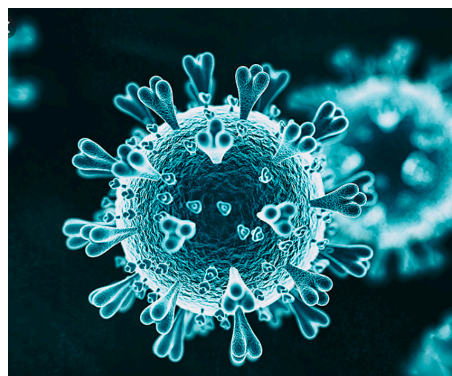


## How COVID has affected West Hagbourne

The December 2020 edition of the village newsletter was given over to how the COVID pandemic affected the lives of residents of West Hagbourne. Lockdown in spring meant that many of us were unable to see family, celebrate family events, or travel. We were working from home, shielding the vulnerable and providing full time child care and education. On the bright side, we walked new footpath routes, people we met always had time for a chat, and we no longer had to fight our way round a supermarket.



Below are some personal accounts of this unprecedented year.

If you would like to add anything to the items here, please feel free to contact me (editors@westhagbourne.org) or drop off an item at Meadow's Edge. This will be added to the website, where we hope to provide an archive for future village historians. Contributions can be anonymous.

## Village Association

At this time of year (November), the Village Association normally holds its AGM, when we gather to review and reflect on the past year's events and look forward to planning for the next. However, as the catastrophic pandemic began to influence our lives early in this year's calendar, it became clear that plans for village community events would have to be rethought.

We were at least lucky enough to lead one village walk on 12th January, which attracted a good turnout of enthusiastic hikers in the winter sunshine. With the country in lockdown in April, the Association was overwhelmed by the response from West Hagbourne villagers, as 30 households displayed an imaginative variety of creative and ingenious dragons and St Georges that were very much admired and appreciated by all who passed through the village. Support for the NHS was also a prominent theme, so the committee decided to donate, on the village's behalf, £5.00 for each display to the Oxford Hospitals Charity.

A big thank you to everyone who took part and well done to the worthy prizewinners. Sadly, we were unable to hold the teas afternoon, which is usually very popular being one of the few opportunities during the year for us all gather.



Winning dragon and garden

Fortunately, as restrictions eased in June, we were able to hold the Madge Trophy Front Gardens competition. Our two judges from East Hagbourne enjoyed their tour of the village and were very complimentary of the neatness of the gardens, eventually choosing Green Thatch as the overall winner.

Before the imposed lockdown, the committee were in the early stages of planning a village 'Family Afternoon' scheduled for early July. We were looking forward to the challenge of holding such an event with a variety of attractions and activities that would appeal to all ages in our community. Hopefully, this will happen next summer.

Possibly our biggest event of the year, the Macmillan Coffee Morning held every September, also had to be cancelled. Attracting not only villagers but also visitors from the surrounding area, all of whom donate so generously to this cause, it was especially disappointing that we were not able to support it in the way we would have wished.

I expect many of you will have recently passed by the bus shelter, the village's war memorial, and seen the new poppy wreath which was placed there on Remembrance Sunday. The Association is proud to support the Royal British Legion on behalf of the village.

As we come to the end of this most unusual year, it is an appropriate time to reflect on past events. My Chairman's annual report, which is available to read on the village website, summarises the Association's activities of 2020 in a little more detail. However, when I circulated my report to the committee, my covering message included my thoughts on the importance of social interaction, and the role the Village Association plays in strengthening a sense of community and belonging.

Thank you, as ever, for the support you give the events that we endeavour to provide and we hope that we can all gather together again before too long.

From the Village Association committee we wish you all best for Christmas and the New Year,



Margaret Leishman.

### A few thoughts on our COVID experiences so far-



We are in the fortunate position in that, apart from curtailing most of our travelling, socialising and eating out, it hasn't really affected us. Whenever the tedium got us we counted our blessings: unlike many others we didn't have to worry about being made redundant, paying the rent etc.

Initially we had the same problems as everyone else in obtaining our grocery deliveries. Thankfully I no longer need to get up in the early hours to book a slot!! The problem was eased somewhat a couple of weeks into lockdown when we set up an alert system with several friends and neighbours. Whenever one of us noticed that Tesco had released another batch of delivery slots they immediately notified the rest of the group. It worked quite well for as long as it was necessary.

Resident

### All masked up

Not so very long ago one of the quickest ways to set alarm bells ringing would be to walk into the branch of any Bank, Post Office or High Street Shop wearing a mask ! How times have changed ! We live a privileged life style, retired, with space around us, health issues well-managed and many good friends. Suddenly it is March 2020, and we are Vulnerable Adults (over a certain age). Suddenly no more Volunteer Driving. Suddenly we are in Lockdown, social distancing, frenzied hand washing. Suddenly we are priority customers for Supermarket deliveries to our door. Suddenly no more sleepovers.

Now it is obligatory to wear a mask when visiting a Bank, Post Office or High Street Shop! How times have changed !



Rob Griffiths, Woodleys.



## Have we been here before?

When Covid 19 first struck it was inevitable that we would look back to earlier epidemics such as the Spanish Flu. Surprisingly, West Hagbourne remained relatively unscathed compared with Upton with its railway station. Could this be because our village was more isolated then? People could not move around so much; there were no roads, only footpaths. West Hagbourne was very much a farming village and self sufficient. Everybody had a vegetable plot and many kept chickens. "Lockdown" was a way of life. Hopefully our own lockdown will keep Covid away just as it kept away the Spanish Flu.

Sheila Taylor, Pippins

## How it felt to be shielding

Being in shielded isolation, due to health issues, we suddenly realised how far removed we were from families and potential support. When we received the note saying the village was setting up a volunteer group, we were immensely relieved. We are very grateful to those people for their time, generosity & kindness. As a result of meeting people at the door, we have been pleased to put more names to people in the village. Meeting previously unknown villagers and chatting over the fence to neighbours and passers-by we have felt much less isolated.

Residents who are shielding

## Dancing postponed

It's been a strange summer. Usually, along with the rest of Rose Hips (a folk bellydance troupe), I spend most weekends from late spring through to late summer dancing out at various folk festivals and other events. We share spots with Morris sides, clog sides and rapper dancers, or else we grab busking spots and do a set on our own. Folk Weekends: Oxford kicks the season off in April and we usually end the season at Wallingford Bunkfest, a Rose Hips favourite. Not this year, though; as the Covid bug began to bite harder, so the festival cancellations started to roll in. A strange, sad summer.



Tracey Anderson, The Square

## Nature in lockdown

The Covid 19 pandemic has probably doubled my time spent in the garden. One day, when the field to the north of Manor Close was being ploughed prior to potato planting, I watched about ten red kites joining the rooks following the plough and catching worms. Kites often perch in my garden and on another day an exhausted juvenile crash-landed on one of my hollyhocks. After 5 minutes rest it was able to fly off. We have had frequent visits to our bird feeder by small flocks of goldfinches. A Humming Bird Hawk moth was observed nectaring on a Mexican Salvia on three occasions in October.

Malcolm Brownsword, Manor Close



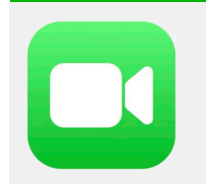
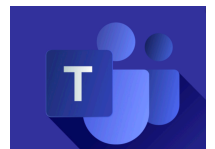
Gold finches feeding & Humming bird hawk moth



## Life in 2020 at Fermain, York Road

Like most people we have found life a real challenge with our day-to-day lives being so different from previous years. Albie (12) has been at home for many months. Maisie & Justine are both key workers so worked throughout at Harwell School and at the Bank. Home schooling and the discipline have been tough for both pupil and parents in attendance, with many distractions to impact effectiveness. The internet has been a lifeline allowing us all to function in some sort of normal way with Nathan & myself both working from home. I know Amazon deliveries to our house have increased as the dogs bark every time they come up the drive. Justine's Mum (Ros) has joined our bubble, so she is not alone and can pop in at weekends. Nathan will be 21 this month, which would normally involve a party or two - of course this will now have to wait. Not seeing family and friends for weeks on end has been no fun and has tested our family relationships to the full. We started quite well, playing family games and cards to break up the day. Although this has slipped a little, we have found other routines to live by and see us through. We sadly lost my mum (Maureen) in July to old age; it was difficult not being able to visit her in hospital until the last few days, but the Royal Berks looked after her very well. We are all looking forward to the Christmas break and really cannot wait for 2021, assuming it can't be any worse than 2020!

Ian Thomson, Fermain



## 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020....the day the music stopped.



The day I and my musical compadres, choral partners in crime, the people I spend so much time with each year making transcendental music, had an email from our conductor saying he'd taken the decision to halt all rehearsals and concerts. I'm a member of three choirs in Oxford – vOx Chamber Choir, Opus 48 (a medium sized choral society) and Amici della Voce (an octet) and I would have been performing perhaps 15 concerts this year but thanks to Covid-19 that's all gone...

At the beginning of the pandemic singing was seen as almost a dangerous activity – and a huge amount of work was done by prominent singer/scientists regarding aerosols/droplets and the actual dangers of singing and playing wind or brass

instruments..... There have been moments of sunlight – in the summer the octet managed to perform outside the Blavatnik in Oxford and a few of us have been able to get together in gardens, but there's not much joy on the horizon.

If you're involved in a hobby with other people, you'll recognise the camaraderie of these groups, and in the case of singers the knowledge that we're all working towards a common purpose, to produce exquisite performances for people to enjoy. The health benefits of singing need no introduction, many studies have been done.



It's a tough time for musicians – most are freelancers and many of my acquaintance do not qualify for any state help, meaning they've had no money since March. I'm crossing everything that we can soon get back to performing, with enough audience to make concerts financially worthwhile. If music (and the wider arts in general) fall by the wayside, we will all be the poorer for it. Here's to a musical 2021.

Meryl Davies, Manor Close

## West Hagbourne Parish Council



The Parish Council now meets using Zoom. This has proved very useful for councillors but villagers do not have automatic access. If somebody needs to talk to the Parish Council they can contact the Clerk and access to the Zoom meeting will be given. This was done once when East Hagbourne PC wanted to talk to us, although it turned out that could have been done by email. We have now also signed up for online banking so that we no longer have to pay people by cheque. Previously the Clerk had to come to the homes of two councillors and leave a bag with the papers and the chequebook outside the house. The councillor would take it, sign the cheques and put the bag outside again for the Clerk to take away. The current system still involves councillors since I have a card and a card reader, as well as the Clerk, so I can check with other councillors and authorise payments he has set up. To that extent the COVID restrictions have made it necessary to bring in a system that is more efficient and we had put off doing for a while

Mike Butler, Chair WHPC, Blissetts

## Life goes on

A week after the new kitten arrived, so did Lockdown. It was tricky getting him checked over and inoculated. We had to make an appointment, then park in the Vet's car park just before the appointed hour, wait for someone to come out and collect him and then return him a little later. When we booked him in for the 'snip and chip', we were expecting that he would be kept in for most of the day, but after less than 2 hours they asked us to collect him. Maybe he was too much to handle, as he certainly didn't seem any less manic on his return – no quiet long snoozes, just quite a lot of biting and climbing the curtains.



The Morris Dance world seemed to take to Lockdown with enthusiasm. With the discovery of Zoom it was off, off and away. People took part in the 'Lone Morris Festival' on Facebook on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March with musicians and dancers dressed in kit and filming themselves dancing in their gardens or even the street. This was repeated for the 'St George's Day Bash' on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April, shortly followed by the 'May Day Lone Morris Festival' starting at dawn on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May, but silently so as not to disturb the neighbours. There were Music Sessions, Concerts, and Ceilidhs in your living room. It was moving to see people dancing in their own houses to music on Facebook, often with the routines adjusted so people could dance on their own or with a spare

broomstick.

I started having music lessons for the first time in my life, and doing Pilates twice a week on Zoom. Four of the Morris sides I belong to started meeting up on practice evenings using Zoom to exchange stories and general banter. A badminton group I go to also did this, so I was pretty busy most of the time. When the lockdown eased, 2 of my Morris groups started meeting, socially distanced, and badminton re-started. It was wonderful to see other people and be able to chat even if at a distance, wearing masks.

There seemed to me to be many positive experiences which came about: no traffic through the village, and you could hardly even hear the A34; the birdsong was really loud, and I think this has

been the best spring/summer in terms of weather that I can remember. People seemed to be much kinder to each other, and posted supportive messages to musicians who had no prospects of earning any money but still had rents to pay, and to others who suffered severe depression with the loneliness of it all. The community spirit when we clapped for the NHS made me feel part of a bigger movement. I also found that I was no longer having to rush around trying to get everything done as there was suddenly time to spend doing things I needed to do in the garden. I even enjoyed not going away on holiday in June when the garden always goes mad and really you need to be at home to sort it all out.



Mary Ann Butler, Blissetts

### Village volunteers



The West Hagbourne volunteer group did more than collect prescriptions and shopping during the summer lock down. Michael Gould, a resident in the village, reached out to the volunteer group for some shopping but it was quickly evident that he had a bigger health issues that were being aggravated by his poor living conditions. These issues were escalated to our local Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson who was able to assist Michael in getting

rehoused to a safer home in Didcot where he has settled and is very content. Michael would like to thank everyone that supported him and helped him out of his very difficult situation.

Lillie Jamieson

### Local hospitality business



When COVID19 hit us all in March it was devastating for so many of us. Not only did it hit the hospitality industry and other businesses extremely hard, it has been heart-breaking to see people lose their loved ones to this pandemic. We felt lucky to have received incredible support from the government and our landlord (Hawthorn Leisure) has also been incredibly supportive (more so than some of the larger Pubco's). In the first lockdown we concentrated on redecorating the pub and tidying the garden up & making everything COVID safe. It was great to see people walking by during the good weather in the first lockdown and to say hello or have a quick chat. When we reopened it was so lovely to welcome our

customers back, although in a vastly different way. The customers who felt comfortable enough to return adapted to the 'new Norm'.

It has been immensely tough both financially & mentally on the both of us but we have remained positive and we really hope that after the second lockdown we can recover and prosper and with the support of the community we believe this is possible. See you on the other side.

Tony & Helen X



## Saying goodbye

The emptiness of the church, chairs distributed sparsely through the nave, merely emphasised the simple beauty of its architecture. We were gathered for the funeral of Mike Duck, long time resident of West Hagbourne, but this was in the time of COVID. Mourners were limited to 30 people meaning friends of many years' were unable to attend. Chairs were grouped into family clusters, with more than 2 metres separation. Whilst the occasion was inevitably sad, the music was stunning. With those present prevented from singing due to fears about aerosol virus transmission, mumbled congregational hymns were replaced by uplifting recordings for us all to enjoy, something Mike himself would have appreciated. More of Mike's friends were able to join the congregation for the interment.

Sue Totterdell, Meadows Edge

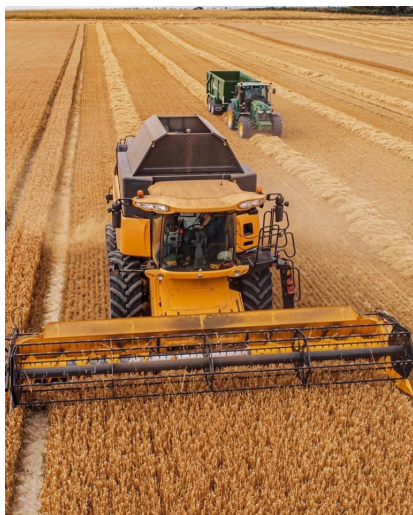
## 2020 At Manor Farm - What a strange year!

Sadly, we had the cancellation of our Family wedding in France and then the same with our trip of a lifetime to Chile and Argentina.

We had pulled down our old and out of date corn store/drier just before Covid 19 set in, then as lockdown began we wondered if the new one would ever be built in time for harvest – it was, literally just as we started.

Being farmers, producing food, we were able to keep working, which was a relief as farmers need to be out on the land!! The harvest wasn't as productive as last year and the climate seems to be so extreme, either all sun and hard ground or all rain and a mire! All was going well until it was time for the potatoes to be dug. Again this year it made such a mess, really damaging the soil structure, that I doubt we will do it again.

Spring and early summer were beautiful and it was wonderful to actually be in the garden and hear the birdlife without the disturbance of traffic on the roads and planes in the sky; actually quite surreal. I think it all made us appreciate where we live in West Hagbourne, far more fortunate than many, particularly those in big cities.



Sue Lay, Manor Farm

## What next for COVID?

It has been a difficult year. For months we were told that masks and social distancing were the new normal. During lockdown, students of all ages missed crucial teaching and exams. Differences in the level of support and facilities at home exaggerated differences in learning for pupils. Schools have stayed open in the second lockdown and it appears that this strategy has not vastly increased infection levels in the area, although masks are still not obligatory in class.

In the last couple of weeks there have been further positive noises from the government. Firstly the introduction of mass rapid testing seems to have made a difference - identifying nearly 700 people in Liverpool as carrying the virus despite their having no symptoms. This was followed by three (at the time of writing) promising new vaccines. Although these still need to complete the safety evaluations, they all seem to offer excellent levels of protection. If you are in one of the vulnerable categories that get an annual flu vaccination then you will know that Didcot rolled out a very efficient flu vaccination programme, based at the Civic Hall, offering both walk through and drive through appointments. Reducing infection levels, protecting the most vulnerable and ongoing improvements in treatment do promise the possibility of a return to something like normal by summer of 2021.

Hopefully the Village Association will be able to deliver their usual excellent programme of entertainments throughout the year, Parish Council meetings will return to face-to-face so that interested villagers are able to participate, and clubs and societies that we all enjoy will be fully functional. For some of us, we cannot wait to be able to travel again to see family and friends and it should be possible to plan family celebrations - a double dose perhaps to make up for those missed in 2020?

We may have to have annual COVID jabs, alongside our flu vaccinations and we may even choose to continue to wear face masks in busy confined spaces, as many Asian countries. It will be interesting to see if people continue to work more from home, cutting out long and expensive commutes. Will the exodus from city centres continue? Whatever happens, 2021 promises to be a year to enjoy.