

Finmere and the family of Finemere

THE parish and village of Finmere, in the north-east corner of Oxfordshire, ¹ which gives name to a station on the Great Central Railway, in the adjoining parish of Newton Purcell, is about four miles west of the town of Buckingham, and adjoins the Roman road which ran from Dorchester to the Watling Street, and here forms the county boundary. It was a district of moor and forest, and though the ancient trisyllable form of the name, Finemere, may seem to indicate a meaning wholly descriptive of natural features, a fenny moor, it is doubtful if this interpretation of the first part of the name is a correct one.

The prefix Fin, which still survives in the English surname Finn, is found in many place-names. Abroad we have Finland and in this country Finborough, Finden, Finningham and Finningley, whilst in Oxfordshire is Finstock as well as Finmoor. Probably Fin is a tribal or personal name. The Finnish tribes, who are said to be of Mongolian descent, were spread widely over some parts of Europe. Finn was a hero, who is included in the royal genealogies amongst the ancestors of Cerdic, being the grandfather of Woden. Beowulf's *Lay* tells how through the winter Hengest, the child of the Jutes, pined in Friesland, until King Finn gave him "Hunlafing, a war flame and best of axes." Finmere, and other places with a similar prefix, may have obtained their appellation from being originally peopled by persons of a Finnish race, or by those who revered Finn, the hero whom the Frisians worshiped. Or possibly it may be derived from the personal name of some early settler in the district.

Variations are to be found in the spelling of this placename Finmere of the same character as those which obtain with the surnames deriving therefrom, though, as might be expected, the alternative forms are not so numerous. The place appears on the ordnance map as Finmere, but even at the present day its spelling can hardly be regarded as absolutely fixed, for the modern nineteenth century milepost at the entrance to the village gives the variant of Fenmore. Commencing with the earliest record of the place, *Doomsday Book*, the following spellings of the name may be noted:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Finemere, 1086 | Fynemere, 1313 |
| [?] Eissemore, 12th century | Finemer, 1322 |
| Fifimere, 1208 | Fynnemere, 1322 |
| Fifmer, “ | Fynmer, 1547 |
| Fifmor, “ | Filmare, 1578 |
| Fismere, 1216-18 | Fynmore, 1598 |
| Fismer', 1291 | Finmore, 1692 |
| Finemere, 1214-1251 | Finmer, 1744 |
| Finnemere, 1262 | Finmere, 19th century |
| Finmere, 1296 | Fenmore, “ |

Of the above variants for Finmere, those of Fifimere, Fifmer, and Fismere are the most remarkable. There seems to be no phonetic connection between them, and they are probably mere blunders, arising from some early misreading of the name. Even now it is often impossible to distinguish between *n* and *u*, and there was the same difficulty in medieval penmanship. Finmere might very easily be read as Fivmere. In dictating, this might be written down as Fifmere or Fifimere, and as *f* and long *s* closely resemble each other it would be easy for a copyist to convert Fifmer into Fismere. It is possible that Eissemore, a place mentioned in the charter of King John, when Earl of Morton, which is recited on a patent roll of Edward II (Pat. II, Edw. II, p. 2, m. 29.), but which has not been identified, is only another clerical blunder for Finemere, as with careless writing at that period confusion could arise between the capitals F and E. The entry is as follows:

“Et preterea concedo eis [i. e., monachis sancti Augustini] ex dono meo xliiij acras terre in Eissemore ad essartandum et ad habendum quietas de visu Forestariorum et de omni reguardo foreste et de omnibus serviciis et exactionibus que ad me et meos pertineant.”

The village of Finmere lies on the road leading from Buckingham to Deddington, and stretches northward across a little valley to the church on the brow of the tableland, this being doubtless the “moor”, extending down to the little river Ouse, a mile away, which forms the county boundary. The village itself is remarkably picturesque, consisting as it does of groups of thatched cottages, many of them being of evident antiquity.

The manor house of Finmere, now known as Bacon's House, after the name of an eighteenth century owner of the property, is close to the Ouse, about a mile north of the church. The choice of this site, so far from the village and church, was doubtless dictated by the fact that its nearness to the river permitted the lord of the manor to establish a water mill, at which his tenants should grind their corn to his profit. According to Mr. Blomfield, the historian of Finmere, the manor or court house “was until comparatively recent times one of considerable size and pretension, with the usual accompaniments of a courtyard, a series of fishponds, traces of which remain, supplied by a strong spring which rose at a little height above them, a bowling green, now the garden of the present house, a garden and pleasure grounds, the latter being chiefly planted with lime trees [of which some very large ones are still standing.] A road under an avenue of elm trees led from the entrance gate to Tingewick², and a large wood [both cut down within living memory] bounded the premises on the north-west side. Some pasture land surrounded the house called the Court Closes. One of these was a close adjoining the old water mill, measuring la. 3r. 4p., known as the Mill Close. The late [i.e., the second] Duke of Buckingham pulled down the greater part of the old manor house and reduced it to its present proportions. Destroying the water mill and most of the former features of the spot, he substituted for them the excellent barns and other farm buildings now standing. “

The early history of Finmere, which has been very inadequately dealt with, begins with *Domesday Book* in 1086, at which date Finmere lay in the counties of Oxford and Northampton, and belonged to the Norman bishoprics of Baieux and Coutance, though apparently both portions were held by the same tenant, one Robert. Odo, Bishop of Baieux, King William's half-brother, held the Oxfordshire portion, which consisted of two hides of land, and the larger portion of eight hides, which was in Northamptonshire,³ belonged to Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutance. When Odo fell into disgrace, his portion of Finmere was granted to Geoffrey, thus uniting the two manors. On Geoffrey's death in 1093, his estates seem to have escheated to the Crown, and the fee of Finmere passed to Robert the Consul, Earl of Gloucester, son of Henry I; to him succeeded his son William, Earl of Gloucester, who died about 1183, leaving as coheireses his three daughters, (1) Mabel, who married the Earl of Evreux; (2) Amicia, who married Richard, Earl of Hertford, and (3) Isabella or Hadwisa, who married the Earl of Morton, afterwards King John. John thus became, in right of his wife, Earl of Gloucester, and so was the overlord of Finmere.

As such, he confirmed the gift which William, son of Gregory, had made to the abbey of St. Augustine at Bristol, of the church of Finmere, in the time of Richard the First, 1189-1199, as appears from an inspeximus on a patent roll.

“Et ex dono Willelmi, filii Gregorii, ecclesiam de FINNENERE” [sic].

Who this William FitzGregory was we know not, though it is evident that he was a man of some means and importance, for besides the gift of the advowson of Finmere, he also gave to St. Augustine's 40 solidates of land in Alberton, in Gloucestershire. It is possible that he was a descendant of the *Doomsday* owner, Robert, or perhaps was connected with the de Clares. He was living, as the rolls of the Curia Regis show us, in 6 Richard, i.e., as late as 1194. The gift of the land in Alberton was confirmed by Earl William, and subsequently by Earl, afterwards King, John, who also confirmed the gift of the rectory of Finmere, which latter was apparently made between 1186 and 1199. William FitzGregory's wife, Olive, survived him, and married Reginald de Hales, for in 1214 they brought an action in the Curia Regis against the Abbot of St. Augustine, to

recover the lady's dower in three virgates of land in Finmere. The Abbot called to warrant Gilbert de Finemere, who had given or sold the land to the Abbey, and he was obliged to pay a silver mark to induce the lady and her husband to release the claim they had against the land. This year, 1207, is the first occasion on which we find mention of Gilbert de Finemere, and it may be regarded as certain that he was the first who bore the name of this village as his surname. It is evident that he was the successor, presumably a near kinsman, of William Fitz Gregory, who gave the church of Finmere to St. Augustine's, Bristol. He was a contemporary of Richard de Clare, Earl of Hertford, the first of his race to own Finmere, and his surname distinguished him from his companion in arms, Gilbert de Clare, son of Earl Richard, with whom, as we shall see, he was not improbably connected by ties of kindred. In June 1210, Gilbert de Finemere accompanied King John and the Earl of Gloucester, Gilbert de Clare, in the expedition to Ireland, which that monarch undertook for the purpose of reducing the English settlers to obedience. He was present at Carrickfergus on July 20, and a month later at Dublin, on the Thursday after the Assumption; his wages being entered in the *Praestita Roll* of 12 John. (pp. 177, 200, 222.)

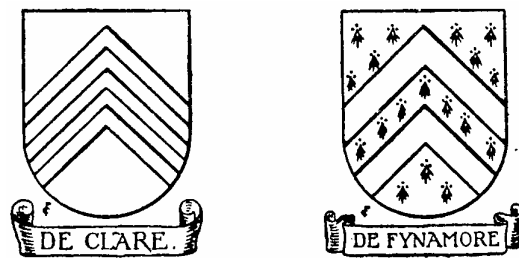
Further, Gilbert de Finemere, according to the *Red Book of the Exchequer*, which relates approximately to the period 1210-12, held in Cornwall and Devon one and a-half knight's fee. Presumably a near relative of his would be that Richard de Finemur, who, with Matilda, his wife, was in 1219 plaintiff in an action against Martin de Fisacre, concerning lands in Woodhuish, a hamlet in the southern part of the county of Devonshire. This very early occurrence of the name in Devonshire is of interest, since we find Fynmores, Finnimores and Filmores in Devonshire in - the sixteenth century, with which county indeed they are still associated, and it may well be that they have dwelt there continuously from the thirteenth century, though at present evidence of their existence there in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is wanting.⁴

Bracton's Notebook (Maitland, iii, 1518, 1960.) under the year 1221, gives two interesting cases, which together throw light on the pedigree. The first, under Oxfordshire, mentions a suit between Petronella de Finemere and Gilbert de Finemere, adjourned for want of appearance, relating to four virgates of land in Finemere, and the second records the proceedings and verdict in an enquiry as to the ownership of a hide of land in Keyham, Leicestershire, a will which was a member of the Soke of Rothley Temple, belonging to the Knights Templar of St. John of Jerusalem. Rosanna de Finemere, mother of Petronella de Finemere, was first married to William Sconard, also styled Willelmus filius Sconardi. He already had a family by a first wife, and Rosanna's parents declined to assent to the marriage unless he settled part of his lands upon her in fee simple. He accordingly, before his marriage, settled a hide of land in Keyham, paying half a mark. After his death Rosanna married a de Finemere, perhaps Gilbert de Finemere, and her daughter Petronel de Finemere, who married Robert le Templar, a name suggestive of the Knights Templar, claimed as against William le Fawconer, presumably Rosanna's stepson, a third part of this hide of land as her "reasonable portion", which may indicate that she had two sisters, co-heiresses with herself to the lands of their mother, Rosanna. The jury found in her favour, she recovered seizin, and William was amerced, as he did not sustain what was evidently his contention, namely, that the land was Rosanna's dower, and reverted to him as heir to William Sconard on the death of Rosanna. In effect, as we should say now, the jury found that this hide of land was acquired by Rosanna in fee simple for valuable consideration prior to her marriage.⁵

From these proceedings we may infer that William Sconard was twice married, his son by the first wife being William Fawconer; that he had no issue by his second wife Rosanna, who afterwards married Gilbert de Finemere, and by her second husband had three daughters, co-heiresses; that Gilbert, the second husband of Rosanna, was dead in 1221, and had also been twice married, and that his son by his first wife was Gilbert de Finemere, elder half-brother of Petronel de Finemere, who married Robert the Templar. Perhaps also Richard de Finemur, who with his wife Margaret, is named in 1219 in a fine of lands in Devonshire, may have been another half-brother. The first-named Gilbert de Finemere was evidently a soldier; Gilbert de Finemere of 1228, presumably his son, was probably a lawyer, as he was appointed, with three others, to take assizes of novel disseisin at Oxford in that year. Their presumed relative positions will be gathered from Table A, in which are set out the descents of the lords and tenants of Finmere, as complete as the evidences permit, down to the end of the thirteenth century.

The century after *Doomsday* is a very dark period for English genealogy, for the records remaining are few, and it is not likely that we shall obtain evidence showing more about William Fitz Gregory and his successor, Gilbert de Finemere. It is quite possible, as already suggested, that they were cadets of the house of Clare, though, except as a matter of presumption, this must remain quite unknown. It will be noticed that Gilbert de Finemere bore the same christian name as his feudal overlord and companion in arms, Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. This name was constantly used by the Clares down to the death of Gilbert, the last Earl of Gloucester of this line, who was killed at Bannockburn in 1314, and it was as constantly used by the Finemeres of Finmere, and the Finamores of Whetham, down to the middle of the fourteenth century. About the middle or end of the thirteenth century we have mention of Geoffrey de Fynamore and Roger de Fynamore. The former Christian name was borne by the founder of the race of Clare, Geoffrey, Count of Eu, a son of Richard the Fearless, first Duke of Normandy ; while Gilbert de Clare, the famous Strongbow, had an uncle and nephew bearing the name of Roger, which was used also by the Finamores. We have a Roger de Finemere in 1284, and another of the same name in 1473, while the last of the Whetham Fynamores was Roger Fynamore, who died in 1576. The same christian name was also borne in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the Fennimores of Wendlebury, a village a little south of Bicester, who became extinct there only a few years ago. Another coincidence is the christian name Osbert. In 1315, Osbert de Finemere held one knight's fee in Finemere, and, though it is uncertain whether Osbert de Clare, once abbot of Westminster, a distinguished monastic writer, who flourished about 1160, was a member of the Clare family or merely had taken for a surname, as many clerics did, the name of the place of his origin, the coincidence is worth noting.

Mere coincidence of christian names between two families, however suggestive, cannot, of course, be relied on to prove identity of origin. There is, however, with Fynamore and de Clare the noteworthy fact that the Finamores of Whetham, who certainly descended from Gilbert de Finemere, bore arms very similar to those of Clare, which for upwards of two hundred and fifty years have also been traditionally used by the Fynmores, who descend from William Fynmore, the Elizabethan Mayor of Reading. It will be seen that red chevrons form in each case the only charge upon the shield, the field in the one case being of gold, and, in the other case, of ermine.



It was, in medieval times, usual for the junior branches of a family to make some slight variation in the arms, such as alteration of the tinctures or a change in the number of the charges borne, in order to distinguish themselves from the head of their house. Many examples of this practice, still followed in Scotland, might be adduced, a notable instance being the arms used by the various branches of the great feudal Family of Berkeley. Such alterations were regarded as suitable distinctions for persons who were related by blood. Further, it was by no means uncommon in the middle ages for younger branches to forsake the surname borne by the head of their family, and to adopt instead, as their new name, that of the manor or lands with which they might have been endowed, Of this custom the Berkeley family will again furnish us with many examples in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Indeed, many of the differences of the arms used by various branches of the Berkeley family are not unfrequently more marked than the distinction between Clare and Finamore, and it must be remembered that the final judgment of King Richard II in the famous case of *Scrope v. Grosvenor*, laid down the rule that minor differences, such as in the case of Grosvenor the addition of a bordure, are appropriate only for relatives in blood.⁶

When we remember that Gilbert de Finemore was holder of a manor under Gilbert de Clare, whose predecessor in the overlordship was King John, who had a residence in Finmere, it seems far more likely that he and William Fitz Gregory were cadets of de Clare rather than strangers. In such case it would be appropriate that they should use similar Christian names and adopt a modification of the Clare shield. Records at this early period are so scanty that it is not likely that we shall find any direct evidence in proof of the suggestion that the Fynamores may have been connected by blood with the great house of Clare. It is but a theory, the value of which it must be left for the reader to estimate.

Having regard to the fact that, with Finnimore, Phillimore, and other allied names, we are dealing with a group of surnames borne by a very limited number of families within a defined area, whose kinship with one another can in very many cases be traced, and in other cases inferred, from reasons of trade and vicinity, it is reasonable to conclude that we have in them a clan, and that, diversely as the names may be spelt, the bearers are akin by blood to one another, since their present aggregate number is no greater than is to be accounted for by the natural increase of the population of England during the last six or seven centuries. Consequently, it is reasonable to regard all Finnimores, Phillimores, Fillmores, Fynmores, and possibly Filmers, as belonging to the same stock,⁷ although in many cases we should have to go back twenty generations or more before we could find the common ancestor.

For when dealing with a surname of limited frequency the question necessarily arises, are the bearers of it all related to one another by descent from a common ancestor? It is useless to consider this of persons bearing trade surnames, as Carpenter or Smith, or patronymic, as Williams or Evans; or, again, surnames from districts, as Devonshire or Derbyshire, or natural features, as Hill or Underwood. It is otherwise with names borne by a few hundred individuals, for if we consider how the population of this country has increased in the last few centuries we shall realize that some of our less frequent surnames would, six or seven hundred years ago, be represented by less than a score individuals. We may apply this theory to Phillimore and the allied surnames, of which in 1885 there were about 1724 individuals who bore them. This is shown by the Registrar-General's Quarterly Indexes for one quinquennial period, viz., 1877-81:

| | Births, 1877- 1881. | No. living, 1881. |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Filmer | 105 | 615 |
| Filmore, Fillmore | 15 | 84 |
| Phillimore | 58 | 340 |
| Finnemore | 50 | 293 |
| Finnimore | 31 | 181 |
| Fenemore | 36 | 211 |
| | <hr/> 295 | <hr/> 1724 |

The population of England in 1881 was nearly twenty - six millions. Suppose that six or seven hundred years ago there were but a couple of million inhabitants in England - that, in other words, the population was about a thirteenth of what it now is - assume, too, that the average rate of increase for these families has been the same as with the general population, it is obvious that the number of representatives of the Phillimore, Finnimore, and Fenemore groups would not number more than 70 or 80 persons, or 120 or 130 at most if we include the Kentish Filmers. There is nothing improbable, therefore, in the suggestion that the existing bearers of the name

should be the descendants of the Gilbert de Finemere and Richard de Finamore, who we know were living in the first decade of the thirteenth century, *i.e.*, seven hundred years ago. How families may increase in two or three centuries can be illustrated by the Phillimore family. Thus, the "Baronetage" of 1881 enumerated some 58 persons bearing the name of Phillimore, who descended from Joseph Phillimore, who died in 1704, less than two centuries ago. Tracing back to his ancestor, William Phillimore, of Cam, who died in 1590, it may be estimated that the descendants of the latter, who bear the name, numbered not much less than a hundred and fifty persons, or nearly one-half of the total number of Phillimores then living. Some branches have increased, others have diminished or become altogether extinct, but the average rate of increase, distributed as it must have been over different parts of the country, has been pretty evenly maintained.

The way in which particular surnames may increase in number is also illustrated in the settlement of America. There are in the United States many names borne by a considerable number of persons, which in England are still infrequent, although the emigrant ancestor may have left this country less than a couple of centuries ago. Of this the presidential family of Fillmore is a sufficient example. Their emigrant ancestor seems to have been a certain John Fillmore, who settled in Massachusetts, and married in the year 1704. The pedigree of this family, printed in 1857, shows that at that date, about a century and a half later, their living descendants included upwards of sixty persons bearing the name. Today the number is probably much larger. A cadet line branching off two centuries ago may become more numerous than the parent stock.

1. In early times the county boundary seems to have been uncertain. Finmere at the time of Domesday was partly in Oxfordshire and part in Northamptonshire; at a later date it was occasionally ascribed to Buckinghamshire, whilst the neighbouring village of Lillingston, on the other hand, is given under Oxfordshire. Indeed, there were till recent years some detached portions of Oxfordshire in Buckinghamshire, a little to the north of Finmere,

2. The adjoining parish of Tingewick, in Buckinghamshire, also formed part of the vast possessions of the Bishop of Baieux, and was associated with the Finmeres, and also with William FitzGregory. Domesday Book records: " Terra Episcopi Baiocensis, Ilbertus de Lacei tenuit de Episcopo Tedinwiche . Hoc manerium tenuit Alnodus teignus Regis Edwardi et vendere potuit. "

According to Dr. Lipscombe, writing in 1847: "From the family "of Lacey the manor [of Tingewick] passed, before the reign of "Henry II [1154] to the Finmores (so called, evidently, from a "neighboring village in Oxfordshire), who bestowed it, in 1210, "upon the abbey of de Rotho Mago [i. e. Rouen] in Normandy, but "being purchased, in 1386, by William of Wykeham, Bishop of "Winchester, it was made part of his munificent endowment of "New College, Oxford, under which establishment, and its lessees, "the estate continues to be holden."

This statement is evidently based on Lysons' Account of Buckinghamshire, published in 1813, but neither writer gives his authority. When the early manorial history of this part of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire comes to be fully worked out it is reasonable to suppose that we shall add something to our imperfect knowledge of the medieval Finmeres. Moreover, as mentioned above, that it was associated with William the son of Gregory as early as 1194, is shown by an entry on the roll of tile Curia Regis : " Dominica post festum Sancti Martini : Willelmus filius Gregorii ponit loco suo Hugonem Peverell' vel Willellmum de Bukingham versus Abbatem de Monte de plocito terre in Tingwick ad lucrandum vel perdendum; anno regmi Regis Ricardi vj ." And in the same year, on Saturday next after the Feast of St. Edward, in the same suit the Abbot excused himself: " Abbas de monte Sancte Katerine essoinavit se de ultima mare versus Willellmum filium Gregorii de placito terre [in ?] Tingwic' per Ricardum Gallic' et per Eliam de Lond' ."

Alnod, mentioned in the Domesday Record as holder of Tingewick, is presumably the great Saxon thane Alnod, Elnod or Ealnoth, who was Staller or Master of the Horse to Edward the Confessor, Harold, and William the Conqueror, and was slain in battle in 1068 when leading the men of Somerset to resist the attack made by Harold's sons on the coasts of that county. His son Harding, who was Provost of Bristol, was father of Robert Fitzharding, the ancestor of the great Gloucestershire family of Berkeley, which still holds the Castle of Berkeley.

We therefore can hardly avoid the conclusion that in these entries we have an explanation of the reasons which led to Finmere Church being given to St. Augustine's at Bristol. That monastery was founded by a grandson of Alnod, Robert the son of Harding, who munificently endowed it in the year 1148. What is more likely than that the tenant should follow the example of his lord and benefit the same foundation?

3. The fact that part of Finmere lay in Northamptonshire wholly escaped the notice of the Rev. C. J. Blomfield, who wrote a history of Finmere in 1887. That the two manors became united is shown by the Hundred Rolls of Henry III and Edward I, in which Finmere is described as the property of the Earl of Gloucester, and containing ten hides, evidently the two hides and eight hides of Domesday, and presumably the 1,500 acres or so of which the modern parish consists. Mr. Blomfield's observations on the increase of Finmere in the two centuries after Domesday must therefore be disregarded.

4. Since writing the above a correspondent of Devonshire Notes and Queries has contributed the following further evidence in the part Issued in July 1903, vol. ii, p. 215: "Thomas Fynamour was one of the jurors in an extent made at Exeter on Sept. 1st, 1301, of the knight's fees and advowsons which had belonged to Joce de Dynham, deceased. The jurors found that Thomas de Cyrecestre held of the said Joce in Wodehywysche and Seynte mariechurche fees, worth annually 40s., but there is nothing to connect Fynamour with Woodhuish. There was no person of that name holding any of the Dynham lands in Woodhuish in 1566."

5. An undated customary of the manor and soke of Rothley was printed in 1881 in *Archaeologia*, xlvii, by the late G. T. Clark, of Dowlais, who suggested that this document was compiled soon after the middle of the thirteenth century. Under Kayham it gives amongst the tenants :-

Petronella, vidua, quinque partes unius virgate pro iij. s. viid. q. Incrementum viid. ob.

Galfridus Faucon tenet tres partes unius virgate pro xviid. ob. Incrementum iij. d.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that here we have another trace of Petronella de Finemere, and that Geoffrey Faucon, who immediately follows in the record, was stepson of Rosanna de Finemere. Fauconer in contracted form could easily be misread Faucon.

6. We shall hereafter notice that the Kentish Filmers, anciently Fynemores, use three bars for arms, which may have been based on those of their feudal neighbors, the Lords of Badlesmere, who bore a fess double cotised. Table A also indicates the connection of the Filmers with Finmere. It will be seen that Elizabeth Badlesmere, who held Finmere, married Edmund Mortimer, a brother-in-law of the Earl of Pembroke, who was lord of Sutton Valence, of which manor the Filmers were once tenants.

7. This, of course, is a generalization to be taken as subject to obvious exceptions, such as persons who may have derived their names from the village of Finmere in later times, through mere residence there. Some, moreover, may have become assimilated with this group, though of wholly different origin, as, perhaps, from the Shropshire Fennemere, the Buckinghamshire Fulmer, or the Yorkshire Pilmore, though, as a matter of fact, we have no evidence connecting any existing family with these places.