are too 'Zoomed out' to join us online, we are fortunate in having highly skilled singer-songwriters like Jim Driscoll and Brock and Vixen as regulars, not to mention, when able to join us, Finstock's own Rachel F. And it's not just the songs. Brock and Vixen's instrumentals, such as 'Saddle the Pony', on accordion and guitar, are always a highlight and in 'gallery' view it's fun to see the rest of us swaying rhythmically to their playing, albeit slightly out of sync because of the latency! Among our number we also boast some fine voices – take a bow, Mandy C., Simon and Rosie C. The latter two also (independently) both compose their own songs and provide original tunes to existing texts, such as Rosie's beautiful tune to Hardy's 'The Darkling Thrush' and Claire, besides being a multi-instrumentalist, is also beginning to perform her own compositions.

Fortunately, there was no problem with Zoom in February. Over a dozen performers arrived, a good number for an online 'meet', and one which enabled everyone to perform three songs during the evening if they wished. Rachel returned and inspired us to feel positive, since fortunately, whatever else happens, 'we cannot cancel spring'. Mandy and Patrick were in excellent form and performed both separately and together, albeit in alternate verses. It was great to hear Mandy using her 'squeezebox' to good effect, while Patrick switched smoothly between guitar and banjo. Dave O. popped up to give us a great new original song, only to disappear again before I could quiz him about it. Gosh darn, he's as elusive as ever!

Brock and Vixen played 'The Atholl Highlanders', after which Brock switched from accordion to guitar to treat us to Vixen's touching Minster Lovell ballad 'Where is the Bride?' and 'You're the Only One'. Jim offered his customary, versatile mix of established songs and his own material, which this month included his philosophical 'The River'. Simon was in fine voice, performing songs by Christy Moore and Ewan McColl. Claire played piano for a gentle jazz improvisation on 'Michelle', later

changing to guitar accompaniment for her songs.

From across the pond, and in a remarkably positive mood considering that she has had to cope with burst pipes and no running water as a result of the Texas big freeze, Nancy performed three of her original songs, including her haunting 'Winter' song. Last but certainly not least, we were delighted to welcome Ted B for the first time, and I'm grateful that he introduced me to the work of Chris Smither through a skilful version of 'Maybe I was happier Blue.' We hope that Ted will visit us again!

Who knows, maybe we'll be back at the Plough soon!

Ginnie Redston

STOP PRESS from Finstock Unplugged!

Delighted to announce that one of our core musicians, Jim Driscoll, has been made Creative Director of Folk Weekend, Oxford. Find out more here: www.folkweekendoxford.co.uk - where further updates will be added as events are confirmed.

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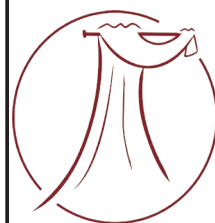
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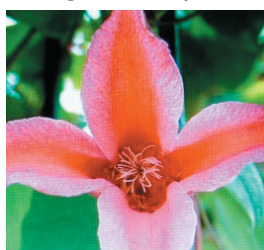
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Joys of growing Clematis

In late March, *Clematis alpina* announces its arrival, with an explosion of hundreds of nodding flowers. I grow four varieties together on an obelisk to produce a continuous display, each colour following the other in hues of blue, pink and white. They are strong growing, amazingly tough varieties, that can withstand temperatures down to minus 40. They naturally grow up in the mountains, hence they never need pruning, thriving on neglect! They can be grown up arches, at the base of a large wall or shed and trained to cover it.

Clematis jackmanii was introduced in 1862 from the Jackman Nursery in Woking, this was the first of the modern large-flowered hybrids. It is a climber which produces masses of large velvety violet-purple blooms, and is still among the most familiar climbers seen in gardens, appearing in early May. It is ideal for growing in a large container, supported by trellis or garden canes; it copes well in a north-facing site. The Jackman family are one of the best-known names in the history of Clematis breeding, operating over a huge time span from 1763-1967.



Another excellent Clematis which deserves a space in anyone's garden is *Princess Diana* with its distinctive deep pink flowers, resembling tulips in their shape. I encourage it to scramble over and through other plants appearing from mid-summer to mid-autumn. I trim this back to 6" at the end of the year as new shoots will appear from below ground in spring.



In late September, *Clematis tangutica* lights up my lilac tree, with a cascade of dainty bell-shaped yellow flowers and fern-like foliage. All clematis have fantastic seed heads after flowering, creating additional interest for some time and make a good feature in flower arrangements.

The best time to plant clematis is in late spring or early autumn, when the soil is moist and warm, but not too hot. Dig a hole about 12" deep, fork over the base of the hole and place the plant carefully in the hole making sure that the top of the root ball is buried about three inches (8cm) deeper than it was in its pot (this is a precaution against 'clematis wilt', as dormant buried buds will produce new growth), infill with a rich moisture-retentive soil, and cut back to six inches, to encourage strong growth, water in with two gallons of water. They're hungry feeders, so add plenty of organic material when planting and feed with a high potash fertiliser in summer.

Why not try producing extra plants by taking inter-nodal cuttings in summer, or growing a new variety from seed. Happy gardening,

Robert Bigwood



How to get plants in the right light

Be aware that our eyes are not very good at measuring light levels. Use a free light meter app, and you will see that the light level at a window can be double that just a metre away from it.

Most houseplants are varieties that grow on the rainforest floor – so they are not adapted for bright, direct light (within about a metre of a window). Exceptions are cacti and other succulents, and some species from the Mediterranean, such as bougainvillea and pelargoniums.

Within 1-2 metres of a window is usually the sweet spot for "bright but indirect" light that doesn't burn leaves, which suits most houseplants, particularly north facing windows and east or west facing ones except at the height of summer.

South facing windows (where it is usually too bright) are about right in winter months.

Few species are happy in low, indirect light (more than two metres from a window), but aspidistras and zamioculcas can tolerate relatively dark corners.

Source – *The Observer*



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