

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 23 - September - October 2023



I'm sure you've noticed the shiny black clusters of blackberries on the road verges and in the hedgerows – it really is a bumper year and I, for one, find it hard to pass by without picking a few. They're great in puddings and jams, and on your breakfast porridge. There's still just enough time to collect some; according to old folklore, the Devil fell out of heaven on Old Michaelmas Day, October 11th, and landed in a blackberry bush, whereupon he spat on the berries and spoiled them. So if you pick them after that, there'll be trouble!

Four-page newsletters are becoming normal now, and Newsletter no. 23 is no exception. I hope you enjoy reading it. If you know of anyone who would like to be added to the email circulation list, or who would like a paper copy, get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com

Great news for **Matfen village hall!** The trustees have won a grant of £21,000 from the National Lottery Fund. The money will be spent on refurbishing the toilets and installing a generator, a major step towards realising Matfen Community Plan to make the hall a warm hub and a safe, accessible space in cases of emergencies such as Storm Arwen a couple of years ago, when many houses in the parish were without electricity for several days. Thanks to the trustees for all the hard work involved in securing the grant. To get the work done, the hall will be closed for about two weeks from Wednesday October 11th, and regular activities will be suspended or happen elsewhere.

The village hall is the venue for a whole list of regular community activities, and 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

Fitness expert, **Jo Stichbury**, has been a regular in the hall for quite a while. She holds classes every Monday morning from 8.45 to 11.00, beginning with *Feel Good Pilates*, then *Legs, Bums and Tums* from 9.30 and *Body Flow* from 10.15. Jo is always keen to welcome new members to her groups – you don't need to do all of the activities, just sign up for those you want! She can be contacted on jostichburyfitness@gmail.com or **07855 247063**

The village hall was, of course, once part of **Matfen School**, which closed 51 years ago in 1972. The building was divided into the hall and a shop, now the village coffee shop. So it was fitting that a reunion of people who attended the school was held in the coffee shop recently, thanks to the kindness of current owner Lisa. She made 26 people welcome after closing time one day, 17 of them former pupils. They remembered their school days, with happy outings including an educational trip to the Hancock Museum in Newcastle, nature lessons in the school garden, football on the village green, hopscotch in the school yard. School days were no doubt very special, though many also recalled being punished with the cane, or having to write 100 lines!

Some former pupils are still living in the Matfen area, while others are in different parts of the world. Maybe there'll be another meeting next year – if you're interested in coming, contact Betty Renwick on b.renwick108@btinternet.com



Great Whittington and Matfen WI is going strong, with over 20 members and a regular programme of meetings, outings, walks and lunches. The next monthly meeting will be on **Tuesday October 3rd, beginning at 7.30pm** in Matfen village hall, and will feature a talk from historian Paul Nash on 'Building a Boundary', about the Scottish Borders. New members and visitors are always welcome - just come along on the night or contact contehjean@gmail.com for more information.

Community garden – September: notes from Liz Bishop



Is it late summer or early autumn? Dry spells, high winds, and deluges – different weathers all make their mark.

Young, green-shelled chestnuts have fallen in the garden; they are not yet large or ripe enough for conker games. By half-term they should be ready and a pot of the best will be left at the garden gate. **PLEASE don't throw sticks at the chestnut tree!** It may be damaged and there are small plants and seeds in the ground which may get spoilt.

Work on the roadside hedge from within the garden is slowly removing dead wood, hopefully to reduce its height. This will allow better visibility for walkers and traffic at the church corner. The new hedge plants, near the water, are doing well. Bird song in that area is lovely.



The ice plants – sedums – are flowering well and more have been promised for the garden. They will keep butterflies happy as the days get shorter. New 'elephants ears' – bergenia – have also been donated, and will provide greenery through winter. A row of Brunnera, Jack Frost variety, has grown well.

Thank you to all who have given and promised plants – they are always welcome and will make an even better showing next year.

Sarah Greaves, PC Chair, reports Matfen Parish Council and County Council News:

The next **Parish Council meeting** is coming up soon, on **Tuesday September 26th** in the village hall, 7-9pm. The meeting is open to all residents of the parish, and you can express your views as part of the discussion.

An item on the agenda that may be of special interest concerns a Tornado plane crash in 1999, that happened on farmland between Kirkheaton and Ingoe. Two young airmen – Flight Lieutenant Richard Ashley Wright and Flight Lieutenant Sean Patrick Casabayo – were killed when their Tornado came down. There are plans to install a memorial near the site, which will be discussed at the PC meeting.

A Tornado navigator, Martin Wintermeyer, has been undertaking memorial activities to commemorate Tornado air crew killed in air crashes in the last 45 years. On October 14th last year, the 23rd anniversary of the crash, Martin cycled up to the crash site near Kirkheaton, to pay his respects. He met a local resident, and said he spent a very special and emotional time in his company.

When I heard of this, it solved a mystery for me. I had noticed that two small wooden crosses appear in October every year on the roadside just at the T-junction above Ingoe onto the Wallridge road. Given the time of year, I thought they were to do with Remembrance Sunday, but it seems rather that someone has already been making their own poignant personal memorial to the lost airmen. It would be good to know who it is, as they may like to be involved in the PC memorial project.



Northumberland County Council produces a monthly email with news of their climate change projects and other community issues. You can get on the mailing list via communications@northumberland.gov.uk. Here are Sarah's edited highlights of the latest newsletter:

Biodiversity and Planning Law: Under the Environment Act 2021, all planning permissions granted in England will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain from November 2023.

NCC launch “Fix my Street”: NCC have just launched Fix My Street to capture reporting of issues like fly tipping, potholes and street lights. Here is the link:

<https://fix.northumberland.gov.uk/>

You can also call **0345 600 6400** in an emergency.

Free trees from NCC: NCC Free Tree scheme is back and they are giving away 15,000 saplings to residents, schools, community groups, town and parish councils as well as charities and businesses.

Groups can choose from Hedge, Copse or Native Harvest species and residents will be given a choice of species depending on their garden size, whether small, medium or large, and even those with limited space, such as balconies, can apply.

To apply contact freetree@northumberland.gov.uk from October 10th.

The Great Northumberland Forest Podcast: If you are interested in planting more trees on your land, you might be interested in this podcast, where special guest Judith Webb from Low Newton Hall talks about wooding smallholdings. Find the link via enquiries.forest@northumberland.gov.uk

Interested in solar panels on your home? Solar panels can help you lower your carbon footprint and typically could save you £565.00 a year on your energy bills.

If you live in an off-gas-grid part of Northumberland, you can get free independent advice from Community Action Northumberland’s Domestic Carbon Reduction Officer on solar panels and all the other options available.

Email energy@ca-north.org.uk to book an appointment either at home or on the phone.

Launch of Climate Resources for Northumberland schools: If you work in a Northumberland school, or are a parent, you may be interested in this initiative from the Climate Change team in NCC, who have been working in partnership with the Ministry of Eco Education to launch the “Climate Change and Sustainability in Northumberland Schools Resource Pack”.

This has been created by the climate change team at Northumberland County Council and aims to help school staff inspire students, alleviate climate anxiety, and empower them to take action locally.

You can access the resource via northumberlandeducation.co.uk, and there is also a resource pack launch event, via Zoom, on **Monday 9th October 4.15-5.15 pm.**

Holy Trinity Church Matfen - repairs to the spire, clockface and weather vane:

No doubt you have seen that the scaffolding to the tower of the church is gone, and the weather vane is back in place, glistening in the sunshine (when we have any!). Congratulations to Northern Steeplejacks for their work on the spire and the clockface and to Michael Amos of Rusty Restorations in Heddon for his skill in repairing the weather vane, as well as to churchwarden, Struan Wilson, who worked so hard to solve the many problems on the way to such a good conclusion.

The PCC is very grateful for the grants it has been awarded by Northumberland Historic Churches Trust, National Churches Trust and Benefact Trust, as well to Matfen Hall for the very successful Coronation Tea fundraising event and to those who individuals supported us with donations. To date we have raised £36,952.23, including Gift Aid recoverable. However, the total cost is £49,123.20 (net of VAT) which means that the church is still many thousands of pounds short of what’s needed to pay for all the work. Indeed, there’s still a lot of other work needed on the church, so this is just Phase One.





Thank you for the generous donations and grants received so far. The PCC would appreciate any support you feel able to give (whether that be through a donation or promoting the work that is being done and the fundraising campaign). Should you wish to help with the appeal to restore the spire and weather vane, please scan the QR code for the [GiveALittle](https://givealittle.co/campaigns/bd32617d-0384-4e06-8d90-3611e06342ac) page. Or <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/bd32617d-0384-4e06-8d90-3611e06342ac>
Many thanks, Brigid Dennison PCC Treasurer, e.mail: matfenpcc treasurer@gmail.com

History Corner – Sally Urwin writes:

After reading about all the activities being held at Matfen village hall, I thought readers might be interested in the types of clubs, religious groups and societies that have flourished at Matfen over the years. All quotes are from the newspapers of the day.

August 1886 – the Matfen Horticultural Society **Flower Show** was held, “... in the park in front of Matfen Hall by kind permission of Sir Edward Blackett Bart. The weather was glorious and attracted a much larger attendance of visitors than usual to this rather secluded but pretty little village”.

October 1889 – a new **Methodist Sunday School** was officially opened in Matfen Reading room by the Reverend Rowell. He said, “Matfen is a hallowed place to me. There are 13 local preachers in the society who go forward in a wide circuit and preach the Gospel ... lately Matfen had been called the ‘Athens of Methodism’”.

December 1897 – the **Primrose League** (an organisation for spreading conservative principles) had their second annual entertainment in the Matfen Reading Room. “Since last year over 50 new members had been enrolled in the Matfen Ward. The entertainment included the choral delights ‘My home across the sea’ by D. Patterson, ‘Three Brass Balls’ by C Llewellyn and ‘Delaney’s Chicken’ by Mr Forster, whilst Mr T. Black, from the Black Bull in Matfen supplied refreshments in a tasteful manner.”

May 1906 – the meeting of the new “**Matfen Literary Society**” was attended by over 60 ladies and gentlemen. Dr Drury gave a talk on Rome which was “profusely illustrated with lantern slides”, and “in the course of the evening entertainment was provided by the Misses Blackburn, S. Wilkinson, Dr Wilson and Mr Weir.”

October 1907 – the **Wesleyan Temperance Society of Matfen** held a meeting with a “the pointed address ‘Who is Willing’ given by Mrs Common” and finished with “uplifting duets sung by Miss M. Renwick and Mr W. Weir.”



November 1920 – the **Matfen Choral Society** met and sang at the unveiling of the new War Memorial in Matfen. “In the presence of a large gathering a ‘celtic cross’ was erected in a commanding position. It is a memorial, which by its simplicity, will attract attention...and is sufficient proof that Matfen Village played its part in the victory”.

April 1924 – in a meeting of the **Matfen Agricultural Discussion Society** an address was given by Mr Gray from Armstrong College on “‘Pests of Farm and Garden’, with a hearty vote of thanks by Mr W Hogarth of Ryal.”

June 1932 – a meeting of the **Cycling Club** was held at Matfen. “Mr CC Turnbull thanked the President who, he said, took a great interest in the activities, especially the poor children’s trip, which will be held on Saturday.”

And finally ... huge thanks, as ever, to Rev Rachel for distributing the newsletter by email, and to the loyal contributors who always respond with material. The next newsletter will be the pre-Christmas one, around the end of November. Contributions are very welcome, and any comments, suggestions and ideas for future newsletters are always very welcome: get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com