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Editorial by James Read



What does 2026 hold in store for you? I hope you have lots to look forward to here in Meppershall – and wherever life may take you. The village magazine team wishes you a restful and enjoyable Christmas and new year break, and everything good in the months ahead.

We are fortunate that Meppershall is one of the rare places where Santa visits in advance to check the roads, ready for his deliveries on the special day. You can catch him and his reindeer, along with a respectable gang of elves, touring the village in the early evening on Sunday and Monday, 14th and 15th December. Apparently it is someone in the church who has a hotline to Lapland to book this celebrity appearance – and you can find all the other church activities and opportunities for you over the festive period, in the church section of this issue.

In fact there are so many wonderful events coming up – organised by Meppershall Social Club, Warden Abbey Vineyard, Meppershall Village Hall, Shefford Community Choir, along with pantomimes staged by The Players and by HATS. Find them all (and more) in this edition of The Meppershall Messenger. Get involved - and enjoy!

I love the phrase “History is written by the people who turn up.” More than ever, our village needs the creativity, commitment and care brought by so many volunteers from across the community here. It is wonderful to see our volunteers recognised and thanked by the Parish Council later in this issue. But they also need people to turn up. The recent Meppershall Green Infrastructure Plan meetings have been well attended, providing crucial community input to shape the natural environment we want here for the future. More news on this consultation, and on the wider Neighbourhood Plan, to follow soon. People attending the meetings naturally wanted to discuss the looming threat of more large-scale planning applications in the village. It was emphasised that anyone can come to the public session of each Parish Council meeting to raise such matters and voice an opinion – on every second Monday of the month, 7PM in the Village Hall (side room). Email clerk@meppershall-pc.gov.uk for more info.

2026 will bring some new development pressures – even to this village which has already patiently and constructively welcomed new houses, increasing its housing by more than half in recent years. It will be crucial to voice our opinions and engage with planning processes as they arise, focused on cold, hard reasoning in line with wider planning policy. We are fortunate to have a Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan volunteers who have listened carefully to local opinion through extensive surveys. Therefore, when the time comes, they will represent the overwhelming wishes of those living here to maintain Meppershall as a village of houses strung along a few narrow country roads, with a limited number of side estates, surrounded by open fields across to similar, neighbouring villages. Yes, we welcomed some new build. But the accessibility, proximity and size of our rural landscape makes this village what it is.

And what did we get for Christmas? Just what we always wanted! The refusal of a planning application that would have destroyed the view of the church. Thank you, Santa. Same again next year, please.

Saved – The Field By The Church

There was a huge outpouring of objections from hundreds of people in response to a proposal to build on the ‘Donkey Field’ – the field between the church and Shillington Road (planning reference CB-25-02814). There were a vast array of reasons why development in that location was not appropriate, considering community interests, environment, safety and planning regulations.

We are pleased to confirm that Central Bedfordshire Council Planning Department refused the application. Their reasons included the following, which are a useful reference point considering future applications:

The location of the proposed development “would result in sprawl into open countryside which would result in a significant urbanisation of the application site and would harm the transition between the adjacent settlement and open countryside to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area. The proposed development would detract from the almost immediate sense of tranquillity gained when leaving Meppershall and would result in undue detrimental harm to the rural character and appearance of the area... the public view and enjoyment of public footpath No.13 would be significantly altered from meadowland in the countryside to an urbanised route... an unacceptable impact upon the character and appearance of the area, including the distinct rural landscape character, and would be contrary to Policies HQ1 and EE5 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan and Sections 12 and 15 of the NPPF.”

It would “significantly erode the historic rural context of the Meppershall Conservation Area and the setting of listed buildings St Mary's Church (Grade II*) and Manor House (Grade II) through the construction of a significant amount of built form as well as associated landscaping, introducing an alien suburban character to the site and its surroundings...restrict views of the listed buildings from Shillington Road, in particular of the Church, resulting in additional harm to their setting and further reducing the ability to appreciate their special interest. The development will diminish the ability to appreciate the heritage assets...The public benefits identified are not sufficient to outweigh this harm... contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE3 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.”

The refusal mentions “the loss of the extant earthworks and substantial harm to the significance of the Scheduled Monument by virtue of its setting” while failing to show “convincing justification for the substantial harm to the significance of the Scheduled Monument” – conflicting with Policy HE1 of the CBLP (Central Bedfordshire Local Plan) and Section 16 of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework).

Also, “The Highways Officer has identified that the red line plan does not abut the public highway along the frontage of the site” – there was a gap between the land within the red line plan (proposed for development) and the public highway - potentially owned by someone else, so it cannot be supported under Policy T2 of the CBLP and Section 9 of the NPPF.

All good news for now – but beware the appeals process! We will be watching.

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meppershallmessenger@meppershall.org

Gladman Developments Proposal For 150 New Homes Behind Coneygate / Fildyke Road

You will have seen the recent leaflet from Gladman Developments, proposing the submission of a planning application to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) for a new development of 150 homes in the field between Coneygate / Fildyke Road / Fildyke Close. Access to the site is shown as via High Street, Gregory Close and Coneygate.

Meppershall Parish Council were made aware of this at the same time as residents and are equally concerned and fearful. Although they have had no opportunity to discuss the proposal at a formal meeting, as this site is not allocated in the Local Plan, it is likely that they will be opposed to any planning application WHEN it is submitted, which it probably will be.

At the moment Gladman (who are a land promoter, not a house builder), are simply trying to show that they have engaged with residents, as required for a planning application of this size. They can then argue that they HAVE engaged with us, irrespective of what our views on the proposal development are.

It is important that residents understand that engaging with Gladman will not prevent any planning application that they submit, and any objections will not be registered as part of the official planning process. Responding to them now will only provide them with details of our reasons for objecting to the application. It gives them the heads up on what we are opposed to and allows them the time to try and mitigate those objections for planning application purposes.

Meppershall residents made their views very clear in the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire we undertook in the spring of this year. Overwhelmingly, you said that you valued the countryside around us. It is important to you. You loved the views and walks surrounding Meppershall that are only a short stroll away. And you didn't want to see these features blighted by large developments – or indeed any more housing, some of you said. You felt the village was large enough having had another 400 dwellings added in the last 5 years. Services are already stretched or overloaded. Facilities haven't grown with the population, and our roads still haven't been repaired from damage caused by 5 years of construction.

The Parish Council know all this, and they will do all they can to object to further unsuitable and unsustainable development in the village. This is only the first proposal of many to come. Numerous local landowners have offered potential field locations to CBC for consideration within the revised Local Plan as suitable for development. CBC are considering these for feasibility. All of us will have an opportunity to comment on these sites as part of consultation and it's important we all do take part.

If you support turning our green spaces into large housing estates, then go ahead and respond to Gladman – you have that right.

If you don't, and you want to help stop these developments, then please - engage with the Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan team with all your thoughts, comments and ideas. Let your Ward Councillor, Blake Stephenson, know your thoughts too. And when a formal planning application is made, oppose it - as you also have that right. We will help with this – because that's what many of you have asked us to do.

We're in the process of completing a Neighbourhood Plan; part of this involved the survey that over 400 of you completed, and the majority were very clearly opposed to further expansion via large developments. We must manage expansion with smaller, sympathetic designs on smaller plots, you said. That is part of the developing Neighbourhood Plan - Gladman's scheme isn't!

Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Contacts:

lovemeppershall@meppershall.org

clerk@meppershall-pc.gov.uk



A crisp, misty winter's morning on the fields around Meppershall.

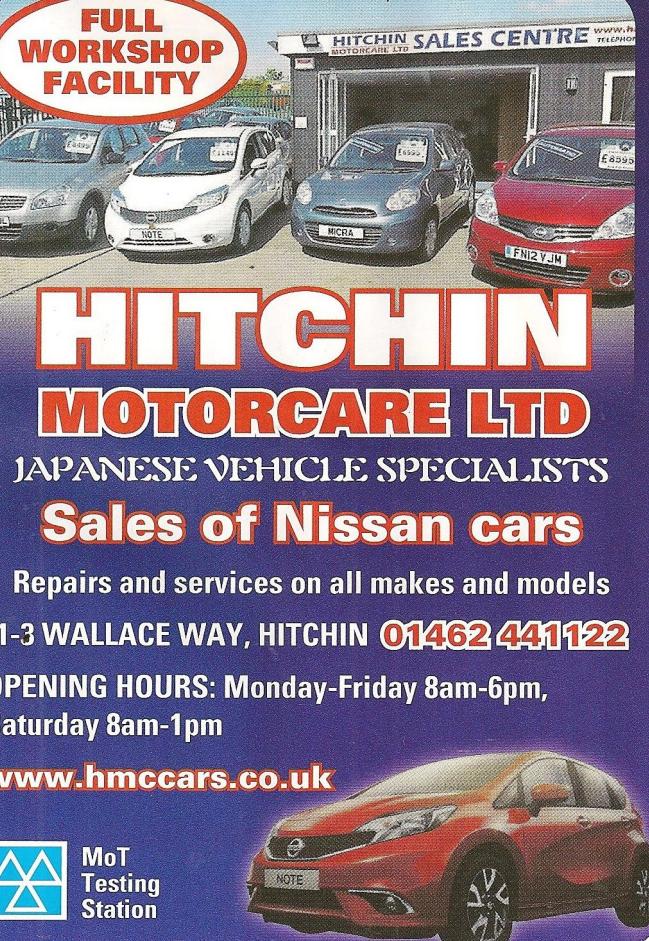
But not everyone wants it this way. While increasing its housing by more than 50% in recent years, the village still faces ongoing pressure from those who want to exchange our rural landscape for cash, swapping the green shoots of winter wheat for paving slabs, scrapping hedgerows and treelines for kerbing and rooflines.

Protect your village.

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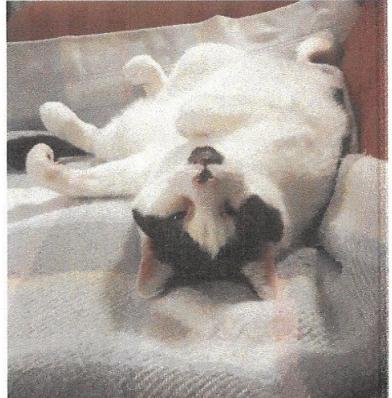

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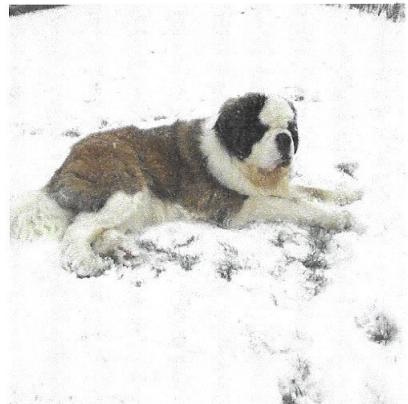


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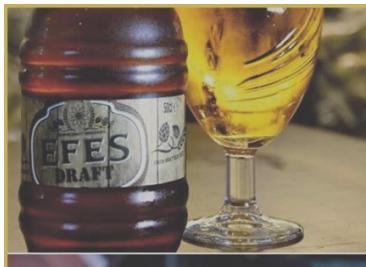
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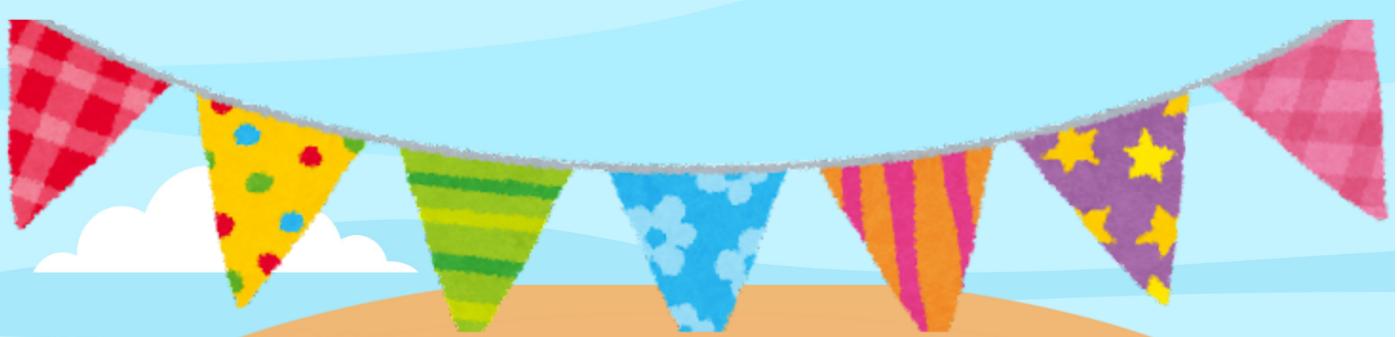
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MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE FETE

Volunteers Needed

We want to bring back the annual Meppershall fete but to do so need a small army of volunteers to help with an assortment of jobs before, during and after the event.

Even if you can only spare a couple of hours that would be a huge help to us.

If you would like to help please contact us at
lovemeppershall@meppershall.org.

Meppershall Parish Council Updates

Key points and summary of recent meetings

Meetings of Meppershall Parish Council (MPC) took place on 13th October 2025

Chairmans Announcements

- Thanks to Meppershall Messenger who have put together 3 prizes for the Christmas Tree Lights Switch on Competition.

Procedures, Consultations and Legal

Co-option

- Mr Jack Marsh was co-opted as a Councillor to Meppershall Parish Council and signed the Declaration of Office.

Consultations

- Councillor Addy attended a CBC information session on the CBC Waste Strategy consultation and has responded to it. Councillors were also asked to respond to the consultation personally.

Procedures

- Clerk has attended further GDPR training with more to come. Confirmation received that the appointment of a Data Protection Officer for Parish Council is not mandatory. Once training completed the Council will need to undertake a personal data audit as a first step to ensure digital and data compliance.
- Lone Working policy adopted.

Stocken House

- No update received from Davidson's or CBC regarding standpipe, alternative play area design or the planning application variation of condition to alter the height and design of the green open space areas intended for adoption by MPC. The Clerk has responded to numerous emails regarding the lack of dog poo bins on the site and explained that this is an issue to be addressed by Davidsons. The Clerk will chase for an update.

IT & Communications

- Creation of the Meppershall.org website and amendments to the MPC gov.uk website is in progress with Iris Web Media.
- Mr Hirst has looked at the Clerk's MPC computer and advised it is running slowly due to age. He recommends purchasing a new laptop. Clerk to add to 2026-2027 budget.

Finance

Purchase orders approved for

- Village hall tables and chairs (gifted to MVH), Green infrastructure plan, conservation area extension for inclusion in the neighbourhood plan, litter pick equipment and BATPC planning training.

Grant applications approved

- Grant to Social Club for child gifts at Christmas Tree Light Switch on Event for £300.

MPC Insurance

- Parish Council insurance policy has been renewed at a cost of £1573. This will be the 3rd year of a 3 year long term agreement.

- The Parish Council insurers have changed terms and conditions of their insurance policy, and they no longer offer motor excess insurance for employees when using their own vehicles for MPC business. *Council resolved to set up earmarked reserve for £500 to cover insurance excess and advise employees via letter of this change to their terms of employment.*

Audit 2024-25

- Councillors noted that the External Auditor Report and Certificate indicated no issues. Completion of audit documentation was already on the Council's website.

Budget 2026-27

- It was agreed that Councillors Thompson and Wright would work with the Clerk on the preparation of the 2026-2027 budget and precept proposals.

Village Escrow Fund

- The Clerk advised that the Village Escrow Fund currently stands at circa £40k. The Village Hall trustees have advised that they are looking at the potential to add solar panels to the village hall and may request part funding from the Village Escrow Fund.

Document approval

- Approval of bank statements and reconciliation as presented.

Orders for the payment of money

- Approval for payments as presented to Council.

Planning applications

- CB/25/02814/PIP - Grass Land to the West of Shillington Road - Permission in Principle: Development of up to 9 single storey Bungalows. *Objection.*
- CB/25/01405/FULL - Land North of Fildyke Road - Erection of four dwellings (Use Class C3) including two bungalows with associated private drive and landscaping – Amendments to application. *Reiterate previous objection.*
- CB/25/02867/FULL - 102 Shefford Road, SG17 5LL - Erection of a part single part two storey rear extension. Conversion of loft and raising the roof height. Front pitch and rear flat roof dormers. Rear Juliet balcony and rooflights. Removal of chimney and alterations to windows and doors. *No objection.*

Neighbourhood Plan

- Work has started on the Design Code. This is highlighting Meppershall good and bad design features.
- Timeline for completion of the Neighbourhood Plan to be presented at the next meeting and a draft plan for circulation in December.

Highways and Transport

- **Update on Shefford Road repairs / re-surfacing** - Resurfacing works are now planned for Shefford Road from the Esso garage up to the village entrance. Works planned for December 2025.

Environment and Leisure

Issues with allotment track and residents parking.

- Letter to High Street homeowners reminding them that the Allotment Track is the property of MPC, access for license holders only and they are not to obstruct traffic or the track pending. The licence agreement to formalise access to the allotment track for High Street homeowners is also pending.

Update on allotments

- Inspection of half of plots completed with the other half due shortly.

Update on Old Road Meadow

- List of works pending.

Update on all other environment and leisure issues

- Pitch marking for the 9x9 pitch completed.
- Water at the allotments and on Centenary Field will be switched off at the end of October.

Christmas Tree Switch On Event

- Event planning is in hand, and the Clerk will begin publicising the event, competition and need for volunteer marshals shortly. A letter will also be issued to all Walnut Tree Way residents about the road closure.

Staff Matters

Appointment of Allotment Co-ordinator

- Advertising of role to start shortly.

Clerking cover during Clerk absence.

- The Clerk is hoping to be available for the next meeting in November but has arranged for Mrs van der Merwe, Clerk to Stondon Parish Council, to cover the meeting if required. Mrs van der Merwe was present at the meeting to meet councillors.

Full meeting minutes can be found here: <https://meppershall-pc.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/>

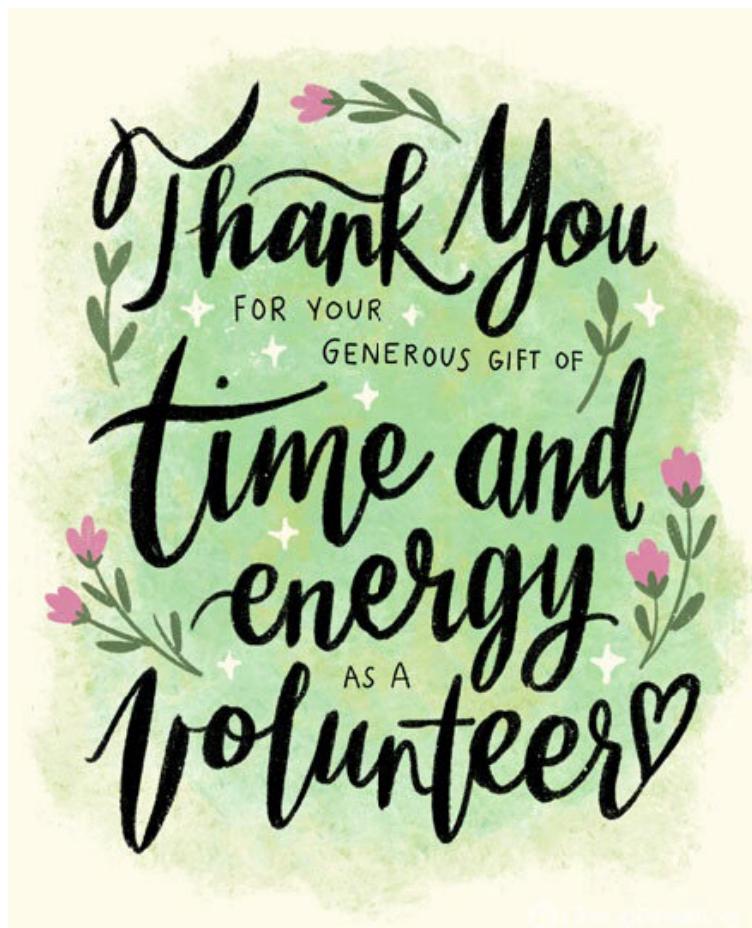
John Parsons - Chairman - Meppershall Parish Council

Works to Old Road Meadow

It has now been 25 years since trees were planted at Old Road Meadow to create a nature reserve. Over time the planting and trees have matured, and we now need to carry out works to maintain and improve the area.

Works are planned to start in the autumn and will include brush clearance, removal of some trees to allow others to flourish, widening of some footpaths, wood chippings added to some footpaths, planting of wildflowers, hedge cutting, fencing over bridge and along ditch, ditch clearance, new signage, new benches, new trees planted, gate repositioning etc.

Contractors will be carrying out much of the work, but some work will require the help of volunteers e.g.: planting of bulbs and wildflowers. **If you would like to help, please email us at lovemeppershall@meppershall.org.**



In times where time is a precious commodity, and when volunteering takes energy and dedication, we would like to thank all our village volunteers who take time from their busy lives to help the many organisations, societies and clubs in the village. To state the obvious, they don't get paid for it.

Thank you so much for the valuable work you have done and continue to do. Whether it be litter picking, cutting grass at St Mary's, helping neighbours, managing the village hall, delivering the Messenger, taking responsibility as a councillor, marshalling at the Christmas Tree Light switch on, organising village events There are so many of you we cannot name you all here.

We do not thank our village volunteers enough, and we want to let you know that your dedication is essential to the work that our village organisations do. You bring ideas, positive energy and simply keep our village going. We cannot do it without you. We would not want to do it without you.

We hope you all continue in your respective volunteer roles, and maybe even add to your numbers! Wishing you all a Happy Christmas.

Alessandra and John – Clerk and Chairman of Meppershall Parish Council

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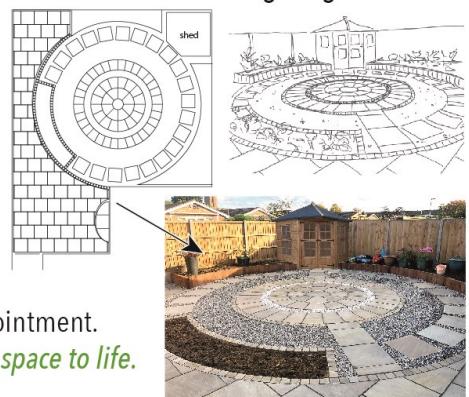
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Meppershall Social Club



Events this month

Saturday 13th from 8pm is Karaoke with MicMaster Entertainments

Sunday 14th @7:30 is Our Monthly Quiz £1 Person. teams Max 6 50% prize 50% to our chosen charities

Sunday 21st 12:30- 3:30pm Children activity afternoon £3 per child

Followed by the Drawing of our Christmas Raffle in the Bar at 4

PLEASE SEE SEPARATE PAGES FOR CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR SPECIAL EVENTS

For opening times over the christmas period are

Tues 23rd Dec 6pm -11pm | **Christmas Eve** 5pm-10pm | **Christmas Day** 12pm-2pm

Boxing Day 12pm-4pm | **Saturday 27th** 2pm-11pm | **Sunday 28th** 1:30pm-10pm

Monday 29th 6pm-11pm | **Tuesday 30th** 6pm-11pm | **New Year's Eve** 7pm-1am

New Years Day Closed | **Friday 2nd January** 5pm-11:30pm

Meppershall social wishes you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



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Toning	£15

Cutting & Styling

Cut & Blow dry	£30
Gents cut	£15
Kids cut 0-3/4-10/10-16	£8/£10/£15
Restyle	£40
Dry cut	£20
Curls/waves	£20
Blow Dry	£20





A Message From Meppershall Munchkins

As we edge towards the end of the year, things are still full of fun, play and festive excitement at Meppershall Munchkins! Although it's the holiday break, there are plenty of wonderful sessions and activities lined up before we say goodbye to 2025.

A Spook-tacular Success!

We're thrilled to say that our very first Halloween Party was a huge success! Thanks to everyone who came, in fabulous costumes. We'll build on this new tradition next year.

Dates for Your Diary

We have two very special festive events coming up in December:

- Elves Workshop – Tuesday 16th December
- Christmas Party – Friday 19th December

These are always popular sessions filled with crafts, festive fun and lots of seasonal cheer, so we hope to see lots of you there!

Holiday Closures

To give our amazing volunteers a much-deserved rest, Meppershall Munchkins will be closed on the following dates:

- Tuesday 23rd December
- Friday 26th December
- Tuesday 30th December
- Friday 2nd January

Normal sessions will resume the following week.

Advent Window Fun

This year, Meppershall Munchkins is proudly taking part in the village Advent Windows. We are Window Number 15, and the children will have the chance to decorate baubles for the display in early December. We're excited to see their creations brighten up the village!

Volunteers Needed

Our group relies entirely on the kindness and energy of volunteers, and we are always in need of more help. If you can spare some time to assist with setting up, tidying away, or supporting sessions in any way, please do come and say hello. Volunteering is the key to keeping this wonderful group running smoothly.

Meppershall Munchkins Baby and Toddler Group

A fun and friendly stay-and-play session held at Meppershall Village Hall.

- Tuesdays and Fridays, 9:30–11:30am
- £3.50 for the first child; £1 for each additional child
- Snack and squash included for the children
- Walk-ins welcome
- Payment via cash or bank transfer

For updates—including emergency closures—please check our Meppershall Munchkins Facebook page. We look forward to seeing you soon for plenty of festive fun and warm community spirit!

Meppershall Village Hall – Going Solar

The village hall committee is developing a proposal to instal solar panels and batteries. This eco project will also include replacement of the lights in the main hall with LED lighting, lowering energy consumption, reducing environmental impact.

A bid for lottery funding will be made and the committee will work with the Parish Council to seek support to use other available local funds.

We hope the project will be successful so that the energy costs of the hall can be dramatically reduced to help keep hire charges reasonable for the local neighbourhood.

If you would like to know more or show your support, please contact the trustees at Trustees@meppershallvillagehall.co.uk

Village Food: Christmas Celebrations

Food forms a focal part of many Christmas celebrations. Although most of the traditional foods can be bought readymade, it can be very rewarding to make some of the traditional fare.

Mince pies can be made with either shortcrust or puff pastry. You can either buy sweet mincemeat or make your own. You can make the pastry from scratch using plain flour, and butter or margarine (and lard if desired.)

However if catering for people with allergies and intolerances, you may want to source and adapt recipes. Gluten free pastry can be made from scratch, but it is very important to follow the instructions carefully as this sort of pastry can be very hard to handle and roll out. If you haven't got the time you can buy gluten free chilled puff pastry which could be used instead.

Sweet mincemeat is not very difficult to make, the thing that takes a lot of the time is weighing and measuring the ingredients. Again mincemeat can be adapted to suit preferences, or cater for people with allergies and dietary needs. For example apple is used in most mincemeat recipes to bulk out the fruit content, but this can be substituted with other dried fruits, as long as total weight of fruit remains the same. Also nuts, can be removed or changed for other types of fruit or nuts. For example if someone has an allergy to almonds.

Christmas cake and Christmas pudding

Apply the same principles as above for sweet mincemeat, when adapting the recipe to suit preferences. I make individual puddings in Dariole moulds and cook them in a Bain Marie in the oven. That means standing the covered puddings in a roasting tin part filled with hot water (so the puddings are effectively steamed in the oven.) We then microwave the puddings out of the moulds just before serving.

Village Recipe: Pumpkin, Leek And Chorizo Soup

Ingredients:

1 large pumpkin. Note: NOT a leftover Halloween one: these are tasteless. Buy an eating one from food shop. Remove the skin and chop the pumpkin flesh (you should have about 800-1000g) and keep the seeds.

1 large leek, chopped into rounds about 2cm thick	100 ml double cream	1 tsp hot paprika
1 onion, finely chopped	150g chopped chorizo	Nutmeg, grated
25g butter	1 tbsp wine vinegar	2 tbsp chopped dill
1 litre chicken stock	Half tsp ground cumin	Sour cream (to serve)

Method:

Heat the butter in a large pot, add the onion and leek. Stir and cook for 10 minutes. Add the cumin and paprika and a little water, stir and cook gently for 15 minutes. Add the chopped pumpkin and stock. Bring to the boil and cook gently for 30 minutes, or until all is soft. Then let it cool and add the cream.

Purée the soup, add the chopped chorizo and reheat. Add the nutmeg and vinegar, tasting as you go to get the balance just right.

Sauté the pumpkin seeds for about a minute in sunflower oil.

Serve with a bit of sour cream, a sprinkling of the pumpkin seeds and a pinch of hot paprika and chopped dill on each bowl. You and your guests will be delighted.

Village Recipe: Gluten Free Scones

Recipe adapted from DK The Gluten-Free Cookbook

Ingredients

115g Gluten free plain flour	4tsp gluten free baking powder	Pinch of salt
115g rice flour	1 ½ tsp xanthan gum	75g cold unsalted butter cubed
1 egg beaten made up to 120ml with milk		

Sweet or savoury? Add the following, depending on what's required:

Sweet: 60g caster sugar + 85g sultanas (optional)

Savoury: 115g grated mature cheddar cheese + 1 teaspoon mustard powder

Method

Preheat oven 220 C (Fan 200 C) Gas Mark 7. Sift the flours, baking powder, Xanthan gum and salt into a bowl.

Grease or line baking tray with bake well paper.

Rub fat into flour mix until it resembles breadcrumbs. (Or use a food processor.)

Transfer mix to mixing bowl if using food processor. Add either sweet or savoury ingredient flavourings, stir to mix.

In a jug beat egg and add milk to make up to 120ml. Add liquid to dry ingredients slowly and mix to a dough, using fingers or a palette knife to mix.

Place on a lightly floured board or surface. Knead lightly until dough is smooth. Either roll or pat dough down until it is 2cm in thickness. Using cutter cut out scones, and place on prepared tray spaced out. Re roll remains to cut maximum number of scones from dough.

Glaze the scone tops with the remaining egg and milk mix using a pastry brush.

Bake in preheated oven for 10-15 mins. The scones should be golden brown and when turned upside down, should sound hollow when tapped.

Serving Tips

Scones are best eaten on day made – but they can be frozen too, and warmed when thawed to refresh before serving.

Serve sweet scones with clotted or thick double cream and jam of your choice.

Serve savoury scones with butter, as an accompaniment to soup instead of bread.



The Players @ STMA

December 2025



Hello boys and girls it's pantomime time. And the Players @ STMA are delighted to Present "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens (adapted by Karen Mitchell). Tickets are £10 & £5 (Concessions under 18yrs/over 60's) and are available to buy **NOW**. For non-internet sales 01462 816336 (after 6pm) or online sales at www.ticketsource.co.uk/themeppershallplayers

Marley's been dead these past seven years, but his partner Ebenezer Scrooge is still raking the money in. Christmas is just around the corner and all of London is getting ready to celebrate, except miserly Mr Scrooge, who thinks Christmas is a humbug. The Christmas Spirits are not happy and are planning a Christmas Eve surprise for Scrooge, As the clock strikes one, two and three o'clock, Scrooge will be visited by the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future. Can the plight of Tiny Tim and the Cratchit family arouse any feelings for Scrooge's fellow man? Or will they're future be as bleak as a mid-winter snow storm? Will Mr Wilkins and his young daughter Emily still have a roof over their heads or be cast out into the street? The answer to these questions can be found at the STMA Digsowell Main Hall, 10 Hitchin Road, Shefford SG17 5JA on Saturday 6th & 13th December with performances at 3pm & 7.30pm. Doors open 30mins before curtain up.

The Players @ STMA wish the Messenger Crew and all its readers a beautiful Christmas 2025 and an amazing New Year 2026

Dates for your 2025/2026 diary:

Saturday 6th December 2025 Panto A Christmas Carol performances at 3pm & 7.30pm

Saturday 13th December 2025 Panto A Christmas Carol performances at 3pm & 7.30pm

Monday 22nd December NO MEETING PLAYERS WINTER BREAK

Monday 29th December NO MEETING PLAYERS WINTER BREAK

Monday 5th January Players re-open Meeting 7.30pm-9.30pm

Saturday 25th April 2026 The Big Quiz & Cabaret evening (quiz starts at 7.30pm)

Find the Players on Facebook (The Players @ STMA) and Instagram

The Players meet every Monday evening at 7.30pm at the STMA, 10, Hitchin Road, Shefford SG17 5JA. Membership is free and we welcome people 18yrs and over who have an interest in amateur theatricalities, whether it be on stage or off indulging in all areas of theatrical performances, set building, costumes, directing, acting, make-up, song & dance, etc.

Interested? We look forward to meeting you.

Karen Mitchell (Players' Secretary) 01462 816336

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Tea / Coffee / Squash / Hot Chocolate



Saturday 13th December

9.00am to 12pm



Meppershall Village Hall

If you can bake and would like to donate a cake, please bring your cakes to the Village Hall on Friday 12 December between 5:15pm and 6pm

Please do not put your cakes in any containers that you would like returned as we cannot guarantee you will get them back.

Please put a note with your cake if you have used nuts.

Any questions email - events@meppershallvillagehall.co.uk

This is a community event & proceeds will go to running similar community events at

Meppershall Village Hall.



CAKE CAFE!

Homemade Cakes / Cookies / Traybakes

Tea / Coffee / Squash / Hot Chocolate



Saturday 24th January

9.00am to 12pm

Meppershall Village Hall

Homemade cake donations needed to support the cake café

If you would like to donate a homemade cake, please bring your cakes to the Village Hall on Friday 23rd January between 5:15pm and 6pm - or on Saturday.

Please do not put your cakes in any containers that you would like returned as we cannot guarantee you will get them back.

Please put a note with your cake if you have used nuts.

Any questions email - events@meppershallvillagehall.co.uk

This is a Community event & proceeds will go to running similar community events at Meppershall Village Hall.

Wonderful Winter Gardens by Donna Cameron

Donna's Garden Designs | 07833670934

Winter is a quiet time in the garden. It is as if it is resting, saving its energy for the new year – to be refreshed, so it can spring into life.

I think we can learn a lot from the garden and to slow down, in this busy, bustling world. It teaches us patience in an age where everything has to be instant. Surely if you wait for something, you appreciate it all the more.

Plant an unassuming spring bulb in the Autumn and wait through Winter. Busy with Christmas festivities, they get forgotten in the cold frozen soil. It is hard to visualise when everything seems so cold and lifeless. Then comes the warmer spring days and magically the most gorgeous colours emerge.

The garden will once again come out of hibernation and we will be spoilt by the huge variety of flowers throughout the year that this country offers us.



diamonds as a robin bobs past, fluffing its feathers on a crisp morning.

Snowdrops, although seeming so fragile, are very reslient and the first flowers are so symbolic of hope when summer in the garden seems so distant.

So appreciate the little things and your day will be much more richer for it. Pause and breathe and know that nature makes life much more beautiful. It has a reliability about it. Mark the calender by the different seasonal flowers. How lucky are we always to have something to look forward to and wonder at.

The simplicity of gardening really can bring so much joy to so many. So make your new year's resolution be to spend more time in gardens - be it your own, or visiting them and enjoying all they have to offer.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to one and all!

Donna x

Of course in the quieter time Mother Nature still offers up some beautiful blooms and in a way we appreciate them all the more as plants are much more scarce.

Hellebores seem to nod their heads on the coldest of days - offering a soft palette of pastels and marrons.

The bright red berries of the Holly are synonymous with Christmas.

The heady fragrance of Mahonia and Sarcoccoca confusa touches a sunny winters day.

The low winter sun shines through the summer grasses and seed heads and the soft rays glisten on the frosty ground like cut

Jobs In the Garden For December and January

Insulate garden taps	Cut off Hellebore leaves to avoid Black Spot
Feed birds and make sure they have water	Don't walk on lawn in heavy frost
Add organic matter to soil	Trim lawn edges and repair any lumps and bumps
Protect vulnerable plants and pots from frost damage	Sow Sweet peas
Prune deciduous trees and shrubs	If dry weather water container plants
If snows shake off plants and shrubs to prevent damage	Force Rhubarb
Plan out your garden	Chit early potatoes
Order seeds for next year	Prune grape vines
Ask for garden vouchers for Christmas to spend throughout the year!	Look for Snowdrops
	Get out in the fresh air on dry days
	Prune Apple and Pear trees

Trugs And Trowels (Campton Gardening Club) – December

This year and in years gone by you will probably have had night time visitors in your garden. Many people now have cameras whereby they can witness this nocturnal wildlife mooching about and looking for food in their gardens. One such animal caught on camera in and around Campton is the badger.

Badgers are highly recognisable due to their size and unmistakable markings but are rarely seen due to their nocturnal existence, however they play an important role in the countryside ecosystem.

Badgers are social animals and generally live in large groups sharing a labyrinth of extensive underground tunnels and purposed chambers for sleeping and raising young. Noted in the Guiness book of records, one sett in England had just short of 900 metres of tunnels. These setts are often centuries old and passed down through the generations.

Badgers have a varied diet, eating fruit, nuts, seeds, insects and small mammals. Earthworms are their meal of choice. This varied diet helps maintain the balance of nature's ecosystem. Badgers are protected by law under the 1992 Protection of Badgers act which makes it illegal to harm them or interfere with their setts.

The best time to see badgers in the wild or as visitors to your gardens (like mine and others locally) is at dusk during the summer months and hence why wildlife cameras are such a convenient and effective tool for this purpose. Keep an eye out for them and enjoy the night time exploits in and around your home and gardens.

Thank you for all your support in this the 10th year of the club - I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and hope to see you at upcoming events at Trugs and Trowels Gardening Club in the coming year. The first meeting in 2026 is at 7.30 pm on 5th January at Campton Village Hall. New members welcome!

Maryika Wilding 01462 851729



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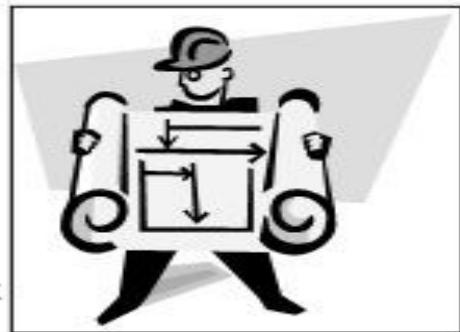
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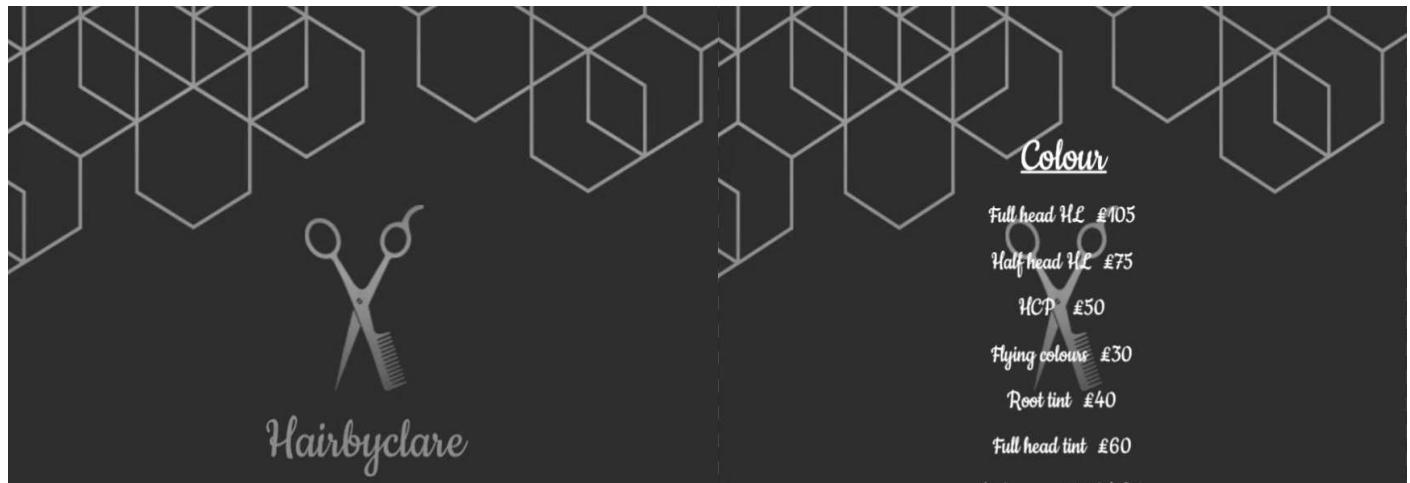
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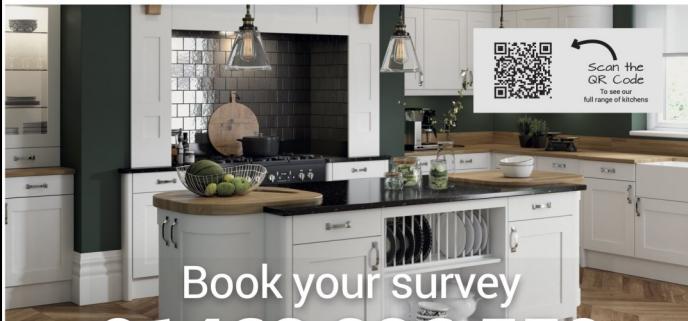
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A warm welcome from the Meppershall Golf Society

We have been steadily increasing the number of players wanting to join in the golf society events. It is safe to say that this last 4 months have been a huge success and our final event to round off 2025 will be played at Chesfield downs on the 6th December.

Plans for 2026 are all but complete and dates for the diary are as follows:

➤ Mill Green Sat 7th Mar	Aldwickbury Fri 10 Apr
➤ Stevenage Sat 25th Apr	Pavenham Sat 09 May
➤ Wellingborough Fri 12 th Jun	The Three Locks Sat 4th Jul
➤ Whipsnade Sat 8th Aug	Redbourn Sat 5th Sep 12.00
➤ The Cambridgeshire Oct	Chesfield Downs Nov
➤ South Beds Dec	

The MGS Committee will hold their AGM on 06 Dec following the last event of the year (Chesfield Downs) where amongst other things membership fees will be discussed and agreed. Our group has risen to 49 members and an average of 23 players per event.

We are delighted to announce that we will be holding our first Benefit Night in support of the British Heart Foundation on Sat April 25 in the Village Hall. This will follow the Pete Cassidy "Grandad" trophy being played at Stevenage Golf Complex. This will be a members-only golf event held annually. The party will be open to all on a ticket only basis where we hope to raise funds for local and national charities now & in the future.

We have a terrific live band – The Long Riders – headlining, with support acts Rose and Adam from 7pm. Tickets are on sale now at £12.50pp.

www.ticketsource.co.uk/meppershall-golf-society Remember your dancing shoes!

For more info regarding the MGS & Events please contact:

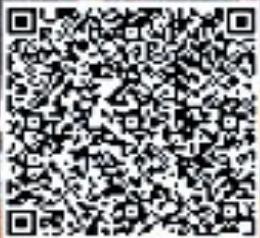
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Christmas Sing a long - Tuesday 16th December



2026 Coffee mornings - January 20th and February 17th

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If you would like a lift, do give us a call a few days before.



07760 793921

Unsolicited telephone calls about external wall insulation

A recent alert from Central Bedfordshire Council noted that they had been contacted by a number of local residents who had received unsolicited telephone calls from a caller claiming to be from their Building Control team. It seems these calls referred to external wall insulation and might be trying to take advantage of recent news stories relating to installations under a Government Grant Scheme.

The Council wants people to know that its Building Control team do not make cold calls like this and is urging residents to act with caution if they receive an unsolicited call about external wall insulation for their home. If you receive this type of telephone call, do not feel pressured to make a quick decision and always consider whether any claims being made are genuine. If you are concerned about what you have been told, always seek expert advice from a reputable business before agreeing to any work taking place.

If you receive a call that you suspect may be a scam, the Council would like it reported to them by calling 0808 223 1133 which is the Citizens Advice consumer service that works in partnership with the Council.

Please help protect others from falling victim to this type of scam by telling your family, friends and neighbours about this alert.



THANK YOU from the Gnomes.
 Meppershall Good Neighbour Group
 would like to say thank you to
Meppershall Social Club
 for their generous donation of £250.

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:

Chris Valentine 01462 815971 John Archer

PCC Secretary:

Anne Parsons 01462 813333 Email: annie10639@gmail.com

A Message From St Mary's...

This year many people have told me that they can no longer bear to watch the news, wearied as they are by the conflict and violence that still wreaks destruction in our world. They used to watch the news several times a day, then once a day, then once a week and often times now... not at all.

But Christmas is coming!

Christmas often seems to come as a moment of respite from "real life" - as it did in the 1914 truce - when guns fell silent on Christmas Eve, a single German soldier sang 'Stille Nacht' and the British soldiers joined in with 'Silent Night' from their trenches. The following day, British and German soldiers met in no man's land, they played impromptu games of football and some even exchanged small gifts.

This year, in the midst of our busy-ness and our weariness, let's fill the air again with our carols! In our hearts and minds let's go to Bethlehem and see the baby lying in the manger. Let's celebrate together with our families and friends, and in our Churches -

and then go into 2026 - with renewed hope in our hearts, working and praying for lasting peace and justice for all.

Wishing you a wonderful, peace filled and blessed Christmas... and a happy New Year!

With love, Rector Roni.

Church Events In December and January

Usual Pattern of Services

Sundays	11.00am	Morning Worship every Sunday Holy Communion: 2 nd and 4 th Sundays
Every Wednesday	10.00am	Holy Communion in the Rectory
Church open to visit	10.00-4.00	Private prayer, quiet time – the church is open.
Online services:	9.00am	Morning Prayer using 24-7's Lectio 365 App 7-days-a-week
	9.00pm	Night Prayer/Compline from the C. of E. Daily Prayer App, 7-days-a-week

Find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stmarysmeppershall/>

Find us on our website: <https://www.stmarysmeppershall.org.uk/>

Find us on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRjDLGAY8GI6afkO8iALYOA>

Please note '9and9' continues daily on our Facebook page.

Forthcoming Services and Events

This Christmas, come and experience the warm welcome and friendly community of St Mary's, your beautiful village church 🎅 We hope to see you soon. Or, if you want something new and spiritual in 2026, make church part of your new year plans!

November 30 th	10.30am	Benefice Service at St Mary's, Meppershall
	6pm	A Christmas Carol - Mat Jones
December 7 th	11am	Morning Worship
December 14 th	11am	Holy Communion
		Santa starts his tour of Meppershall this evening
December 15 th		Santa continues his tour of Meppershall
December 21 st	11am	Morning Worship
December 24 th	3pm	Christingle
	10.30pm	"Midnight" Communion
December 25 th	10.30am	Carols at Christmas
December 28 th	11am	Holy Communion
January 4 th	11am	Morning worship - Epiphany
January 11 th	11am	Holy Communion
January 18 th	11am	Morning worship
January 25 th	11am	Holy Communion

Come along on
Christmas Eve!

Come on Christmas Day!

St Mary's Church Meppershall

Christmas Gingerbread Decorating
Saturday 20 December 10am-12noon

Come along for some festive fun

Refreshments provided

Free entry - All welcome

Please email Amanda on
amandajanebakes@gmail.com if you
would like to attend so I can make sure
we have plenty of Gingerbread for
everyone to decorate

Bell Tower News by Gillian Marshall-Davies

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from The Tower!

With Christmas and the New Year on the horizon, it's a time when we reflect on the past year.

The tower has welcomed three new ringers who are enjoying learning the ropes with our experienced bell handlers.

John Parsons continues to play a very important role in the tower, teaching and mentoring for which I am very grateful. Thank you John.

It has been great to ring with a full Meppershall band on occasions so a huge thank you to all of the ringers who have been a part of that. Of course the band always needs new ringers to ensure that the bells at St Mary's continue to be rung for many years to come. So, thank you to all who come to practice for your commitment.

Before 2025 ends, listen out for the bells being rung throughout December. The band look forward to ringing before services and events during this festive period.

Thinking about learning or returning to ringing? Why not come along to a practice on a Thursday at 7.30pm. Let me know you're coming on 07778 449051. **Gillian**

St Mary's Church, Meppershall - Junior Church

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from St Mary's Church - Junior Church

The Junior Church team would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

The final JC session in 2025 will be on Sunday 14 December.

We will return in 2026 on Sunday 11 January. Have a fun and safe festive period.

The Junior Church Team

Meppershall Second Sunday Strollers

Sunday 14th December 2025: A familiar loop of Shillington to end the year, meeting at the church gate in Meppershall at 2.00PM and heading out past Shillington Bury and Lordship Farm, over the playing fields in Shillington to All Saints Church. From there, we head up Bury Road Shillington before branching off to follow the River Hit back to the Cow Bridge and back up to Meppershall. It's around 4.5 miles in total and we aim to be back by 4PM.



Sunday 11th January 2025: Join us for a new year away fixture, meeting in Pegsdon for a loop of Pegsdon Hills Nature Reserve (part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), crossing The Icknield Way high on the hill and exploring The Baulk (an ancient route to Lilley) before returning east of The Meg. This is a shorter hike of just 3 miles, but it includes significant climbs, of around 170M in total, to work off those Christmas inches. The whole route is off-road. Meet at 2.00PM in the parking area near the junction of Apsley End Road in Pegsdon with the B655 Hitchin Road (find it on Google Maps at <https://bit.ly/PegsStrollPark> – just 10 minutes from Meppershall – additional parking on 'Pegsdon Way'). We aim to be back at the parking by 4.00PM.

For more info or to discuss lifts / parking for the Pegsdon hike, call James and Miriam on 857836 or message us on Facebook @meppershallstrollers.

Meppershall Living Advent Calendar

*1 Meppershall Academy	2 Roger's Bakery	*3 Meppershall Pre School	4 Marywells	5 Meppershall Social Club	6 Brookmead
7 5	8 27	9 8	10 10	11 4	12 33
Orchard Close	Shefford Road	Orchard Close	Hoo Road	Rectory Road	Hoo Road
13 40 Walnut tree way	14 The Acres	15 Munchkins@ 44 Orchard Cl	16 Taylors Close	17 New Meppershall Care Home	18 TBC
19 58	20 44	21 97	22 51	23 Brookmead	24 The Old Coach House
High St	Fildyke Rd	High St			The Crib at St Marys Church

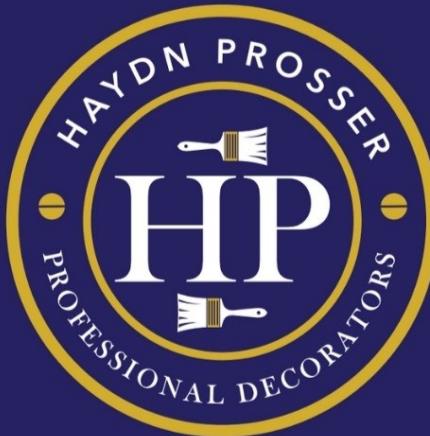
Count down to Christmas with a new window lit each night through Advent

* Term time only – until 19th Dec



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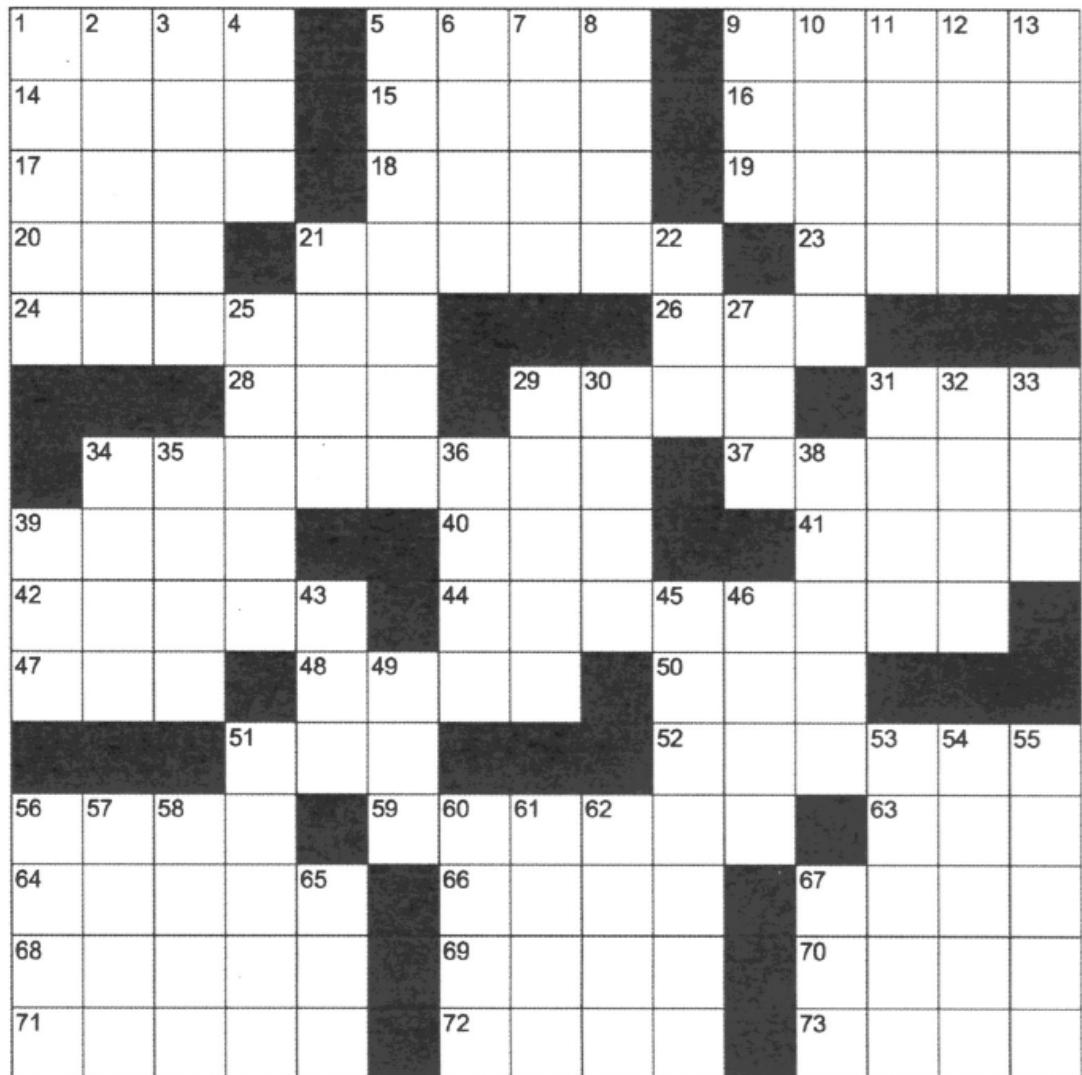


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ACROSS

1 Bivouac
 5 Island
 9 Many times
 14 Allege
 15 Runners used to travel over snow
 16 Picture border
 17 Woman
 18 Droopy
 19 Molds
 20 Roman three
 21 Yellow fruit
 23 Chair
 24 Flask
 26 Central daylight time
 28 Abort
 29 Indonesian island
 31 Ocean
 34 Joseph's elder son
 37 Plant with shiny leaves, red berries and prickly edges
 39 Central points
 40 Marvel
 41 Gripping tool
 42 Juliet's boyfriend
 44 Idaho (2 wds.)

DOWN

47 Wrath
 48 Hard, black substance burned as fuel
 50 Apparel for the head
 51 School group
 52 Builds
 56 Singer Billy
 59 Throws in the air
 63 Hand tool
 64 Tapestry
 66 Dock
 67 Dunking cookies
 68 Remains ready
 69 Women's magazine
 70 Traveled by airplane
 71 Freezing rain
 72 Without warmth
 73 Children

1 Title of Islam's head
 2 To no __
 3 Communicators
 4 Open forcefully
 5 Isles
 6 Injure
 7 National capital
 8 Sports channel
 9 Disconnected
 10 First processes in the freezing of water
 11 Weight of a container
 12 Austin novel
 13 Bird's home
 21 __ fide
 22 Air Cushion Vehicle (abbr.)
 25 Wish granter
 27 Morse code dash
 29 Ruby
 30 Excuse me!
 31 Rift
 32 Otherwise
 33 Positive vote
 34 Anchor
 35 Apex
 36 Heroic tale

38 Egg-shaped
 39 Friday (abbr.)
 43 Halloween mo.
 45 Swerved from course
 46 Sticky black substances
 49 Cereal
 51 Eating dish
 53 Monte __
 54 Baby bird sound
 55 Reduces speed
 56 Mandibles
 57 Spoken
 58 Canal
 60 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
 61 Grainery
 62 Market
 65 Concord e.g.
 67 Often poetically

Carolyn's Celebrations And Memorials of Life and Love

Tips from Your Local Celebrant

Hello, I'm Carolyn Holmes, your local celebrant. My role is to walk alongside families and friends during life's most important moments. Whether it's a wedding, a funeral, a naming, a vow renewal, or even a ceremony for a beloved pet, my aim is always the same: to listen, to involve, and to weave together your ideas and wishes into something that truly reflects you — in spirit and in word.

Celebrants are ordinary people from all walks of life who have trained to make a difference. We are there at the moments that matter most, leading and "holding space," enabling others to take part in rituals that may be religious or non-religious.

We create what is called a *script* — a written piece of theatre that sets out everything to be said and done during a ceremony. You may have seen a celebrant holding a large folder; that's the script. Some use iPads, but I prefer paper — I don't trust the internet connection at such important times!

(Ultimately, celebrants are MCs — masters of ceremonies. Our primary objective is to create a ceremony that reflects your beliefs, values, and love story, tailored to your preferences...)

In contrast, a minister of religion or registrar adheres to a particular approach and form of words prescribed by law or tradition. They may also weave in elements of your story, but the additional option of celebrants extends choice — offering flexibility and creativity that many people don't realise they have.)

Top Tips for Your Ceremonies

Funerals / Celebrations of Life

- Gather photos to share at the ceremony or wake
- Think about stories you'd like told — those little moments that capture someone's spirit
- Make sure the right people are at the meeting with the celebrant

Weddings

- Decide the vibe: fun, serious, jokey, or simply beautiful
- Plan your vows — will you write your own, or get some help?
- Ask readers early if you'd like poems or readings included

Vow Renewals

- Reflect on how this day will differ from your wedding day
- Decide who you want there — familiar faces or new ones
- Choose which parts of your love story you'd like retold

Namings

- Pick a place that feels right for your naming ceremony
- Add rituals if you'd like — e.g. candle lighting, tree planting,
- Share the meaning behind your child's name

Pet Ceremonies

- Tell the stories that show your pet's personality
- Choose a location — maybe their favourite spot outdoors

- Plan ahead if other pets will be joining in

As we approach Christmas and the New Year, I wish you a **peaceful Christmas and a prosperous New Year**. I look forward to sharing more tips in the months ahead.

Contact me, Carolyn Holmes, on 07305 002858, at ritesofw@gmail.com, or via the contact form on my website for a free ceremony audit — a chance to share your ideas and explore how your celebration can truly reflect you.

✿ “Contact me for a free ceremony audit —
let’s make your celebration truly reflect you.” ✿

Birthdays

In December... Jean H, who will be 86

In January... Barbara C, who will be 90 - and Brenda W, who will be 95

Best wishes for wonderful birthdays and inspiring years ahead,
from everyone at The Meppershall Messenger!



Crossword Solution For November

1	S	A	3	U	4	C	5	E	6	A	7	V	8	I	9	V	10	B	11	A	12	R	13	B	
14	A	E	S	S	O	P			15	R	O	D	E				16	E	M	I		R			
17	K	O	A	L	A				18	R	I	O	T				19	N	O	N	E				
20	I	N	F	O			21	O	O	D	L	E		22	S		23		U	S	A				
									24	N	W	B	W		26	R	27	O	A	R	E	D			
28	P	A	P	Y	R	I								31	L	A	S	S							
32	O	U	R				33	Y	E	34		35					36	S	37	38	39				
40	S	T	O	P					42	P	A	Y					43	N	E	A	R				
44	H	O	M	E			45	P	U	L	S	A	47	R		48	S	H	E						
							49	S	K	I	S			51	D	52									
53	R	E	C	O	I	L				56	P	A	T	H											
57	E	R	A				58	A	G	59	L	E	A	M			61	A	62	63	64				
65	A	R	I	A				67	R	O	D	S				68	S	N	O	R	E				
69	C	O	R	N			70	I	R	I	S				71	S	K	E	I	N					
72	T	R	O	Y			73	M	E	T	E				74	E	S	T	E	S					



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Personal Finance: by Paul Savuto

Women lag behind with pension savings – time to make amends

Nearly 40% of women in the UK risk not having enough funds for a comfortable retirement, according to research. Men contribute 27% more to their pension on average per month, which means they have built up nearly double the funds of women. For every £1 in a man's pension pot, a woman has just 42p.

The pension contribution imbalance starts early. At 20 years old, men already have a 15% head start. By the time they reach their mid-thirties, the gap has widened to 22%. It gets even bigger closer to retirement, with men aged 60 or over contributing 41% more than women.

Time to redress the balance: Career breaks for care-giving, part-time jobs and lower wages can all impact a woman's ability to grow a healthy pension pot. More than a third of women work part-time compared with 14% of men, which means they don't always earn enough to qualify for auto-enrolment in workplace pensions. There are opportunities, however, to redress the balance whatever your age.

Making some purposeful pension contribution decisions: Making decisions about pension contributions can be overwhelming – especially if you lack confidence or knowledge. With 38% of women worried that their pension won't fund a comfortable retirement, now is the time to take control – and make pensions work harder within your overall wealth strategy. And remember – it's never too late, you deserve to flourish in retirement.

Clients are tuning in to intergenerational planning

The Great Wealth Transfer is happening, with the UK expected to see a significant shift in assets passed down to younger generations over the next 30 years. This is perhaps why more people are showing an interest in intergenerational financial planning.

A survey of financial advisers found that 80% of clients are now concerned about intergenerational planning, compared with 75% in 2022. Clients seem to be recognising this area as an increasing priority, with 39% seeing it as 'highly important,' up from 34% three years ago.

This growing focus is likely due to changes announced in last year's Autumn Budget, which have prompted more advisers to use trusts when IHT planning. Also, record IHT receipts have probably encouraged people to take action to minimise their estate's tax liabilities.

Who's getting advice? Intergenerational planning advice is more in demand, with 68% of clients discussing IHT with their adviser. However, only 47% of advised clients actually have solutions in place to reduce the IHT on their estate. Despite this advice-action gap, there's a near-universal agreement that intergenerational planning matters, with 98% of advisers saying it is important to their clients.

The gender gap Research suggests that women are at the centre of the Great Wealth Transfer as they are 45% more likely to have inherited assets than men. This puts them on track to control 60% of UK private wealth by the end of 2025. Despite inheriting

more, women do not hold as many long-term income generating assets. This could be because 69% of women said they haven't received financial advice before. It's time to start a conversation about intergenerational planning. Preparation is essential to ensure wealth is passed smoothly and efficiently across the generations.

Personal pension age change delays access to savings

A two-year increase in the normal minimum pension age could impact retirement planning for thousands of people. Under current rules, personal and workplace pension funds can be accessed from the age of 55. From 6 April 2028, the age limit will rise to 57 years.

This means if you were born on or after 6 April 1973, you will have to wait until after your 57th birthday to access pension-based savings. If you were planning to access these funds before 2030, then you might want to rethink your draw down strategy.

There are still some circumstances when you can access funds earlier than the normal minimum pension age, for example if you are suffering from ill health or have a protected pension age. Anyone born before 6 April 1971 will not be impacted by the change.

Funding a happy retirement

The pension freedoms that were introduced in 2015 meant the over-55s could dip into their personal pension pots even while they were still working. As a result, the government is concerned that older adults will not have sufficient resources to provide for later life.

A recent study found that the happiest retirees have an income of around £1,700 per month, which equates to a pension pot of around £221,000 at retirement age. However, 22% of retirees in the UK are living on less than £1,000 a month, which is below the recommended minimum for covering essential costs later in life. With 63% of 50-year-old workers worried about the upcoming increase to the normal minimum pension age, don't suffer in silence. We can advise on what the changes mean for your retirement planning.

GET IN TOUCH

DGS IFA Ltd are Independent and Chartered Financial Advisers. I am a Chartered Financial Planner with over 30 years financial services experience, so you are in safe hands. To discuss your financial situation and to discuss your plans and goals, please contact me, Paul Savuto, AFPS, Chartered Financial Planner. DGS Independent Financial Advisers Ltd. 07834 499 595 or email ps@dgsifa.com, I'll be happy to talk to you and answer any questions you have. FCA 225814. Please note: This blog is for general information only and does not constitute advice. The information is aimed at retail clients only.



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Cougar Journey by Patrick O'Connor

I booked a crew place on a yacht sailing from England to Malta, the legs from Vigo in northern Spain, via Gibraltar to Marseilles, with other opportunity stops in between. I booked an Airbnb room in the town for the night before: in the preliminary chat with the hostess Angela she said she would greet me with a hug: Airbnb is a very friendly system. I booked a Ryanair flight to Santiago de Compostela and the train to Vigo.

I was walking out to the aircraft at Stansted when my phone rang. It was the company organising the sail. They had bad news for me. My first thought was that they had decided that I was too old for such an exploit: I had been refused another ocean journey before on those feeble grounds. But no, the news was that the yacht could not make it to Vigo due to big contrary winds on the Bay of Biscay. She was stuck at Camaret, on the south side of the Brest estuary. What to do? Angela was waiting for me in Vigo. So I boarded, flew, took bus to railway station, train to Vigo. It was raining when I arrived after dark. There was an attractive lady on the platform, arms outstretched to greet me. We hugged like old friends.

The next morning I had to plan. I could just give up and fly back to England. But I had come to sail. I was in touch with the yacht's skipper, Jenn, and they needed me because most of the other crew had had to leave, and one had broken an ankle. The planned sail to Malta had been cancelled, and the yacht was going to sail back to England. Could I please try to join them?

I studied Google Maps. It seemed my best bet would be to travel to the French border, then up the West coast via Bordeaux to Rennes, and there get the TGV to Brest. Easy. The most convenient crossing would be near Bilbao. But transport links across the lovely Basque Country are not so easy: the easiest route was via Madrid. So I bade farewell to my splendid new friend and took the train there, arriving in the evening and checked in to a hotel in a very lively part of town. I explored a bit, then had an excellent king prawn paella with Rioja, followed by cheesecake and Muscadet at a pavement restaurant.

Early on the train next morning, a very pleasant tour of Northern Spain up to Bilbao. Then another train East through beautiful country to the little French town of Hendaye, on the border. I had booked a seat on the overnight coach to Rennes, leaving at 11.25 PM. By 11.45 the coach had not arrived. I was at the wrong station.

I found a hotel room for what little was left of the night. I now had to get to Paris, the only way I could make it to the yacht in time. That meant departing Hendaye at 5.00 AM. I tried to book a ticket on my phone, but the SNCF system refused to accept my cards.

I got up at 3.30 and took a taxi to the station, without a train ticket. I planned to just get on the train and hope I could sort things out on board, and not be thrown off or prosecuted. Sitting alone on a bench was a lady. I threw myself on her mercy. "Come with me" she said. Yamina took me on to the train, and when the conductor came she explained my situation and I was able to pay him. We chatted all the way to Paris.

I bought a ticket to Brest at Gare Montparnasse. Only first class was available, so I sped across Brittany in comfort. There I got the local bus, about an hour's ride around the estuary to the marina at Camaret. I found Jenn and the remnants of her crew,

Marion and Lisa of the broken ankle, at a waterfront hotel. Jenn had decided to delay departure until the next day.

Cougar is a racing yacht, a very sleek and lovely Reflex 38. She lacks some of the comforts of the cruising yachts that I have sailed on before, having basic bunks, a simple galley and manual head.



Another big storm was forecast and Jenn wanted to shelter in the more protected marina at Brest, so the next morning we prepared for sailing, slipped our lines and motored out, then raised our jib for the sail across the estuary.

It was blowing and raining, quite hard work for the crew of only three, but exhilarating for me to be sailing at last. In the afternoon we were securely berthed, Marion and I dealing with lines and fenders while Jenn skilfully manoeuvred Cougar on to the pontoon.

We sheltered there all next day while stormy winds blew along the English Channel. I explored Brest with Marion: it has an interesting naval history, including its time as a major German base during the war, with huge concrete submarine shelters that we bombed but could not destroy. Another pleasant dinner ashore, accompanied by Jenn's brother Andrew who had flown out to make our numbers up to a crew adequate for the long sails to come.

We left early next morning heading for the little harbour village of Aber Wrack'h on the North Brittany coast. The wind had abated to about Force 5 westerly, but the waves still showed their storm origins, so sailing was exciting. Jenn organised us into three-hour watches: I was with Andrew.. We performed the intricate docking operation and went ashore in search of victuals, but only one little café was open. Fish soup and galettes sufficed before squeezing into bunks.

Another early start for the long sail to Guernsey, steadily downwind, watch after watch, into the dark, around the South and up the East coast to St. Peter Port. Sails furled, we motored in, berthing about 10.



No respite the next day. Up at 4.00 for a 4.20 departure in the dark: that takes teamwork!

Motored out along the channel between the red and green marker buoys, sails hoisted and away northward, wind now gentle F4 on

the port beam. We left the Channel Islands behind in the dark and sailed on through the long day, cloudy sky, watch after watch, gazing at the sea, talking little, snatching sleep. The sun was going down when we first glimpsed the Isle of Wight, then it broke through the cloud base as we approached The Needles, the dramatic line of chalk pinnacles at the Western end. We sailed happily around them into the Solent, then on Eastward towards



Southampton, now in the dark among the myriads of lights, red, green, white, steady, flashing, that called for Jenn's skilful navigation.

Suddenly, almost miraculously, we were at our destination, the Hamble Marina, about 9.30 PM.

This photograph shows Skipper Jenn rounding the Needles

In all I had travelled about 750 miles by air and 1,200 miles by land to sail 265 miles. Not exactly the trip I had planned, but most interesting and rewarding and I made good new friends.

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TIMETABLE - VALID FROM 2nd September 2024

Time/Days have changed – please check & new W16 Stevenage

As from 2 nd September 2024		"Stops at all Bus Stops on Request"	
W2 BEDFORD	- 2nd Wednesday of Month	OUT	RETURN
Shefford Rd, / High St., / Rectory Rd. - all stops		09.00 / 09.02	RR
Interchange Retail Park		09.40	12.15
St Pauls Square / Corn Exchange		09.55	12.00
W3 BIGGLESWADE	- Every Monday	OUT	RETURN
Rectory Rd / High Street, / Shefford Rd., - all Stops		09.36 / 09.40	RR
Biggleswade – A1 Retail Park		10.10	12.15
Station / Town Centre - pick up Church St. Bus Stop o/s Asda		10.15	12.10
W5 BIGGLESWADE - A1 Retail Park/Town Centre - Every Friday		OUT	RETURN
Rectory Rd / High St. / Shefford Rd – all stops		10.00 / 10.03	RR
Biggleswade A1 Retail Park / Station & Town Centre		10.25 / 10.30	
Church St bus stop o/s Asda / A1 Retail Park			12.10 / 12.15
W6A CAMBRIDGE	- 4 TH Wednesday of Month	OUT	RETURN
Shefford Rd. / High St. / Rectory Rd. - all stops		08.48 /08.52	RR
Cambridge, Downing St. – o/s John Lewis		10.15	14.10
W8A ST ALBANS	- 1 st Wednesday of Month		
Shefford Rd. / High St. /Rectory Rd. – all stops		08.48 /08.52	RR
St Peters St. o/s Santander Bank / pickup opp Bank Stop 13		10.15	14.00
W10 ST NEOTS	- 2 nd Thursday of Month	OUT	RETURN
Rectory Rd. / High Street, / Shefford Rd. All stops		09.18 / 09.20	RR
St Neots - Market Place		10.15	12.20
W11 MILTON KEYNES	- 3 rd Thursday of Month	OUT	RETURN
Rectory Rd. / High St., / Shefford Rd. - all stops		09.08 / 09.10	RR
MK - Midsummer Blvd / M&S (Stop J3) / o/s John Lewis Stop E3		10.10	13.15
W12 HITCHIN	- Every Tuesday	OUT	RETURN
Shefford Rd. / High Street / Rectory Rd - All stops		09.18 / 09.20	RR
Bancroft Stop D		10.05	
Bancroft Stop G (Outside Oliver Bonas)			12.10
W14 WELWYN GARDEN CITY	- 1 st Thursday of Month	OUT	RETURN
Rectory Rd. / High Street, All stops		09.14	RR
Shefford Road, All stops		09.16	RR
WGC Central Bus Station		10.00	12.15
W16 STEVENAGE	- 3 rd Wednesday of each Month		
Rectory Rd. / High St. / Shefford Rd. – all Stops		09.34 / 09.37	RR
Tesco Extra, The Forum Centre (opp Station)		10.05	12.10
M&S, Roaring Meg Retail Park		10.10	12.05

EXCURSIONS – 4TH Thursday of Month – call For Details – 0300-123-3023

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Central Beds Council 0300 300 8301

CBC Councillor for Gravenhurst, Meppershall, Shillington:

Blake Stephenson blake.stephenson@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

hello@blakestephenson.uk

0300 300 8526

Parish Council Clerk

Alessandre Marabese clerk@meppershall-pc.gov.uk

Member of Parliament:

Alistair Strathern MP C/O House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

020 7219 6004

alistair.strathern.mp@parliament.uk

St Marys Church

Rev. Veronica Goodman, The Rectory, Church Road 01462 339962

See full details in the church pages of The Meppershall Messenger

Library: High St Shefford 0300 300 8067

Tuesday – Friday 9am – 6pm, Saturday 9am – 4pm, closed Monday & Sunday

Whitbread Wanderbus service

Stephanie Kirby thewanderbus@gmail.com

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Meppershall Academy, High Street 01462 813293

Meppershall Pre-School Village Hall, Ella Carey-Butler 07816 357159

meppershallps@gmail.com

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meppershallmunchkins@gmail.com

Organisations

The Players @ STMA, Karen Mitchell 01462 816336

Meppershall Good Neighbours (GNOMES) 07760 793921

Meppershall Brownies, Suzanne Brightwell 07817 392325

Shefford Guides, Angie Griffiths 07957 462519

Shefford Scout Group (Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Explorers)

Kathy Georgiou 01462 629313

HATS Drama Group, Linda Winfield lin.winfield5@gmail.com

Meppershall Village Hall Trustees trustees@meppershallvillagehall.co.uk

Meppershall Village Hall Bookings bookings@meppershallvillagehall.co.uk

Bookings Tel. 07485 102727

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 submitted. Contributions should run to not more than one A5 page (except by prior arrangement) and should ideally be received by the Editor not later than the 12th of the month, for publication at the end of that month (or by the later deadline date publicised by email or Facebook). Contributions received after the deadline may be held over.

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PRODUCTION DATES AND DEADLINES

The table below shows the dates for collation of the magazine. The collation team generally meets at 2.30pm in the Village Hall on the collation date. Printing takes place 7 days prior to collation. The deadline for submissions is two Fridays prior to collation. Please look out for updates and alterations to usual plans when occasionally necessary. Can you spare some time to help produce the magazine? We would love to have you on the team! Use the contacts above to find out more.

Issue date	Collation date	Issue date	Collation date
February 2026	Tues 27 th January	Aug-Sept 2026	Tues 28 th July
March 2026	Tues 24 th February	October 2026	Tues 29 th September
April 2026	Tues 31 st March	November 2026	Tues 27 th October
May 2026	Tues 28 th April	Dec-Jan 2026-7	Tues 1 st December
June 2026	Tues 26 th May	February 2027	TBC
July 2026	Tues 30 th June	March 2027	TBC
Contact John Thompson to confirm arrangements (contact information above).			