

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 19 – January - February 2023



Welcome to **Newsletter Number 19**, the first for 2023. The muted colours in the garden, the green shoots of snowdrop and daffodil and the gradually-returning light at the start and end of the day are all promise of the Spring, which isn't too far away. And Spring will see developments in the Jubilee Garden, which is shaping up into a real community project. You can read the report below, and there's something you may be able to donate as the year goes on – sunflower seedlings: more details below. If you'd like to get involved in developing the garden, please contact the PC on matfenparishcouncil@gmail.com.

Over the page, there's a gripping story of a tragic event from the Blckett family historic annals, sourced by local author **Sally Urwin**.

I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter. If you know of anyone who would like to be added to the circulation list, or who would like a paper copy, please get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com



Matfen village hall trustees will be holding their AGM next week, on **Tuesday February 7th, from 6-7pm**. It's open to everyone in the community, so go along if you'd like to know more, and perhaps volunteer to support the charity that runs the hall. If you can't get to the meeting, email on the village hall address below to express your interest.

The poster to the right is for the next village hall event, a **Quiz and Food Night** – sounds as if it will be a fun night.

There are many group and community activities in the hall, and it can also be hired for private events. You can find out more and make a booking by email: matfenvillage@gmail.com or phone: **07817 375237** or via the website, at www.northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/matfen-village-hall



Matfen Karate Club got off to an early start in 2023, back in the first week of January. Students are working hard towards their next grading at Stamfordham on February 12th. This is our club's 10th year and we have been delighted to see some new members. We are very grateful to Seiken Ryu Karate Association for our fab new sign outside the village hall. March 4th sees the return of our annual sparring show, War on the Floor, at the Queen's Hall in Hexham, tickets available soon direct from the club. The club meets in **Matfen village hall every Friday from 6-7pm**.

Contact **Harry Waters 07775 726 240** or email Matfen.srka@gmail.com.

Fitness expert **Jo Stichbury** also runs classes in the hall, on Mondays. There's **Feel Good Pilates** at 8.45, **Legs, Bums and Tums** at 9.30 and **Body Flow** at 10.15 you don't have to do it all, but if you do, you'll need coffee and at least two kinds of cake in the village store afterwards! Get in touch with Jo on jostichbury@gmail.com or **07855 247063** for more details.

The Jubilee Garden in bare winter shows areas for this year's work. Our sturdy new bench is set in the gravelled viewing area. Boulders donated from within the village mark its boundary. Plants from community gardens have been resettled along that line. A wider boundary marks a sunny corner, and various seeds and small plants have spent winter there. Sunshine and warmth will help them thrive. Bulb spikes are pushing through the cold soil: snowdrops, crocus, scilla, tête-à-tête are all joining the stately daffodils which were set round the garden edge some years ago. Tulips, cowslips and primulas will wait for warmer weather. Meadow flower seeds are being prepared for setting in the central area. Please help create a carpet of colour for the future.

Towards the lower garden, bronze grasses and evergreen plants have come through the frosts. Tubes protecting new hedge plants – dogwood, hawthorn, dog rose, crab apple – will stay in position another 12 months. Birds are making good use of their feeding station, generously kept refilled. There may be some wintering insects and small creatures in the logs and leaves of the compost corner.

Our late Queen's celebrated her jubilees and this year our new King will be crowned. Can you set sunflower seeds to start growing on sunny window sills in yogurt pots? Then you can come and plant your yogurt-pot size seedlings in the garden over the time of the Coronation celebrations.

So as we wait for Spring, watch the changes in the garden. Again, thank you to all who have shown interest, helped and donated to making a peaceful community garden in Matfen village.



PC and County Council News:

You've probably heard that from May 2023 voters in England will need to show photo ID to vote in person. This is a change that will apply to all future local elections: referendums, recall petitions and Police and Crime Commissioner elections from May 2023 and all UK Parliamentary General Elections

from October 2023. Electors who currently do not have an accepted form of photo ID can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate free of charge. The full list of accepted IDs and all other information is available on the Electoral Commission website:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id>



And a couple of links that you can follow to find out about what's happening in Northumberland about energy and climate change:

<https://nland.cc/climatenews> – where you can download a copy of Northumberland's Climate Action Plan, packed with information and:

<https://energyadvicenorthumberland.org.uk/> – where there's an informative Community Action Northumberland (CAN) newsletter and information about how you can get specific advice about how to improve use of energy in your own house, including a home visit from one of 3 advisers, Leanne, Brian or Caroline. Here are their details:

Leanne Shipley: mobile: 07724 867010 email: leanneshipley@ca-north.org.uk

Brian Watson: mobile: 07715 408343 email: brianwatson@ca-north.org.uk

Caroline Armstrong: mobile: 07726 931005 email: carolinearmstrong@ca-north.org.uk

History Corner: Keith Atkinson may have ended his writing career for the newsletter, but he's still a keen reader. In response to Sally's piece in Number 18, Keith has sent some information about his father, John, who was a pupil in Matfen when Mr T.W. (Tommy) Richardson became headteacher in 1912. John became a pupil teacher at West Matfen Mixed and Infant School in 1913, at the age of 14. His starting salary was £5 per annum, rising to £16 in four years. He served with the Durham Light Infantry at the end of the First World War, and went on to train as a teacher at Bede College, Durham. His teaching career lasted until 1965.

Sally Urwin tells the tragic story of an accident that happened in the Blackett family, first reported in The Newcastle Guardian, 30th October 1863 – quotes from the paper are in italics below.



The accident befell Mrs Lucia "Lucy" Blackett (nee Minchin, wife of Captain Edward Algernon Blackett of Oakwood House in Wylam) in the grounds of Matfen Hall. Captain Blackett was the son of Christopher Blackett Esq, the late MP for South Northumberland and he managed the estates and colliery at Wylam.

Mrs Blackett, being a good carriage driver, "*frequently drove out without attendants or any company*" and on Monday 26th October 1863**¹ drove a "*rather low slung basket carriage, that are now so fashionable*" with two of her children (Lucia her eldest daughter, 9 years old and John her second son, aged 7 years) from Wylam to Matfen Hall to pay a visit. After lunch, she and her children "*entered the carriage intending to drive home, by way of Stamfordham ... Scarcely had they taken their seats when the spirited bay ... became restive.*"



The lady bravely told her children to jump down from the carriage "*while she endeavoured either to calm or control the vicious brute. They (the children) did so but the horse continued to rear and plunge on the road through the shrubbery and at last the carriage was upset, and Mrs Blackett was thrown with great violence to the ground.*"

One of the gardeners had seen the accident and raced to the scene. He carried the badly injured Mrs Blackett back into the Hall, "*but her head was so severely injured ... that in a very few minutes the poor lady had ceased to breathe.*"

The news reporter goes on to say that the carriage wheels must have become caught in the number of trees growing by the side of the road and it was thought that Mrs Blackett had been thrown from the carriage and struck her forehead against one of those trees. Mrs Blackett was only 35 years old and the journalist reports that she died leaving her husband and seven young children.

A very tragic tale indeed, especially as Mrs Blackett left behind a large family and her children Lucia and John witnessed the actual accident. But at least she had the foresight and bravery to save them before the carriage was overturned. Captain Blackett eventually remarried in 1870, and died in 1873 aged 49, father of nine children.

Since Lucia Blackett was attempting to drive to Stamfordham, the route taken must have left by the main front door of Matfen Hall and then through the grounds to the exit by the Lodge on the road called "Jingling Gate" to Fenwick Shields. I have heard vague suggestions of a "white lady" ghost that haunts the woods of Matfen Hall, and I wonder if the story has developed from this tragic tale.

And, finally... many thanks to all the contributors to Newsletter 19, and huge thanks, as ever, to Rev Rachel for distributing the newsletter by email. Any comments, suggestions and contributions for future newsletters are always very welcome: get in touch on contehjean@gmail.com

¹ ** another source gives the date of the accident as Tuesday 29 September 1863 (thanks to Keith Atkinson for this information)