

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 24 - November - December 2023



It seems to have hardly stopped raining in the past few weeks but one of the few compensations has been that, when the sun does occasionally come out, the rich colours of the autumn leaves shine like jewels through the gloom. And glowing red berries in gardens and hedgerows remind us that Christmas isn't too far away.

Newsletter 24 is the last one for 2023, and the pre-Christmas edition. I hope you enjoy it. If you know anyone who would like to be added to the email list, or who would like a paper copy, get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com

The renovations in **Matfen village hall** are complete, and look fantastic. The contractors have done an excellent job, as you can see from the photo. The new facilities will make using the hall much more comfortable and accessible for everyone, and help to make it a great community asset, attracting new hirers and perhaps different uses. Congratulations to all those involved in getting the project to such a satisfactory conclusion.



Regular users are now back in the hall:

Busy fitness expert, **Jo Stichbury**, is in Matfen on Mondays and can be contacted on jostichburyfitness@gmail.com or **07855 247063** for further details of the classes she offers.

Yoga with Ruth is on Wednesday: ruth@namayay.co.uk

Freya Renison-Benn's 65+ exercise class on Thursdays: <https://www.functionalfit.org>

Jill with Pilates is on Fridays: jillie.g@live.co.uk

Andrew and Harry's Karate runs on Fridays from 6-7pm. You can contact Andrew/Harry via Matfen.srka@gmail.com

And the **Christmas Matfen Movie** is coming on **Monday 11th December**, when Matfen Films will be showing '**It's a Wonderful Life**' in the village hall. It's a fabulous Christmas classic and will

hopefully bring some festive spirit to everyone. Please email matfenfilms@gmail.com for tickets - more info soon via facebook and on posters in the village.

The village hall can be hired for private and community 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



Great Whittington and Matfen WI are about to embark on their Christmas programme beginning with a stall at the Christmas Fayre in Great Whittington on Saturday 2nd December, then a Social (with Skiffle group!) in Matfen village hall on the 5th and an evening meal on Tuesday 12th. After that, there's a short break until meetings begin again on **Tuesday February 6th 2024, at 7.30pm in Matfen village hall**, with a talk on 'Female Autism' by Ellie Rose Guillory. New members and visitors are always very welcome - just come along on the night or contact contehjean@gmail.com for more information.

The Community garden: towards winter – notes from Liz Bishop



Autumn blew in with gales and rain. Trees changed their leaf colour after an early frost. Hedgerows along the lanes are carrying bundles of berries, winter food for birds. Chestnut leaves in the community garden will rot down in the cold months and feed the soil.

Excitingly, the large donated pyracantha which lay like a skeleton over summer has sprouted leaves and small flowers, maybe benefitting from the wet weather. Near the memorial wall one of the original rambler roses was weighed down with blossom. Has anyone got spare stakes or a piece of leftover fencing to help hold it up next year?

Seeds in the flower corner have sprouted at different times. Foxgloves which flower every second year may give a display next year.

Plants which made seed heads this year have been left to spread their seeds to flower another year, especially 3 or 4 varieties of poppy.

Welcome offers from villagers tidying and splitting plants in their own gardens will be set in the community garden as time goes on. Sedum, crocosmia lucifer and rudbeckia will each add colour as they settle.

Countryside and gardens rest over winter. Frosts will kill bugs but also prevent water draining from sodden land. Under the soil and leaf blanket, bulbs will prepare to emerge as daylight increases in the new year. Birds benefit from feeders well filled through winter. If you see they need it, please feel free to top up the feeders in the garden, especially when the weather is bleak.

Thank you for your interest during the past year and especially to 25 community members who have contributed and spoken of their pleasure in the garden. The two photos show the garden and surroundings from interesting angles.



The next **Parish Council meeting** is coming up on **Tuesday November 28th** in the village hall, 7-9pm. The meeting is open to all residents of the parish, and you can raise matters of concern to the community. The agenda will appear soon on the PC website: <https://matfenparish.org>

In Newsletter 23, I mentioned an interesting item from the agenda at the last meeting – commemorating the Tornado crash that happened in October 1999 between Ingoe and Kirkheaton. Two young airmen, Flight Lieutenant Richard Ashley Wright and Flight Lieutenant Sean Patrick Casabayo, lost their lives in the disaster. Their deaths have been quietly remembered for many years by two small crosses placed by local farmer John Walby at the T-junction of the Wallridge and Ingoe roads.

A few years ago former Tornado navigator, Martin Wintermeyer, began trying to commemorate airmen killed in crashes round the country. Last year, his attention was drawn to the events of October 14th 1999 in our area. He cycled up from his home in Newcastle in a headwind (I know the feeling!) and met people who remembered the crash, which clearly still had a powerful effect on them. You can see pictures of Martin on that day on the Kirkheaton facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MartinWintermeyer/posts/>



Events have moved on since then and Martin has made more visits to the area – not on his bike, I trust. A decision has been made to site the memorial near the entrance to Mount Huly Farm, off the Belsay to Kirkheaton road. This feels a very fitting spot; it will be accessible to anyone wishing to stop and quietly pay their respects, and it's very near to the crash site, which is between Mount Huly and Tongues Farm in the farmland framed by four minor roads.

The aim is to have the memorial ready for an event next October, the 25th anniversary of the crash – more details in future newsletters as they become available.

Northumberland County Council's monthly email has news of their climate change projects and other community issues, and makes an interesting read. You can get a copy via communications@northumberland.gov.uk.

Here are a few highlights of the latest newsletter:

The new cycling and walking route linking Ponteland to Callerton Metro is almost complete, with the final phase under way, due to be completed by the Spring. It will offer a sustainable way to travel into the centre of Newcastle from Ponteland. Read more on: <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/News/2023/Oct/Final-phase-of-new-cycling-and-walking-route-getti.aspx>

There's a new funding opportunity coming on stream, for sports projects which deliver both environmental and physical benefits – grants of up to £15,000 are available. The funding will go towards projects which support inactive and less active people to get more active, whilst also reducing environmental impacts. Funding is available to a range of voluntary community groups, charities and local authorities. The deadline is March 2024, so time to think about a good application – read more on <https://www.sportengland.org/funds-and-campaigns/our-funds/small-grants>

History Corner – Sally Urwin writes:

I've been chatting to my father-in-law, Geoff Urwin. He's just turned 89 and has lived in Matfen all his life - first at Burnside Farm and then, when he was married, at High House Farm. As it's November I've been asking him whether he remembers anything about WW2 in Matfen. He told me this:



I can't remember the celebrations for the end of the War. I was only 11 and I know there was one, but I can't quite remember the details. I do remember the German Prisoners of War though. They were transported from Throckley PoW camp to various farms around here, to do the heavy work. When they came to our farm my Dad set them on potato picking or cutting wood. I really liked them. There was one I remember called Hans, who was an estate agent back in Germany. I was just a bairn, but I remember him being nice. They liked spending time with us – they must have missed their own families. My Mum always fed them, although she didn't have to, but if she had time, she'd always get them something to eat and in return they used to fetch water for the kitchen from the well. They wore dark trousers and tops, and their overcoat had a yellow patch on the back so people knew they were PoWs. They worked hard, and I remember them cutting huge piles of logs for the house fires and the big farm dryers. They would set the log on a "cuddy" – like a log cradle – and use a double ended saw, one at each end, to make a huge pile of logs. They sang songs as well.

My Dad also employed land girls during the War and I do remember the names of two of them: Monica and Jean Dodds. There was also another one, and she had a wonderful singing voice, and my mother would say, "Come in and sing for us and I'll make you something to eat". So, this lass used to come and stand in front of the fire and sing – she was one of the most beautiful singers I've ever heard. She sang things like "*I'm dreaming of a White Christmas*." She was blonde and very pretty, but I can't remember her name."

Land girls were part of the Women's Land Army, established during the First World War to help increase food production for the war effort. The army was restarted in July 1939, as war was imminent again. By 1944, it had over 80,000 members, the majority of whom already lived in the countryside but more than a third came from London and northern industrial cities. A separate branch was set up in 1942 for forestry industry work, its members were affectionately known as "Lumber Jills".

The land girls' contribution to the war effort was finally recognised in 2008, when a badge of honour was given to each of 45,000 surviving members. And in 2012, Prince Charles unveiled a memorial to the Women's Land Army in both world wars on the Fochabers Estate in Morayshire. In 2014, the Lumber Jills got their memorial, along with the land girls, at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire.

There's a great website about land girls in Northumberland, where you can find out if anyone in your family was involved:



<https://www.womenslandarmy.co.uk/october-snapshot-in-5-northumberland/>

Christmas is coming – and here's the list of the services planned for the local churches:

Sunday 3rd December Advent:

4pm Messy Church at Matfen.

Monday 4th December:

6pm Ryal Advent Carols by Candlelight – this is not our Christmas Carol service but the wonderful and dramatic readings and hymns for advent, a very special service and often well supported. All welcome.

Saturday 16th December

6pm Stamfordham Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 24th December Christmas Eve Advent 4 (No Morning Services):

5pm Ryal Christingle and Crib; 7pm Matfen Christmas Night Mass

Monday 25th Christmas Day

10.30am Stamfordham Holy Communion

... and here's a way of supporting the Church when you do your Christmas shopping:

Your Christmas shopping could help Matfen, Ryal and Stamfordham churches raise free donations from easyfundraising. Upper Pont Churches are registered with easyfundraising, which means you can help us for FREE. Over 7,000 brands will donate to us when you use easyfundraising to shop with them – at no extra cost to yourself! All you need to do is sign up and remember to use easyfundraising whenever you shop online. It's easy and completely FREE! These donations really mount up, so please sign up to support us at [https://](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/upperpontchurches/?utm_campaign=raise-more&utm_content=en-n1)

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/upperpontchurches/?utm_campaign=raise-more&utm_content=en-n1



And finally ... huge thanks, as ever, to Rev Rachel for distributing the newsletter by email, and to all the loyal contributors. The next newsletter will be in January. Contributions are very welcome, and any comments, suggestions and ideas for future newsletters are always very welcome: get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com

Have a relaxed and happy Christmas!