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Herbie Harris, Meppershall carnation grower, 1966.
Greenhouse article elsewhere inside...

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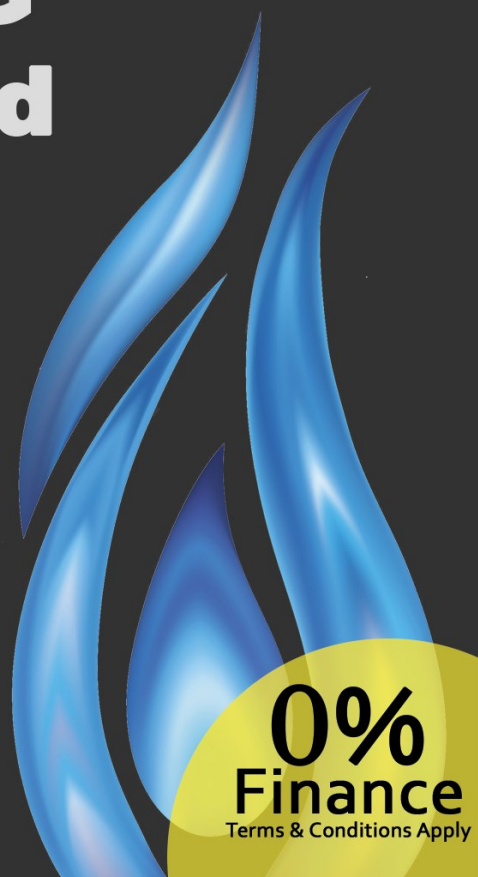
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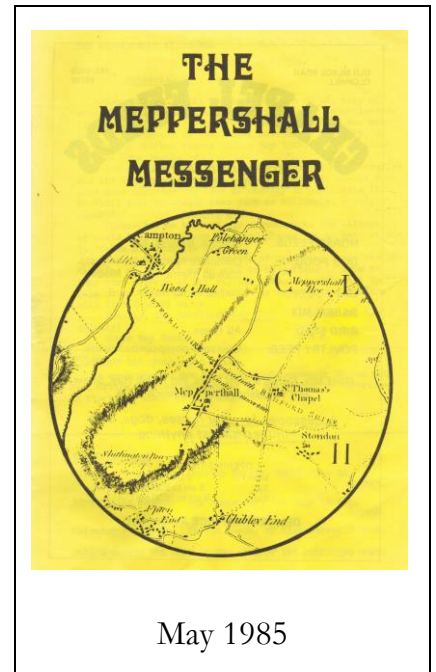
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35th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE by John Thompson, Treasurer

As we celebrate our 35th anniversary, I thought it important in these uncertain times, to reflect on how it all started. Back at a meeting of the Parochial Church Council held in September 1984, a small working party was formed and by November 1984 a group of interested people from the village had studied alternative formats, costs, and ways and means, reporting and recommending to the PCC that a Village Magazine be started. It was to combine the Church news-sheet with the quarterly Village magazine funded by the Parish Council. The new magazine would be delivered free to every house in the Village, paid for by advertising.



An ad-hoc Magazine Committee was formed and set to work, seeking advertisements, organizing printers for the advertisement pages, planning the cover, allocating tasks and deciding on a name, ***"The Meppershall Messenger"***. The first volume and issue would appear on April 1st 1985.

Technical changes have made the current magazine look a lot different from the duplicated pages of the early issues of the Meppershall Messenger, but beneath the surface the fundamentals have not changed. The original printing need then was for 521 copies, compared to the 825 copies printed today. Over the years, our processes have been refined and new technology introduced to speed up production. Originally printed entirely in black and white, colour covers and adverts appeared in April 2009.

The ad-hoc Committee decided that the running of the magazine should be on a more democratic basis and so in January 1988 the first open A.G.M. was called. Reports on all aspects of production were given; the accounts were presented and discussed; editorial content was evaluated; rates for advertising were set and suggestions for improvement were made. The AGM is still open to all villagers, and in 2008, we adopted a formal Constitution which incorporated virtually all of what the original Committee had laid down as Policy in 1991. Basically, both documents say that The Meppershall Messenger is a magazine produced by the people of Meppershall, for the people of Meppershall. Similar A.G.M. meetings still take place annually today.

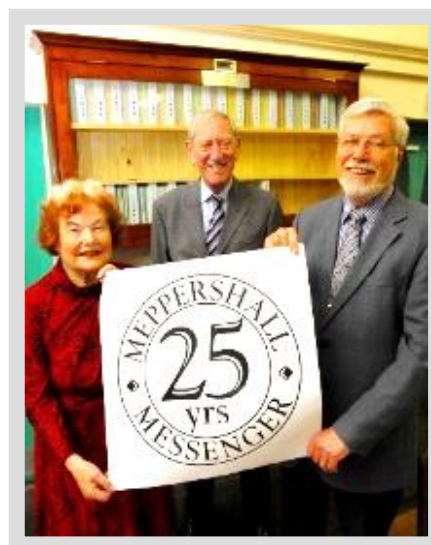
In March 2010, The Meppershall Messenger celebrated 25 years of production with a full colour souvenir. At the same time, with the help of Signline Imaging now located at the airfield in Campton Road, an advertising logo was created for the Meppershall Messenger and shown on the back page of the souvenir issue. We updated it in 2015, to celebrate 30 years of The Meppershall Messenger and so, below, we have updated it again to celebrate 35 years of The Meppershall Messenger.

The Meppershall Messenger is still run by its small committee: the Editors, Treasurer, Advertising Manager, Distribution Manager and team of distributors and Production Manager and team of printers and folders of the printed pages that form our magazine today.



Allow me to say ***"thank you"*** on behalf of the entire magazine committee, to the whole village and to our faithful band of advertisers for their continued support. I look forward to when our roundel will read 50 years and beyond!

John Thompson, Treasurer



It is the continuing support from our village, whether by printing, collating or distributing or by turning in pages of copy each month, that keeps the Messenger going.



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Editorial by Mick Ridley and James Read

We're not just looking back on 35 years of Meppershall Messenger history this month. Village history appears inside the front cover too, thanks to Gary Dilley and his wonderful photo of one of Meppershall's legendary greenhouses in its heyday. Herbert (Herbie) Harris is pictured amid an abundant crop of carnations, grown in his glasshouse down off Hoo Road in 1966. He was a friend of Gary's grandfather and was photographed by Gary's Dad, Brian. When I look at the image, I can feel the lazy sun watching over a long hot day in rural Bedfordshire. I can almost smell the musty, humid atmosphere and the lush produce of a gentle industry born of a green-fingered community in the heart of the English countryside. Read more on Meppershall's market gardening history in John Parsons' article in this issue.



I hope it inspires comfort and hope in these unique times. Social distancing (a term we had never heard, just a few weeks ago) does not mean we have to literally stay indoors all the time. If you have a garden, enjoy it - and use your "one walk, cycle or run per day" wisely! Social distancing does mean staying 2 metres away from other people, avoiding visitors and obeying a range of other measures. You can read government information at www.gov.uk/coronavirus. Stay home.

The Messenger team has reflected carefully and decided that, although we will publish an April edition, we cannot go ahead with the usual printing, collating and distribution of the magazine. This will be continually reviewed for subsequent months, depending on government guidance. The April issue will therefore only be available online. Please find the issues of the magazine online at bit.ly/MessengerIssues.

This month you'll find information from our Parish Council and nearest Town Council on how they will protect and support us – plus a call for volunteers (and an offer of support) from the Meppershall Good Neighbours (GNOMES). If you are struggling, there are numbers you can reach out to. We will look after each other through this. Idyllic summer moments will return, there will be very happy days again. But first we all have to commit to the public health measures being put in place and do our bit.

We are especially thinking of the public service heroes who will continue to work so hard and under huge demands to get the country through the current coronavirus challenges. Our village is home to a range of healthcare professionals and we are in awe of them and what they do for us all. Thank you. It was amazing to see such a big village response to the campaign to #clapforourcarers at 8pm on Thursday 26th March.

The photos here are a big reminder of the beauty around us here. Perhaps being stuck at home for a while will remind us of that. The views from our windows matter. The birdsong matters. The long drive into the village on a hedge-lined lane and the open fields and meadows adjoining our residential streets: these are at the heart of why we love this place.

So it is no surprise that village reactions get stronger every time a new development proposal emerges. Understandably, it seems that many people feel like a couple of hundred new houses is probably more than enough in Meppershall! The Walnut Tree Way development is pleasant to live in, to walk around and it has brought some nice new neighbours. But an unending series of new developments (most recently the application to build on The Mow, plus an astonishing demolition on Fildyke Road) have sparked articles and letters. I wonder what Herbie Harris would make of it all.



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Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

A resident of more than 60 years in Meppershall, I am disgusted to see more piles of dog poo than ever on Crackle Hill. It is not pleasant to walk up there, as it once was.

Also, cars parking on pavements and grassed areas which churns up mud, which is trodden everywhere.

Also, it saddens me to see many black bin bags outside no. 2 Fildyke Road where the lady died some weeks ago. Such an eyesore and cats are getting into them, spreading the contents everywhere. I reported this to the Council over a week ago, still nothing has been done. Such a shame for such a lovely village. It makes me wonder where this is all going. Lovely new houses but a filthy mess in places.

Message to the people of Meppershall: please try and clean up and respect your village which was once a very industrious and pleasant place to live.

E. Lawrence

Editor's comment: It does seem that in some spots people are thinking that being a few yards down a footpath means dog poop doesn't need to be bagged and binned. Let's all try to be as tidy as possible. Please pick it up, wherever your doggy puts it.

Dear Editors

This month's picture inside the front cover is an illustration of a facet of village history that's being lost under the tidal wave of development swamping the village.

With over 250 additional homes currently approved or under construction, we are losing our village character hand over fist.

The village is surrounded by fields, and barely visible from many of the approaches - in fact the first thing many people see of Meppershall is greenhouses!

But for how much longer?

The latest application to build still another 19 homes on the site of "The Mow" off Hoo Road calls for access for all construction traffic, deliveries etc, going through Brookmead... **Brookmead!?** Unbelievable...

The Parish Council are powerless to stop this, much as they will want to - they're against this type of infill development, but planning is a Central Beds decision. You, the villagers, need to let CBC know that this is not acceptable.

We've tried before to prevent this over-development of Meppershall, but we have to try again. Go to the CBC planning website and register objections, and maybe CBC will take on board how much of our village character has been, and is still, in danger of being destroyed by developers.

Name supplied

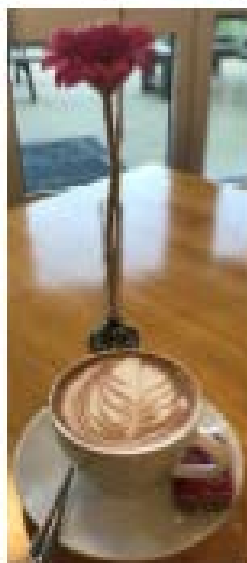
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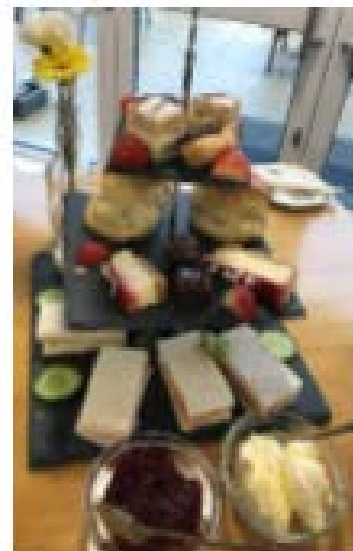
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Meppershall Parish Council: Epidemic Information

Meppershall Parish Council is assisting local support groups and is working together with other local town and parish councils and organisations to assist those most vulnerable in our society. Please check out the 'coronavirus update' page at www.meppershall.org. The Parish Council is coordinating with the Meppershall GNOMES (see GNOMES article and contact information below). Shefford Town Council may also serve as an additional source of support to Meppershall (again, see separate article below).

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak develops, the Government are holding daily press conferences to announce changes to the advice and new support being put in place.

Across Bedfordshire, all blue light services (police, fire, ambulance), NHS organisations, unitary councils (Bedford, Luton and Central Bedfordshire) and other key stakeholders such as the voluntary sector, work together in co-ordinating responses to emergencies. These organisations work together as the Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum (BLRF) to deliver the requirements of the Government's COBRA Committee, take action and develop plans in this context.

As Government has advised self-isolation and social distancing, the implications of this on our communities and council services is under constant review.

These are unprecedented times and given the pace of change it will be extremely difficult to keep you up to date. Therefore, Central Bedfordshire Council has a dedicated section on their website that they will keep up to date with the latest information specific to Central Bedfordshire: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/covidinfo.

As well as the latest information on Central Bedfordshire Council services, the web pages include the latest health advice, information for vulnerable groups, information for volunteers and information for businesses. Whilst some of this is still in development, these pages will be updated as more information and advice becomes available.

Shefford Town Council: Epidemic Information



Shefford Town Council has set up a dedicated support line **07923 224636** for anyone in the community who needs help during the COVID 19 crisis. The Town Council are in the process of co-ordinating local support and are working together with Churches Together, Shefford Good Neighbours and Lloyds Pharmacy, with other local businesses coming on board to offer their support daily as the crisis deepens. Some businesses are offering goods and takeaway services with free delivery (including a low-cost nutritious lunch/dinner menu), whilst others can take card payments over the phone with goods being delivered by our volunteers.

We have a group of vetted volunteers, local residents who will be working as a team to help those who need support; be that to pick up shopping, walk a dog, post a letter, pay a bill, collect a medication prescription, delivery of a hot meal or just a chat over the phone. Our volunteers will be issued with ID badges and a password to share when organising delivery.

Phone **07923 224636** and if we are unable to answer straight away, please leave your name and number and someone will call you back.

GNOMES (Meppershall Good Neighbours)

A Key Village Organisation At This Time



Can you help with the current COVID-19 crisis in Meppershall?

The Meppershall Good Neighbour Group (GNOMES) has teamed up with the Parish Council to provide help to those in need in our village. Unfortunately, many of our GNOMES are in the vulnerable age group but most have expressed a willingness to help by manning the telephone to receive calls from those who need help and to telephone those who are alone and chat with them. To meet the anticipated demand over the next few months we really need more people to help.

NO PRESSURE but if you feel you could help in any capacity please do contact lovemeppershall@meppershall.org by email.

There will be a form to fill in. Should you have a DBS Clearance then there is less to complete, if you do not have such a clearance, we can arrange for a check to be conducted at no charge to the volunteer.

If you could do any or all of the following: pick up shopping, walk a dog, post a letter, pay a bill, collect a medication prescription, deliver a hot meal or just chat over the telephone, then you could be a great help to Meppershall.

Many neighbours, relatives and friends are rallying together to help each other during these unprecedented times. However, we urge everyone to be vigilant as there are some unscrupulous people around who will take advantage in times of crisis. The GNOMES can offer a trusted neighbour service where any unexpected callers can be referred, which often sends them on their way if they are not genuine. Please do not hand over cash, bank account details or bank cards to anyone, unless you trust the person implicitly.

Please note that some businesses are offering goods and takeaway services with free delivery (including low-cost nutritious lunch/dinner menus); others can take card payments over the phone with goods being delivered by volunteers. For more details of these services ring 07923 224636 (Shefford Town Council support line).

For Meppershall GNOMES assistance the number is the same: 07760 793921.

Lastly, please note that our coffee morning in the Walnut Way Café (Village Hall) on 9th April 2020 is postponed.


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Thank you

On behalf of the whole village, The Messenger says a big THANK YOU to all those involved in the GNOMES and to everyone involved in the epidemic response more widely. We are also fortunate to have excellent local businesses and shops on our doorstep – everything you are doing is much appreciated. At the time of writing, this now includes “Meppershall Catering” operating from the Sugar Loaf, delivering home-cooked meals to order, 6-10pm. Call 01462 654334 after midday for information.

Parish Church of St Mary The Virgin (Church of England)

Church Road, off Campton Road, Meppershall

www.stmarysmeppershall.org.uk † facebook.com/stmarysmeppershall



Rector: The Reverend Veronica Goodman

01462 339962 – ronigoodman@gmail.com – usual day off Monday

Churchwardens:

Dawn Abbatt 01462 816962 Chris Valentine 01462 815971

Email: Meppershall.PCC@gmail.com

PCC Secretary:

Anne Parsons 01462 813333 Email: annie10639@gmail.com

Message from St Mary's

It is hard to know what to say as I write this. I would normally be doing a straightforward article about the coming joys of Easter but we seem firmly embroiled in our own “Good Friday” Corona Virus event at the moment and that cannot be ignored. I know so many who are worried and afraid - for themselves, for loved ones, for physical health and for emotional and mental health. “Social distancing” over time brings with it the danger of social isolation and increased loneliness.

As we are bombarded by information from all over the world, how can we manage our own levels of anxiety and support one another during this difficult time?

Oasis UK have been thinking about community responses to Coronavirus. If you haven't discovered it yet, on their website www.oasisuk.org/coronavirus, their leaflet Finding-Calm-Coronavirus-Oasis.pdf is full of some really sensible and practical advice about looking after ourselves and others.

Sadly, we have had to suspend our usual face-to-face church activities. However, we are firmly committed to making sure we all keep in touch with one another – via text, WhatsApp, phone, Skype and in any ways we can to maintain friendships and care for one another practically at this time. We are blessed to have the wonderful GNOMES in our village, but you are welcome also to contact the Church via Rector Roni 07533376880, Mr Chris Valentine 07701 039324 or Ruth Callard 07837960727 if you think we can be of any help.

The church Facebook page is an important link at the present time (search Facebook for @stmarysmeppershall). We have begun to livestream daily prayer and Sunday services, led by myself and Andrew – usually at 9am/9pm or 10.30am Sundays.

Praying is a particular role for the Church at this time. We are praying for those who are physically vulnerable, or who are made financially insecure at this time, who do not have nearby family and friends, for healthcare workers, those looking for vaccines and medical solutions, those in countries without good public healthcare systems. We are praying also for wisdom for the leaders of the nations.... and... and ...and. Please give Rector Roni a ring if you would like to be prayed for by name by Church members.

I know that for some people there are many questions about turning to prayer, not least “How could a good God let things like this happen in the first place?”, but I think at this time of year particularly it is helpful to remember that our God is a Good Friday God as well as an Easter Sunday God.

“I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross,” wrote John Stott, one of the most important Christian evangelists of the last century, in “The Cross of Christ.” “The only God I believe in is the one Nietzsche ridiculed as ‘God on the cross.’ In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?” (Continues Peter Wehner of the New York Times). From the perspective of Christianity, one can question why God allows suffering, but one cannot say God doesn’t understand it. He is not remote, indifferent, untouched or unscarred.

As we approach Holy Week, in our thoughts and prayers we are alongside Jesus who prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that “this cup might pass him by”, and who endured betrayal, scourging, mocking and the humiliation and the unspeakable suffering of public execution on the cross. It is he who is the Good Shepherd (Psalm 23) who comes to lead and guide us through everything life throws at us - and who ultimately will lead us “through the valley of the shadow of death” to life everlasting.

The Joys of Easter Sunday were hard won for us - and God does not promise there will be no dark Good Friday moments - but he promises to walk through them with us into the new days beyond.

Praying for a Happy and Holy and healthy Easter for you all.

With best wishes, Rector Roni

Church Services and Events – April 2020

In accordance with national health service advice, government guidance and the Church of England statement of 17th March 2020, public worship and church gatherings are on hold at the present time.

However, you will know the church community is here at the heart of the village:

- Please find us at www.facebook.com/stmarysmeppershall for livestreamed moments of prayer and reflection, photos, videos and information – we would love to have your comments and feedback!
- Please get in touch using the phone numbers and email addresses listed above.

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Planning and the Council(s)

Following recent posts on the Meppershall Noticeboard (Facebook) about developments, we felt it would be useful for villagers to have a breakdown of who does what with regard to planning applications.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS – are made to Central Beds Council (CBC) Planning dept. at the CBC offices at Priory House Chicksands, and the details are published by CBC on their website for residents to see. They also send a copy to the Parish Council

PLANNING DECISIONS – are made by either the CBC Planning Officers, or by the Planning Committee (District Councillors), based on planning law, and other factors.

RESIDENTS – can visit the CBC Planning Applications web page and view any application, and make comments about it, for or against, as they choose.

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL (MPC) DOESN'T MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT PLANNING.

It's important to understand that the PARISH Council can only make comments to CBC about applications, it does not make the decision itself. Sometimes MPC oppose an application, sometimes they don't. Applications are discussed by MPC in their regular monthly meetings, and they write to CBC advising them of the MPC view on each - whether CBC take any notice or not is up to them. But they don't allow any and all developments. CBC refused the change of use for the pub, and kept it open. They refused the "Gladman" application at 59 Shefford Road, fought the developers appeal, and applied to the High Court to try to prevent it. They've refused developments in other villages as well.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS – these are held every month at the Village Hall, on the second Monday in the month, at 7.45 PM. Villagers are welcome to attend, and listen to the discussions. There is generally a briefing by one of the CBC Ward Councillors at the start of the PC meeting, where they outline CBC decisions, policy changes, planned actions etc. that might impact Meppershall. Decisions by CBC about changes to the education policy, leisure facilities, and highway maintenance were among these subjects at the last PC meeting.

The PC Chairman will then allow residents a short while to ask questions, or to raise issues and concerns so that the PC can take appropriate action. Things like conditions of footpaths, traffic, parking, anti-social behaviour etc. are often raised.

The PC discuss things like village facilities, playgrounds, roads etc. on a monthly basis, so this is a good way to keep abreast of what's going on!

It's YOUR village. You can get involved, or just take an interest in how it's run. But we thought it would be helpful to understand the process behind planning matters...

Feel free to contact us (clerk@meppershall.org) for clarification of anything, or come along to next Parish Council meeting! It's your village, and your magazine.



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The Meppershall Coprolite Miners by Mike Read

In the second half of the 19th Century a new rural industry sprang up in Bedfordshire, the opencast mining of coprolite, and Meppershall and the surrounding villages were all involved.

So, what is coprolite? In reality, it constitutes nodules with a high lime and phosphate content, partly from the fossilized dung and intestinal content of prehistoric reptiles and animals including scales, bones, teeth, oysters, sponges, ammonites and other shells, but more generally the accumulation of phosphate-rich Cretaceous sediment. After washing, crushing and treating with Vitriol (sulphuric acid), this produced the first commercial and highly effective artificial fertilizer which could be used to increase the fertility of weak or exhausted soil. The first person to take out a patent to produce fertilizer in this way was John Bennet Lawes, who in 1843 founded the world renowned Rothamsted Experimental Station in Harpenden, and was created a baronet by Queen Victoria in 1882.

These fossil deposits were to be found 10 to 20 feet down in a narrow belt running between Tring in the South-West, to Cambridge in the North-East, and were laid down in the Upper Gault Clay and Lower Greensand during the late Jurassic and Cretaceous periods (146 million years ago). When it was realized that there were big profits to be made from excavating this material, farmers and other local entrepreneurs got together to seek licences from landowners to extract the coprolite. The contractors agreed a Royalty payment to the landowner according to the acreage worked each year, and this could be up to fifty times the return yielded from agricultural rents at the time – a very attractive income.

Once work began, the topsoil and subsoil was moved to one side, to be restored later, and the coprolite seam was exposed. Using pickaxes and occasionally explosives, the diggers shovelled it into barrows and took it to a washmill on site for removal of unwanted material, and it was then transported by tumbrel to the nearest railway or treatment works. The task was dangerous, many of the men were inexperienced and poorly supervised, the sides of the excavation could frequently collapse, accidents were common, and many injuries and even fatalities were recorded.

This new industry brought some welcome prosperity to the area, as the coprolite diggers earned more than the local agricultural labourers, twelve shillings (60 pence) or more for a six day week compared with the national average agricultural wage of 8 to 10 shillings. It also brought friction as many of the diggers were itinerant workers, but they did need to be fed, housed and equipped locally. Many of these workers brought their families. The local pubs (five in Meppershall, twelve in Shillington) did a roaring trade, particularly those providing accommodation. The pubs, or beer houses in Meppershall were the Sugar Loaf (on the same site as the present building), the Barley Mow, the Red Lion (better known by the locals as the Pig & Whistle), the Five Bells, and another Barley Mow down at The Hoo. In Shillington there were at least 400

men extracting coprolite in 1876 on land owned by Trinity College, Cambridge. In fact some sources put the figure as high as 1,400 which, if true, is remarkable.

The 1851 census recorded the population of Meppershall at 503. The number had swollen to 778 by 1881 (an increase of over 50%), but had then declined to 650 by 1891 when digging had largely ceased, or most licences had expired. It seems likely that many of the men swelling the Meppershall population were actually employed at the Shillington sites which were extensive. The 1871 census described the occupation of six local men as 'extractor of coprolite', including John Bygrave, the oldest Joseph Izzard (age 36) and the youngest Alfred Dilley (age 19).

The 1881 Meppershall census named 41-year old Amos Dear from Oddesborough in Buckinghamshire as the 'Coprolite Foreman'. Other local fossil diggers included James Barratt, James Izzard and James Primmott (possibly a census misspelling), all young men in their twenties.

So where were the coprolite workings in Meppershall? One known seam was excavated by contractor Frederick Smith at Chapel Farm (then owned by Christ's Hospital) adjacent to St. Thomas' Chapel). The tenant farmer Charles Brown had discovered fossil deposits whilst carrying out drainage work on the northeast-facing fields. The Hospital Governors granted Smith a licence to extract coprolite, expiring on 25th December 1894. He then had to restore the land to full agricultural use within 12 months.

Local historian, the late Vic Chambers, recorded details of the locations of the workings: *"There are only three small inliers of chalk marl, partially marked by boulder clay drift in Meppershall parish, and it is a mark of their profitability that they should have been discovered. Two of these outcrops were worked, a small one east of Shillington Road where Mr. Parson's nursery stands, the other on Rust Hill, Chapel Farm to the southeast of Cow Lane footpath... The third outcrop, also on Chapel Farm, but now Mr. Parish's land towards the A600, was evidently not worth working"*. Crop marks visible to the south of Chapel Farm indicate the site of some of the old coprolite workings.

Apart from the extensive workings in Shillington, coprolite excavation was also recorded locally in Campton, Shefford and Stondon. Towards the end of the 19th Century the industry in Bedfordshire fell into decline. This was in part due to the more accessible seams of coprolite being exhausted, and it was not cost effective to dig much deeper than 20 feet, as this was often below the water table level. More importantly, large scale importation of rock phosphates began to arrive from Charleston, South Carolina, and from Algeria. For a couple of decades the industry had created a level of prosperity for some Bedfordshire parishes that had not been experienced ever before, or since.

Mike Read, Manor Farm



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‘Now I get to see you break’ by Caroline Carter

Dedicated to Bill and his orchard.

I’ve lived here over 20 years, ‘landed’ by mistake; but I hung around, I stayed awhile
cheers; **now I get to see you break.**

It’s true my lovely ‘mish-mash’ friend, we’ve seen things, come and go,
we’ve shared the births, the deaths and such but now who can know.

Land grab rife, power and might, it’s slashing you full face on,
It ravishes your greenest space and I can hear it groan.
I’ve seen the deer, I have felt the trees, groaning as they die,
That beautiful old walnut tree, who can justify?

I wish that I could save you, but its way beyond my means,
I wish I could assuage them, those all consumed by deals.
We fear for what will be left of you when all is said and done,
When all is left is angry folk, rows of cars, the rest long gone.

I will retain a piece of you, though they want that too,
I will try to do right by you, that’s what I hope to do.
But they come closer all the time, they're gathering at the gate,
Let’s try our best, let's hold on, honour you before it’s all too late.

March 2020. Caroline Carter

Editor’s comment: Thank you Caroline for this beautiful and
heart-felt piece of writing.

V.E. Day Street Party and Fireworks

Due to the current situation, it is with much sadness that the Meppershall Events team are postponing the village’s V.E. Day celebrations planned for Friday, 8th May. We hope to hold an event later in the year and will let you all know as soon as we can set a date. Thanks to everyone who has supported this event and we look forward to seeing you all in the near future.

Meppershall Events Team

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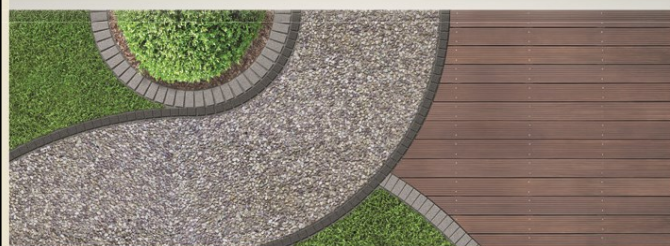
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Our Health Depends on our Custodianship of the Earth

Nature may seem to have thrown rather more problems at us recently than usual – or more, at least, than we are accustomed to in the developed world. Firstly there were the disastrous fires in Australia, then the storms and floods which brought serious problems to several parts of the UK; and now coronavirus, affecting at least 100 countries worldwide. Looking at the three crises together – fire, flood, and virus – it could seem that our whole way of life, our assumptions about how and where we can live, may be threatened. It may indeed be time for a re-think.

I don't know how many readers are familiar with Cormac McCarthy's prize-winning novel, *The Road* (2006), or the film subsequently made. It depicts a world in which familiar civilisation has been destroyed by fires, the ultimate cause of which is unknown, and a few survivors struggle for existence. Extreme, if you like. Teaching it only five years ago as a set text for A Level it seemed just one of those bizarre futuristic science-fiction fantasies that bears little relation to our world. Now, just a few years on, I'm starting to feel it is eerily prescient of dangers that might just lie in our future path. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* must similarly have seemed an unrealistic sci-fi fantasy when it was first published in 1932. But it turned out to be prophetic of the possibilities of genetic engineering, which have been a reality for some years now; and it remains one of the most insightful accounts of dangers accompanying the advances of science, to have been written in the last 100 years.

As the writer of this article, I had better acknowledge that I am not particularly religious in any conventional or traditional sense. I do not know whether it is God, or Nature, or the Laws of Physics, or some other factor or force that we do not understand and probably never will, that shapes what happens in the Universe, and particularly on our Earth. But I am intrigued that in the *Old Testament* it is a massive Flood that is sent to punish the world for its mistakes. And that the *Book of Revelation* speaks of a fire coming down from God out of the heavens. (20: 7-15). *Genesis* also states that Adam was given the task of naming the animals (which might be seen as the beginning of science), and was also given dominion over them (1:26). But I think that the Bible would also imply that it is our duty as human beings to be the custodians of the Earth, to look after it, and its animal life.*

It is easy to see that over the last few centuries in particular we have not been taking very good care of the Earth, nor of animals or wildlife. The coronavirus is believed to have started (transferred to humans) at a market in Wuhan where wild animals, dead and alive, were on sale; and it seems at least probable that some of those animals had been farmed for the purpose in wild-animal farms where, one imagines, the conditions may have been far from good for the creatures concerned. So a virus sprang up, and was transmitted from one species to another, perhaps leaping across boundaries in the market where different species were in unnaturally close proximity. And so it leapt to the human species, and now we may be paying the price for exploiting those creatures in the first place.

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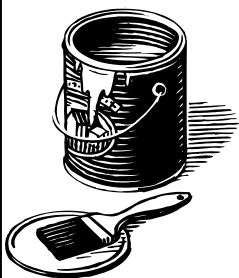
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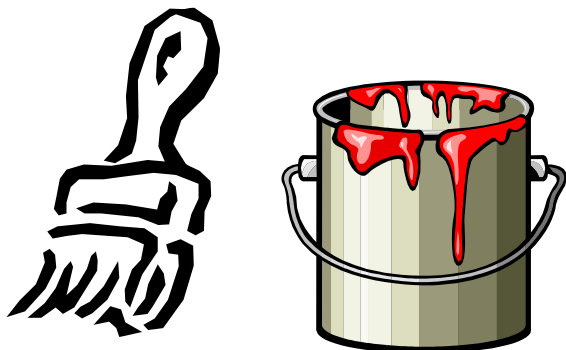
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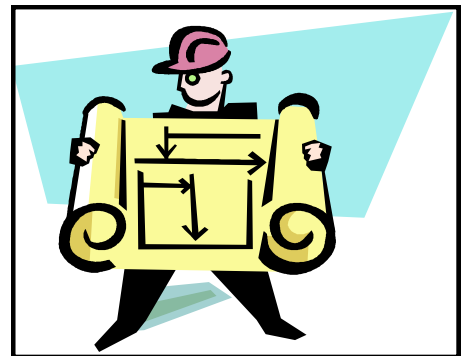
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All three potential disasters, fire, flood and the virus, are a timely reminder that Nature is still greater, more powerful, than us. We have become too accustomed to believing that the Earth is here simply for us to exploit. Likewise, in the developed world we too frequently seem to believe that we can have, indeed have a right to have, whatever we want in terms of material possessions and jet-set travel. But now we are facing forces which are telling us we are going to have to change these beliefs, these behaviours.

Our primary duty as humans should be, not to exploit the Earth, but to respect and take care of it. We have too often forgotten that it is the source of all the life, the health, and the beauty that we have. Likewise, humans have spent far too many centuries fighting other humans, whether on grounds of religion, ethnicity, culture or whatever. Essentially we have been turned inward, ignoring our duty to take care of the Earth, and attacking our own species. The Coronavirus is like an alien enemy that could affect us all. And if there is one message of the virus, it is that as a species we must stop this petty squabbling and over-reaching of ourselves. We must come together and look after each other, for the safety of the whole species, as we must also respect our place in the Earth, and look after it.

And if there were a God, perhaps that would be the message that s/he/they would wish us to learn.

S.W.



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

CPRE Bedfordshire, the countryside charity, has recently launched a new website to share their work with a wider audience.

You can explore by areas of work including nature and landscapes, local food, what gets built and where, and local transport or find out what's happening in your part of Bedfordshire by visiting the pages for Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton.

Under a brand new Discover Our Countryside heading there are ideas for days out in the county, a new blog series 'celebrating the everyday' and details of the Living Countryside Awards. There are also some in-depth features on issues including climate change, environmental protections and ways of connecting with nature.

There are lots of ways to get involved with the charity including volunteering opportunities, membership and events. They recently held a workshop on Neighbourhood Planning with over forty representatives from local parish and town councils coming together to learn more and share knowledge at our workshop. Having received very positive feedback from the delegates the charity is exploring ways in which it might provide ongoing support including developing extra web resources.

<https://www.cprebeds.org.uk/>

CPRE Bedfordshire and Langford Parish Council vigorously opposed the proposed development of 55 new homes that were to be built in countryside, on the northern edge of the village and close to the River Ivel.

The village's Neighbourhood Plan was nearing completion and this site had not been allocated for development within it.

<https://www.cprebeds.org.uk/news/langford/>

Can You Help? (Your village magazine needs you!)

We are fortunate to have a very lively and successful village magazine at the present time.

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Email us at mepp.messenger@gmail.com or see our contact info at the back of this issue. We'd love to meet you! Get involved! It's fun! Thanks as always to The Sugar Loaf for (in normal circumstances) hosting our monthly collating session to prepare the upcoming issue of The Meppershall Messenger!



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TJ Plumbing are really excited to bring something new to Shefford. We are a hard-working, loyal, local family-run business who advertise in this magazine, and carry out lots of jobs for Meppershall residents. In a few weeks we're opening a showroom in Shefford (opposite Town Hall) to show you some of the things we can do for you. We hope people will pop into see what we offer, to make appointments and have a friendly chat and cup of coffee.

In the shop will be examples of our boilers, some different styles of taps that people can come and see, with fixed-price "supply and fit" deals. Radiators, shower and smart heating controls are also going to be on display.

TNM PROPERTY SERVICES will also join us, showing bathroom and kitchen ideas with more choices of showers and taps. We are hoping as well to have a carpet display by a local carpet fitter who we highly recommend.

We are *hoping* to open Tuesday after Easter - with things the way they are 😞 we are taking this one or two days at a time! Hopefully we will have a big opening once the new signs go up (but that could be a couple of months due to planning permission).

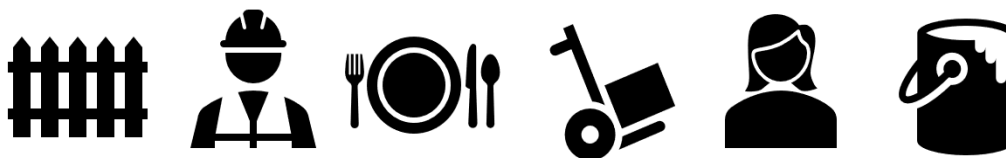
We will be opening a few days a week to begin with including Saturday mornings - hope to see you there.

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Take a moment NOW to look through the useful ads in the centre section and also in the colour section.

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The Meppershall Players at S.T.M.A.



Our V.E. Day production, “When the lights go on Again,” is a new musical play written especially for the 75th Anniversary. We follow the lives of a group of people working together in a small London theatre, with much humour and great songs from the 40s. We’ll follow the lives of Gramps, the stage doorman, his granddaughter Gladys, her husband Bert and their son Billy, along with Arthur the stage manager, young Carol, Flo and her daughter Mary and Beryl, as they try to get through World War 2 the best they can.

Get in the spirit of the era as you sit at long tables giving the feel of a street party, food is included and served during the interval (not suitable for anyone with food allergies) and sing along with the cast to the well-known songs in your souvenir song book. Wave your union flag with pride and gusto.

All dates and meetings are now subject to review because of the epidemic and the social distancing restrictions.

Tickets all £10 on sale at ticketsource.co.uk/themeppershallplayers. Non-Internet sales 01462 816336.

“When the Lights go on Again” V.E Musical Play at S.T.M.A

Sat 5th December Aladdin Pantomime at STMA

Sat 12th December Aladdin Pantomime at venue TBC

You can find the Meppershall Players on Facebook (Meppershall Players Community), Instagram and Twitter

If you want to join our merry band of thespians whether it’s on or off the stage contact Karen on the number below or pop in and see us (when things are back to normal) on Monday evenings 7.30pm-10pm at Shefford Town Memorial Hall (S.T.M.A). Junior members usually finish at 9pm due to school the next day. Membership is currently free. We welcome people to indulge in all areas of theatrical performances, set building, costumes, directing, acting, make-up, song & dance, etc. Interested? We look forward to meeting you (once the pandemic has passed!)

Karen Mitchell (Players’ Secretary) 01462 816336



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Shefford Leisure Group by Enid Pamment



Shefford Leisure Club has naturally been affected by the travel and social distancing requirements currently in force. Trips will be transferred or cancelled until later in the year and for now all London theatre trips are cancelled. It is hoped that trips will resume with Hunstanton from the normal list (26th July). Warners near Lowestoft has been booked from Friday 9th – Monday 12th October. We thank you for your patience and understanding - and for your ongoing support.

April is upon us, but we still have the high winds making one feel a little chilly - not a good start especially with this awful virus we are currently plagued with! Let's hope it won't last much longer! At least the lighter evenings have helped a little. Even though the weather has been most peculiar the gardens do not seem to be affected. The countryside is lovely and the hedges along the roads are rapidly turning green with spring flowers and tree blossom in abundance - a lovely time of the year.

We recently met Christine, our Blue Badge Guide for the day at The National Army Museum, Chelsea who kindly escorted us for our welcome coffee and refreshments. So interesting is this building and contents, we could have spent so much more time there. We then boarded our coach for a tour around Kensington and Chelsea with Christine who gave us a wonderful commentary on the areas, famous people who lived there and what their occupation was... causing a little hilarity! We finished our tour at the entrance of the Saatchi Gallery to see the Tutankhamun treasures of the Golden Pharaoh. Shortly these wonderful treasures, originally discovered in 1922, will be escorted back to their home in Egypt where they will stay forever!

A small group of our people sent to the Milton Keynes Theatre to see The King and I – this is a marvellous show direct from the West End of London. Everyone said how much they enjoyed their afternoon.

Next month we planned to tell you all about our River Seine Cruise – but it was one of the first postponements caused by the epidemic. In the meantime, with the lighter evenings you won't have to pull the curtains quite so early and maybe, weather permitting we will be able to spend a little time in our own gardens. Who knows!!

Take care,

Enid xx

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In Memoriam



With great sadness and sympathy we remember the passing of two great village characters:

Penny Trundle, dearly loved wife of Mick, in March. Our sincere condolences to Howard and the family.

Maurice Horwood, in March, at the age of 89. Our sincere condolences to Barbara and family.

We hope to write more about both Penny and Maurice in a future issue. They will be so very deeply missed.

Birthdays in April

We wish a very happy birthday in the coming month to...

Doreen Lawrence

Peter Lambley

Derek Poulter

Pam Halliwell

Shireen Longland

'TRUGS & TROWELS'

Campton Gardening Club

It is with great regret that due to the unprecedented situation at present around the Coronavirus Outbreak, our monthly meetings are now CANCELLED until further notice.

I would like to thank everyone for their understanding during this difficult time and hope you all stay well and virus free!

Could I also ask if you could kindly pass this message on to anyone who would normally attend the Gardening Club, but doesn't receive the Meppershall Messenger - Thank You

For more information, please contact... *Maryika* 01462 851729



In light of the current epidemic Wanderbus services are currently suspended. The Wanderbus team will be reviewing the situation at the end of April.



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Gone, But Not Quite Forgotten – Market Gardening in Meppershall by John Parsons

Horticulture, or market gardening, has been a feature of Meppershall for a long time. There were nurserymen working during the eighteenth century. Records show Elizabeth Millard had a nursery garden in the Shillington Road area in 1845. At this time these growers would have been producing vegetables, fruit and flowers grown seasonally in their open fields and mostly for local sale in Meppershall and neighbouring villages until the construction of the railway through Shefford which would have enabled delivery to Bedford, Hitchin and beyond.

The first glasshouse, numbers of which became so prominent in the village, was built in 1913 for the growing of cucumbers and was situated on land now occupied by Brookside and Brookmead. After the First World War the nursery was sold to the former Head Gardener of Chicksands Priory who began producing ferns, lilies and flowers. He employed young local men who in due course thought they could do the job just as well and set up further nurseries around the village. This growth continued through the decades until, at the peak of the local industry, there were 22 nurseries in production within the parish. Initially both flowers and salad crops would have been produced, at least until the Second World War, when the government required flower production to be replaced by food crops - more specifically cucumber growing. By the 1950s, produce was being sold locally and in the London wholesale markets as well as further afield. For a period, cucumber production was so high that a railway wagon was filled twice every week with Meppershall produce and left the Goods Yard at Shefford for Manchester. Produce harvested in here was available in shops in Manchester the next day!

Over the years many different crops would have been produced; tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, celery, chrysanthemums, carnations and more recently roses and bedding plants as well as young plants for other growers in the county. But nurseries usually grew tomatoes in the summer and lettuce through the autumn, winter and spring.

Most of these businesses were small, family-based enterprises and this is probably the first of many factors that ultimately led to the disappearance of the industry from the village. It was not an easy way to earn a living, even at its height. The success of the business was dependent on the weather, the level of demand from customers and freedom from pest and diseases, to name just a few of the challenges. As the years passed the sons and daughters of the growers chose in many cases not to join the business. Also, many of greenhouses, built as each nursery was founded, became

unsuitable for the modern ways of growing and many of the small firms could not invest the large amounts needed to modernise. The small scale operations were at a further disadvantage as the way we shopped for fresh produce changed with the growth of the supermarkets. The majority of Meppershall's production was ultimately sold through the vast number of greengrocer's shops found on every High Street. As the supermarkets increased their market share, the small shops disappeared. Nationally some growers set up cooperatives to supply the new customers but it could (cautiously!) be suggested that the nurserymen of Meppershall were too independent and set in their ways to change. So the industry declined. Further damage was done by the increases in energy costs as oil prices rose and, in an early manifestation of globalisation, it became advantageous to import fresh food in ever increasing amounts.

In fairness to the growers of Meppershall this decline was reflected nationally. A very large number of small enterprises vanished leaving a smaller number of very large-scale producers to successfully continue to grow British fruit, vegetables and flowers. In our village, as the demand for new housing grew, the old nurseries have been redeveloped in places and many have now disappeared. Today, there is no commercial market gardening taking place here. A chapter of village history has closed.



**Flowers grown by Herbert Harris in his glasshouse off Hoo Road in 1966.
Photograph courtesy of Gary Dilley.**



Fred Parsons, John's father, photographed in the late 1960s with his glasshouses in the background. John's family have farmed the same land in Meppershall for many generations. They still grow some excellent fruit and veg for themselves, drawing on skills and experience accumulated over many years.

Photograph courtesy of John Parsons.

Bedford Model Engineering Society Summerfield Miniature Railway Off the A600 just past Haynes Turn

In light of the epidemic social distancing advice, public running days at the miniature railway are postponed and we will publish further information in future editions of The Meppershall Messenger. Please refer to **www.bedfordmes.co.uk**.



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Financial Matters by Paul Savuto

Coronavirus and your investments

Stock markets sold off towards the end of February with investors concerned by secondary outbreaks of the coronavirus in Italy, South Korea and Iran. While the human cost is of course tragic, coronavirus also carries an economic cost, chiefly through reduced consumption, lower (or cancelled) leisure activity and, in China's case, labour shortages as workers remain at home.

As a result of the spread of the disease and its impact, a number of clients have contacted us about their portfolios, questioning whether they should sell investments. We would caution against a knee jerk reaction to move to cash. While the emergence of clusters outside of China is an unwelcome development, the Chinese authorities and international community have mounted an aggressive response to the disease. Coronavirus will depress global economic growth in 2020, but it is impossible to say whether markets are currently too optimistic or pessimistic about its progress.

We are presently waiting to see whether the World Health Organisation (WHO) declares coronavirus as a Phase 5 pandemic, which would mean the disease was spreading from human to human in more than one country of one WHO region.

Encouragingly, the Chinese authorities appear to be checking the progress of coronavirus. An extension to the Chinese New Year holiday, travel bans and event cancellations have all helped the country to get a handle on the disease. As a result, the number of new cases in China (outside of Hubei province, the original epicentre) has been declining. While there are questions about whether the numbers are skewed for political reasons, the trend the numbers portray is likely accurate.

Global economic growth is still expected to be between 2-2.5% this year, with the potential for a rebound towards the end of 2020. For investors who are mindful of selling their investments now, there is a clear risk of selling at the bottom and having to buy back into the market once stocks have rebounded. There are prudent steps investors can take, such as limiting their exposure to the travel and tourism sector, but this could also be a good opportunity to increase investments to high quality companies which reliably grow their earnings over time.

The immediate impact on individual companies themselves is uncertain. Some have tried to provide an estimate of the effects, with Diageo, the alcoholic drinks company, expecting a 4% reduction in earnings per share for 2020. By its own admission, however, Diageo's figures are highly contingent on the progression of the disease and other companies have chosen not to provide guidance. On Diageo's assessment, disruption from the disease persists into March, with a gradual return to normality by the end of the year.

We expect investors to react more to ongoing news flow around the virus rather than company updates about what it might mean for their individual businesses. Stock markets may continue to fall, but it is worth noting that the world's policymakers stand by to cushion the impact of the virus. The Chinese central bank, the People's Bank of China, has already taken steps to protect the economy. Attention will now turn to whether the US Federal Reserve follows in March. Western governments may also follow the Chinese authorities in boosting spending, helping to further protect the global economy.

From a more general perspective, we would encourage clients to 'wait out' the coronavirus. Any decision to move to cash / sell down shares need two things to happen for the decision to pay off:

- 1) Markets must continue to fall, AND
- 2) A decision must then be taken to reinvest before share prices recover.

As long-term investors, we believe in identifying fundamentally strong companies – either directly or through funds – and investing in them on the basis of their future prospects. Coronavirus will not alter the business model of the companies we invest in. It is not so much about timing the market, but time in the market, with long-term investors benefiting from steadily compounding returns over the years, as any chart of historic market performance will show.

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CBC councillors:

Tony Brown anthony.brown@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
 Mark Liddiard mark.liddiard@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

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Parish Council Clerk Alessandro Marabese clerk@meppershall.org

Member of Parliament

Nadine Dorries dorriesn@parliament.uk

St Marys Church

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(see the church section of The Meppershall Messenger for full details)

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meppershallps@gmail.com
Robert Bloomfield Academy, Shefford 01462 628800
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Organisations

Meppershall Players Karen Mitchell 01462 816366
Meppershall Good Neighbours (GNOMES) 07760 793921
Meppershall Brownies, Suzanne Brightwell 07817 392325
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The Team and Collation Dates

CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editor welcomes contributions to the Messenger, whether as letters, articles or notices. Contributions should preferably be as attachments to e-mail (address below) but handwritten contributions may be sent by post, or left in the folder kept at the Village Stores. Contributions should run to not more than one A5 page (except by prior arrangement) and should be received by the Editor not later than the 12th of the month for publication at the end of that month. Contributions received after the deadline may be held over.

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Collating Dates 2020			
May Issue	April 27th	August-Sept Issue	July 27th
June Issue	May 26 th (Tues)	October Issue	Sept 28 th
July Issue	June 29th	November Issue	October 26 th
Please contact Colette to confirm arrangements (contact information above).			

Please note that dates in the above table USUALLY show when collating will take place, at 2.30pm in the Sugar Loaf, for the corresponding month, displayed to the left. The issue being collated usually relates to the following month. However during the coronavirus social distancing measures, our collation procedures have changed and we will review our plans for the printed magazine in line with government guidance.