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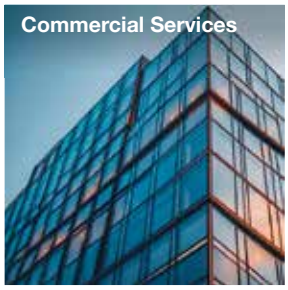


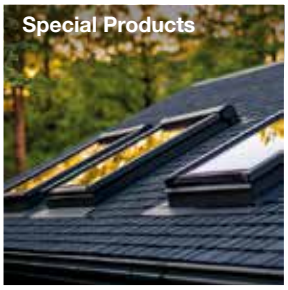




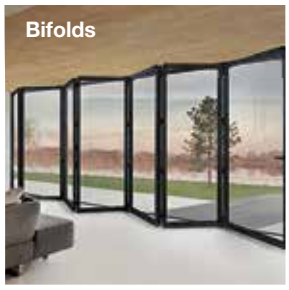












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Wow, wasn't Olney Pancake Race Day good this year? If you were able to make it into town to join thousands of families and friends for this wonderful, historic annual event, you can't help but have been impressed by what went on.

In the great scheme of things Olney is a small town, but my word when its people come together to make things happen the result is brilliant and quite heart-warming.

Dignitaries from our town and city councils, along with the local MP and other officers, joined in the fun, which was shown live on TV. It was a great occasion and reminded me how great it is when people come together to help each other. Full coverage of the event is on page 42.

Talking of coming together, we were invited to the 10th anniversary of CAMEO, the friendly Club that gets people together to 'meet each other'. That again showed the power of people all pulling in the same direction. Read about it on page 56.

Our 'Club of the Month' regular feature (page 38) and the Olney Ukraine Aid page (52) do a similar thing. We are lucky to have each other for support.

And while I'm talking about support and love, I'm led nicely onto our special feature, which always comes about, around this time of year: Mother's Day. It's a time to remember and thank our mums, grandmas, aunts, guardians or whoever helps you through life.

Treating them to something special doesn't have to cost the earth, and we show you how on page 32.

Enjoy this month's magazine and carry on helping others and supporting your family and friends. It really does make a difference – even if they don't always tell you.

See you next month.

Ron Hall, Editor













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Major exhibition opens in Milton Keynes

City's art gallery is showing the first expo of British artist for 20 years.

Milton Keynes's art gallery is showing the first major UK exhibition in more than 20 years dedicated to one of Britain's most significant figurative artists.

The landmark exhibition, 'An Arc from the Eye', brings together more than 70 of artist Euan Uglow's paintings and drawings from public and private collections, ranging from his iconic large-scale nudes, to studio-based still lifes and landscape works from his summers in Europe.

The artist's works are shown alongside others by masters who have influenced him, including Paul Cezanne and Alberto Giacometti and tutors William Coldstream, Victor Pasmore and Claude Rogers.

Uglow is best known for his meticulous paintings from life. Some of his paintings took months or even years to complete, and his repeated, careful measurements and a wholly devised set-up resulted in a limited body of work, making this exhibition a rare occasion.

The display, which runs until May, showcases landscapes from Uglow's weeks spent in France, Italy and Morocco, alongside a large selection of his revered nudes and still-life paintings.

Euan Uglow: An Arc from the Eye is at MK Gallery, Midsummer Boulevard, until Sunday 31st May.











From left to right

1. The Mosque at Çiftlik Köyü , 1966, Oil on board. AC 894, Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Image © and courtesy Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. © The estate of Euan Uglow. All rights reserved 2025 / Bridgeman Images

2. Head of Pat, 1978-83, Oil on canvas laid on panel. Collection of Bernard Jacobson Gallery. Image courtesy Browse and Darby, London. © The estate of Euan Uglow. All rights reserved 2025 / Bridgeman Images

3. Marigold, 1969, Oil on canvas. Image courtesy Browse and Darby, London. © The estate of Euan Uglow. All rights reserved 2025 / Bridgeman Images

4. Still Life with Honeysuckle, 1968, Oil on panel. Image courtesy Piano Nobile, London. © The estate of Euan Uglow. All rights reserved 2025 / Bridgeman Images

5, *Three in One, 1967-68, Oil on canvas. Image © 2014 and courtesy Christie's Images Limited. © The estate of Euan Uglow. All rights reserved 2025 / Bridgeman Images*

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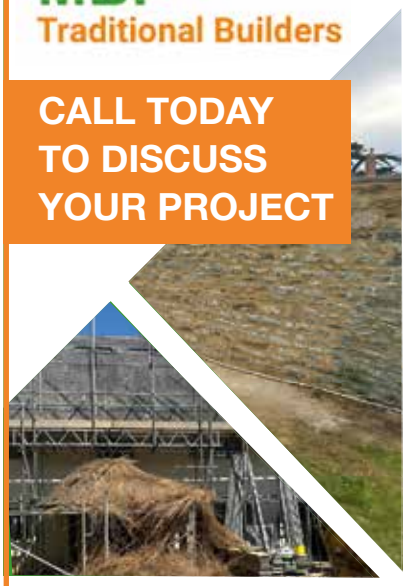
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Olney Camera Club: Smartphone Photography

Recently, Jeanette Lendon gave the club a talk at our usual meeting rooms in the Olney Centre, entitled "Smartphone Photography". Our organisers wondered whether it would have appeal to our membership, but we had a full house.

While she demonstrated with enthusiasm using an iPhone, she also described setup details for other manufacturers' phones, encouraging us all to try settings on our own devices – which, of course, most had with them.
Jeanette illustrated her talk with projected images and provided useful instructions:
Her keynote was: if you have a camera, you can do photography. She was not there to convert us to smartphone cameras and throw our old gear away, just to be happy to use what we have got to hand. Photographers can easily let a good image go because they don't have their camera with them, and those interested in learning to take better pictures can invest their time with their phone camera without spending lots more money on loads of gear.

- Jeanette's suggested settings included selecting RAW mode when you need to edit an image, and jpeg for general use.
- Turn on your rule-of-thirds grid lines to encourage better focal point positioning – what do you mean: don't put the subject in the middle?
- Turn on the horizon indicator to help prevent sloping images.
- Don't bother with wildlife or sports photography – smartphones have their limitations.
- Jeanette uses Snapseed for her image editing; a useful, intuitive and free app.
- Turn your phone upside-down when you are trying to take a low-down shot, close to the ground – saves having to crouch or strain your wrist.

Missing from all but a few smartphone cameras is variable lens aperture. For photographers this is considered essential for creative options and is a component of the exposure triangle; historically, a variable aperture has been provided in regular cameras for over one hundred years.
Instead, camera phones use the processor to create artificial blur around our selected focal point, approximating the look of depth-of-field.
Huawei and Xiaomi brands have variable aperture on premium models, while it is not widely offered now by Samsung. The Apple iPhone 19 Pro is expected to feature it when released in 2027.
Our thanks to Jeanette Lendon for her splendid, spellbinding talk. Images shown here are a sample of past club competition entries using smartphones.

All images have previously been entered into our club competitions.



Tulipa Serono; by Stephen Isherwood on Apple iPhone 11 Pro



Underground; by Nick Biddle on Apple iPhone 17 Pro Max



Working the land, Northamptonshire; by Maureen Smith on Apple iPhone 12

Next Meetings:

Wednesday 25th March: Competition: 2026 Round 1.
Starts 8pm at The Olney Centre.

Wednesday 29th April: Talk: Land, Air & Sea, by Dave Peck.
Starts 8pm at The Olney Centre.

For further information, check on meeting dates or to see our 'gallery', our website address is below, or you can email info@olneycameraclub.co.uk or call Andy on 01234 714570.

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Spring into the new season at vintage event

There's nothing quite like replacing the old with the new, the quirky, and the cool – all of which will be in ample supply with the return of the popular MK Handmade & Vintage Extravaganza.

Returning to the Centre:MK for its 16th year, this triannual event makes shopping for the unusual, the bespoke and the beautiful an absolute breeze, and is a great way to reinvigorate your home this spring.

Shoppers will want to get along early on 7th and 8th March to peruse the stalls, connect with traders and find those must-have items, the likes of which you simply won't find elsewhere.

More than 130 stalls will replace the wide open space of Middleton Hall with the bustle of handcrafted, unique and retro goodies.

Antiques, authentic vintage, jewellery, toys, homewares, collectables, ephemera, ceramics and glass, memorabilia, music, accessories, original art and gifts are just some of those items to shop for.

From vegan cakes to handmade teddies, fossils and trinkets, personalised gifts, jewellery and all manner of items in-between, MK H&V will get your taste buds salivating, and your inner designer working overtime.

Among the weekend's exhibitors, you'll find colourful abstract artist Doodle and Squiggs, needle felt and crafts from Luna's Lot and stallholders, and Erin and Janis Ardis with Alice Joseph Vintage.

The Busy Baking Company delivers baking kits for many dietary needs, and if you feel like a little tipple, Foxdenton Gin has a delicious array of flavours to tempt you.

This huge pop-up bazaar is one of the biggest and best markets in the country, and gives a welcome space to talented designer-makers, artists, artisans and specialist dealers, who can't be found on the high street.

"Everyone loves a good old rummage, and there's no better place to get stuck in than at this event," says organiser Jen Reeves-North.

"We are also proud to be able to give a platform to hardworking creatives



in our community who are delivering amazing items as standard. And if you are looking for awesome antiques, eccentric creations or a pretty adornment, Handmade & Vintage won't let you down.

"Entry is free, too, which means more to spend on the stalls. This has turned from a market into a community of traders and shoppers, and the more the merrier. We hope you will be able to join us."

MK Handmade & Vintage is on Saturday, 7th March (9am-6pm) and Sunday, 8th March (10.30am-5pm).
More information: mkhandmadeandvintage.co.uk.

Sherington Belles banish the winter blues

Local WI group fills new year with fun events.

The Sherington Belles WI kicked off the year with Professor Andrew Norton's fascinating talk, 'The Life and Death of Stars - We are made of Star Stuff'.

They also welcomed Sara Whatley from Ailsa's Aim, which is their current chosen charity. The Walking Belles enjoyed lunch at the White Hart pub after their stroll, and the group's Film Club organised for 25 members to see the brilliant Hamnet at the cinema.

The Book Group reviewed 'How to Disappear' by Gillian McAllister which, they had thoroughly enjoyed reading. The new Belles Board Games Group met for a morning and evening session while the Foodie Group celebrated Mary Berry's 90th birthday by preparing a stunning selection of her recipes.

The Theatre Group organised a trip to 'TINA', the Tina Turner musical, at MK Theatre, where they had front row seats.

"We ended the month with 80 of us having a blast at our Barn Dance, so we kept ourselves busy," said club secretary Anne Anthony.









The group meets at Sherington Village Hall at 7pm on the first Tuesday of each month. More details: thesheringtonbelleswi@gmail.com.

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IT'S **MORSE** OF COURSE!

Actor Tom Chambers leads the way as the loveable Inspector in this new tour. And he's quite nervous about it, Phonebox Magazine discovered.

Taking on the iconic role of crime-solver Endeavour Morse in Inspector Morse: House of Ghosts, Tom Chambers admits to being daunted at the prospect of following in the footsteps of acting legend John Thaw from the much-loved TV series.

"But it's a thrilling challenge," he says. "And it's a delicious treat for anyone who is a fan of Morse, like I was and indeed have been throughout the decades."

For most theatregoers, House of Ghosts will be a brand-new story full of surprising twists and turns. It was written in 2010 by Alma Cullen, who, along with Anthony Minghella and Danny Boyle, was one of the original writers on the Inspector Morse TV show when it premiered in 1987.

Reunited with director Anthony Banks after touring last year in Dial M for Murder, Tom says he is looking forward to playing the massive title role in this new production.

"Morse is such a fantastic brand, and we're both really excited about the fact that the audience is going to see something that the vast majority of them won't have seen before," he says.

"And given that Alma was one of the original writers, this is very much the Inspector Morse that we know and love."

The ITV show was hailed by Radio Times as the 'greatest British crime series of all time' and it inspired the equally beloved spin-offs Lewis and Endeavour. Based on the novels by Colin Dexter, the hit series starred Thaw as the erudite Inspector, famed for his love of opera, crosswords and a fine real ale.

Alongside Detective Sergeant Lewis, played by Kevin Whately, the pair captivated audiences for 13 years and a total of 33 episodes with the programme's trademark gripping mysteries, intelligent plots and memorable characters. The series became a classic of British television, earning numerous accolades and a devoted fanbase.



In House of Ghosts, a chilling mystery unfolds when a young actress suddenly dies on stage during a performance, and Morse and Lewis are called in to investigate. What begins as a suspicious death inquiry takes a darker turn when they uncover a connection to sinister events in Morse's own past at Oxford 25 years earlier.

"The thrill for me is in the dialogue and the writing, the camaraderie between Morse and Lewis and their relationship, where you have that classic thing of him putting Lewis down but with a sense of irony or jest and sometimes despair," says Tom.

"So it's great fun but daunting too, because you know that an audience is going to want to see something in the style of what they've seen before.

"They don't want to see something that's completely, shockingly unexpected, although there's a different kind of energy to the setting because we're back in 1987, where there are no mobile phones and it's all analogue."

Joining Tom is actor and rapper Tachia Newall, who played Bolton Smilie in BBC drama Waterloo Road, as Lewis, bringing a fresh dynamic to the beloved detective duo.

"Lewis is pretty down-to-earth and hard-working," says Tachia. "He loves his family, and he's usually thinking about getting home to his wife and kids, but he also wants to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"I'm probably quite different because I wouldn't say that I'm relatively chill. I'm down-to-earth, but I'm a little bit nutty. People will tell you that I'm very excitable."

Inspector Morse: House of Ghosts is at Milton Keynes Theatre, Tuesday 17th to Saturday 21st March.





WHAT'S COMING UP IN: MARCH

Sun 1st
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Tue 3rd
Feast of Fiddles
The Stables, Wavendon

Wed 4th
Hayseed Dixie
Roadmender, Northampton

Thu 5th
Bye Bye Baby
Castle Theatre, Wellingborough

Thu 5th
Bowie Experience
Milton Keynes Theatre

Thu 5th-Sat 7th
Spitfire Girls
Royal & Derngate, Northampton

Thu 5th
Totally Tina
The Stables, Wavendon

Fri 6th
eXTC
Bedford Esquires

Fri 6th
As December Falls
Craufurd Arms, Wolverton

Sat 7th
Verminthrone
Craufurd Arms, Wolverton

Sat 7th
I Am Woman
Stantonbury Theatre, Milton Keynes

Sat 7th
Austentatious
Milton Keynes Theatre

Sat 7th
Gary Delaney: Work In Progress
The Quarry Theatre, Bedford

Sat 7th
A Walk in the Park
The Place Theatre, Bedford

Sun 8th
Natural History Museum presents Dinosaurs Live!
Castle Theatre, Wellingborough

Sun 8th
Showaddywaddy
Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Tue 10th-Sat 14th
Hamlet
The Place Theatre, Bedford

Tue 10-Sat 14th
Legally Blonde
Milton Keynes Theatre

Wed 11th
The Dublin Legends
The Stables, Wavendon

Thu 12th
Hidden Dance
Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Thu 12th
Anita Harris & Freddie Davies: A Lifetime of Memories
The Old Savoy, Northampton

Fri 13th
Performers Night @ The Song Loft
York House, Stony Stratford

Sat 14th
Legend: The Music of Bob Marley
Royal & Derngate, Northampton

Sat 14th
Will Wilde Band and Brave Rival
The Stables, Wavendon

Sat 14th
The South
Bedford Esquires

Sat 14th
Sing The Musicals
The Old Savoy, Northampton

Sat 14th
Josh Widdicombe: Not My Cup Of Tea
Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Sun 15th
Nigel Havers – Talking B*ll*cks
Milton Keynes Theatre

Tue 17th-Sat 21st
Inspector Morse: House of Ghosts
Milton Keynes Theatre

Tue 17th
Harry Enfield and No Chums
Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Wed 18th
An Evening with Joe Thomas
The Stables, Wavendon

Wed 18th
The Kerry George Show
The Place Theatre, Bedford

Thu 19th-Sat 21st
Blue Murder at Bluestone Hsall
Castle Theatre, Wellingborough

EDITOR'S CHOICE
Thu 19th
Judi Love: All About The Love
Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Thu 19th-Fri 20th
Jen Brister: Reactive
Royal & Derngate, Northampton

Fri 20th
Pet Needs
Craufurd Arms, Wolverton

Fri 20th
Sonic Time Machine – The 70s & 80s
Stantonbury Theatre, Milton Keynes

Sat 21st
100 Years of Laurel & Hardy
Royal & Derngate, Northampton

Sat 21st
The Magic of Motown
The Old Savoy, Northampton

Sat 21st
Pixiematosis
The Place Theatre, Bedford

Sat 21st
Straighten Out 'Stranglers Tribute'
Craufurd Arms, Wolverton

Sat 21st
Ferocious Dog
Roadmender, Northampton

Sat 21st
The Magic of Knebworth
York House, Stony Stratford

Sun 22nd
Dead Ringers – 25th Anniversary Tour
Milton Keynes Theatre

Tue 24th-Thu 26th
The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show
Royal & Derngate, Northampton

Tue 24th-Sat 28th
Blood Brothers
Castle Theatre, Wellingborough

Thu 26th
Employed To Serve
Craufurd Arms, Wolverton

Fri 27th
Genesis Connected
The Old Savoy, Northampton

Fri 27th
Phil Beer Trio
The Stables, Wavendon

Fri 27th
The Lonnie Donegan Story
York House, Stony Stratford

Fri 27th
Andrew Cushin
Roadmender, Northampton

Sat 28th-Sun 29th
The Last Dance
Stantonbury Theatre, Milton Keynes

Sat 28th
Harry Baker & Tom Syson
The Quarry Theatre, Bedford

Sat 28th
UK Subs
Bedford Esquires

Tue 31st
Mae Stephens
Bedford Esquires

Dates might change: check with venue

the stables

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March highlights

The Herd: Counting Sheeps



Wednesday 18 March, 10.30am, 12.15pm & 2pm

Snuggle up and join two sheep on a journey through the joys and frustrations of everything bedtime. Magical sensory play for 0-3 year olds and their (very tired) grown-ups.

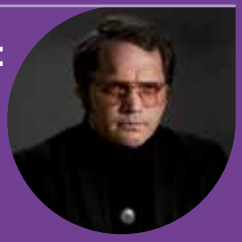
Phil Beer Trio



Friday 27 March, 8pm

Enjoy an evening in the company of multi-instrumentalist Phil Beer as he explores the blues roots of his musical life.

Garth Marenghi: This Bursted Earth Book Tour



Saturday 28 March, 8pm

From Horror's Grand Frightener, Garth Marenghi – bestselling author of *TerrorTome* and *Incarcerat* – come three freshly rancid tales of apocalyptic imagination: *This Bursted Earth.*

Hejira: Celebrating Joni Mitchell



Tuesday 31 March, 8pm

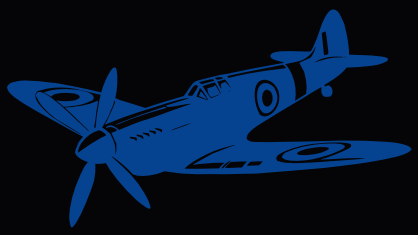
Seven-piece band Hejira present an evening of great songs from Joni's back catalogue, including *Amelia, Woodstock, A Case Of You, Song For Sharon* and *Edith And The Kingpin.*

The Stables
Wavendon
Milton Keynes
MK17 8LU

Box office:
01908 280800
stables.org

SPIT AND POLISHED

A new play, released last year to mark the end of World War 2, is flying into Northampton for three nights. Writer Katherine Senior told Phonebox Magazine's Tom Johnston how she researched the remarkable story.







Spitfire Girls, which marked the 80th Anniversary year of the end of the war, premiered at MAST Mayflower, Southampton, in March 2025 and enjoyed a successful debut tour, with standing ovations and critical acclaim.

It's inspired by the extraordinary true stories of the women who dared to fly during WWII and the incredible bond that tied them together. Funny and heart-warming, this is an untold story of strength, courage, loss and hope.

Decades after answering the call, two women separated by the war meet again as the rain hammers down on the windows of The Spitfire pub. As we hear their story, we're transported back to a time when female pioneers defied expectations and soared through the skies.



"I am over the moon that Spitfire Girls is back on the road again after such an incredible tour last year," says writer and cast member Katherine Senior.

"Working on this play has been a little adventure of my very own over the past 10 years, and I am so very grateful that it gets to have another outing across the UK to more beautiful venues."

Joining Katherine, who plays Bett, are Kirsty Cox ('Joy/C.O.') and Jack Hulland ('Dad/Frank'), Hannah Morrison who will play 'Dotty', Katriona Brown sharing the role of 'Bett', and Paul Brown as 'Tom/Jimmy'.

Writer Katherine always loved 'diving into other worlds and digging around', but research on this level was something she had never done, so it was a slow burn for her.

"So I watched documentaries, read books and articles but, most importantly, met with the women pilots and their relatives," she says.

"I couldn't believe that I didn't know women flew during the war. How did this pass me by? And it was a woman who got them there; Pauline Gower was tasked with the job of gathering the first eight female pilots to join the ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary) and contributed to what was going to be an extraordinary feat for this civilian organisation.

"I have met many people over the years connected with the ATA, including the Heritage museum in Maidenhead and family and friends of the pilots, all of whom have been so supportive of the project."

She met former women pilots and the families of pilots and shared huge amounts of archive material and families' personal collections to formulate her story, making it as accurate and polished as possible.

"I went to the Isle of Wight in 2017 with my six-month-old boy in tow to meet ATA pilot, Mary Ellis, who at the time was 100 years older than my little boy," says Katherine.

"He sat on her lap while she talked about her time in the ATA. It was a privilege and honour to meet her. And of course, I was interested in gathering as many stats and facts, and I enjoyed adding those details to the piece, but I was more intrigued by her stories of friendship and camaraderie.

"There are enough books and papers out there that can give us the historical facts, but I am a storyteller, and I believe we need to tell stories with a beating heart at the centre of it. Our job is to zoom in on the humanity behind the history, otherwise we may as well watch a documentary."



Spitfire Girls is at Royal & Derngate, Northampton, Thursday 5th to Saturday 7th March.

Why is your house full... but your loft is empty?

Local homeowners are discovering storage space they already own

With growing families, home working, and ever-increasing storage demands, many homeowners are finding their houses feel cluttered, even though there's often a large, unused space directly above them.

Home Counties Loft Ladders is a local company that helps homeowners safely and correctly use their loft space. By improving access, lighting and boarded storage areas, most installations are completed in less than a day, with minimal disruption to the home.

Jamie Oakley, Manager at Home Counties Loft Ladders, explains: "*Most people know their loft is there, they just don't use it because access is awkward or unsafe. Our job is to make that space easy, safe and practical to use.*"

"*We work to three simple principles: Quality in our materials and workmanship, Integrity in how we treat people's homes, and Value in offering a fair price for a job done properly.*"

That approach has led to much of the company's work coming from recommendations by previous customers, homeowners who wanted the job done correctly, without mess or hassle.

To find out how you could make better use of your loft, call Jamie on **0808 301 9552** or visit **homecountiesloftladders.co.uk** to book a free, no-obligation quotation. You may be surprised how much space you already have.





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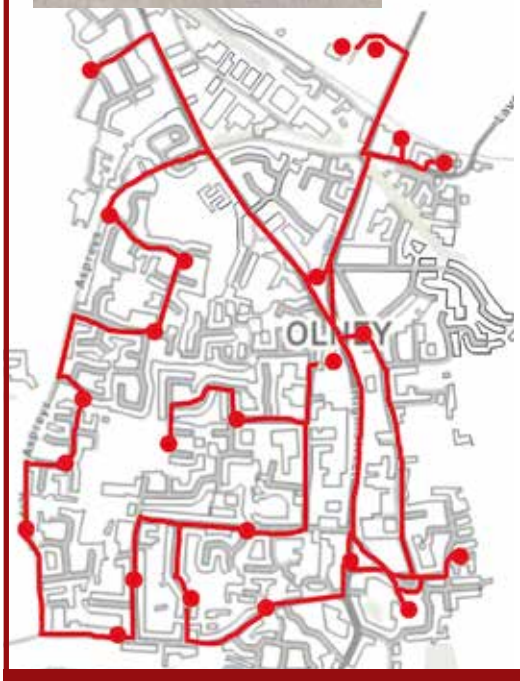
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CONNECTING OLNEY

THE COMMUNITY MINIBUS SERVICE

MAP & TIMETABLE



The Community Minibus provides free, scheduled transport around Olney, helping residents get to shops, services, local events and community groups.

The electric 8-seater minibus runs fixed routes on **Tuesdays and Thursdays,** and is driven by local volunteers.

See the timetable and map here for pick-up points and times.

	Tuesdays		Thursdays	
	OUT	BACK	OUT	BACK
The Olney Centre	10:00	12:30	11:00	14:30
Long Lane / West Side Rise	10:02	12:29	11:02	14:29
Johnson's Field	10:03	12:28	11:03	14:28
Spring Lane / Paxton Close	10:05	12:26	11:05	14:26
Winterbottom Way Sculpture	10:10	12:21	11:10	14:21
Aspreys / Foxhill	10:12	12:19	11:12	14:19
Foxhill / Hawkswood	10:13	12:17	11:13	14:17
Foxhill / Rivetts Close	10:14	12:16	11:14	14:16
Sillswood / Court Corner	10:16	12:14	11:16	14:14
Aspreys, Hollow Wood	10:17	12:13	11:17	14:13
Weston Road (Yew Tree House)	10:19	12:12	11:19	14:12
23 Spinney Hill Road	10:20	12:11	11:20	14:11
Dagnall Road Play Area	10:21	12:10	11:21	14:10
Oakdown Crescent / Alms Houses	10:23	12:09	11:23	14:09
Market Place, The Bull	10:25	12:07	11:25	14:07
Clifton Court	10:27	12:05	11:27	14:05
Freemans Gardens	10:29	12:03	11:29	14:03
Newton Court / Broomfield	10:33	12:01	11:33	14:01
Sainsbury's	10:35	11:57	11:35	13:57
Teedon Lane / Penny House	10:37	11:53	11:37	13:53
Aldi	10:40	11:50	11:40	13:50
Olney Meadows	10:45	11:45	11:45	13:45
corner of Newton Street and East Street	10:50	11:40	11:50	13:40
Market Place, The Bull	10:55	11:35	11:55	13:35
The Olney Centre	11:00	11:30	12:00	13:30

Please note: The minibus is run by volunteer drivers. While every effort is made to ensure you have a safe journey, drivers are not trained carers and will not be able to help you get on and off the bus: If you need carers, they are welcome to travel with you.

Example Route on a Tuesday:
Out from Dagnall Road 10:21 - arriving at Sainsbury's 10:35
Back from Sainsbury's 11:57 - arriving at Dagnall Road 12:10

Explore, Connect, Contribute: Olney's Community Minibus Brings Us Together More details at **www.olneytowncouncil.gov.uk**



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Sunday 15th March



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ARE 'WOO' READY FOR GARY?

Radio legend Gary Davies is returning to Northampton with his disco spectacular, and he's looking forward to it, as he tells Phonebox Magazine's Tom Johnston.

Gary Davies says he 'can't wait' to revisit Northampton as part of his biggest UK tour to date as a DJ. The music legend and host of BBC Radio 2's 'Sounds of the 80s' show has added the town's Derngate Theatre to his extensive tour of the country for his Disco for Grown Ups night.

A regular on 1980s Radio 2 and Top of the Pops, 'Woo' Gary Davies has teamed up with the Discos For Grown Ups organisation to create an unstoppable, high-energy 80s party, packed with iconic hits from probably the best era of pop and floor-shaking anthems from the decade that defined pop culture.

The show features dancers, confetti showers, lights, lasers, mirror balls and some of the best 80s classics to dance to from huge artists including Wham, Erasure, ABBA, Whitney Houston, A-Ha, Queen, Depeche Mode, Duran Duran, The Human League, Madonna, The Eurythmics, Soft Cell and more.

"I just love playing live," says Gary, 68. "I guess it's because when I first became a DJ it was in a packed nightclub in Manchester. I used to play there three nights a week for three years before I got my first radio job, so I feel very comfortable and happy in front of a live audience."

The Manchester-born former marketing executive has never tired of DJ-ing, both on radio and live, and has made a 40-year career out of music. It has been 23 years since he left Radio 1, but the passion and knowledge remain undimmed.

As well as being heard daily on the nation's radios, Gary was a regular presenter on the iconic Top of the Pops, hosting the TV show more often than any other DJ in the 80s. He left Radio 1 in 193 but returned to the BBC in 2017 and has hosted many shows for the station since, including standing in for presenters Sara Cox and Vernon Kay.

But he loves live shows and has started his own monthly London night playing out his own style of underground Deep and Tech House music.

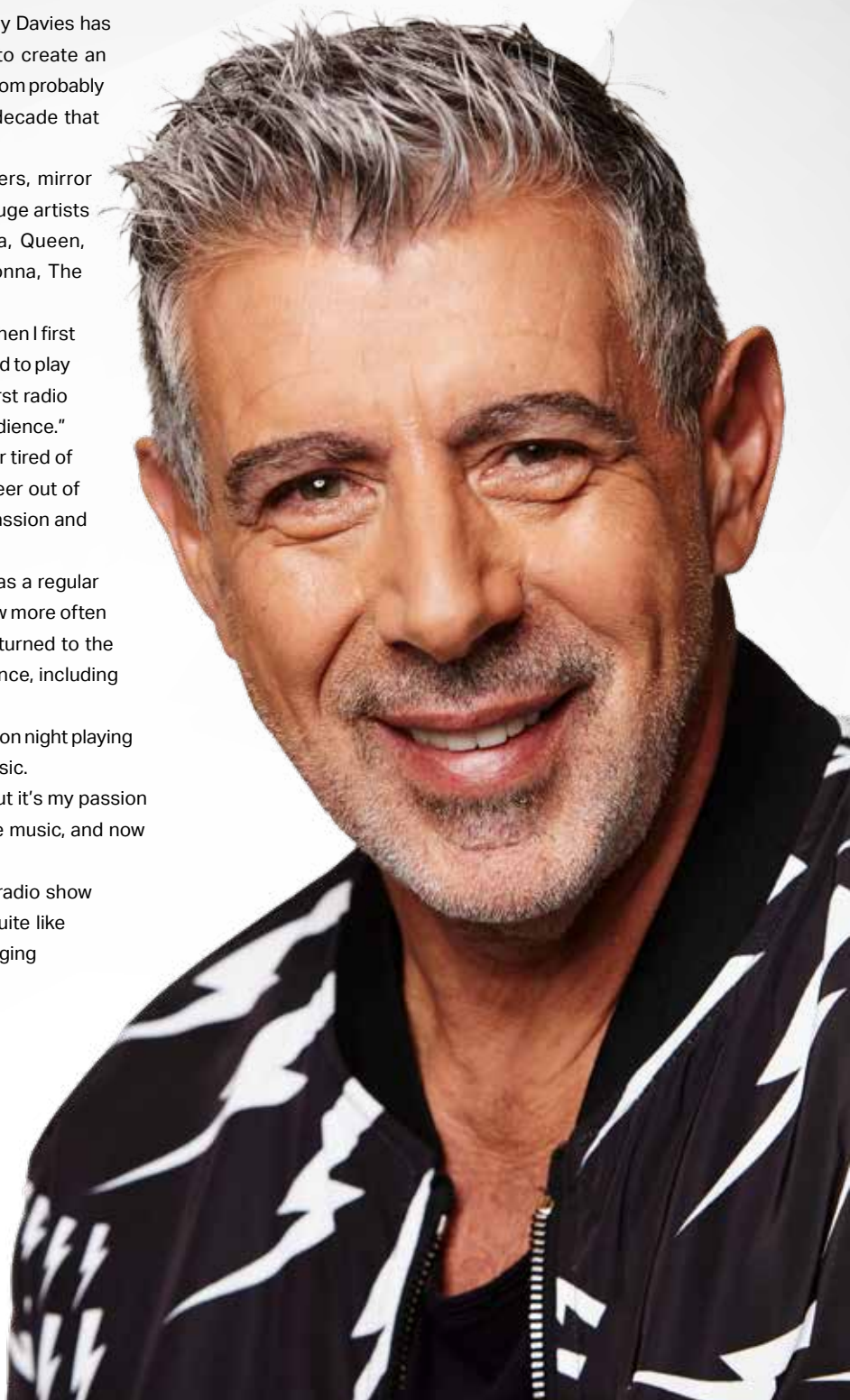
"It's different to the music that most people know me for, but it's my passion and my hobby," he says. "I've always sought out new dance music, and now I'm playing it.

"Playing live is a completely different approach to doing a radio show because you can see your audience and there's nothing quite like taking them on a journey and seeing their reaction to the banging tunes I play."

And Northampton will give Gary a chance to relive the good times he has had while previously visiting the town.

"Yes, I have been to Northampton before, but to be honest I can't remember the last time I was there," he says.

"It was quite a few years ago, but I can't wait to go back there with Discos for Grown Ups. It's going to be one hell of a party."



Gary Davies 80s Disco For Grown Ups is at Royal & Derngate Theatre, Northampton, Friday 29th May.


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Mercury Report

There was no meeting of the full Olney Town Council in January so February's was the first of the new year.

Public Participation

There was one member of the public who spoke this month. Martin Wilkinson started by saying that everyone knew why he was there and jokingly admitted to being 'a pain' but said he was speaking on behalf of the many residents who want to see a 20mph limit imposed on all side roads in Olney. Many are not fit for purpose for 30mph due to the volume of traffic and number of potholes, he said. He noted that the council had voted against a blanket 20mph restriction at the December meeting, instead opting for a targeted approach. A blanket restriction would be much simpler to implement, less confusing, and would cost a lot less than the suggested targeted zones, he thought. He referred to a petition raised a couple of years ago that had been signed by 'a fair few hundred' people. East Street is particularly dangerous, he said, suggesting that it would be too dangerous to install speed awareness cameras in some locations. He also noted that many road markings in the town, particularly at the bottom of Weston Road, are in urgent need of repainting. He finished by saying that it would be his last time of asking, as he felt like a lost profit in the wilderness.

A letter had been received from Naomi Brock on behalf of Olney Is Kind, thanking the council and staff for hosting the Christmas Day lunch at the Olney Centre. Mayor Debbie Whitworth said the event had been a huge success.

Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

David Tyler, Dan Rowland and Alan Stone had sent apologies. There were no declarations of interest.

Ward Councillor's report

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) Ward Councillor Keith McLean was present to give the report on behalf of the Conservative group. Noting that there had been no OTC meeting in January, he wished everyone a Happy New Year. He said he had been notified of a few changes to the MKCC budget, one of them being that the Highways Department would be seeking a headcount reduction of eight people. However, seven of those were posts that had been vacant for some time, so there would only be one person affected. It was a tight but balanced budget, he said. As previously reported, the Petsoe End Windfarm Fund exists to make donations to community groups. It receives an annual grant of £7k and currently has around £35k in the pot. As a result of the acquisition of the windfarm by OnPath in January 2025, the administration of the fund has now been transferred from the committee made up of Parish Council nominees to the Milton Keynes Community Foundation. Keith said he was confident that the governance structure and transparency of the process for assessing applications would now be much better once it was fully up and running in six to eight weeks. The Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner had that day announced that £200k would be available for suitable schemes and Keith had passed details to all parish clerks in the ward. The MKCC Customer Services email facility has recently been withdrawn and all contact should now be made via the online form. There had been grumbles on social media for the first couple of days but the system now appeared to be working well. The consultation period for the New City Plan had been extended from late December to 16th February due to a flaw in the process of notifying consultees of the previous stage about the Regulation 19 consultation. At a previous meeting it had been reported that the Newport Pagnell recycling centre would be closing at the end of the current financial year, even though the replacement Wolverton 'Super-Site' would not be up and running by then. Keith reported that the closure date was now autumn 2026, but an undertaking had been given that it would not close until the new site was open. The rather vague nature of MKCC's advance road closure signs was a cause for concern for Keith. There did not appear to be standard times for one-day road closures, he said. Usually it was 09.30 to 16.30, but occasionally it was 08.00 to 18.00, which made it very difficult for people to plan their journeys. He noted that the recent closure at Petsoe End had been signposted on the A509, but there were no signs coming from Turvey until the point of closure. Regarding the council decision not to implement a 20mph blanket speed restriction, Keith said he had also spoken to residents who found the decision 'strange' but said he looked forward to a report on the council's further research on the matter. Finally, Keith said that he and fellow ward councillor Peter Geary fully understood why Debbie Whitworth would not be standing in the forthcoming MKCC elections and thanked her, but it wasn't clear whether they were thanking her for standing down or for her service over the past two years! David Chennells agreed with Keith about the lack of information on the road closure signs and thought the signs should give more information about the actual location. Keith responded that he was more interested in the timings as location data, and more is available on the one.network website. As a supporter of the blanket 20mph restriction, Colin Rodden thought that the council should inform residents about how to go about requesting a restriction in their area and appeared to want to continue the discussion further, but both Mayor Debbie Whitworth and Town Clerk Jane Brushwood indicated a strong desire to move on with the agenda.

In her role as Labour Ward Councillor, Debbie Whitworth gave a brief update on the takeover of the 41 bus service and said she was hopeful of a smooth transition to Palmer Grant, the new operator. The parents of students using the current service had paid large sums upfront for season tickets and were worried that they would not get reimbursed, she said, but she had been assured that would not be the case and all advances would be refunded. The fare cap of £3 would also remain, said Debbie. Parents of Children using the Whirly Pit roundabout crossing had expressed concerns about safety and as a result MKCC would be sending a Traffic and Transport team, including the new Road Safety Officer to investigate and report back. Potholes continue to be a problem, she said and MKCC had investigated and many marked in white for repair. If residents noted a deterioration in potholes that had already been reported the MKCC advice is to report them again, she said. Finally she reported that Aspreys is due for resurfacing in the next financial year.

Keith said as a member of MKCC Planning Committee he had seen an application for the East Street Community Centre (ex-Youth Club) to locate 10 solar panels on the roof of the building, but with no battery storage. He said he had 14 on his own house, along with a 13kW battery so this appeared to be a very cheap solution.

PCSO report

No PCSO was present, so Debbie Whitworth read out the report for the period 01/12/2025 – 02/02/2026:

Incident Type	Count
Assault without injury: fight amongst students outside school	2
Business Burglary: 1x shoplifting, 1x break in	2
Residential Burglary	1
Public Order	2
Theft: 1x theft of Pokemon cards, 1x theft of scrap metal	2
Theft from vehicle	2
Suspicious persons	4
Suspicious other: 1x suspicious Yodel driver, 1x loud continuous alarm	2
Suspicious vehicle	5
Suspicious Package	1

Additionally, there have been incidents of hare coursing in rural villages.

Data results from Speed Indicating Devices (SIDs)

As there was no meeting in January, two sets of results were available. Deputy Clerk Rob Mungham first provided the stats for the period 7/11/25 to 05/12/2025:

Location	Vehicle Count	Speed Limit	Average Speed	85th Percentile
Yardley Road, Yardley Manor – Southbound	47161	20 mph	22.43 mph	28.3 mph
Aspreys, Hollow Wood end - Southbound	45345	30 mph	25.56 mph	29.4mph
Aspreys, Foxhill end – Northbound (18 days only due to faulty SID)	26167	30 mph	23.35 mph	27.8mph

Results for 6/12/25 to 14/01/2026

Location	Vehicle Count	Speed Limit	Average Speed	85th Percentile
Yardley Road, OMS – Northbound	25537	20 mph	20.25 mph	24.3 mph
Weston Road top - Eastbound	47949	30 mph	25.03 mph	29.0mph
Weston Road bottom - Westbound	36945	30 mph	23.61 mph	27.9mph

All locations recorded a decrease in average speed from previous measurements. Colin Rodden expressed the opinion that SID data alone was unreliable because evidence suggests that drivers speed up once they have passed a SID and had some data to prove it. David Chennells said that in his view the only reliable measurements came from average speed cameras. Colin Rodden wanted to continue the discussion, but was asked by the mayor to provide the data so that it could be an agenda item for a future meeting.

Reports from external meetings

Many councillors represent OTC at external groups and forums. Mary Prosser and David Chennells had attended the quarterly meeting of the Ann Hopkins Smith Alms Houses. Mary reported that future maintenance work on the fabric of the buildings would be required, and she had applied to the Emberton Windfarm Fund, but due to the transition to the MKCC Community Foundation, she would need to apply again in March. There was currently one vacancy which would be filled from the waiting list.

Update on the ex-Football Club building and Padel Court

Jane Brushwood said that all Building Control requirements for renovation of the ex-football club had been met and work would start the following Monday. No progress on the Padel court.

Tree Preservation Working Group

A lengthy and detailed report had been provided by David Tyler on behalf of the working group proposing to apply to MKCC for a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) on trees and hedgerows on the site known locally as 'The Orchard' off East Street. This is the site behind the new wooden fencing by the Tennis Club. Jane Brushwood thought it 'a little bit bonkers' to apply for a TPO on land where the owner had done nothing but plant trees. Sarah Lowe said as a nearby resident she had read the report with some astonishment. The report stated that there was a clear and persistent development intent on the site which poses a direct and foreseeable threat to an irreplaceable green asset, but the planning applications referred to were not relevant as two shown as pending had since been refused and a subsequent application had been approved on appeal.

A further application was the Arboricultural Method Statement which had been approved. The Landscaping Plan made clear that all existing trees would remain and there would be additional planting. Several trees in a poor state had been removed by the previous owner but the new owner was replanting the orchard as part of the application, including 30 mature trees and 400m of hedgerow at huge expense before they even knew that the appeal against refusal had been granted.

The proposed TPO included trees that the new owner had planted, she said incredulously. A dilapidated hedgerow from the end of her own garden had been removed, replanted in a better location and watered all through the summer and was now thriving, Sarah said. The trees were not at threat, she said, and did not understand the report. The owner obviously loves trees, she believed, and the report, as worded, was unfair on that individual. Agreeing with Sarah's viewpoint, Deirdre Bethune was concerned that a subsequent owner of the site might not be so benevolent so it might be prudent to apply for a TPO now. It was agreed to hold fire on the TPO request and ask David Tyler to revise the report.

Finance Matters

Finance matters are discussed and decisions made at the Finance Subcommittee. The accounts are then sent to all councillors before the full council meeting. Any issues are now dealt with before the meeting rather than discussed at the meeting, where they are effectively 'rubber-stamped'. This year the Draft Budget and Draft Schedule of Charges for 2026/2027 has been agreed in the same way.

All charges for services and charges will rise by 3.6% in line with inflation. Chair of Finance Chris Shaw noted that there was no charge shown for a plaque to be fixed to a bench or post in the cemetery where ashes had been scattered so a fee of £50 was discussed and agreed.

From the ensuing discussion it appeared that this is to cater for the situation where ashes have been scattered elsewhere, but a memorial is wanted in the cemetery. Deirdre Bethune asked if this same cost would apply if ashes were scattered in the cemetery, but no plaque was required. An awkward silence ensued as it appears that this isn't a service that is officially offered by the council. Jane Brushwood thought it unlikely that anyone would ask permission to do this, but she said the groundsmen had evidence that it is happening because 'the lawnmower makes a different sound'!

The recent internal audit gave the council's accounts a clean bill of health, and thanks and congratulations were offered to Clerk Jane Brushwood and Deputy Rob Mungham. Colin Rodden noted that OTC had used the same company to audit the accounts for several years and suggested that it might be good governance to change. Rob said that there was a regular rotation within the company and as a result there is a different auditor every two years or so. Besides that, there are very few companies offering that service, he said.

Dates for the diary

Riverfest will take place on Sunday, 5th July and Motorama will take place on Sunday, 14th June.

The next meeting will be held on Monday 2nd March at 7pm in the Olney Centre. If you would like to contribute to the Public Participation section at the start of the meeting, or any time the mayor deems appropriate, please contact the Town Clerk, townclerk@olneytowncouncil.gov.uk.

Newport Pagnell Mayor's Update

Have a say



Councillor Paul Day

Milton Keynes City Council have elections in May. Whether you'd prefer someone from one of the established parties, from new choices or someone completely independent, you need to be registered to vote if you want to choose who makes big decisions that impact our lives. The deadline to register to vote is midnight on Monday, 20th April, and to make it easier to participate, you can also request a postal vote up until 5pm on Tuesday, 21st April. Details are on the MKCC website.

International winners

If, like me, you've been watching the Winter Olympics, you'll recognise the glory that athletes bring to their nations, communities and clubs. I was extremely honoured to meet four young members of our local Kicks Taekwon-Do Academy who had triumphed when competing for England at a recent international in Belgium, bringing home five medals between them. Congratulations to Amanda, Amirah, Clara, and Finlay. They smashed it – literally in terms of Clara's power-breaking!

Mother's day

15th March is Mother's Day, so as with all events and occasions, I'd remind you that our town has places to buy gifts, cards, flowers and/or to go for a meal, so if you can, please keep it local.

If we want our town to prosper, we need to support it, buying things locally, using local facilities, and supporting local clubs, all helps our local economy.

Bucket list

I'm trying to create a bucket list of Newport Pagnell things we could all tick off to help show our Newport Pagnell credentials. Here are some early ideas, but what would you add? Watch the Carnival parade – learn a new skill at a creative club – watch a football match at Willen Road – enjoy a night out in the High Street pubs – walk across Bury Common.

I'll publish a full list once I've heard from people, and we can then see who has done them all.

What do you think?

Phonebox readers with any comments about Newport Pagnell, can contact me at pauldayMK@outlook.com I am also @pauldayMK on Facebook.

Newport Pagnell Councillor Corner

Newport Pagnell South FOCUS Team, Cllrs Jane & Andy Carr, Tony Oyakhire



This will be our last report for a few months until after the election period as we wish to respect election law.

Budget Update

The City Council held its budget meeting in February and set the council tax increase at 4.99%. Whilst many will be worried about any increase, this is necessary to cover the inflation rises in costs, such as for building materials and road maintenance.

The increase includes a 2.0% rise to support adult social care. As a growing city that is seeing an increase in older residents this is essential to protect vital services.

Other important services, such as support for our more vulnerable children who have special needs is costing the city far more than it used to. However, the Government is saying that in time it will take on the management and costs for our children with Special Educational and Disabled needs. What this means in practice is yet to be confirmed, but as this is the biggest area of spending for the council, it is vital the Government gets it right.

However, other councils are having to put up charges, such as in West Northants, where they are charging £80 per green bin, threatening parking charges for shoppers in all their towns and have confirmed that Blue Badge holders will no longer get free parking! We have fought against any suggestion that this comes to Newport Pagnell or Olney.

Flooding

In other news, funding has been secured via the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee of the Environment Agency for various flood prevention projects. Jane is the only Milton Keynes voting member on this committee and has successfully pushed for a feasibility study for a further balancing lake for the city. This will help protect Newport Pagnell and the villages both upstream and downstream.

Funding has also been agreed for Lavendon to help protect homes in the village from repeated floods, and also for Woughton.

Councillor Surgery – Our next councillor's surgeries will be on Saturday 28th March from 10 to 11.30am, at the Mead Centre, Newport Pagnell, to coincide with the Repair Shop.

Follow us on Facebook – Newport Pagnell South Ward. You can also contact the Focus team by emailing newportsouthlibdems@gmail.com or phoning 01908 216366.

You can contact the Focus team by emailing newportsouthlibdems@gmail.com or phoning 01908 216366. Follow us on Facebook – Newport Pagnell South Ward

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The Diary: March

Folio Talk
Mon 2nd, Olney Centre, Room 4, 7pm
Jean Yates presents 'Ladies of the Grand Tour', Intrepid Wives, Widows and Mistresses'. Tickets: £6 in advance at www.ticketsource.co.uk/folio or 0333 666 3366 (includes refreshments).

Newport Pagnell Historical Society
Tue 3rd, United Reformed Church, Newport Pagnell, 7.30pm
Annual General meeting followed by 'The Story of Newport Pagnell Service Station', a short talk by Geoff Morris. Entry: £4 non-members, £2 members.

Three Hares Gallery
Tue-Sat 3rd-27th, Cowper & Newton Museum, Olney, 11am-4.30pm
We open our 2026 exhibition season with 'Amazing Grace: John Newton & Olney', a free exhibition in the gallery. More details: www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk.

Brooklands Tai Chi
Tue 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st. Brooklands Centre, Newport Pagnell, 9.30am and 10.30am
Ancient Chinese exercise involving deep breathing, relaxation and flowing movements. Beginners/Seated at 9.30am, Intermediate at 10.30am. Entry: £6. Everyone welcome. More details: 01908 614749.

Brooklands Tuesday Pop-in
Tue 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st. Brooklands Centre, Newport Pagnell, 10am
Meet new people or take a friend and enjoy good company and a delicious snack. Coffee, tea and cake. Everyone welcome.

The Sherington Belles WI
Tue 3rd, Sherington Village Hall, 7pm
Monthly meeting with a talk by Charmaine West, Sherington Belle, on 'Hats and Millinery'. Visitors/potential members welcome to this large and vibrant group. Entry: £5 cash includes refreshments. There is a charity raffle. Please let them know if you would like to attend: thesheringtonbelleswi@gmail.com or message 07901 648124.

First Steps
Wed 4th and 18th, Olney Baptist Church,10-11.15am
Playgroup for accompanied 0-4 year olds. Go and join in for free play time, crafts, baby area, snack, Bible story and songs. Please use the side entrance. More details: firststeps@olneybaptist.org.uk.

Open Film Society
Open University Berrill Theatre, Milton Keynes, 6.30pm
March's screenings: Wed 4th, The Girl With The Needle; Wed 11th, Misericordia; Wed 18th, Next Sohee; Wed 25th, On Becoming A Guinea Fowl. More details: openfilmsociety.co.uk for full programme, times and cost.

MK16 Badminton Club
Wed 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th, Lovat Hall, Newport Pagnell, 8-9.30pm
Fancy giving badminton a try? Thinking of playing again after a break? Want a new club to play at? Join this small, sociable, non-competitive club for beginners and intermediate players. All welcome. If attending for the first time, call David, 07941 922538 or mk16bclub@gmail.com.

Chatty Cafe
Thu 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th, Mead Centre, Newport Pagnell, 11am-1pm
Friendly drop-in session. Go alone or with a friend; a warm welcome awaits you. Situated just off the High Street, through the archway opposite Superdrug. Refreshments available. All welcome. More details: 01098 739716.

Bedford Art Society
Fri 6th, Putnoe Heights Church, Bedford, 7.15pm
Matt Waruszynski will be demonstrating how to create a pencil portrait. More details: Jean Paterson, 01234 307210 or www.bedsartsociety.co.uk.

Two Brewers
Fri 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th, High Street, Olney, 7pm
Popular pub now has a resident solo singer every Friday. Entry: free.

Memory Club
Fri 6th, Church Hall, Olney, 1.30 -3pm
In addition to tea and biscuits there will be pancakes to enjoy. You can also try your skill at tossing them. Deidre Bethune will be with the group to talk about her exchange visit to America. If any of you have photos of the Pancake Race, past or present, bring them with you. All welcome.

Olney Senior Citizens Club
Fri 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th, Olney Centre, 2-4pm
Popular social club's regular meetings in March include: Whist/Chat (6th); Bingo (13th); 'Keeping strong in later life' (20th); Holiday Memories of Vietnam. (27th).

Georgian Dancers of Amazing Grace
Fri 6th,13th, 20th, 27th, Olney Centre, 7pm-8.30pm
Join the friendly group of 18th Century Dancers. Gentle exercise with a historical interest. New people warmly welcome. No partner nor experience necessary. More details: contact.jones4647@gmail.com, 07967117019. Affiliated to the Cowper and Newton Museum. Entry: £3.

MK Handmade and Vintage Weekend Extravaganza
Sat 7th-Sun 8th, Centre: MK, Milton Keynes, 9am-6pm / 10.30am-5pm
Returning to the Centre:mk for its 16th year, this triannual event makes shopping for the unusual, the bespoke and the beautiful an absolute breeze, and is a great way to reinvigorate your home this spring. More details: mkhandmadeandvintage.co.uk.

Nook by Nature
Sat 7th, 15-17 Osborn's Court, Olney, 10am-12pm
Mindfulness and Meditation Saturdays with Helen Stephenson. More details: www.nookbynature.co.uk/our-groups.

National Lottery Open Week
Sat 7th-Sat 14th, Cowper & Newton Museum, Olney, 11am-4pm
To show their appreciation for grants we have received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, anyone with a National Lottery ticket, Scratchcard or Instant Win Game can explore the historic house, beautiful, tranquil gardens and art gallery for half the usual admission price. Show lottery ticket on arrival. More details: www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.co.uk.

Newport Pagnell Historical Society
Sun 8th, Newport Pagnell Museum, Chandos Hall, Silver St, 2-4pm
New exhibition: 'Bottles, Flagons and Labels'. Admission: free.

Nook by Nature
Sun 8th, 15-17 Osborn's Court, Olney, 11am-2pm
Learn Meditation through the Chakras with Fernanda. More details: www.nookbynature.co.uk/our-groups.

Denton & District Gardening Club
Mon 9th, Denton Village Hall, Denton, 7.30pm
Speaker Robin Pearce will talk about 'Ornamental Grasses and Ferns'. There will be a raffle and homemade refreshments. Entrance: free to members, £5 for visitors. Everyone

is welcome to this club. More details: Margaret, 01604 890875, m.pateman@yahoo.co.uk.

Tea & Chat
Mon 9th, Olney Centre, 2-3pm
Regular meeting of this friendly chat group, where the tea is good and the friendship is even better. More details: Debbie Whitworth, 07494 681907.

Newport Pagnell Women's Institute
Tue 10th, Brooklands, Newport Pagnell, 7.15pm
Monthly meeting of the Newport Pagnell WI. This is a social evening with a chance to catch up with your WI friends or make new ones. Visitors and potential members welcome. Entry £5 (cash). There is a raffle and tea, coffee and cakes are provided. More details: newportpagnellwi@gmail.com.

Monthly coffee morning
Tue 10th, Olney United Reformed Church, 10am-12pm
Everyone welcome. Go and enjoy delicious homemade cakes and great company.

CAMEO
Wed 11th, Baptist Church, 2-4pm
Come and join us to hear advice from Tommy and Andy of TOPS Physiotherapy on 'Healthy Ageing', plus the usual tea and cake and companionship. Everyone is welcome.

Arts Society North Bucks
Thu 12th, Lovat Hall, Newport Pagnell, 10.15am
The lecture is 'In the Footsteps of Wren: the architecture of Norman Foster and Richard Rogers' by Brian Slater. The talk will begin at 10.50am with coffee from 10.15. Guests welcome for a small charge. More details: membershipnorthbucks@theartssociety.org.

Museum Guided Tour at the Home of William Cowper
Sat 14th, Cowper & Newton Museum, Olney, 11.15am-12.30pm
Step inside the historic home of poet William Cowper and uncover the remarkable story behind one of Britain's most influential literary and spiritual partnerships. Discover how the lives of William Cowper and John Newton became closely intertwined. Book via: events@cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk, 01234 711516. Tour price: free with your annual pass. Pass: £12 for a year.

Newport Pagnell Historical Society
Tue 17th, United Reformed Church, Newport Pagnell 7.30pm
'Cars, Stars and Minibars – my life as a motoring writer', a talk by freelance journalist and Phonebox Magazine columnist Tom Johnston. Entry: £4 non-members, £2 members.

Inner Wheel Newport Pagnell
Tue 17th, Olney Centre, 2-4pm
This month we have a representative from Ride High, an equestrian centre for vulnerable young adults in MK, and the charity we are supporting this year. Also joining us for the afternoon is Jenny Versey the District Chairman. Visitors always welcome. Entry: £5 including refreshments. More details: Jackie, innerwheelnewportpagnell@gmail.com.

Brooklands Quiz Night
Fri 20th, Brooklands Centre, Newport Pagnell, 7pm
Teams of 4-6. Money prize for winning team. Raffle. Tickets: £3 per person. Take your own drinks and snacks. More details: Sandy 01908 614749, on the door or brooklands.centre@btinternet.com.

Spring Flower Show
Sat 21st, Denton Village Hall, Denton, 2.30-4.30pm
Denton & District Gardening Club will be holding their Spring Flower Show, where there will be a plant stall, home-made refreshments and a raffle. It is an open show with classes for many flowers and floral arrangements. Entry to each class is 30p. Anyone interested in entering, please contact Margaret, 01604 890875, m.pateman@yahoo.co.uk.

Folio Children's Craft Club (Third Saturday of the month)
Sat 21st, Olney Library, 10.30-11.30am
Book your child a place in person at the Library desk or phone 01234 711474. Maximum of 12 places available. Parents and carers must remain with their children throughout. Free session suitable for children aged 3-9, however donations are welcome to cover the cost of materials.

Newport Pagnell Historical Society
Sun 22nd, Newport Pagnell Museum, Chandos Hall, Silver St 2-4pm
Museum, Admission: free.

Bedford Art Society
Tue 24th-Sat 28th, Basement at Bunyan Church, Bedford, 11am-4pm
Spring Exhibition 2026.

Newport Pagnell Historical Society
Tue 24th, Ousebank House, High St, Newport Pagnell, 2pm
A more informal afternoon session: 'Clay Pipes and other treasures'. Refreshments afterwards. £4 non-members, £3 members.

Olney and District Gardening Club
Tue 24th, Olney Centre, 7pm
Speaker Diane Clement will talk on 'Botanical travels in Japan'. Refreshments from 7pm, meeting starts at 7.30pm. More details: Chris Richbell, 01234 241700.

Olney and District Gardening Club
Tue 24th, Olney Centre, 7pm
Diane Clement will talk on 'Botanical travels in Japan'. Refreshments from 7pm, meeting starts at 7.30pm. More details: Chris Richbell, 01234 241700.

Guided Tour – The Transatlantic Slave Trade
Wed 25th, Cowper & Newton Museum, Olney, 11am-12pm
Join a guided tour to find out more about the Transatlantic Slave Trade, explained through the museum's collection, held to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Places limited to 10 people. Book via: events@cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk, 01234 711516. Tour price: free with your annual pass. Pass: £12 for a year.

CAMEO
Wed 25th, Baptist Church, 2-4pm
Celebrating Easter with Stuart Macdonald. A warm welcome awaits you, plus tea and fun.

Saturday StoryTime
Sat 28th, Olney Library, 11-11.30am
Popular drop-in session in the Children's room at Olney Library, of stories, songs and rhymes suitable for children ages 3-7 years, but all welcome.

Cowper and Newton Museum Garden Quiz
Mon 30th, Swan Inn, Olney, 7pm
Raffle Prizes and quiz menu on offer. In aid of repair of the Museum garden paths. To book a table or for more information contact the Swan Inn. Table maximum 8, but just go along and you can join up with other quizzers. Entry: £5. More details: info@theswanolney.co.uk.







Olney Ward Councillor Corner



Cllr Debbie Whitworth

CONTACT DEBBIE:
Tel: 07494 681907 /
debbie.whitworth@milton-keynes.gov.uk

My Ward surgeries are every Tuesday, 10am-12pm at the Olney Centre. No need to book, just pop along.

Johnson's Field Skate Park / Pump Track Survey

Milton Keynes City Council is improving play facilities at Johnsons Field, Olney, using S106 funding from recent housing developments. (S106 is money developers provide to improve local facilities when new homes are built.) Plans include a new 'skate' area for wheeled sports like BMX, scooters, and skateboards, plus upgrades to the play area with a zipline and better toddler equipment.

The designs being looked at for the top of the field to replace the aged climbing frame will include better surfacing, a new climbing frame, swing and roundabout, as well as a picnic bench. I have been informed it is hoped to get that work in hand and delivered for the summer.

MKCC want to give residents the opportunity to comment first on whether they look at a 'skate park or pump track', (a pump track is a purpose-built, loop-shaped circuit featuring a series of rollers (small hills) and banked turns), and so they have put together a short survey to gather local feedback. (Please note the images are just indicative.)

The survey will be live until 20th March, and it will also be going out to Olney schools: which type of 'skate' facility do you prefer?

I encourage residents to complete and help shape the design.

https://tinyurl.com/pbhsvyan

Local Transport Plan 5 Consultation

A good many residents across the ward have been asking me about local transport for the future, and were unaware of the consultation which is running until 31st March.

Please see link below - the draft plan which sets out priorities and policies for the next 10/15 yrs.

https://mktransportconversation.commonplace.is

Crime

MK city council asks local people to give their thoughts about crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the annual Community Safety Survey MK Together (a partnership with police and other organisations) and would appreciate you taking a couple of minutes to take part. The survey closes on 13th March.

Reporting Crime whether it be via 101 or online gives TVP accurate stats and allows more resources to be delegated to that area, as there is a higher requirement for a Police presence based on the reports that TVP are receiving. Again, I kindly advise and remind residents to keep reporting any ASB to the police.

River pollution

We sadly all know, just how polluted our rivers have become and we should be alarmed that they are almost at an unfixable state.

I arranged a meeting last month inviting our MP, Chris Curtis together with representation from the Environment Agency (EA), Anglian Water (AW) and MKCC, OTC and Olney & Clifton Fishing Association to discuss exactly what action agencies are planning to take going forward and what hard action the government intend taking to crack down on sewage dumping as promised, preventing pollution at source and priorities for water infrastructure (I'll update you next month as this went to print prior to the meeting).



Pump Track



Skate Park

Olney Ward Councillor Corner

CONTACT US: Keith: 07983 456081 keith.mclean@milton-keynes.gov.uk :: Peter: 07774 939404 peter.geary@milton-keynes.gov.uk



Cllr Keith McLean



Cllr Peter Geary

This is the last Phonebox column from us, as when the next edition is published, we will be in the middle of an election campaign and hence cannot publish this for Purdah reasons. The next column from Olney and Rural Councillors will be in the June edition.

Elections

The elections this year are slightly different. In a normal election year, you vote for one councillor and do so for 3 years out of 4, as the area is represented by 3 councillors. This year, due to the significant growth that Milton Keynes has experienced and will experience in the next few years, the wards have been rearranged. The Olney Ward is changing; its name now becomes Olney and Rural Ward (not the best name, but that's what civil servants decided). The village of Moulsoe, in which MK East sits, leaves the ward and moves to the new Broughton and Moulsoe Ward, whilst Stoke Goldington and Gayhurst rejoin the Olney and Rural Ward. It means the electorate will now be 11,000 people rather than 10,000 before. Due to the boundary changes, you will be voting for three councillors on May 7th, not just one. This means the ballot paper will be very long. Please ensure you use all three of your votes.

Budget 2025-26

Milton Keynes City Council agreed its budget for 2025-26 on Wednesday, 17th February. The budget is very complicated, but the highlights are, Council Tax is rising by 4.99%. The Council is cutting 65 posts as a result of the budget. The Council is saving around £9m in this budget out of a spend of just over £300m. The capital budget includes funds for the Lavendon Flood protection scheme, something we have been fighting for since 2016. It also includes funds for the 15% increase in councillors' allowances, which the Council agreed in January, and we reported on last month, we were against.

There are numerous other issues, some we support, some we do not, but when voting on the budget you can only support the whole thing or not. In our view the budget does not prioritise the things important to most people such as repairing the roads, public transport, picking litter, clearing up graffiti, mowing the grass or clearing drains.

Milton Keynes is becoming a mess, and the Council is doing very little to stop this. When the increase to Councillors' allowances was included and knowing that the Lavendon flood scheme would be passed no matter which way we voted, we decided to vote against the budget. The Leader of the Labour Administration threatened to let the villagers of Lavendon know we had voted against the Flood Alleviation scheme, but as we noted above, we knew the outcome of the vote on the budget.

It is a shame politics in MK has come to such threats, but residents of Lavendon know what we have done to push for this scheme and that we were the only councillors on MKCC continually and assiduously advocating for this scheme. Hopefully after the election when the current Leader has gone there will be a better atmosphere where we can focus on getting things done for communities, not petty point scoring.

If the Conservative Group have any influence in running the Council after the election, we will ensure many of the things mentioned previously are funded by reducing inefficiencies and reviewing costly services.

Potholes

The roads have suffered this winter, and many potholes are now appearing; some may be the same potholes repaired only a couple of years ago! If you notice a pothole, then please "Report It" on the Council system.

If you do not get a satisfactory response, such as they say they are not going to repair it, then please get in touch, and we will speak to officers about getting it repaired. Even though there is an election we remain councillors until the 11th May, so please, if you need help with anything, please let us know.

Advice Surgeries

A reminder that our monthly advice surgeries are run in the Olney Centre on the first Friday of each month between 7pm and 8pm - appointments are not necessary. Alternatively, we can be contacted at other times by phone or email, our details are as above.

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Olney May Ball

SATURDAY 6TH JUNE 2026

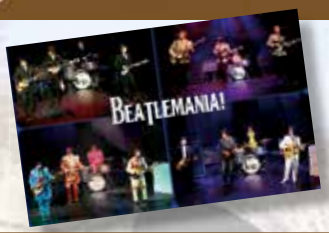
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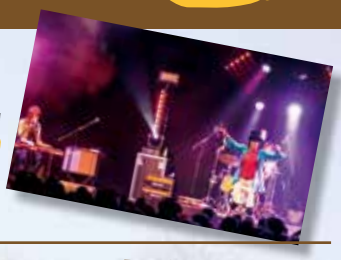
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Prince Kaspar
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Saturday 1st August, 3.30pm

Around The World In 80 Days
with Tethered Wits
Saturday 1st August, 7pm

Twelfth Night
with Unbound Theatre
Sunday 2nd August, 2pm

Charles Dickens Telling Tales
with Don't Go Into The Cellar
Friday 7th August, 7pm

Romeo & Juliet
with British Touring Shakespeare
Saturday 8th August, 2pm

Dracula
with British Touring Shakespeare
Saturday 8th August, 7pm

Wizard Of Oz
with DOT Productions
Sunday 9th August, 1pm

Lady Windermere's Fan
with DOT Productions
Sunday 9th August, 5pm

Whose Turn?
Milton Keynes Theatre of Comedy
Friday 14th August, 7pm

A Midsummer Night's Dream
The Shakespeare Circus
Saturday 15th August, 2pm

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
with LOL Theatre
Sunday 16th August, 1pm

Hounds of the Baskerville
with LOL Theatre
Sunday 16th August, 5pm

Jeeves & Wooster in Perfect Nonsense with Underneath The Arches Theatre Company Friday 21st, Sat 22nd, Sun 23rd August, 7pm

www.thearchestheatre.co.uk Email: david@thearchestheatre.co.uk Call: 07879 414110
The Arches Theatre, Church Farm, Clifton Reynes, Olney MK46 5DT



The pub meet up when you're over 60

written by ANDY RAMSDEN of Water Lane, Sherington

We meet around once a month for what we still insist on calling "a catch-up," although it now resembles a moderately informal outpatient clinic. For a few hopeful seconds, as the first pints land and we lower ourselves carefully into our chairs, it feels like we might talk about something expansive – ambition, travel, politics, challenging ideas. Instead, someone clears his throat and says, "How's the knee?" and the triage begins.

The knee, of course, is never just the knee. Within seconds it has migrated to hips, backs, shoulders, and then something "odd" happening with the left thumb. We lean in, not out. There are detailed descriptions involving cartilage, inflammation and the phrase "underneath the kneecap in the fleshy bit." Someone has seen a consultant. Someone else mistrusts consultants. A third has a supplement recommendation involving turmeric and a man on YouTube.

There is, of course, a faint but undeniable competitiveness to it all. No one wants to be the worst case, but nor does anyone want a trivially minor complaint. A mere "tight calf" feels amateur. A confirmed diagnosis carries weight. MRI scans are the gold standard. We nod gravely at the mention of a consultant's name, as if he's just signed for Man City on a five-year deal.

And yet beneath the posturing there is something softer going on. A discreet stocktake. We are checking each other's decline against our own. When someone admits to sciatica or a rogue blood marker, there is a flicker of sympathy … and, if we're honest, relief.

Every group has an Over-Sharer. Ours arrives prepared. He does not say, "Bit of a twinge." He says, "So what happened was…" and we settle in. There are timelines. There are diagrams sketched in condensation on the table. There is an explanation involving ligaments, a mildly dismissive physiotherapist and a sentence that begins, "You won't want to hear this, but…"

We absolutely do want to hear it. He lowers his voice for the most graphic passages, which has the opposite of the intended effect. At one point he uses the word "oozing." Nobody touches their crisps.

Then there's the Stoic.

He claims to have "nothing much going on," which we all know means something moderately catastrophic has been quietly unfolding for months. He waves away symptoms with the air of a wartime general. "It'll sort itself out." It will not sort itself out. We make a mental note to check in with him next month.

The Biohacker sits opposite, glowing faintly with supplementation. He has numbers. Resting heart rate. VO_2 max. HRV trends. Cholesterol ratios delivered with the authority of a man who has stared at them for hours. He says things like, "I've cut out refined carbs and aim to reduce my HbA1c by 35% within six weeks," while drinking a pint of bitter and eyeing the cheese and onion ridged crisps. His body is a project. Ours are merely happenings. I describe him as if he sits across the table. In truth, I'm staring at him in the mirror behind the bar.

And finally there is the Diagnostician, the man who, without medical training, can identify your condition before you've finished describing it. "That's patellar tracking." "Classic impingement." "Sounds autoimmune." He says this with alarming confidence. We both fear and rely on him.

At some point, usually when the third pint is half-finished and the medical symposium has reached diminishing returns, someone says, "Anyway, enough about ailments." It's delivered with forced cheer, as though we've all agreed to stop ageing for the evening. And for a few minutes it works. We talk about football, well, some of us do. The rugby lot look a little glassy eyed, and so a side convo strikes up to discuss the 6 Nations.

We converge again after sport has been aired and focus on our next favourite topic – holidays. Then house prices. Then cars. Then solar versus heat pumps.

The volume rises and we all relax into our seats as the conversation becomes looser and the laughter comes quicker. For a brief stretch we are not a collection of joints and blood markers but men who once closed pubs down and thought sleep was optional.

But the truth is this, the first thirty minutes were never really about knees or thumbs or mildly elevated cholesterol. They were about reassurance. About confirming that we are all still here, still mobile, still turning up.

The ailments are a roll call, taken in pints and milligrams. A strange, male way of saying, "How are you, really?" We compare symptoms the way we once compared ambitions. The body may be negotiating, but the banter remains stubbornly intact.

And when someone stands up too quickly, we all reach out — just in case.

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HAPPY Mother's Day

Mother's Day is coming. Why not make her a gift?

It's the thought that counts, not the price tag, when it comes to Mothering Sunday. And while there is an endless supply of Mother's Day gifts to choose from or expensive places to take her, it will generally be the thoughtful, handmade present that means so much to Mum when she opens it on the day.

A gift made at home or school will be loved and cherished for life – long after a box of chocolates, bouquet of flowers or bottle of perfume has been used and thrown away.

Whether it's a hand-drawn and decorated card, a painted picture frame or some personalised jewellery, almost all mothers would rather have a homemade gift from their loved ones than an expensive shop gift. Even a little time with their children on this special Sunday will go a long way towards making the day special, gifts or no gifts.

There are lots of fun and interesting things you can do for and with your mother that don't cost big money but are worth their weight in gold. Breakfast in bed. A handmade card. A tote bag with your design on it. Hand-designed serviettes. These actually cost very little. But the thought and the simple carrying out of these clever ideas are priceless. A foot massage, a home-made lunch while Mum puts her feet up, a video telephone call with all the family. These are things that can make all the difference and yet cost so little.

So here's your chance to have a think about what you might want to do for your Mum – or your grandmother, aunt or guardian – and let her know it's on its way too.

We've come up with a few suggestions to help you decide what to do this year to make Mother's Day a special one for her. But if you don't like our suggestions, simply use the list to help you come up with one of your own.

And why not cut out and fill in our easy-to-use label to give to Mum on 15th March, Mothering Sunday.

Top 10 gift ideas to make Mum's day



1. A greetings card using pressed flowers
2. Printed napkins
3. Mother's Day biscuits
4. Homemade lip scrub
5. Glass of bubbly and some light snacks
6. Collage of photos of you and Mum
7. Individually wrapped chocolates – one for each day of the week
8. Tassle fabric bookmarks
9. Homemade pizza party or the family
10. Indoor herb planter







Mother's Day this year is

Sunday 15th March

Don't Forget

Mother's Day has never been about buying big, expensive presents. It's a more personal and loving celebration than that. So a handmade gift is probably more likely to be appreciated than a shop-bought one. So what could you create?









Homemade Mother's Day Tray Cake

For the Cake
225g unsalted butter plus more for the baking tray
375g flour
1 tbsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
700g granulated sugar
4 large eggs
2 tsp pure vanilla extract
9 fl oz whole milk

For the Buttercream icing
400g sugar
225g unsalted butter
0.5 tsp salt
2 fl oz double cream
1.5 tsp pure vanilla extract
Sprinkles or edible flowers to decorate

Directions
Heat oven to 160C.
Butter a 9 x 13 inch cake tray and line the bottom with parchment, leaving an overhang on two sides
Butter the parchment
Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt
Beat butter and granulated sugar on a low electric speed to combine everything
Increase speed to medium-high and beat until light and fluffy
Reduce speed to medium and add eggs one at a time, beating each until incorporated before adding the next
Beat in the vanilla
Reduce speed to low and add the flour mixture in three parts, alternating with the milk and beating until mixed
Spread the batter into a prepared pan and bake until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean, about 40 minutes
Let the cake cool for 10 minutes, then use overhangs to remove from tray and let it cool completely

For the buttercream icing
Using an electric mixer, beat confectioners' sugar, butter and salt on low speed until combined, then increase speed to medium and beat until fluffy, about 3 minutes
With the machine running, slowly add cream. Beat until fluffy, about 3 minutes and beat in vanilla
Spread icing over the cooled cake and decorate as desired

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BLACK TO BASICS

Some people love it, some hate it, but you can't doubt its popularity. Black pudding is considered an important part of breakfast. But there are many other ways to use it too.

Don't just think of black pudding as an ingredient of a hearty cooked breakfast. It's much more than that and can be found in several gourmet-style recipes and dishes.

This historic sausage, made using animal blood, has its place in fine dining establishments and even has a special day dedicated to it – 18th March, which this year falls on a Wednesday.

National Black Pudding Day is organised by the National Craft Butchers organisation, who are trying to promote the food to a wider audience by encouraging its use beyond a 'fry up'.

Of course, it goes down well with a fried egg, some bacon and tomatoes, but its appeal goes further than that, says the NCB. And they encourage people to try new black pudding recipes such as black pudding sausage rolls, a black pudding salad with apple and honey dressing, black pudding with diced potatoes or black pudding on sourdough bread.

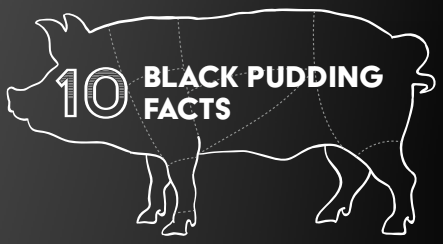
With the opportunity to grill, fry, bake, simmer or even microwave black pudding, there are all sorts of ways that this sausage can be prepared. Its use of blood means even less of an animal so wasted, while the sausage is considered a 'superfood' due to its high protein, low carbohydrates and general nutritional qualities.

It has enjoyed a surge in popularity over the last decade and is very popular in Scotland and Ireland. But the foodstuff can be traced back to other European countries too, including France and Spain, where variations on flavour are introduced.

Once a basic ingredient that used as much of a slaughtered animal as possible, one kind of black pudding, called the Stornoway, includes sheep's lungs among its ingredients.

But its basis is as a rich, dark sausage that is combined with fillers such as oats, suet and spices.

Campaigners for black pudding want it to have the same kind of popularity as haggis in Scotland and use the special National Black Pudding Day to raise its awareness.



ONE
The first mention of a blood-filled sausage is from Homer's Odyssey, written in 800BC

TWO
The first black pudding was sold in a pudding shop in Bury, Lancashire, in 1810

THREE
Extravagant breakfast held by King Henry VIII included black pudding on the menu

FOUR
Some people think eating black pudding can promote luck and ward off evil spirits

FIVE
In Spain it's called Morcilla, in France it's known as Boudin Noir

SIX
Sir Isaac Newton was said to avoid black pudding due to its blood content

SEVEN
The Stornoway Black Pudding has Protected Status to ensure its authenticity

EIGHT
The annual World Black Pudding Throwing Championships take place in Ramsbottom, Great Manchester

NINE
The Brotherhood of the Knights of the Black Pudding host an annual international pudding-making contest in France

TEN
Some recipes add milk or cream for an even richer flavour and texture

BLACK PUDDING AND POTATO HASH

Ingredients:

- 200g black pudding
- 4 large potatoes
- 1 onion, finely
- 1 red pepper
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- One egg

Method:

1. Boil the potatoes and drain
2. Heat the oil in a large frying pan
3. Dice the onions and peppers, then sauté them until soft
4. Chop the potatoes and add the pieces, cooking until crispy
5. Add sliced black pudding and fry until crispy
6. Season with salt and pepper
7. Serve with a fried egg



Chris Curtis

MP for Milton Keynes North



The best part of being an MP is getting out and about at the many wonderful local events we have across Milton Keynes, and one of the days I always look forward to is the famous Olney Pancake Race. It was great to attend this year's race and see another fantastic turnout. My thanks go to the Pancake Race Committee and volunteers for all their hard work, and congratulations to Eloise Kramer, Nicole Murfitt and Sophie Reynolds on their well-deserved wins.





From left to right: Enjoying some pancakes and celebrating local events in Newport Pagnell with Paul and Sarah Day, Mayor and Mayoress

It's days like these that make me reflect on how Milton Keynes is often incorrectly branded as a place with no history. I see one of the key parts of my job as telling the story of our city, towns and villages: celebrating our rich heritage at home, while making sure the rest of the country sees just how much Milton Keynes has to offer. Although Milton Keynes celebrates its 60th birthday next year, our new town sits on centuries of history.

By now, I hope most people already know Olney as the home of Amazing Grace, written by John Newton and forever associated with William Cowper. The pancake race itself stretches back nearly six centuries to 1445. Yet even this tradition is only a chapter in a much longer story.

However, archaeological discoveries in and around Olney have uncovered Roman sites and artefacts, including the remains of settlements, pottery, coins and evidence of farming and trade. Nearly two thousand years ago people were already living and working here. By the late Saxon period, Olney appears in records as 'Ollanege' in 979 AD, an established settlement long before the Norman Conquest. The fields and footpaths we know so well today sit on layers of history stretching back to Roman Britain, a powerful reminder that our community has deep roots. This just scratches the surface, and the fantastic Cowper and Newton Museum brings that history to life.

Newport Pagnell's history stretches back well over a thousand years. First recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086, Newport Pagnell was already an established market town. Its name reflected its role as a 'new port' market, and the later addition of 'Pagnell' came when the manor passed to the Pagnell family after the Norman Conquest. Its position at the crossing of the River Ouzel and the River Lovat, and on key routes linking Oxford, Cambridge, Leicester and London, made it a natural centre for trade and travel. Coaching inns flourished as horse-drawn traffic increased; by the late 17th century, hundreds of services passed through each week.

The town also played a role in the English Civil War, with earthworks on Bury Field that survive today as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

In 1810, Tickford Iron Bridge, one of the earliest cast-iron road bridges in Britain still carrying traffic, strengthened its engineering reputation. Canal and railway links followed, keeping the town firmly connected to a rapidly changing industrial Britain.

In the 20th century, Newport Pagnell became synonymous with British automotive excellence as the home of coachbuilder Salmons & Sons and later the original factory of Aston Martin- a reminder that innovation has long been part of our local character.

And that is still only part of the story. Wolverton grew as England's first railway town, purpose-built to serve the London and Birmingham Railway. Stony Stratford became famous for its historic coaching inns lining Watling Street, once a Roman road and later a key turnpike. Great Linford offers its 17th-century manor house and landscaped parkland. Together, this paints a picture that stretches back not just sixty years, but across many centuries. reminding us that Milton Keynes has a story worth telling, and one we should be proud of.

From that deep heritage to the vibrant community we see today, Milton Keynes has always been a place where culture and creativity thrive. That same spirit of innovation and community now underpins the exciting bid for Milton Keynes to become UK City of Culture in 2029. I'm proud to be backing this bid because it gives us the chance to showcase the very best of our city on a national stage.

Along with the potential to secure up to £10 million of investment, this provides us with a platform to highlight not just who we are, but where we've come from and where we're heading next.

If you ever need my assistance, or would like to attend one of my constituency surgeries, please don't hesitate to get in touch with my office via chris.curtis.mp@parliament.uk

As always, please follow my Facebook page (@ChrisCurtisLabour) for frequent news and updates from both Westminster and our constituency.

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BOOK REVIEW



By Any Other Name by Jodi Picoult

Reviewed by Thelma Shacklady

Jodi Picoult's latest novel has something of a campaigning spirit as she seeks to combine history and fiction with more than a touch of feminism.

Doubt about whether Shakespeare was the sole author of the plays and sonnets ascribed to him is not new; there have been several theories and other Elizabethan names suggested as contributors, but none of them women. In this novel that omission is corrected as Emilia Bassano, the mistress of the Lord Chamberlain of the time and the secret lover of the Earl of Southampton, is suggested as the dramatist responsible for some of Shakespeare's better-known plays.

First we are introduced to one of her fictional descendants; in 2013 Melina Green is a student at Bard College, encouraged by her tutor to submit a play to the collegiate playwriting competition. However, its final scene suggesting harassment was deemed offensive and the play rubbished by the adjucator, a well-known theatre critic. Subsequently her thesis, containing the play, received a low grade, and her overall degree result suffered.

We are then introduced to Emilia Bassano, a twelve-year-old in 1581 whose guardian is the Countess of Kent. She is a lively girl with a vivid imagination, telling stories to her young cousins. However, her life changes when the Countess remarries, and Emilia is sold by her musician relatives to be trained as a courtesan, and subsequently mistress to Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain, one of whose tasks is to read and approve the plays submitted to be performed in the various playhouses in the city and also at court.

Melina has been totally crushed by the reaction to her play, yet still feels the urge to write. Eventually Andre, her roommate, discovers the play she is writing about her ancestor Emilia, 'By any other name,' and, unknown to her, submits it to another competition, hiding her gender by entering it under her pet name – Mel. It is assumed to have been written by a man and the two of them are forced to continue the deceit with Andre answering to Mel and Melina becoming his assistant, Andrea. Interspersed with the 21st century story, the account of Emilia's life continues. She, too, writes plays, but has no hope of seeing them performed under her own name. She discovers that a jobbing actor called William Shakespeare is happy to buy her work and present it as his own, together with the work of other would-be playwrights. We follow her life as she loses her position when she becomes pregnant and is married off to a friend of her cousins. She also meets Henry, Earl of Southampton, with whom she has an affair.

Throughout the account of her life are various Shakespearean quotations, which are referenced at the end of the novel. It is interesting to spot them in the script! Did Shakespeare write the plays and sonnets assigned to him? If her did not, then they were by someone of the same name!

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Club of the Month: Brooklands Centre Art Groups

Fancy exploring your creative side? One of these Newport Pagnell Art Groups could help you get your artistic side going.







Is now the time to get your arty side fired up? A Newport Pagnell club's two groups meet regularly upstairs at The Brooklands Centre: one on Wednesday, 1.30-3.30pm and the other on Friday, 2-4pm, and they run throughout the year.

The club was first set up in 2011 with three members, and two of the original three still attend. Today, the Wednesday group attracts around 15 people, while about 11 go to the Friday session, with attendees coming from Newport Pagnell, Olney and Milton Keynes.

One of the original members is Loretta Ramsay, who has been running the group since the start. Loretta is a keen amateur painter and was asked to start a group after she attended a two-year watercolour painting course at Ousedale School.

Anyone, regardless of ability, is welcome to join either group, and Loretta is always on hand to provide guidance and support. Each session's small entry fee includes all equipment and materials, plus refreshments.

Members can choose either drawing or painting, and whatever media they wish, for example: watercolour, acrylics, oils, pencil and crayons. They get their inspiration from a wide range of sources, including personal photos, TV and Pinterest.

Some members use their skills to create Christmas and birthday cards, while others display their works at The Brooklands Centre, the local parish church, Newport Pagnell's Mead Centre and the annual Alderton Art Festival.

"We're a very friendly and relaxed group," says Loretta. "It's good fun, and we have a lovely time. It's an easy group to belong to, and you don't have to commit. Everyone can do their own thing, work at their own pace, and dip in and out of sessions.

"It's also a great way to meet people. We welcome anyone of any ability. Don't think you can't draw or paint. Give us a try and you'll probably find that you can."

The Brooklands Centre Art Groups meet every Wednesday and Friday afternoon at The Brooklands Centre, Newport Pagnell. Entry costs £3 for each session. More information: 01908 614749, brooklandscentre@btinternet.com, www.thebrooklandscentre.co.uk/contact-us.

Marcus & Jordan Co

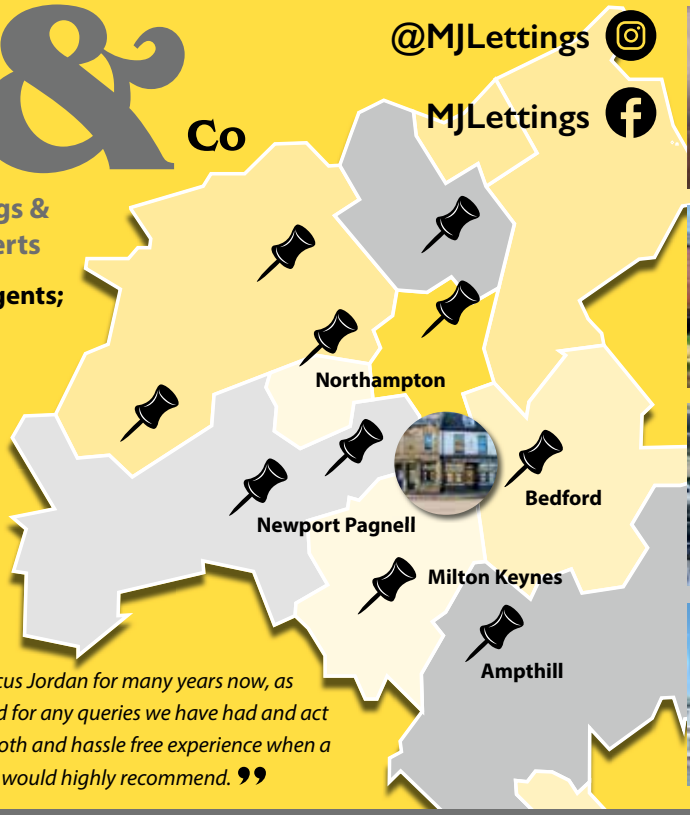
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PEST FOOT FORWARD

PHONEBOX GARDENING

There's always plenty to do in the garden, and as winter turns to spring, it's time to plan your defences against unwanted bugs.

You spend ages on your garden, making its borders and shrubs look good, cultivating your vegetables, only to find you're under attack from unwanted insects and pests, all trying to ruin your hard work. And while shop-bought, powerful pesticides can do a good job at keeping the onslaught to a minimum, they can also harm the environment and your own health with their harsh chemical compounds.

Thankfully there are several ways of keeping pests at bay in a more eco-friendly way. Here are **Phonebox Magazine's** top tips for planet-friendly garden management.



ATTRACT HELPFUL INSECTS

There are plenty of insects that are natural predators of pests such as aphids, caterpillars and mites that can do such damage. Ladybirds are voracious at this, as are lacewings and some wasps. Planting beds of flowers – a wide range of different types – can help with this. Pollinators such as bees and butterflies are also attracted, which can help with keeping your garden full of new plants.



INSECT HOTELS

Another way to attract good insects is by creating insect 'hotels' by way of rock shelters or small piles of logs. A log cutting with holes drilled in it is another good idea. They provide safe and secure places to hide and rest for an array of bees, wasps and other insects.

COMPANION PLANTING

Plant pockets of crops together that are compatible with each other. Strong smelling plants such as mint, rosemary and sage can help to keep some pests away, deterred by their odour. Marigolds will also keep insects such as aphids down for the same reason.



NATURAL REPELLENTS

Strong plants on their own can also ward off invaders. Onions are strong smelling, as are chillis and garlic. You won't miss the aroma of lavender in a garden either, and many pests just don't like it. Smells like these also deter mosquitoes and other flying nuisances.

USE NATURAL SPRAY

Natural sprays are available that do not contain pesticides and are also biodegradable, so they're much safer to use on the garden. If slugs and snails are your problem, chewing their way through your beloved leaves and plants, there are a range of organic pellets which act like a barrier against the slow-moving menaces.



BARRIERS AND NETTING

Sometimes a good, old-fashioned physical barrier is the answer to your pest problem. Netting or meshing can keep lots of things off your plants while still allowing valuable sunlight through. If you have only a small infestation of pests, physically pick them off your plants before long-term damage is done.

ALLOW PREDATORS IN

Nest boxes, water sources such as ponds and small shelters will attract natural insect predators such as birds, frogs and toads into your garden, so consider placing a few of these on the ground or attached to a tree. They will help to keep the pest population down.



Eloise does it again

Former winner makes it three and then declares, 'That's it'.

Olney running champ Eloise Kramer won her third Pancake Race last month and then said she would not be entering any more rounds of the famous event.

The restaurant waitress stormed to victory in 1 min 5 sec to beat 25 runners and cement her place in Olney history with three Pancake Race wins in four years. Second place went to Nicole Murfitt, with Sophie Reynolds taking the third spot.

"That was a good race," said Eloise. "I enjoyed it very much. But that's it now. That's enough.

"Now I've won three times, I'm not able to win again, and instead, I'm going to join the organising team to help keep this great event going."

The half-term event meant that Olney town centre was even busier than usual, with hundreds of families attending and local people making the most of a pancake breakfast in the George Davies Marquee, from 8am.

Children's races started at 10am with dignitaries including Olney MP Chris Curtis, Milton Keynes Mayor James Lancaster, Countess Howe, the Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, Pippa Kirkbride, the High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire and Olney Mayor Debbie Whitworth, ringing the starting bell.

A Shriving Service was held in St Peter and St Paul Church following the race at which some of Olney's hymns were sung, including Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken and Amazing Grace.

The 77th international race was won by Hannah McCarter from Liberal, USA, in a time of 1 min 3 sec. The international event with the Kansas town began in 1950 and, in a spirit of goodwill and friendship, the two towns compete annually, and prizes are exchanged.








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IN NEWPORT PAGNELL

Spring is springing!

I am a big fan of gardening, and spring is one of the most exciting times in my garden. Bulbs are in full flow now; the snowdrops may have faded away, but others are out in their place. The tulips, dandelions, hyacinths and alliums are in full bloom. They really do cheer me up after a drab and grey winter, the likes of which is common here in the middle of the country, but seems considerably greyer and drabber than recent years.

We have seasons of life where things seem static and unmoving. We have seasons where just getting by is a good day, and positive change is hard to come across, and we have seasons in life where suddenly the sprouts of new growth and the bright flowers of spring seem very prevalent in our lives.

Here in the UK, we do seasons very well. Each has its own weather, light levels, temperature and rainfall, although we do, of course, sometimes have days where all four seasons pop by and wave in a single 24-hour period.

Our lives are seasonal as well. It's well worth remembering that autumn and winter are needed for spring and summer to happen. The falling of the leaves in autumn fuels the soil with new nutrients for spring's growth. The rains, and even floods, of winter bring saturation and refreshment that recover the soil and replenish our rivers and reservoirs.

We often don't seem to have enough water in summer, and hosepipe bans are mooted. In winter, the fear of floods and bailing water out of properties is a real concern as the Ouse and Ouzel burst their banks after prolonged or intense periods of rain. But spring needs autumn, and summer needs winter.

If you are going through a tough time, if you feel a little wintery at the moment, I hope and pray that this may be fuelling a time of positivity and growth in a season to come. It can be hard to see this when you are going through difficult times, and I appreciate that not all hard seasons in life yield fruit and positivity. Even so, I do think that we can learn from those dark times. The words of a psalm come to mind:

Psalm 30:4–5

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; his favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Here, the writer of the psalm is also talking about seasons. A season of weeping lingers for a night, and we need to be able to reflect on that, experience that, and not rush on from it. But there is hope that joy will come in the morning — a season of bright garden flowers, longer evenings and, for me at least, the coming excitement of the cricket season!

The opportunity to spend more time outside is something that I always look forward to. Being in the garden at 8pm without freezing in the dark is something that I long for again. But I know that in the hot and sticky weather, I might just forget this and yearn for the comfort of the central heating and the reduction in flies and mosquitoes. We are funny things, us humans, aren't we?

I do believe that we have a steadfast and reliable God — and that's great news. Any of the churches in Newport Pagnell, Olney, or the other areas that this magazine reaches would love to hear from you if you want to know more about God or the church. Feel free to pop in or get in contact if you would like to know more.

Peter Young, Associate Minister, Newport Pagnell Baptist Church

IN OLNEY

Running a race

In Olney, we have recently celebrated our annual Pancake Race, which we share with our twinned town, Liberal in America. As always, there is a large crowd of family, friends and curious onlookers crowding the main street, ready to cheer on the competitors (all ladies) as they run with a frying pan in hand. Like all such events, it is a mix of good-natured fun with an element of friendly competition, especially in good weather!

Seeing this every year reminds me of how the Bible compares life to running a race and of how this can best be done with God's help. Life, like a race, can be marked by trips and falls, the unexpected potholes of surprising circumstances and other obstacles and dangers. When these things happen, they remind us that the road and race of life is seldom smooth and that it is always better to run that race with someone to help you, especially when times of difficulty arise. God gives us the gift of family and friends to help us do that, but he also wants to give us the gift of friendship with him, if we will let him. In Hebrews Ch 12 v 1, the Bible encourages us to run the race marked out for us by God and to look to Jesus, who has run the race before us and is willing to show us how to run that race and complete that race. For this to happen, we need to put our trust in Jesus, and when we do, we will know the joy of what St Paul describes in Phil Ch 3 v 14 when he says that we will win the goal and receive the prize that will be eternal life in heaven. Unlike the Pancake Race, where only one can win and only ladies can compete, this race is open to all and where those who enter are all winners.

Rev Stuart J.Macdonald (Minister, Olney Baptist Church).







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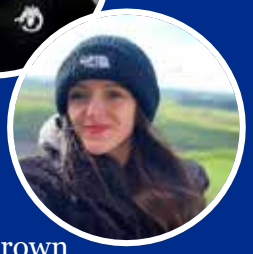
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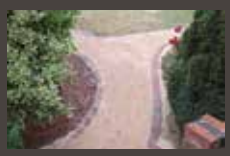
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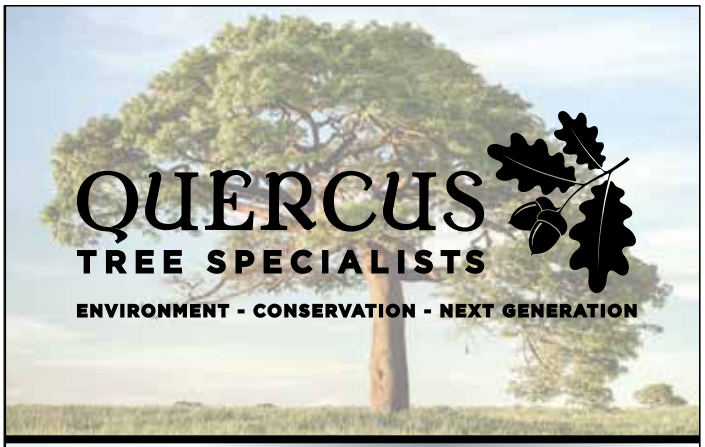
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If you want to drive your car, you must insure it. It's as simple as that. Anything else, and you're breaking the law, so make sure you're covered. But even though there are thousands of insurance companies and brokers ready to take your money in return for protection – which means the industry is very competitive – you still might be paying over the odds for the insurance you need.

Nobody's going to talk you out of taking a policy that you don't need, so it's your responsibility to make sure that you have the cover you require for the type of driving you do.

And it only takes an hour of your time, sitting down and working out what insurance you require, and looking around for the best insurer to sell it to you. A little time now can save you many pounds later.

Shopping around, negotiating with cover providers, not paying for extras you don't need – these are all ways of lowering your annual premium. And you'll probably find it quite easy to do.

Here are Phonebox Motoring's top tips on how to save money the next time you have to insure a vehicle.

1. CHECK THE PREMIUM FOR YOUR NEXT CAR

If you're thinking of getting yourself a new car, check what its insurance premium is likely to be first. Many people have bought their dream machine and then discovered they can't really afford to insure it. Most people check out fuel consumption on their next vehicle before buying it, so why not do the same with the insurance? You could find yourself having to cancel the vehicle purchase or, worse, take delivery and then have to sell it straight away. Either way, that's going to be money down the drain.

2. DO YOUR HOMEWORK



When looking for a quote for a new car, have a good look around at what's out there in terms of cover. It will vary quite widely. It's not difficult – there are several price comparison websites that will help you decide what is a reasonable price for the cover you need. Armed with that, you can contact a shortlist of providers to negotiate for the best price. They all want your business after all.

3. BE HONEST WITH THE INSURER



It might be tempting to omit to tell your cover provider something that might increase a premium, but don't go there. If you have to make a claim, the insurer will make all sorts of checks before paying, and if they discover that you had an undeclared speeding fine or have modified the car without declaring it, they simply won't pay out. You will be left with a potentially huge damages bill that could so easily have been avoided.

4. LOOK AROUND FOR COVER, EVEN WHEN IT'S RENEWAL TIME

Many insurers will contact their customer at renewal time and say, 'We'll automatically renew your cover, you don't have to do a thing'. That all sounds convenient, but it might not be saving you any money. The premium could have gone up, and even if you notice this, you might think it's not worth the bother of calling up about it. Well do. Ring your insurer and tell them you have found cheaper prices elsewhere. They might be prepared to come down a bit to keep you as a client.

5. BE PREPARED TO SWITCH PROVIDERS

Insurance companies rely on customers not taking much notice of their premiums, or not bothering to do anything about them when they do notice. So ring your provider and challenge them on the latest cost. Tell them you will take your business elsewhere and be prepared to do that. It's not much hassle finishing with one insurer and starting with another, and if the savings are big enough to be worth it, go for it.

6. CONSIDER HAVING A BLACK BOX FITTED

A black box recorder fitted to your car could be a good money-saving idea, especially if you are a new driver. The device monitors your driving style to assess the risk to the insurer, so having one fitted can help to reduce your premium. Some people think it's a bit 'Big Brother' being watched and assessed, but if you are driving sensibly – and getting rewarded for it – it might be a good idea.

7. OR HAVE A DASH CAM INSTALLED



Likewise, dash cams can attract discounts from cover providers, although not all insurers do this. The dash cam (dashboard camera) video records the road and traffic around you, and these are liked by many insurers. They can help to prove you weren't at fault in the event of an accident, which could save your insurer from having to pay for damages to you or someone else. They are becoming increasingly popular, especially with high-mileage drivers.

8. PARK YOUR CAR OFF ROAD

One of the questions you will be asked when applying for car insurance is 'Where will the vehicle be parked at night?' If you answer 'on the street', you will almost certainly pay more than if the car was tucked away somewhere safer where there's less chance of it being damaged,

SURANCE THIS YEAR



Phonebox Motoring
with **Tom Johnston**





stolen or struck by another vehicle. Clear out your garage and keep your car in there, or at least try to ensure it's parked on private land overnight, such as a driveway.

9. CUT OUT ANYTHING YOU DON'T NEED

Added to many policies will be an array of items of cover that you might not need. These include European motoring cover, additional driver cover, legal expenses, personal accident, broken windscreen, lost keys and use of a courtesy car. You might consider some or all of these items unnecessary for your particular lifestyle, so get them removed. The insurer is more than happy for you to have them on there, so they won't suggest getting rid of anything. But you'll see the premium coming down as each item comes off.

10. GET IN EARLY WITH RENEWAL

Although this is not an exact science, studies have found that being organised and getting your premium sorted and paid for in advance of its renewal day can actually lower the price. Starting the process of buying new insurance three weeks early not only gives you a greater choice of insurers, but the premium should be cheaper too. Experts think this might be down to insurers preferring to deal with organised people rather than last-minute 'rushers'. Also, if you've left it late, you'll have less time to shop around and might have to take the first thing offered.



QUICK BURSTS:

Skoda hits a million

They were once the butt of all the car jokes, but nobody's laughing now, and it's a different story these days for Skoda. The Czech company proved its popularity by building more than one million cars in 2025, an increase of 15% year-on-year.

The manufacturer says it also constructed 329,000 battery systems for its own electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles and also for other models in parent company Volkswagen's vast range.

But it didn't stop there: the company built 1.3 million transmissions and more than half a million engines last year. Its main plant, in Mlada Boleslav, created 605,000 vehicles alone – that's a 4.9% increase over 2025 figures – while overall its all-electric compact SUV, the Elroq model, reached the mark of 112,500 units built since production of it started in January 2025. Its larger all-electric Enyaq SUV is hot on its cousin's heels – more than 77,000 units have so far been built.



More help from MG

MG is strengthening support for its UK customers with an MG Assistance breakdown policy. In the case of a repair, the plan will automatically be supported with a like-for-like MG until their own vehicle is back on the road.

MG Assistance will also extend beyond support at the roadside; more than 180 MG dealerships and authorised repairers across the UK have access to a large fleet of courtesy vehicles and can supply customers with a courtesy vehicle if there is a complex technical issue or a part is not immediately available. The support is 'uncapped' with the loan renewing until the vehicle is back with the customer.

"If your car needs to be recovered to one of our dealerships, you will have the peace of mind of knowing a like-for-like MG is quickly available and it will stay with you until the issue is fully resolved," said Dr Peter Lin, MG Aftersales Director.



Mardi Gras just great

It was back to New Orleans at a local care home last month as residents and guests enjoyed a post-Olney Pancake Race party.

Olney Meadows Care Home organises its Mardi Gras Party, New Orleans-style buffet and live jazz afternoon every year after the town's famous race.

And this year's 17th February event proved a great success, with guests enjoying live music while sampling a free spread of food.

"We organise events in the home for our community, which are free and open to all," said Caryn Cooper, of Olney Meadows.

"We have a cafe which is open and also free, for anyone who wishes to visit or just come in for a cuppa. Follow us on Facebook to see what events are happening every week."















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A GLEBE VIEW...



The Glebe Field – the Olney Pony and other stuff! Let's put one rumour to bed before it goes too far. Some people occasionally suggest that the Glebe Field beside St Peter and Paul church should be turned into a car park.

The Glebe field beside the church was left to the people of Olney by Mr Wallace in memory of his daughter. There is a plaque on the wall stating precisely that. It was left to be preserved. Not for houses. Not for a car park. Preserved.

The church uses it for the Cherry Fair, which is as it should be. A field with a pony and a church fair is civilisation. A field with a ticket machine is Milton Keynes.

Speaking of the pony – an agreeable creature of gentle disposition – it is well cared for, so please refrain from introducing him to your surplus carrots.

Should anyone attempt to replace its grassy domain with painted white lines, I warn you now that the Phonebox and I were prepared to adopt the stance of Messrs Belushi and Aykroyd in The Blues Brothers and declare ourselves "on a mission from God." It is not often I commend American cinema, but in this instance, I make an exception. We were going to call it 'Save The Olney Pony', which would have been a good name and also a lesson in the pronunciation of the word 'Olney' for the uninitiated.

Anyway, it isn't under threat. So, let's have no more of it.



Filming in Public – Are You Allowed?

Having helped with commentary at the excellent Olney Pancake Race, someone asked whether the television cameras needed permission to film in public.

The short answer? No, anyone can film in public in the UK. We're not to be confused with North Korea, where cameras can be confiscated, and you can be detained. It's amazing how many people, including the police, don't understand the law on this matter.



There is no general law preventing filming in a public place. You can film buildings, streets, events – even the exterior of MI5's headquarters if you wish. Though don't forget, they may well be filming you.

What you cannot do is film inside private property without permission. And while filming in public is legal – harassment, obstruction or behaviour giving reasonable grounds for suspicion is a different matter.

We're all being filmed constantly by CCTV anyway – most of it unnoticed.

If someone is deliberately trying to provoke a reaction by filming, I've found the best response is theatrical countermeasures. I once responded in London, with a run of impromptu magic tricks and questionable jokes in front of their cameras until the would-be provocateurs retreated to find someone who didn't know the legalities.

There is no privacy in public. So, if you're somewhere you shouldn't be – or with someone you shouldn't be … assume you are being filmed – or hide – to avoid future blackmail possibilities.

The Great Political Swamp Clearance

Talking of privacy and rights, the current shower in charge politically seems obsessed with ID cards, curtailing trial by jury, and delaying elections to avoid an electoral trouncing. Most of these areas are being knocked back by the spectacularly useless prime minister, but I suppose we're getting used to it by now. Boris Johnson, Liz Truss. Oh, the list goes on. Interestingly, it was the Reform party who stopped the delay of elections, which must be a bit embarrassing for the government, who target Reform as undemocratic. The Lib Dems and Conservatives have tried to take credit for the reversal, but that's utter nonsense, although the one thing all the main parties can take credit for is the rise of Reform, not forgetting the Green Party, and should we get either Nigel Farage or Zack Polanski closer to a sniff of power, then who's to blame? Not Reform or The Green Party, and that's for sure. The PM will go before the year's out – just too many U-turns and scandals, and currently it could be another Mandelson pal or someone under investigation by the HMRC who takes over – and we're supposed to be worried about Reform and the Greens? Get a grip, Labour, you do have a chap in your ranks called Al Carns who is normal. Clear the swamp, look at new people. But they never take any notice of me, so sod 'em all.

I'm not even going to say much about the Peter Mandelson/Jeffrey Epstein scandal currently unfolding at present, other than to say – Tee Hee!

As a keen follower of political scandals, and in fact, I'm currently working on a podcast regarding which one, in my lifetime, has been the worse. I can truthfully say it'll be this one, and it's nowhere near finished yet. The Liberal party have some interesting ones. For those who remember John Profumo – well, that looks pretty tame now.

Events, as I write this, have been overtaken by a right royal scandal, with the arrest of Andrew, formerly known as Prince. A royal having his collar felt, as they say, is a huge story, and I'll watch with interest as it unfolds. But, for the Royal Family, who have been concerned about where Andrew might live out his days in solitude and out of the public gaze – maybe that one will be solved for them.

Every cloud has a silver lining.

See you next month!

Dave...

OLNEY UKRAINE AID NEWS

Spring concert returns to Olney

A night of music and poetry is being organised in aid of the Ukraine war effort, two years since the last spring concert proved such a great success, organisers have revealed.

Rehearsals are being planned for this year's 'Spring Concert For Ukraine' at St Peter & St Paul Church, Olney, next month. The audience will hear singing from leading choir, the Musica Charity Choir, plus indigenous music and poetry from Ukrainian people who are living locally to Olney.

There will be red and white wine available, along with soft drinks and a selection of snacks – these are included in the £15 price of the ticket.

"We were approached by the Musica Choir, who were with us two years ago, and asked if we would put on another night of music, and we were delighted to do so," said Alex Thomsen, from the event organising committee.

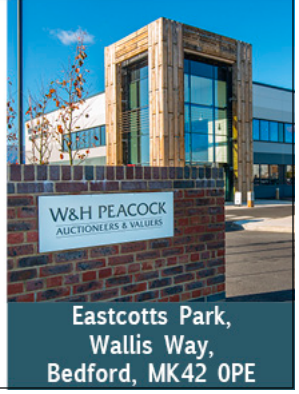
"This is for one night only and should be a wonderful evening of music and solidarity, just as it was in 2024. We are looking forward to preparing for it."

The Spring Concert For Ukraine takes place at St Peter & St Paul Church, Olney, on Saturday 25th April, 7.30pm. Money raised from the event will go to the local Ukrainian BAMK charity. If you can't make the concert but would like to make a contribution, you can leave it with The Phonebox office or AlexThomsen at The Old Maltings (102a). The team are also collecting very specific items on the night, which are detailed on the tickets; so if you'd rather donate physical items and can't make the concert, that would be a huge help (Dextrose energy tablets, Germolene, Sudocrem, Baby wipes, Antihistamine tablets).





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At our meeting last night, we were delighted to present, all the way from the US, a 25-year service award to our great friend and fellow Lion, Bob Benbow. What a great Lion he is, a Club Secretary, mastermind of our annual Motorama event, and all round great bloke. Well done Bob. We also issued a challenge to our newer members, to take on the Event Manager role for a fundraiser of their choosing – I'm sure they will all rise to challenge. So, watch this space for more news.

. . . AND FUN

That's a key element in what we try to bring to all our Social, Community Service and Fundraising projects. When you volunteer with us, you become part of a team that really enjoys everything we do. Whether it's marshalling at a public event, helping with Motorama, Calendars, Craft Fair – fundraising to help those in need, we have fun while we do it. If you would like to make new friends, have fun and make a real difference in the community, why not come along and meet us sometime? If you check out our Facebook page, you'll find details of our activities and our social meet-ups. Come and join us for a drink, a laugh and a chat. No pressure, no hard sell, just friends having fun.

FUNDRAISING EVENTS



Lions Toast: The 6 Nations Tournament comes to Olney, as the Lions leap into their next whisky Tasting event, to be held at the Carlton House Club, on the 27th March. We will be tasting a whisky from each of the participating Rugby Nations. You'll be rating each whisky and deciding on the overall favourite. We'll be showing video clips of amazing tries, funny incidents and snippets of recent games on our big screen. We are also delighted to announce that Duncan Taylor will be joining us for the evening. Duncan has played for Scotland on many occasions and was a regular player in Saracens first team. They recognised his skills and experience and were quick to take him on board as a member of their coaching team. During the evening, you will have plenty of opportunity to put any questions about life as a professional rugby International to him and you are sure to leave the event with a lot more knowledge about the game. Oh, and there'll be food too. If you want to reserve tickets, (including food-only tickets for drivers and other non-drinkers), please send a note to thelionstoast@gmail.com and when the tickets become available, we will get them to you along with details of how to pay. All proceeds will go to Ailsa's Aim.

Town Calendars: We still have a little money to come in, but it looks like we will have raised about £1,500 (net) with our calendars. A huge 'Thank You' to everyone who supported us, Sponsors and Retailers in Newport Pagnell and Olney, and all our lovely customers too. This money has helped pay for our 300 Christmas Parcels this year, provided to local residents in Olney, Newport Pagnell and surrounding villages.

Motorama 2026: We have started to receive monies in from this year's entrants in the show.

Cherry Fair 2026: We are planning what to do at Cherry Fair this year – and looking forward to it, whatever we do.

DONATIONS



This month we also donated to the Cowper & Newton Museum, The Woodland Trust and a local Lion who is performing a 5k run (at the age of 81) in support of Willen Hospice. We are also looking at sponsoring a table at the District Senior Citizens Annual Party.

We've also formally agreed, and after consulting with his family, that we will use the funds donated in memory of our friend and a great Lion, Jon, to pay for a perpetual trophy for 'our' NPTFC Under 15's football team. We are working with a local supplier to come up with a fitting trophy.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES



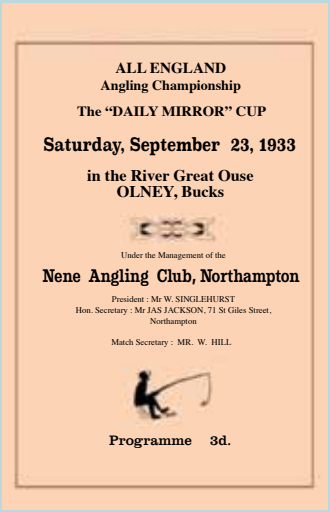
- We collected more spectacles for re-cycling from Herons in Newport Pagnell and from Punch Opticians in Olney – making a total collection of around 1,700 in this period. We also collected around 170 hearing aids via our good Friend John Ferris.
- We are planning to meet with a local residential home to arrange a mini-Motorama event. More details soon.

MEETINGS and SOCIAL EVENTS

- We are still hoping to meet with the coaching staff of the Newport Pagnell Town Football Club Under 15's team that we are sponsoring – after their first match of the season was cancelled due to the rather inclement (frosty) weather!
- We are organising a social event for our Friends and Members at the Naga Tandoori restaurant
- We've been invited to The Olney Group's Thank You to Our Volunteers Night!
- We're planning our Christmas Dinner
- We started planning our 50th Charter Anniversary celebrations! (which arrive in February 2027)

That's all folks!

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Angling Championship
The "DAILY MIRROR" CUP
Saturday, September 23, 1933
in the River Great Ouse
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Hon. Secretary : Mr JAS JACKSON, 71 St Giles Street, Northampton
Match Secretary : MR. W. HILL
Programme 3d.

"*For the rain it raineth every day.*"
I wouldn't usually begin this column with a quote from the Bard, but last month's weather makes it very apt.

So, unfortunately, I only have one recent event to report on, but some exciting future news, and for those historians amongst us, some interesting facts from nearly 100 years ago.
The heavy rainfall has caused many stretches of our waters to flood and render the river unfishable. We have had to cancel all but one of our matches, and many of us thought that the anglers who fished that day were wasting their time. How little we knew! Nigel Porter (pictured) had the longest walk to his peg at Lavendon Mill, but he must have metaphorically floated back after catching a fantastic 62lbs, having found a shoal of bream.
I said we had some exciting future news, and it is a real coup for the club. We have been chosen to hold one of the qualifying rounds for Riverfest, the major river angling competition in the country. Qualifiers are held on noted fishing rivers such as the Trent, the Severn and the Warwickshire Avon, so to be the only venue on the Great Ouse is a credit to all of us. Our qualifier on 5th September will have 40 top anglers, quite possibly including England Internationals, so it should be quite a spectacle.
Finally, this month, a look back to when another major competition was held here; the National Angling Championships were fished here in 1933. I have been in touch with John Essex, a former member of Ivan Marks' infamous Leicester Likely Lads team, who has written the definitive history of the National, and he has very kindly sent me some newspaper articles about the match, which hopefully should now be on our Facebook page.
Next month's column will take us to the end of the season, so let's hope that the rain has finally stopped and I can report on some up-to-date fishing.

Until next month, tight lines.
Damon





OLNEY BOWLING CLUB

Olney Bowling Club are looking ahead to the new season, which will start mid-April, weather permitting.

The Registration Night will be held on Thursday, 2nd April, when the bar will be open for members to enjoy a social evening. The opening of the green is scheduled for Saturday, 11th April, when an internal game will be held, President v Captains. The first friendly match against Ampthill is away on Saturday, 18th April. The annual OBC Open Day will be held on Sunday, 3rd May, so please look out for further details nearer the time.
If you are interested in joining but either can't wait for the Open Day or are unavailable, please contact the Membership Secretary, ray.smith.rs95@gmail.com for further information. Additional information can also be found on the OBC website www.olneybc.co.uk.



CRMK RADIO

International Women's Day



It is already March and spring has sprung meteorologically if not quite astronomically. How time flies! Indeed, it perhaps proves that 'Time waits for no man'. The phrase should be more correctly stated, though, as 'Time and tide wait for no man' and comes from the prologue of The Clerk's Tale in Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. That said, time marches on, and it only seems like yesterday that we entered 2026. Of course, time and tide wait for no woman as well! March weather is very unpredictable and by the time you read this we may well have had the Full Worm Moon which peaked on 3rd March. St Patrick's Day in Ireland is in March, which also sees International Women's Day, the first of which took place in 1911. This celebrates the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender equality, with this year's theme being, "For ALL women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment." CRMK is not quite so old, and since 1978 has seen very few women compared to men sit behind the microphone to present a show. Why is this, you might ask? A good question that I couldn't really give you an answer to except to say that the opportunity has always been there. Since our 'rebirth' in Newport Pagnell in 2017, we have seen female presenters come and regrettably go. At present the baton is held by Louise who has recently started two weekend early morning breakfast shows to go with her Thursday afternoon show. It could be that women are put off by the fact that radio presenting is falsely perceived as a man's preserve. It categorically is not! Aside of the likes of Sara Cox, Pam Ayres and Mishal Husain in mainstream radio, there are many more who have or are currently presenting radio programmes. Women presenters at CRMK have fronted music, sport, chat and interviewing shows. They've all had their own styles. There is no 'one way' to present, and we do not want that. We want women in particular to embrace a radio presenter's role and have fun doing it in their own inimitable way, whilst this facility is still available. For any women reading this who may have the faintest interest towards radio presenting or perhaps are just curious about CRMK, please get in touch, make arrangements to see our fully equipped studio and to find out more. There is no obligation to take it further. Ultimately, presenting a show is a hobby and, like all hobbies, needs a little time and effort, but we can guide you through all you need to know. So, for all the many women out there, how about taking up the theme of 'rights, equality and empowerment' and open a new, exciting chapter in your life. Young or not so young, singly or with others, make International Women's Day an extra special day and get in touch.

www.crmk.co.uk

contactus@crmk.co.uk

Emberton Country Park Update Winter 2026

The team at Emberton Country Park sent an update on the improvement works being done, thanks to a grant from the Department of Transport.





Work is being done in the car park near the café to provide a safe location for people to embark and disembark from community buses, as well as improving the area outside of the toilets with an upgrade to the accessible parking. There are also improvement plans for cyclists in the works. Work is being done to repair the drains throughout the park, so if you notice contractors and wonder what is going on, they are doing essential maintenance.

The team are aware that people are missing access to the Conservation Area. This has had to close as the boardwalk was no longer safe, with the Rangers working hard to remove it. A more affordable and lasting alternative is currently being considered. Unfortunately, trees have also come down in this area, blocking the alternative path. Work is currently underway behind the scenes to find a solution that will not cause any disturbance to protected wildlife. Until there is a safe path in place, it will be closed, so the team would like to thank all the visitors for bearing with the situation.

The timetable of events at Emberton Country Park is being worked on, and the team look forward to welcoming our visitors back for more: dragonfly walks, dawn chorus, bat walks, night safari, a guided walk with the Park Manager, and the ever-popular moth mornings. Some dates for the diary are below, with more to follow on at a later date.

Sunday 3rd May: Dawn chorus – 5am walk to listen to birdsong and identify the birds. Pre-booking required.

Friday 8th May: Guided walk with the Park Manager.

Saturday 20th June: National Lithuanian Midsummer event: the Lithuanian community from across the UK come together for a ticketed event where they celebrate their traditional dance, music, and culture.

Sunday 5th July: Annual raft/duck race at the Sluice organised by The Olney Group and the start hosted at Emberton Country Park.

Sunday 2nd August: The Cowman Triathlon event.

Dates for the other wildlife walks are currently being finalised for July/August. The Moth Mornings are more pop-up events due to logistics and weather, but are planned from April to September. Posters will go up around the park and on our Facebook page closer to the time to advertise these events, as well as on the MKCC website. More live music at Emberton Café in the spring/summer are also being planned with dates to be confirmed.



Chris Curtis pays tribute to Debbie Whitworth



Chris Day from Alban Hill Nurseries



Dragon Boat entries are on the up



News Round Up

MP's Mayor tribute

Local MP Chris Curtis has paid tribute to Olney Mayor Debbie Whitworth with a moving acknowledgement of her work.

Debbie announced last month her decision to step down as Labour Ward Councillor at next May's local elections. She will, however, stay on as a town councillor and Mayor.

"In my time campaigning to get someone elected, I have never known anything like it," said Chris Curtis. "We are talking about the most solid Conservative Ward historically in the entirety of Milton Keynes.

"Three years ago, when I supported Debbie in the Ward Council elections, people thought I was crazy because she would never win.

"The reason I knew they were wrong, and that we would win, is because she would go up and down Olney High Street and everyone would know who she was. "Everyone would say hello, she would talk to them, she would know them, she would understand their issues, their challenges, and most of them would be able to point to some of the fantastic work she had done.

"And that is exactly the type of person we need on local councils, and it has been nothing but a privilege to work with her over the past few years. She's a tireless and inspirational advocate for her community, even though she has health challenges herself.

"Olney is incredibly lucky to have had a local councillor who has worked so hard for it over the last three years, and I'm sure she will continue to do so too."

Allotment Acknowledgement

Debbie Whitworh would like to give a big shout-out and thank you to the committee at the Olney Allotment Holders Association for providing a ramp for their cabin.

For those residents new to the town, down at the OAHA HQ Community Allotment, they have a wonderful cabin - where each Saturday morning, 10am to 12pm, allotment holders and passers-by can drop in for tea, coffee, biscuits and a chat.

Much great work has been achieved successfully over the years to make the allotments 'accessible and inclusive to all' with the raised beds and the ramp it is yet another example of how the allotment community truly care.

90 years of Olney WI

This is the year that Olney WI will be celebrating its 90th anniversary. In June they have arranged a trip to the National Memorial Arboretum to see the WI memorial and in September they'll enjoy a 'Celebration' meeting with members at the Olney Centre.

Chris Day from Alban Hill joined their February meeting and gave an interesting talk about 'The Gardening Influences of Beatrix Potter'. On 4th March we will be taking part in CPR/Defibrillator training.

Comedy duo celebrated at Royal

Silent movie fans will be looking forward to a new celebration of Laurel & Hardy, which comes to Northampton's Royal & Derngate Theatre next month. Writer and pianist Neil Brand will celebrate the centenary of the famous double act with a new show, a century since the pair appeared for the first time in a film together.

With restorations of their silent movies and the rediscovery of some of their lesser-known comedies, Neil uncovers gems of hilarity from the team whose comedy never ages and brings them to life with his piano improvisations.

'100 Years of Laurel & Hardy' is at the Royal Theatre, Northampton on Saturday 21st March.

Local shop hospice care

Local charity Willen Hospice has opened a shop in Milton Keynes, giving supporters a new way to help while shopping sustainably. Located in the heart of Oxley Park local centre, the shop offers quality, preloved items at great value.

Through the new shop, which opened last month, the hospice aims to create a welcoming, community-focused shopping experience, where it can connect with existing supporters and reach new customers in the area.

"Every item we sell helps fund the care local families rely on," said Ian Palmer of Willen Hospice. "It's a simple way for people to support their community while shopping sustainably."

Stable diet of talent

The Stables in Milton Keynes has announced the publication of its What's On guide for March to June 2026, revealing a wide-ranging programme of live events for the months ahead.

The programme brings together celebrated artists, exciting new performers and returning favourites, presented across both the main auditorium and Stage 2, The Stables' dedicated space for more intimate shows and emerging talent. Highlights of the programme include performances by Fairport Convention (17th March), Wonder Stuff lead singer Miles Hunt (26th March), T'Pau (29th April), Cowboy Junkies (13th May) and Seth Lakeman (19th May).

The guide is available from The Stables Box Office and online at www.stables.org.

Dragon Boat entries surge

Organisers of this year's Milton Keynes Dragon Boat Festival have announced that entries are flooding in, with a host of high-profile local companies already signed up to battle it out on the legendary Willen Lake this



Nationwide now back open



Debbie Whitworth with allotment team



Sharnbrook theatrics



Willen Hospice have a new shop

summer. The festival, on Saturday 4th July 2026, is renowned for its explosive mix of adrenaline-pumping action, team building, and fantastic community spirit. It has already attracted a stellar line-up of corporate teams ready to test their mettle.

The festival promises a spectacular family day out, offering far more than just racing. Alongside the thrilling action on the water, the event will feature a dedicated bar, diverse food stalls, and private BBQs for teams. Families can enjoy an RAF flypast, inflatables for all ages, a face painter, and a creative Dragon Head workshop.

More details: www.dragonboatevents.co.uk/milton-keynes-dragon-boat-festival.

Waiting for Godot

The fast-paced tragicomedy that is packed full of heartfelt, tender and touching moments, comes to Sharnbrook this month.

It starts with two men waiting by a lonely tree, their conversation spinning between the tragic, the comic and the absurd. What are they waiting for? Will they or won't they ever arrive, and what does it all mean?

Join the multi-award-winning Sharnbrook Mill Theatre as it presents the timeless masterpiece by the great Samuel Beckett, featuring the spell-binding main characters of Vladimir and Estragon, in the roles made famous over the years by world-renowned actors including Keanu Reeves, Alex Winter and Robin Williams.

It comes to Sharnbrook Mill Theatre, Sharnbrook, Tuesday, 3rd to Saturday 7th March. More details: www.sharnbrookmilltheatre.co.uk.

Alban Hill Nurseries helps plant 962 trees in Malawi

Sherington-based Alban Hill Nurseries were delighted to support Ripple Africa in their plant a tree campaign. "For every Christmas tree we sold, we planted two trees in Malawi with Ripple Africa. Thanks to our wonderful customers, that makes 962 trees to be planted this year in Malawi, East Africa," said Chris Day, Plant Manager at the Nursery.

Ripple Africa are a UK registered charity based in Buckingham. Their overriding aim is to empower communities so they themselves can achieve a sustainable future. Ripple Africa strongly believes that the local people can be the solution to many of the challenges they face. By enabling them, great things can happen. Ripple Africa's belief is "Providing a hand UP and not a hand out," and that philosophy has been central to the charity's ideology for over two decades.

To find out more about Ripple Africa's Tree planting project, please visit their website: www.rippleafrica.org. Chris is pictured above with Nina Konig, MD at Alban Hill Nurseries and Laura Massey from the Ripple Africa charity.

CAMEO hits the big 10

A local chat and social group celebrated its 10th anniversary last month, with fun, magic, quizzes and a special cake.

Come And Meet Each Other (CAMEO) marked its 10th anniversary in style at Olney Baptist Church in front of nearly 100 guests in February. Entertainer and Phonebox columnist David Pibworth amazed the crowd with his close-up magic, and there were special quizzes, tea, coffee, the cake made by Amy Panter and lots of chat.

"Ten years ago, we were talking and we wondered how we could get people together," said Chris James of the CAMEO organising committee.

"And we wrote a special letter to our Minister asking if we could come in and make a group in the church's Gravett Hall. We had our first meeting on 27th January 2016, and everyone had lots of ideas. We decided to call our group CAMEO so that everyone can come in and talk to each other.

"Our aims were to encourage people to come and get to know each other, to give people somewhere to go and to feel safe and accepted, and to encourage everyone to enjoy laughter."

Today the group meets in the larger space of the church itself and welcomes guest speakers, enjoys games and celebrates special occasions such as Valentine's Day, Pancake Day and Christmas.

For more information on CAMEO, call Chris, 07970 973226 or Anne, 07375 425325.

Nationwide re-opens on Pancake Day

The Nationwide branch in Olney's High Street, which was badly damaged in a destructive raid last October, re-opened its doors to customers on Shrove Tuesday, the day of the town's historic race.

Thieves used agricultural machinery to rip through the bank's façade and rip out the cash machine, causing thousands of pounds worth of damage to the listed building five months ago.

The repaired branch has a new glass front, interior decoration and a new ATM cash machine, which bank officials say is more difficult to attack.

"The cash machine no longer needs envelopes to pay in, you just put your money straight in," said branch manager Tom Radford. "It's also a higher security machine."

Staff joined together to perform a ribbon cutting ceremony before welcoming customers back inside for the first time in nearly half a year.

"It's lovely to see the branch up and running again," said one resident. "I have missed it not being able to operate."

Last October was not the first time the branch had been targeted – in 2010 the front of the building was ripped out when thieves used a digger to steal the ATM machine.

And early last year the nearby Sainsbury's store in Olney suffered a similar fate when its cash dispenser was torn from a wall.



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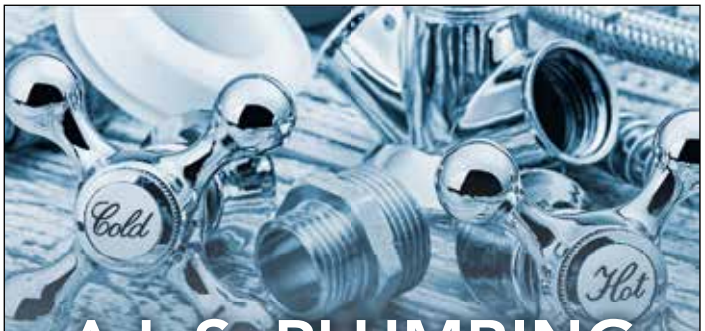
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SPRING VIBES

Spring has sprung again

The Equinox is coming this month, when the day will be the same length as the night.

As everything starts to brighten up and daylight lasts longer into the evening, you sense that things are starting to change. That can only mean one thing: Spring is coming.

You will also start to notice new things appearing in your garden, in the surrounding fields and throughout the woodlands around us.

The coming of Spring signifies the birth of new life. Flowers begin to bloom, daffodils start to peek out of the ground, new lambs are seen playing and gambolling in the fields near the safety of their mothers. Garden insects start to return, birds look for secure places to make their nests, and young animals are increasingly seen moving around.

Spring was originally known as Lent, which came from Old English terms and phrases meaning 'lengthen', which of course means 'to make longer'. And as Winter ebbs away and Spring makes a welcome return, we notice that our days are indeed lengthening and we have more light as each evening comes along.

Centuries ago the season was known as 'Springtime', but today it has been shortened and is known by most of us simply as 'Spring'.

During March we will have the Spring Equinox, a marker in the Earth's annual orbit of the Sun. This year it's on Friday 20th March, when the Sun will be shining directly over the equator and day and night will be exactly the same length, 12 hours.

And that should give you plenty of time to sit and have a go at this month's Wordsearch.

F	T	L	Y	T	O	I	B	R	J	K	V	S	B	G	M	U	M	M
A	A	E	J	F	D	L	O	F	U	M	S	O	T	A	F	V	Z	H
U	L	H	P	U	D	D	L	E	P	A	E	E	Y	S	D	T	B	E
S	B	L	U	B	Q	L	F	R	R	Z	T	G	Y	T	H	A	W	U
L	X	Z	B	U	N	N	Y	G	K	Q	B	W	G	F	R	Q	X	M
W	M	S	H	O	W	E	R	S	G	B	L	O	S	S	O	M	C	B
P	W	U	M	P	N	V	A	R	Q	T	G	E	F	G	D	X	Z	R
F	T	N	K	A	K	H	V	H	E	K	P	B	R	E	T	S	A	E
G	E	S	W	O	R	O	B	I	N	C	O	F	R	J	M	P	J	L
M	Y	H	M	L	Y	C	L	L	J	I	Z	B	H	E	D	U	Z	L
N	N	I	Q	Q	I	U	H	I	T	H	R	U	T	Z	E	T	W	A
L	E	N	U	H	S	X	Z	D	U	C	Z	T	P	S	N	Z	Q	A
R	Y	E	Y	Y	N	N	M	O	L	H	N	T	Z	B	E	X	E	F
O	A	U	R	I	U	O	D	F	I	G	E	E	H	G	A	N	Q	T
W	P	I	J	G	G	K	S	F	P	P	J	R	J	I	A	S	A	M
K	R	J	N	Z	B	E	X	A	Y	B	C	F	J	H	A	T	C	H
B	I	S	U	B	U	X	M	D	E	B	F	L	Y	W	M	B	B	H
X	L	M	B	N	O	A	C	T	J	S	U	Y	H	B	H	G	Y	F
X	X	I	J	W	E	W	R	D	V	E	D	D	K	A	A	W	H	M

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