

# RETROSPECTIVES



**'Up the 'Rec'**

Crowd scene at Finedon United v West Bromwich Albion Colts  
Finedon Recreation Ground, Easter Tuesday, 30th March 1948  
Photograph donated by Bert Darnell



**The Journal of  
FINEDON  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**September 2022**

## Hold The Front Page!

**Mick Britton**

The first society newsletter, consisting of two sides of A4 paper, was published in the summer of 2002. Over the years the newsletter expanded by increasing the number of pages and adding short articles, reports of previous speakers' meetings and photographs from our archive. In essence, it remained a newsletter, with the emphasis on 'news'.

Early in 2018 I was asked to take on the role of editor of the newsletter. Working with Carolyn we began to develop the newsletter further and focused on researching and writing a wide variety of Finedon-related local history events and topics for publication. We have also been very fortunate that several individuals, both members and non-members, have kindly written articles for publication.

A fellow committee member once made a complimentary comment that, in her opinion, *'the newsletter has become more like a journal'* This sowed the seed for changing the name of the newsletter to something more appropriate to the way in which the publication has evolved during the twenty years, since those first two pages of A4 appeared in 2002.

Taking all of this into account, and after sharing and discussing these observations with my fellow committee members, I have worked with Rick Buckby on a new design, including the Obelisk on the front cover. The old title 'Newsletter' has now been replaced with 'Retrospectives'. Whilst the front cover and title may have changed the content will remain similar to that contained in recent issues.

The next edition of 'Retrospectives' will appear in January and there will be further issues in May and September as has been the case in recent years.

For those of you with internet access and who wish to 'dip into the past', the full set of society newsletters, from 2002, can be found on our website at [finedonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk/society/newsletters](http://finedonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk/society/newsletters).

Articles from society members for publication in future issues of Retrospectives would be most welcome, and I would be happy to discuss this further with any potential writers out there.

I can be contacted on 07988 065010 or by email at [finedonlhs@outlook.com](mailto:finedonlhs@outlook.com).

## 'Up the Rec'

Carolyn Smith

The recreation ground was purchased by Finedon Urban District Council (FUDC) for the benefit of local residents in 1922. Prior to the purchase of the Wellingborough Road site, several different privately owned fields were used by the town's inhabitants when large public gatherings were held. For example, for the Diamond Jubilee in 1897 it was proposed that the Hall courtyard be used, along with Mr Robinson's (probably the Gate House) field next to the Hall grounds for the sports. However, in the end the FUDC decided that no town event would be held to celebrate the Jubilee and it was left to individual organisations to make their own arrangements. These included: the Gladstone Club organising a tea and using a field provided by Mr Hawthorne for sports and dancing. The Conservative Club had a picnic, sports and dancing in an orchard provided by the Misses Hill and Presland.

During the early 1900s, Miss Ellen Mackworth Dolben rented out the current cricket and Tainty fields to the FUDC as a recreation ground for the town. Unfortunately, following the sale of the Hall Estate in 1912, this arrangement ended as the land had been purchased for ironstone extraction by the Ebbw Vale Steel, Iron and Coal Company. However, quite quickly Mr Knight's field in Orchard Road, (the present site of Hulatt and Barnes garage) became the place where, along with Dolben Square, outdoor meetings, national celebrations, hospital parades and the like were hosted.

By June 1921 the quarry on the old recreation field had been exhausted and the Dolben Cricket Club seems to have had an informal agreement with Ebbw Vale to resume its use as a cricket pitch. The Wellingborough News indicates that Finedon youngsters had assumed that they also had a right to use the field, and this may have spurred FUDC into looking at options to formally rent or purchase land for a town recreation ground.

At their meeting in August 1921 the FUDC set up a committee to consider the provision of a recreation ground. On the 2nd September the committee had nothing to report, but the Vicar suggested that the cricket club and the council could share the 'old field', although this would need an agreement with Ebbw Vale Company, and the eviction of Mr Wallis, the current tenant. The Wellingborough News of 30th September 1921 also commented on the progress being made, albeit slowly, '*...there is a strong probability that the old field, or part of it, will be diverted to its former use. Of course, during the summer it has been freely used as a recreation ground, and one would*

*imagine by the numbers using it for cricket on some evenings that it was still the recreation ground.'*

All then went quiet, apart from the rumour machine around the town of underhand goings on regarding the project. Early in January 1922, it was reported that FUDC proposed to purchase from Mr Leonard of Northfield Farm, a field alongside the Wellingborough Road, for £1,600, with the council having access to the field sometime during the next two years, as the current tenant had a lease until 25th March 1923.

On 3rd February 1922, the Wellingborough News expressed the hope that they would have been able to report some progress. However, the only information available was that the FUDC had had a special meeting to discuss the issue without notifying the press. At the January full council meeting it was confirmed that the FUDC had agreed the purchase. No other detail was given bar a suggestion from Mr Knight that if the field were named after Mr Leonard, he may be willing to knock £100 of the asking price. However, the gentleman himself was not enamoured with immortalising his name at that price. The February meeting confirmed that a deposit of £150 had been paid, but nothing further could now be done until the Ministry had agreed the loan required.

Suddenly, in mid-April, opposition in the shape of Finedon Property Owners' Association, to the purchase of Leonard's field began to be expressed. Their prime objection was, *'...on the sole grounds of expense. It was made clear that they are not by any means against a recreation field, but they were decidedly against a loan of £1,800 to pay for one.'* In May, while this debate continued, Mr Knight agreed that his field in Orchard Road would be available to be used again for the Finedon Hospital Fete, with the usual parade, stalls and sports.

To try to bring clarity to the situation regarding the purchase as to whether too high a price was being paid, the Wellingborough News of 2nd June 1922, provided the following information, *'...the Housing site was bought at 1 shilling per yard only because, as Mr Knight proved at the Council meeting, the late Mr [Walter] Neilson had a soft spot in his heart for his old town. The cemetery site, on a by-road, cost 1 shilling and a penny per yard. The recreation ground field, splendidly situated on the main road, and with iron underneath it, is offered at 1 shilling and a ha'penny per yard. The public can judge whether or not it is too dear. Other places, it is possible might be got at a cheaper price, but to all those earnest public-spirited people who are suggesting this field and that field as a cheaper recreation ground, one might say: Why on earth didn't you come forward with your suggestions during the years in which the Council were looking for just such a field? Whatever one may think of the*

*Council's decision, one must remember that for them it was no case of choosing between one field and another, but simply of taking or leaving one.'*



Plot 14. Leonard's field, from the 1912 Finedon Hall Estate sale map

At the council meeting on the 26th June, it was reported that a delegation from the Council had been to the Ministry. The Ministry had initially wanted the Council to use leftover housing land as a recreation ground, but the Council representatives had argued that this land was already in use as allotments and should remain that way. The Ministry agreed and sanctioned a loan of £1,607 over a period of 60 years. The clerk to the FUDC was instructed to negotiate the loan which resulted in a less than twopenny rate.

Further information to justify the purchase price agreed was provided by Councillors Holley and Minney: Mr Leonard had been offered £500 just for half an acre fronting the Wellingborough Road, and the minerals at the rear of the field were valued at 1 shilling and 2 pence a yard.

At this late stage in the process Councillor Holley said that Mr Knight was willing to offer to the Council the opportunity to rent his field in Orchard Road as a recreation ground, something that he had twice refused to do when asked during the previous year. The opinion was that, had this offer been made earlier, it would have been accepted, even though it would have been only for a brief period, with the Council having nothing at the end to show for their outlay; but now the purchase of Leonard's field must go ahead.

It was the spring of 1923, when the tenancy of the Leonard's field expired, before work could begin on the new recreation ground. June and July proved to be exceptionally busy. Regulations were to be framed for the recreation ground, especially as, *'in view of the love the younger boys in the place seem to have acquired for climbing perilously up most insecure looking branches attached to those two trees that serve as football posts,'* reported the Wellingborough News of the 1st June.

Additionally, during that time, FUDC was in negotiation with the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). The arrangement was to be that FUDC would give up a narrow strip of ground from the recreation field and in exchange the NCC, would along the whole length of the recreation field, widen Wellingborough Road and install a footpath to join up with the path in front of the Mulso Schools. The FUDC was hopeful that the NCC would also be willing to supply and install, free of charge, fencing along the length of the frontage. At the same time FUDC submitted plans for urgently needed sanitary arrangements for the ground. The estimated cost for those works would be £140-£150 but by using their own labour they could do it for less, so this work was given the go-ahead.

When the FUDC proposals were put to the NCC Roads and Bridges Committee, the committee was willing to make the footpath provided Finedon would contribute a quarter of the £200 estimated cost, but they were opposed to providing the fencing which was estimated at £70. However, if Finedon were willing to put the fencing up, the committee would pay half the cost of the materials. FUDC agreed to this proposals and additionally they decided that when the bottom hedge was removed it could be used to repair gaps in the hedge along the topside of the ground.

Early in July it was agreed, that because of the time that would be taken to agree by-laws governing the recreation ground, notice boards would first be erected to warn people against damaging any part of the ground. Unfortunately, before the boards could be erected youths, out of sheer mischief, set fire to a dead tree near Mr Paterson's rickyard. It burned all night, and two men had to sit up to prevent the damage spreading. Mr Paterson had been in indifferent health for some time and this was an unnecessary and undeserved worry for him.

It was October 1923 before any work began on the recreation ground frontage: this was to include widening of the roadway, a new footpath beside the roadway; removal of an unsightly fence and the erection of a fine new iron replacement; and the removal of two or three old, but dangerous, trees. Work progressed slowly during the winter months and it was February 1924 before

the Wellingborough News was able to report that high, unclimbable but ornate, railings had been installed, along with a couple of large gates in the centre. Two separate narrower means of exit, with only a post in the middle, had also been provided. However, some concern was expressed about the ease with which children would be able to get out of the field and onto the busy highway, and whether the single posts should be replaced by swing gates on safety grounds.

On 21st March 1924, the Wellingborough News reported, '*...with the widened road, the new footpath, the erection of new fencing, together with the recently planted row of trees, the frontage of the new recreation ground looks far more presentable than it did. It is certainly an improvement upon the old days of Leonard's field, with its dilapidated rails, no footpath, unsightly trees and narrow roadway.*' It was also noted that, '*the new trees had all been donated by Mr A Parker.*'

In March 1924, to complete the 'Rec' as we would recognise it, FUDC discussed having an additional entrance into the field. However, they first needed to obtain a piece of land from the estate of the late Mr Walter Neilson to establish a connection to Summerlee Road. The hope was that this entrance would have a swing gate to prevent children being able to run straight into the road.

Almost one hundred years later almost all the above mentioned remain in situ; with only the double gates being removed within my memory, when the car park area was put into place.

May the 'Rec' remain a public amenity for the town for another one hundred years.

### **Tudor Enclosure at Finedon: Inhabitants of Thingdon v. Mulso**

Stephen Swailes

The Tudor period saw many attempts by lords of the manor to enclose lands. In some cases, this led to wholesale removal of tenants, the destruction of houses and sometimes the destruction of whole villages. Creating land for use as sheep pasture was a profitable incentive as was clearance to build a substantial residence and gardens for the lord. Northamptonshire was no stranger to enclosure disputes which sometimes led to riots, as the Newton rebellion of 1607 in which upwards of fifty people were killed shows.

Finedon, it seems, was the centre of a long and protracted enclosure dispute between John Mulso, Lord of the Manor, and certain inhabitants, primarily one Henry Selby. Not all the legal proceedings have survived but much has, and the main events and participants are clear. A summary is given below.

John Mulso came into possession of five-eighths of the manor in 1478 and his first enclosures were probably made in 1488-9. In 1494 the tenants took their case to the Court of Star Chamber and the court ordered Mulso to take down his enclosures. Whether he did so or not is unknown, and if he did, he seems to have made more enclosures as the tenants went back to court with their complaints. Although Mulso was forbidden from making more enclosures he was allowed to keep the areas that he had previously enclosed.

The inhabitants of Thingdon went to court again in 1510 outlining the *'hurtes and wronges don by John Mulsho'* to various freeholders and inhabitants. He was accused of enclosing six fields which for time out of mind had been used for grazing cattle, and by virtue of these enclosures they could not access other commons lying further away. He was accused of enclosing a common balk (an unploughed ridge lying between ploughed lands) and that in a great close lying in the middle of the fields *he 'hath norisshed gret nowmber of Conyes (rabbits) wherby all ther felds ben gretly hurt and distroied in cornes growing ther.'* Mulso was further accused of enclosing other lands with osier (willow) and thorn to the detriment of others and to the profit of himself.

Litigation recommenced in 1526 when Mulso was accused of abusing manorial customs by imposing unreasonable fines when tenants re-entered their land. He countered this by producing ancient court rolls that, he argued, said the lord could fine as he pleased. In 1528, the whole township wrote to the Court of Star Chamber about excessive fines, enclosure of pasture and overcharging. Commissioners were sent to Finedon to sort out the dispute, and separately the Abbot of Croxton, a freeholder in Finedon, approached Cardinal Wolsey. Wolsey was powerful at the time and ordered the sheriff to go to Finedon with his enforcers to destroy the enclosures, and together with about seventy inhabitants, spent eight days felling Mulso's wood and timber. They threw down *'the saide hedges and Dyches and dystroyde all the quicke of the same.'* Mulso countered with claims of illegal assembly and, when Wolsey had fallen from power he continued his land grab and imposition of fines.

One tenant took out several suits against Mulso: Henry Selby. In 1526 Mulso seized the copyhold lands of Selby, a husbandman, on some pretence. Selby was given an award but Mulso continued against him by imposing a fine thought to be unreasonable. In 1528 the Court of Requests held that the fine was reasonable but Selby would not have it. Cattle were driven by the

inhabitants into Mulso's enclosures to eat his grass, and later Mulso's drovers attempted to take the herd of around two hundred beasts to a pound in Northampton. They got as far as Orlingbury where they were intercepted by fourteen women, half of whom were the wives of men charged with driving the beasts into Mulso's enclosure at Finedon.

When Selby re-entered his lands, Mulso sued for trespass. In 1530 a commission awarded the copyhold to Selby upon payment of a fine of five shillings which he refused to pay, and for that was sent to Fleet prison for two weeks. The dispute rumbled on with more legal actions by Selby, but at one point the Lord Chancellor told him that the matter was over and that if he troubled him anymore '*he would cause his heyrez (ears) to be naylled to a pyllory.*'

John Mulso died in 1535, possibly at the good age for the time of 77, and was succeeded by his grandson, Thomas. Peace returned briefly to Finedon, but in 1537 Selby went to court again in a dispute about fines. Meetings of the inhabitants to decide their position were usually described as 'riotous'.

The Tudor enclosure story at Finedon is unusual in that it dragged on over decades and was costly to both sides. The inhabitants must have had popular support as they gathered a big enough purse to maintain legal actions. The inhabitants, perhaps unwisely, stuck to their position and their faith in the courts as extensions of the Crown, but they were easily countered by Mulso who referred to ancient court rolls to justify whatever he wanted to do. In the end, the lord was said to hold five sixths of the land and may have considered that he had won the battle. For reasons of agricultural efficiency, considering expanding populations, a large proportion of parishes in Northamptonshire were enclosed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Finedon was enclosed through an Act of Parliament of 1805.

As well as providing an insight into Tudor enclosure the documents are useful, at a local level, in naming about forty parishioners and several field names. Lands enclosed were: Debdale or Depedale mill close, Bull holme, a meadow ground, North holme, Mill close called Salowys, West towns end at Bery grene, Tryndull or Turndyll crosse, Priors close (or Prices close) called lyme kyll (lime kiln?). Grymes close, and a close at 'pig in dyche'.

Sources: Quarterly Journal of Economics, 1904, 19(1); The English Historical Review, 1893, No. XXXII. The most detailed account of the legal proceedings is given in Select cases before the Star Chamber, vol. II, Selden Society, 1910.

**'Up the Rec' from the FLHS Archive**



Possibly the earliest photograph in our archive of the carnival, early 1930s.  
Miss Win Keech, left, and on the right, Olive Haynes [mother of Harry Nicholls]  
Photograph donated by Harry Nicholls.



Finedon Cubs at the Carnival Parade, believed to be late 1930s.  
Leaders: Rose Richardson [left] and Margaret Partridge [right].  
Photograph donated by the late Derrick Richardson.



Coronation Celebration Carnival, 1953.  
Photograph donated by Christine Holley



Finedon Carnival, 1978.  
One image that portrays the contemporary community spirit of the carnival.  
Crowds like this will perhaps not be seen again 'Up the Rec'!  
Photograph donated by Cath Sturgess.

## The Free French Forces at Finedon

Elizabeth Taylor

By the mid-1930s it was clear (to some) that war was inevitable. The Imperial Defence committee decided that secret surveys should be undertaken to identify suitable properties for requisitioning to accommodate the increased military activity, auxiliary hospitals, as well as artefacts from the museums and libraries of London. This became the responsibility of the Office of Works, with local officers undertaking the surveys. Some properties were exempt, such as government buildings, railways, food stores and hospitals. All of this was kept secret until the outbreak of war.

Requisitioning of country houses during the Second World War led directly, or indirectly, to one thousand demolitions in the following decade. Most were requisitioned by the government, or in some cases lent by the owners, for use as schools, hospitals, barracks, storing of works of art, or military headquarters. Hardly any were destroyed by enemy action, but many suffered irreparable damage at the hands of their temporary occupants. Fire was a major problem, one of the issues being that cigarette smoking was much more prevalent in those days; lack of maintenance caused burst pipes, ceiling collapses, and dry rot was allowed to set in. Beautiful staircases were used as firewood, paintings and wooden panelling were used as dart boards; military vehicles were driven into lakes, or up staircases, and graffiti was daubed around liberally. Windows were broken, gardens abandoned or, even worse, covered in concrete. When the properties were returned to their owners, in some cases they simply could not afford to make the necessary repairs and chose not to return to their ancestral home.

Some owners were keen to volunteer their houses through national pride as they had done in the First World War. Others thought that by offering their homes for use as a school or for art storage, before requisitioning, they would be saved from the depredations of the military.

According to the Harrington Aviation Museum, approximately sixty large houses (country houses, manor houses, rectories) in the area covering thirty miles around the Harrington airfield near Kettering, are known to have been requisitioned by the government for use in one way or another. Finedon Hall is not mentioned amongst those because it was not actually requisitioned, rather it was volunteered.

The Free French Forces (Forces Françaises Libres) were members of a movement for the continuation of warfare against Germany after the military

collapse of France in the summer of 1940. They were led by General Charles de Gaulle from his base in London. The group initially consisted of French troops in England, volunteers from the French community resident in England since before the war, and a few units of the French navy.

The first report of Finedon Hall being used as a recuperation centre for the Free French Forces appeared in the Northampton Mercury of 30th May 1941. Mrs Jeanne Mitchell, who lived in Spring Hill, Broad Green, Wellingborough had been awarded the Croix de Guerre for helping her fellow Frenchmen during The Great War. Following the French capitulation in World War Two Mrs Mitchell wrote to General de Gaulle in London offering assistance. The General agreed with her plan and as a result she opened Spring Hill for use as a convalescent home for members of the Free French Forces. More than two hundred French personnel had been helped by her in this way by the time she planned a larger scheme involving the use of Finedon Hall as an instructional and training centre for those of the Free French Forces who were not able to return to service. The plan was to help these people learn new skills such as shoe making, printing, horticulture, agriculture, chemistry, painting and sculpture.

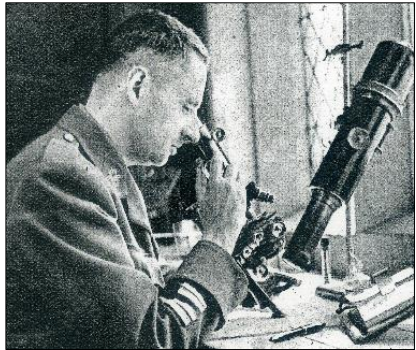


A French serviceman working as cobbler at Finedon Hall.  
The Picture Post, 10th October 1942.

Mrs Mitchell also suggested that a part of the Hall should be set aside for those suffering from lung ailments. Funds were being raised to bring the Hall up to an acceptable living standard; an indication of the state of the Hall at that time is given by the need to buy furniture and redecorate a great deal of the property, but this turned out to be only the tip of the iceberg.

The owner of Finedon Hall at that time was Major H M Greaves. He did not live in the Hall but in nearby Thingdon Cottage, and he offered the use of the Hall as a centre for the rehabilitation of Free French Forces personnel.

From October 1941 Finedon Hall became a 'school' for the rehabilitation of the wounded; approval for this was given by General de Gaulle's National Committee. The school was established by Colonel Pierre Baranger [right] and Monsieur Joseph Lacasse. Colonel Baranger was formerly the Professor of Chemistry at the Sorbonne and his friend Monsieur Joseph Lacasse, a well-known Belgian artist.



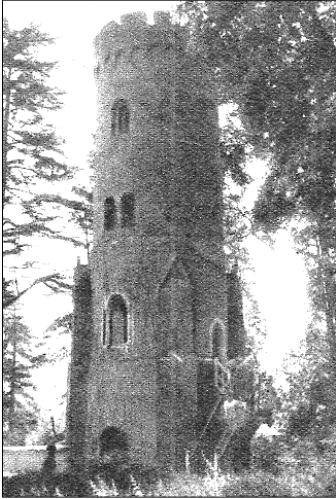
Joseph Lacasse [left] was the son of a socialist militant and was a militant himself. As a young man his father apprenticed him to a painting contractor, but an artistic gift emerged and he was able to enrol in the Academy of Fine Arts (1906-1921). During the German occupation in 1916 he was taken prisoner of war but managed to escape and hide in the Hospice Civile de Tournai, where he continued to paint. After the war he completed his artistic education in Brussels and then settled permanently in Paris in 1925. His work displayed an

element of cubism which is reflected in the work seen at Finedon Hall. When World War Two broke out it was the Resistance to which he directed his efforts. In 1940, following an appeal by General de Gaulle, Lacasse joined the French Resistance reached London, where in 1941, he took control of the technical direction of the military re-education centre at Finedon Hall.

The Hall at that time was in very poor repair. Earlier reports of needing furniture and redecoration were vastly understated. The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News of 10th July 1942, in an article entitled, '*Education Centre – A Fine Effort by the Free French*' reported that, '*...the whole place was derelict and portions of it were falling down; the grounds and gardens were a wilderness. There was no water, power, light or gas and before the men moved in the first task was, in fact, to lay pipes with their own hands to the main water supply.*' By Christmas 1941 the injured men began to arrive. Their disabilities varied: some were ill, wounded, limbless, deaf, or suffering from shell shock and other nervous disorders; others had lost all their faith and interest in life. Their stress was increased by the fact that nearly all had families in occupied France.

However, it was quite an easy way of life for the battle-scarred men at the Hall who were referred to as 'pupils'. No-one was forced to do any one thing but could choose his subject from the wide range of interests. All contributed to the life of the school. Whilst Lacasse was in charge of the technical aspects of the school, Colonel Baranger was continuing his research into malaria, helped by some of the 'pupils'. Lacasse set up an art school to teach painting and sculpture. There was an extensive library where the men could continue studies that had been interrupted by the war. The upkeep of the house was a responsibility that fell to them all in equal share. Floors, windows and stonework were repaired. The spacious grounds were there for all to enjoy, as shown in the image below, taken from the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, dated 10th July 1942.





An area of garden adjacent to the Hall was used as a bowling green. A photograph of the Ice Tower [left], in *The Picture Post* of 10th October 1942 is captioned '*The Ice-House Becomes a Barn*'. The whole estate is turned over to their use. Farm produce was stored in the tower. Other photographs from the same publication show men creating a wooden form, or frame, of one of the gothic windows whilst others are making or mending shoes. A short clip of archive British Pathé News film footage<sup>1</sup> from 1942 shows soldiers scaling the long and short stonework at the southwest corner of the Hall, and a monkey resembling a long-tailed macaque can be seen sitting in one of the windows on the first floor.

The venture was not only self-supporting, but it made money. One half of the earnings was divided between the members of the school; the other half set aside for the use of those who left to take their place back in the wider world. In June 1942 General de Gaulle visited Finedon Hall.



General De Gaulle [front row, between the two ladies], Colonel Pierre Baranger [front row, second from the right] and Joseph Lacasse [foreground, sitting]

In 1942, even after some work had been done to repair the Hall, an indication of the state of the building was given by James Lees-Milne, the secretary to the country houses committee of the National Trust when he visited to see if the property was a suitable candidate to be taken on by the charity. He described the stone of which the Hall is built as *'the most beautiful imaginable'*. However, his opinion was that *'although originally Elizabethan it was dreadfully altered about 1850 and was not suitable for the Trust. It was unfurnished and occupied by Free French troops who were offhand and rude to Major Greaves. The grounds were sad, the elm avenue disordered. The place was neglected and pitiable.'*<sup>2</sup>

By 1945, the Weekly Despatch reported that the hall was being used as an annexe of L'Ecole Polytechnique de Paris for the study of tropical diseases under Baranger, and disabled soldiers of the Free French Forces were being trained there as chemists.

Following Major Greaves death, Mrs Filer and Colonel Baranger continued their experiments at the Hall. Upon Colonel Baranger's death in 1971 the Hall and its fifteen acres of forlorn gardens were sold to the developers, St Clair Wade Holdings. Lacasse died in 1975.

As a child in the 1960s I regularly used to wander in the Hall grounds, like many Finedonians of the time, although I do not remember ever seeing anyone else there; perhaps we all hid if we heard someone nearby! On one occasion I was peering in through one of the windows of the cloisters, I saw what to me appeared to be, an altar with a cross at the back edge in the centre covered by a dust cloth. On asking about this when I returned home, it was put down to a child's imagination. The combination of seeing such an evocative image when peering through the chapel windows, together with my childhood 'country house snooping', with all the apparent penalties should one be caught, meant that I did not return...that I do remember! However, during some recent research into the gardens of Finedon Hall I came across an image showing exactly what I'd thought I had seen.

I do not remember the detail of the painting, but it was by that time a very faint image and the photograph shown on the following page has been enhanced. The painting was covered over when the Hall, the stable block and cloisters were converted into separate dwellings, the cloisters has now become the 'Old Chapel.'

<sup>1</sup> [Soldiers' Home Issue Title Is Tomorrow Always Comes \(1943\) - YouTube](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Ancestral Voices*, James Lees-Milne, 1975. Chatto & Windu

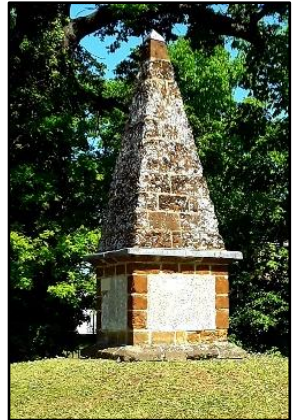


The wall painting seen by Elizabeth  
From the collection of Wendy Redding

## Finedon Obelisk

Mick Britton

My own early memories of the Obelisk by the crossroads, in the early 1960s as I walked to school, a time when young children were allowed to walk alone across a busy road to school, were of a stone memorial surrounded by overgrown vegetation. I recall, at the time, that I had no idea what it represented.



Joseph Harlock (1820 – 1909) in his *'Recollections of Finedon in the Eighteen-Thirties'* writes, *'Its history is clouded in obscurity. A generally accepted opinion is that its erection commemorated robbery of the Leeds mail [Leeds – London stagecoach] at that spot.'* The booklet was published in 1930 and contains three 'Notes' that bring Joseph Harlock's original recollections up to date. Of the Obelisk, the publisher added, *'The origin and purpose of the Obelisk has long remained a mystery, which has perplexed the inhabitants of Finedon for many generations. In March, 1925, in going through some old papers in the possession of Miss Ellison of Mulso Cottage the clue to the mystery was found. In an extract taken from the diary of Sir John English Bart., we read:- This day I laid the first stone of the Finedon Obelisk, at the cross Turnpikes, East Town End (Sumpter of Irthlingborough, Mason) as a Direction Pillar and record the many blessings of 1789.'*

*'The question was then asked: what were the special blessings of 1789? The Sunday Observer of July 7th, 1929 seems to throw light on this point :- Of thanksgiving services for the restoration to health we may begin with George III. His recovery from his first serious breakdown occurred officially on March 10th 1789.'*

*It is known that Sir English [Dolben] was devoted to the King. The deduction, therefore, that he had the Obelisk built as thank-offering for His Majesty's recovery does not seem far-fetched. Its erection was made for two purposes - a sentimental one and a practical one.'*

Ownership of the Obelisk is, at the time of writing, in process of being transferred from North Northamptonshire Council into the care of Finedon Town Council. It is now pleasing to see, compared with my early memories, that the small area of ground on which the Obelisk stands is being maintained to reveal the small piece of Finedon history it represents.

## Finedon Hall, 1921 and 1970s



The south entrance. From the Country Life Magazine, 1921



The south entrance, prior to the total renovation of the Hall, early 1970s  
From a collection of photographs donated by Ted Amey.