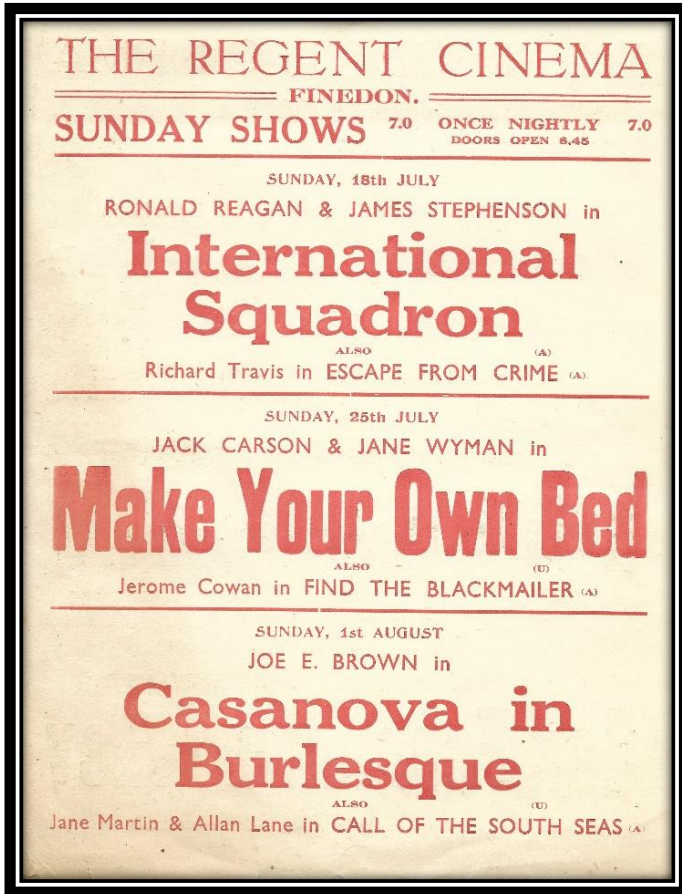


Finedon Local History Society



*Finedon Regent Cinema Advertising Poster, 1948.
(See pages 17 & 19)*

Newsletter
September 2018

Since Our Last Newsletter...

We would like to thank all those who provided names (and corrections!) of the people in the photographs we published in the May edition of the newsletter; it was very much appreciated.

The Society's continued use of the Friends' Meeting House is still in doubt. Earlier this year the Northamptonshire Quakers requested the use of the Meeting House during one Sunday in May. On hearing of our situation, the Clerk was very keen for their organisation to consider purchasing the building due to its historical significance. When the Clerk took up the matter with his Trustees and Area Finance Committee his proposal was not supported. In the meantime, we will continue to use the building until the owners decide their way forward with the sale and disposal of the building. The committee have looked at two other buildings in the town for a potential use as a "base". Our request was declined at one site whilst the second site was not considered ideally suitable. In the meantime, the committee will continue working on this pressing challenge.

Welcome to our newly co-opted committee member James Sheehan who recently volunteered to join our small band. More places on the committee are available, ready and waiting!

Mick & Carolyn

Gift Aid

Gift Aid is a regular and worthwhile source of income to the Society, for which we can receive 25p for every £1 donated by **tax payers**, including your annual FLHS membership subscription, if a Gift Aid form has been signed. Many of our members have already signed up for Gift Aid, for which we are very grateful.

Members who have not yet signed up will have a Gift Aid Declaration form included with this newsletter. Those who receive their newsletter by email will have a Gift Aid Declaration sent as an attachment. If you can take up the option of supporting the Society by Gift Aid as a taxpayer, at no cost to yourself, then please complete the form and return it to Rachel Terry, our Treasurer, at Mill Cottage, Finedon Road, Finedon NN9 5NQ. Alternatively, it may be given to a committee member at our monthly meetings.

Humphry Repton at Finedon Hall

Stephen Radley

This year marks the bicentenary of the death of Humphry Repton (1752-1818). He is widely seen as the successor of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783), the major landscape gardener of the eighteenth century. By the time Repton died he had helped change landscape design to accommodate the smaller estates of the gentry and the villas of the growing middle class. His designs sometimes included formal flower gardens and paved the way for the Victorian fashion for bedding. He wasn't alone in encouraging the trend but, especially because of his writings, his ideas were developed in the nineteenth century.

He had a novel way of working. He realised that by drawing a 'before' and 'after' sketch he could show what a big difference his design would make. He showed the 'after' view with a movable flap that he called a 'slide'. He sold his client a 'Red Book', so called because they were usually bound in a red cover. The books contained a description of his proposals, a plan, some sketches and at least one 'slide'. He didn't often oversee the implementation of his proposals so sometimes the client would only use the parts of the plan that they liked. The Red Book also became an object of desire and a status symbol.

Sir William Dolben Bt. (1727-1814) inherited Finedon Hall in 1756. He married Judith English a wealthy heiress in 1771 and by the end of the decade he was improving the Hall, no doubt using some of the £30,000 she brought with her. In the 1780s Sir William and his son John English turned their attention to their parkland. They asked Humphry Repton to advise them on the layout of their pleasure ground and parkland in 1793 and he duly delivered a Red Book later that year. It still exists but it's in private hands and not available to researchers.

They weren't inactive in the meantime. Figure 1 is an engraving by Jacob Schnabbellie who died in 1792. The drawing is pretty accurate and everything that can be seen in this engraving was in place before Repton visited.

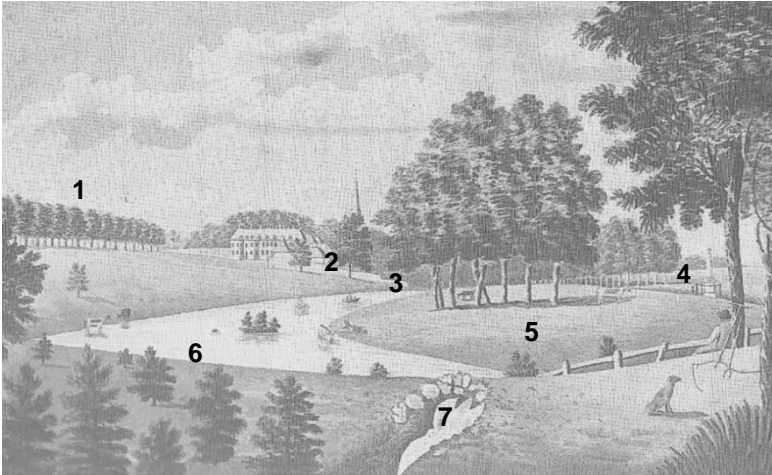


Figure 1: Drawing by Schnabbeli, c.1790
 'View of Finedon Hall from South-West'
 (reproduced with permission of Northamptonshire Record Office)

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|------------------------|
| Key | 1. Holly Walk | 2. Kitchen Garden |
| | 3. Shrubbery Walk | 4. Queen Edith's Cross |
| | 5. The Island | 6. The Dam |
| | 7. The Cascade | |

A letter from Sir William to John English from 1789 asked:

'Pray has J. Warner finished the Dam, and will the water be pent up high enough to make a perfect fence: How does it look to the Eye, and what effect has it on the Shrubbery walk: it must, I shd think, very much improve and ease the rise of the hill up to the Root House; I shd like to know whether the Holly hedge makes a good shoot this year: Give my love to Mrs D and tell her that I shop to bring her some African seeds from Mr. Clarkson's Collection.' [NRO D/44]

When Repton arrived the area west of the kitchen garden (roughly where the public footpath is now) was already landscaped and he didn't suggest any changes there. He commented on four parts of the landscape as shown in figure 2



Figure 2: A detail from a c. 1808 Enclosure Map (reproduced with permission of Northamptonshire Record Office Map 585)

1. He thought the [old] parsonage and school house were too close to the Hall and should be moved. He realised that St. Mary's, which he also thought too close, had to stay where it was! The Dolbens left them where they were.
2. The two avenues are a remnant of an earlier formal landscape (see Figure 3). Repton used these avenues to illustrate the contrast between 'ancient gardening' and 'modern' taste in his book *Sketches and hints on landscape gardening* (1794). Reluctant to remove too many trees he suggested thinning the avenue between the bridge and the hall on the southern approach but leaving the rest. Holly Walk and Avenue Road follow the line of the East-West avenue. This advice was probably followed.
3. The 2-acre walled kitchen garden, stables and offices obscured the view of the lake from the Hall. Repton said they should be moved to the north-west of Hall, where they were moved about 40 years later.

4. Across the Town Brook from the Hall Repton wanted to hide some small houses. To make a good view he proposed some trees in the field below the church (foreground), a lake between the south avenue bridge and Stocks Hill (middle ground) and some trees and shrubs on the far side of the lake (background). The Dolbens were content with one lake.



Fig 3: Looking north along the south avenue to the Hall

Researchers are realising that a growing number of estates where Repton was consulted made very few alterations to their pleasure grounds and parklands after his visit. Sir William and John English Dolben removed some trees from the south avenue and may have added to their shrubberies. But Finedon, immortalised in Repton's first gardening book, is another location where the owners were probably more interested in owning a Red Book than they were in spending more money on the garden. Later in the nineteenth century there were more changes when the kitchen garden was moved, but that's another story.

Stephen Radley is a mature, part-time PhD student at Nottingham University. His thesis has the working title 'The cultural geography of the designed landscapes of Northamptonshire gentry between 1750 and 1830'. Stephen has previously worked for the Durham Diocese and the Civil Service.

The Log Books of the Finedon Infant National School 1902 – 1931

The Early Years

Mick Britton

Finedon Infant National School formed part of the Girls School, in what is now the Charity House, a private home in Church Street. The Infant National School began in 1839 with Mrs Mary Ann McAlister as its first headmistress. The school closed in 1931 when this school and the Infants section of the Mulso School, in Wellingborough Road, combined and moved into the new Infant School in Orchard Road.

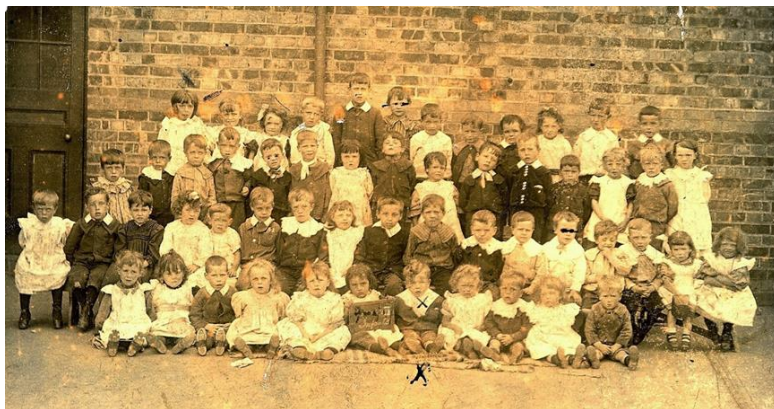
The Society is fortunate in having access to two school log books (1902–1923 and 1924–1931) from the Infant National School. Log books were a requirement of the Education Act, ... *“kept by the principal teacher, who is required to enter in it from time to time such events as the introduction of new books, apparatus or courses of instruction...the visits of managers (the forerunners of our present-day school governors), absence or illness...any special circumstances affecting the school, that may, for the sake of reference...deserve to be recorded”*.

As primary sources these two log books present a revealing and fascinating insight into the day-to-day events of the life of the school in times past.

The first entry dated 1st December 1902 reads, *“The school year begins today. Twenty-two boys and sixteen girls have been promoted to the Mulso Mixed School”*. At that time there were 7 staff: Jane McAlister, Certified Mistress; Alice Lewis, Article 50 (Holder of the Queens Scholarship Examination); Emily Cottingham, Article 68 (Additional Female Untrained Teacher); Frances West, ex Pupil Teacher, Article 50; Alison Dawson, Article 68; Florence Partridge, Candidate and Margaret Desborough, Monitoress.

Four days later it states, *“A small attendance this week owing partly to the promotions and partly due to a severe frost. Numbers on books = 165. Average for the week = 102.7”*. This represents a 62% attendance across the whole school; the issue of poor attendance, mainly due to illness and weather conditions are a common theme throughout both log books. By comparison, a

school today with attendance figures of less than 92% is deemed to be failing.



*Class IV (Babies Class) c1901
Finedon Local History Society Photographic Archives*

On 19th December 1902 “Francis West and Alice Dawson absent this week as they are attending the King’s Scholarship Examinations at Bedford”. Alice Dawson subsequently passed and was appointed as an Assistant Mistress at St Barnabas Infant School, Wellingborough, leaving Finedon on 30th January 1903.

On 6th March 1903 “Miss Mary E Addis (formerly a Pupil Teacher in this school) began her duties as an Assistant Mistress – Date of Birth March 15th, 1879”.

“A holiday was given today (1st May 1903) it being May Day and many of the children wishing to go round (sic) the town with garlands”. On the same day Florence E. Partridge was recorded as having “passed her Board of Education Candidates Examination and will be admitted as a Pupil Teacher...apprenticed for three years”.

The children were subject to regular testing and examinations as an entry from 19th June 1903 states, “Examined the Babies in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic” followed on the 26th with “Finished the examination of the Babies Class this week”.

At the end of November of each year the Log Book records the Scheme of Instruction for the following 12 months commencing on 1st December. There were four classes in the school: Classes I, II, III and IV. Class IV being the “Babies Class”. Their Scheme of Instruction for 1904 included:

Reading - Names and sounds of the letters of the alphabet.

Word – building of words of two or more letters.

Writing – Writing from the blackboard the letter i, u, n, m.

Counting – Addition and subtraction up to five by means of objects.

Object Lessons – Hen, Duck, Owl, Cat, Dog, Sheep, Lead Pencil, Fork and Spoon, Pin and Needle, A Book, Coal.

Conversational Lessons – My Body, My Clothes. At Home, Spring Flowers, Postman, Carpenter, Blacksmith, Setting the Tea Table.

Occupations – Needle Threading, Brick Building, Stick Laying.

It was not all work and no play as pupils were given a day off each July to attend Kettering Feast plus another day “*on account of the Church Sunday School Treat*”. Additionally, the school closed for one week each September for the Finedon Feast. Both events are recorded in the log books on an annual basis.

Another annual event was the visit to Finedon Hall. An entry from 8th September 1904 records, “*At 3.30 the children and teachers, by the invitation of Miss Mackworth Dolben, walked in the Hall garden. The children picked up chestnuts and went home delighted at 4.15*”. This event is recorded every year until 1911.

In this period, before mass immunisation and, what would be now considered unsanitary living, the spread of infectious disease could have a devastating impact on the school and the local community. This is highlighted in an entry from 28th October 1905. “*The school was closed this day, for one month, under order of the Sanitary Inspector on an account of the epidemic of Scarlet Fever in the place. Two children, attending this school have died.*” The school reopened on 27th November and there are no reports of any other deaths of school pupils.

On the 28th February 1906 Jane McAlister “*Resigned the Headship of this School*” and on the following day Miss Rosa Poppleton signed the log book and recorded “*Commenced my*

From Our Archives. That's Entertainment!

The St Mary's Players



Production title and date unknown

Finedon Church Sunday School Entertainment Society



Dick Whittington (?)



Sinbad the Sailor, 1958

We only have a few of the names of the people in the photographs. If members can identify any faces, we would be pleased to hear from you. The images are from Mary Shipton and the late Derek Richardson.

duties as Head Teacher in this school". The school changed its name on 1st April 1906 as the log book records, *"For official purposes this school will be designated in future: - Finedon Infants Endowed C of E School"*. The entry was signed by the Rev G W Paul. From this date onwards, there are annual "Reports of Religious Instruction". The first, dated, 23rd November 1906 records, *"Infants of all ages are bright and not at all shy. They answer readily and accurately and their repetitions distinctly"*.

Reports of the illness of children and the subsequent very poor attendance levels is a main theme for 1907. On April 22nd the school *"receive notice that there is an epidemic of measles"*. Two days later Dr Burland visited the school *"to see about the health of the children"*. Other recorded outbreaks of illness this year affecting the children included mumps, whooping cough and chicken pox. *"There is much sickness amongst the children so that the attendance is much reduced"*, the log book records on 30th November.

The H.M. Inspectors report for 1908 following his visit on 17th September begins in a positive way, *"It is pleasant to note the energy and enthusiasm with which the class teachers of this school do their work. The scholars are doing well"*. The tone then changes, *"Attention is drawn to the terms of the report after the inspection of 21st December 1905. Nothing has been done to remedy the situation..."* This relates to what would now be considered today a serious breach of health and safety. *"The stoves (in the teaching areas) have no proper flues but long stove pipes going through the roof. Inlets for fresh air needed and the classrooms require apex ventilation"*. Between the years 1905 and 1908 there are regular log book entries detailing the effects of poor and inadequate ventilation to both staff and the children. From 22nd January 1907, for example, *"The little classroom is not fit to be used today due to smoke"*.

This article will continue in the next edition of the newsletter looking at the years surrounding the First World War.

Finedon Hall and the National Trust? – Not To Be!

This article has been written following information kindly received from society member Janet Schmelzer (nee Dunkley, formerly of Mulso Road) who now lives in New Berlin, in the state of New York. Janet came across a reference to Finedon Hall in a book written by James Lees-Milne entitled, "Ancestral Voices, 1942 - 43", published in 1975.

James Lees-Milne was, from 1936, the secretary of the National Country Houses Committee of the National Trust. The National Trust had only recently, at this time, adopted the conservation of country houses as one of its purposes. Lees-Milne's task was to help compile a list of the houses most worthy of preservation, approach the owners and visit such of them as were potentially interested in arrangements with the National Trust.

At the start of the Second World War his work came to an end. In the spring of 1940, Lees-Milne was commissioned into the Irish Guards only to be seriously injured in a bomb blast during the London Blitz in October of the same year. Following 12 months of hospital treatment he was discharged from the army and took up his previous role with the National Trust.

Following the death of Miss Ellen Mackworth-Dolben in 1912 Finedon Hall passed through several owners who did nothing or very little to maintain the property. At one point it found its way into the ownership of the Bishop of Portsmouth "for the benefit of a diocesan scheme". Some renovation work did commence with the intention of using the Hall as a rest home for retired clergy - this was never finished. Then, in 1936, Finedon Hall was sold to Major Greaves of Thingdon Cottage (brother of the Rev. Greaves, Vicar of Finedon, 1911 – 1928). Major Greaves kept the Hall empty until it was used by the Free French army during the war.

From 1942 to 1945, Lees-Milne describes and documents, in detail, in his famous wartime diaries (published in four books from 1975 onwards) his visits to country houses during those challenging and difficult days of wartime.

An extract from Lees-Milne's diary entry for Finedon Hall, taken from *Ancestral Voices*, 1942 - 43 reads: -

Tuesday, 6th January 1942

...(I) motored with the sun in my eyes straight to Finedon Hall. The windscreen was so splashed with thawing slush that I could barely see. At intervals I was obliged to stop and wipe the glass with a rag and spit.

Major Greaves lives alone in the cottage (Thingdon Cottage) which he thinks wonderfully antique. It was built in 1850. He would not get down to business – with me - despite my prompting. Finally, I persuaded him to show me round the big house. It is interesting in being the childhood home of Digby Dolben, the poet school-friend of Robert Bridges.

The colour of the ironstone of which Finedon Hall is built the most beautiful imaginable, being deep orange, sprinkled with a powdery grey film of lichen. The Hall, once Elizabethan, was dreadfully altered about 1850 and is not suitable for the Trust. It is unfurnished and at present houses Free French troops. They were most offhand and rude to the poor Major, who I could see was a great tribulation to them, constantly prowling around and extolling his own property. In the dining room was a central stove, gothicky, and of the period...The grounds sad, the elm avenue disordered. The place neglected and pitiable...I was not sorry to leave.

The opportunity for Finedon Hall to become a National Trust visitor attraction on the tourist route close to 80 years later has passed us by!

Note: Further details of the life and work of James Lees-Milne can be found online at www.jamesleesmilne.com

Finedon's 18th Century Industry

Carolyn Smith

In his recollections of Finedon in the 1830s, Joseph Harlock said that industries that were in decline in the town at that time were weaving, dried apples and mat making. Before the time of decennial censuses, it is far more difficult to identify trades people as there are few sources available, and those often rely on the whim of the compiler as to whether an occupation was included. However, I have been investigating the various records that are easily available and have been able to draw up a picture of these trades, and hopefully most of the Finedonians involved up to the industries demise during the 19th century.

Mat Making

Rushes have been used to cover floors from at least medieval times to cover both stone and earth floors. The rushes would be removed along with all the dirt and refuse and replaced on a regular basis. By Tudor times the rushes had begun to be dried and rush mat making had become well established, it is possible that this was when mat making first began in Finedon, as an enterprising individual identified an increase in local demand from most levels of society. The industry was certainly established in Finedon within one hundred years as the first evidence for mat making in Finedon is found in the Burton Latimer Overseers of Poor records, when in 1656 Margery Peters was apprenticed to John Dickensce, mat maker of Finedon.

Mat makers appear to have been involved in the collection and processing of the rushes before they actually made the mats. The rushes were harvested at the height of the growing season from the river beds, probably the Ise brook, between June and August. They were put into bundles and then stacked into stooks in an open space, so they would quickly dry. Although it is not known for certain where the drying grounds were Harlock said they would be stacked in the streets of the town to dry. After the rushes had dried they would be stored in a loft until required. The weather conditions during drying produced different shades of colour in the finished product.

A bundle of dried rushes would be selected, and final preparation work would be done. The rushes needed to be flexible, so they

were damped and then the spine of the rushes was broken either by hand or with a small mangle type machine. The mat maker would then choose reeds of a similar length, thickness and shade before he began work on the first plait. The most common plait was the nine-end flat weave which produced a length of matting approximately 3 inches wide. When the end of the first rushes was reached further rushes would be worked into the plait until the required length of matting was reached. A number of plaits would then be sewed together, with twine, to get the required width.



*Rushes drying at Islip after being harvested from the Nene
Image from "Islip Northamptonshire – Over 100 Years Recalled in
Photographs". The late Allan Gray.*

Mat making was a significant industry in Finedon through the 18th century, and Finedon may well have been the second largest producer in the county during at least part of the century. In the 1777 militia list there were only 11 places in the county with mat makers between the ages of 18 and 45 years. Of these 9 of the villages only had one or two mat makers, Earls Barton had 15 and Finedon 4 mat makers. With the onset of industrialisation mat making declined as a "home based" industry and Isaac Ward, the last Finedon mat maker died in October 1871.

The evidence suggests that mat making was very much a family industry. Four different families had mat making in several generations. The Dicksons/ons family died out before the industry itself died, but the Quittance, Clapham and Desborough families

were all still mat making well into the 19th century, although younger generations did not follow their fathers into the trade the older ones remained as mat makers until their deaths.

Facsimile copies of "Recollections of Finedon in the Eighteen-Thirties" by Joseph Harlock (born Finedon 1830) are available from the Society priced £2.

Memories of the Finedon Regent Cinema

We recently added several advertising posters and photographs, from the 1940/50s of the former Regent Cinema, kindly donated by Tom Watts, onto our Facebook page which were well received.

I sent some of those images to Janet Schmelzer in the US in an email entitled, "The Day President Reagan Came To Finedon". They bought back many memories for Janet, who replied.

Watts Cinema – their slogan used to be "What's On At Watts's" and I recall seeing their van (often driven by Marjorie Watts) delivering the reels between the three cinemas: Finedon, Irthingborough and Burton Latimer I believe. Ah yes, I remember it well and certainly was a patron for a couple of years perhaps at about age 11. Two friends and I often used to go 3 times a week, so I remember a great many of those old movies and still watch some of them on TV (and wishing they'd show more old British films). So yes, I no doubt saw Ronald Reagan in 1948 and surely, we knew him as Reagan back then.

Believe it or not the front seats (benches) cost 5 pence and that's how we kids could afford to be such regular customers. Next came "the nines", 9 pence which I think I graduated to on occasion but the next few shilling rows were too expensive, and I think were often taken up by "courting couples." I remember a Mrs Pugh (her granddaughter Janet was at school, though younger than me) used to work there and hollered at us when the film occasionally broke down temporarily and the kids would holler and catcall "Put a penny in the gas" or words to that effect. Occasionally the curtains wouldn't open when the movie started and Mrs Pugh had to do the necessary...while the kids hollered.

I am sure some of our members have very similar memories!

Royal British Legion Finedon & Irthlingborough Branch



The Legion will be holding an exhibition of their history and work at the Friends' Meeting House on the two weekends of 6th/7th and 13th/14th October between 2pm and 4pm.

The exhibition is being created by Society (and RBL) members Michael Shipton and Karen Eames supported by Pete Eames, the branch chair.

The Finedon branch was formed in 1922 and it continues to provide practical support and advice to serving and ex-serving members (and their widows and widowers) of HM Forces.

If anyone has at home any artefacts such as: letters, badges, certificates or photographs relating to Finedon British Legion that may be borrowed for the duration of the exhibition they would be very pleased to hear from you. If so, please call Karen on 07434 133100.



Finedon Branch of the British Legion. 1933

More Photographs From Our Archives



*Regent Cinema. 1960
Bert Hurst, Mrs Hurst, Joe Munday, Gladys Blunt, Frank Blunt*



*RC Tann Builders, Finedon Parade c1950
The Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe Tea Party*

2018 MEETING PROGRAMME

24th September

Gary Shaeffer

An American Eye-View of Northamptonshire.

22nd October

Delia Thomas

The Powder Treason – The Events Surrounding the Gunpowder Plot.

26th November

Annual General Meeting

FINAL CHANCE



This year's exhibition, "Finedon Shops – Past and Present" had 220 plus visitors and it proved to be very popular with many positive comments recorded in the visitor's book.

Thank you to all those involved in setting up this exhibition, particularly Michael Shipton and Karen Eames for their hard work.

Whilst the exhibition is now closed at weekends it will remain available to view on Tuesday's between 10am and 12 noon until 11th September.

It will also be open for one evening on Wednesday 5th September from 7.00pm – 8.30pm. We look forward to seeing you.

www.finedonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk



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