

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 26 - March - April 2024



Easter is almost upon us, and we seem to be moving slowly from Winter to Spring – welcome to Newsletter number 26, and a particular welcome to new contributor, **Alan Todd**. There's no History Corner this time as Sally Urwin, a local farmer as well as author, is working all hours at lambing, but no doubt she'll be back for Newsletter 27.

Kaye Forster-Hill, our reader in New Zealand whose ancestors came from Matfen, sent some interesting feedback after the last newsletter:

I do enjoy reading about Matfen and district and the activities of your village. The garden info and photos is always interesting, particularly because you are in the opposite season to us in New Zealand, and I enjoy the History Corner. Reading Sally Urwin's piece about her elderly father-in-law was a revelation. I had heard about "first footing" on New Year's Eve but, if the custom was carried on by our early Colonists, it did not stand the test of time in this country. I certainly have not known of it happening here in my 72 years.

If you have any comments or feedback, please pass them on, and if you know of anyone who would like to be added to the email list, or who would like a paper copy, please get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com. Happy reading!

Matfen village hall continues as a busy community space in the centre of the village. It can be hired by individuals, community groups or anyone wishing to start a regular activity. Find out more, and make a booking by email: matfenvillage@gmail.com or phone: **07817 375237** or get in touch via the website at: www.northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/matfen-village-hall

There's lots of exciting news from **Matfen Karate Club**. The class continues to be busy and there were 9 successful students at our latest grading on March 3rd – well done everyone!

Even more exciting, Seikenryu's annual sparring competition, *War On The Floor*, took place at a sold-out Queen's Hall in Hexham a couple of weeks ago. Sensei Harry was part of the victorious red team as was the very brave Neil Tait who has only recently started training with us. A massive 'well done' to them and to Chris and Evan from our Stamfordham class!

The club is always delighted to welcome new members. The class is on every Friday at 6pm at the village hall – just turn up, or you can contact Andrew/Harry via Matfen.srka@gmail.com



Fitness expert, **Jo Stichbury**, runs two popular classes in Matfen on Mondays; **Feel Good Pilates at 8.45** and **Legs, Bums and Tums at 9.30**. She also runs classes in Dalton, Ovingham and Newton and Bywell, and can be contacted on jostichburyfitness@gmail.com or **07855 247063** for further details.

After it closed as a school in 1972, the village hall served for a time as the local **Post Office**, which itself closed a few years ago. Now, the Post Office van visits every Wednesday afternoon, providing full PO services. Of course, the continuation of the service depends on how many customers use it. The van is in Matfen from 2.45pm - 4.45pm on Wednesdays. Try to use it when you can, and try to get there by 4.30 as the driver has to get back to Stocksfield before the main PO closes.



Great Whittington and Matfen WI have enjoyed several meetings in Matfen over the winter months, and are now heading off to Great Whittington for the summer programme. This begins with the AGM, followed by a Quiz, on **Tuesday April 2nd at 7.30pm**. The group also have regular walks, lunches and trips out to places of interest. 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: Liz Bishop looks forward to Spring

This past wet and wearying winter must surely be at an end. The odd sunny, even warm, day is so welcome. It is cheering to hear hedgerow birds and see skeins of geese, calling as they fly high in the sky.

Brown bin collection has restarted and last season's trimmings have been removed for council composting. Prepared, bagged compost is available to buy at council recycling centres.

In the community garden, the compost heap in the corner is now as high as the log pile. It contains mostly hedge trimmings at present, but as more dead leaves and green litter get added, and with warmer weather, rotting will speed up. That will reduce the height of the heap ready for more additions. Around the heap, there are various grass types, and in the weeks ahead, there'll be wild garlic plants – ransomes – leaves and flowers.

In the top corner of the garden, rosettes of leaves promise

flowers. The leaves suggest there'll be primroses or maybe cowslips – watch for them flowering. The bigger leaf groups are foxgloves, which flower only in their second year. But they are also good seed spreaders so will be around in years to come. And there is an aquilegia, which will also cast seeds later in summer.



Down by the water, large daffodils, planted some years back, are no longer producing flowers. Similarly daffodils along the village green and walls have gone 'blind'. After Easter, it would be good to have a working party to lift those clumps, tease the bulbs apart gently and reset them in the ground.

In hopes of better weather, spring and summer warmth, and longer hours of daylight, expect to see more in the garden this year as last year's plants grow. And, as ever, any plants no longer wanted in your own gardens can be given a new home.



Our new contributor is local bird expert, **Alan Todd**, and I'm grateful to Alan for keeping us right on our birds. The picture of swifts that I used in Newsletter 25 (thanks to the internet) and in previous newsletters actually showed Alpine Swifts, with their white chests, not the **Common Swifts**, which are our seasonal visitors. If Alpine Swifts did turn up round here, it would cause a stampede of bird watchers!

Common Swifts are plain brown, and here's a photo of one leaving a nest site in Elsdon – thanks to Alan Jack for this amazing image.



Alan Todd knows the landscape round Matfen better than most of us – here's what he's noticed recently in the wetland areas round the golf course:



To a golfer's despair, a wayward drive can appear attracted to ponds or waterways. Whether playing, walking, or 'at the 19th'; a closer inspection reveals Matfen's water hazards lure birdlife, too!

At Douglas Pond: Mute Swan, Mallard, Moorhen, Little Grebe, Greylag and Canada Geese find year-round sanctuary; whereas Goldeneye, Coot, Cormorant, even Wigeon, spend part of the Winter. In Summer; Swallow, Sand and House Martin hawk overhead for recently emerged insects.

And at Dewlaw or Standing Stone, a pensive Grey Heron may lift from the reed-edged Pont; and an electric-blue flash discloses an elusive Common Kingfisher.

The photo shows a male Wigeon – two have been seen in the area in the past month.

Matfen Cricket Club - Women's Softball Cricket

Sessions are starting up again from **19th April, on Fridays from 6-7pm**. This will be the 4th year together for the women's squad at Matfen, and they're always keen to welcome complete beginners, so please get in touch if you'd like to know more.



Softball cricket is played with a SOFT ball and all the kit is provided. As well as training, there are opportunities to go 'on tour' in Northumberland, to play in fun festivals or in league matches.

If you fancy the idea of learning a new sport and the camaraderie it brings, then come and give it a go! Please contact Lisa on 07484777494 for further details, or leave a message on the village facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/matfenvillage/>

News from Parish and County Councils

The next **Matfen Parish Council meeting** will be held on **Tuesday March 26th** in the **village hall, 7pm - 9pm**. As ever, the meeting is open to all residents of the parish, and there is an opportunity to raise matters of concern to the community. The agenda will appear soon on the PC website: <https://matfenparish.org>

Community Action Northumberland - Warmer Homes Grants

As part of the Government's sustainable warmth strategy, The **Home Upgrade Grant 2 (HUG) scheme** is now open for applications.

The County Council's Warmer Homes Team is encouraging residents to apply for fully-funded energy upgrades. If your home does not have a mains gas connection, or you only have a gas cooker and another energy source for heating, you may be eligible to apply for this scheme. Eligible residents could access a range of energy-saving improvements to their homes, including:



- floor, loft and wall insulation
- carbon heat systems such as air source heat pumps and heating controls
- solar panels

An assessment will be completed for your property, and the assessor will create an energy-saving plan tailored to your home.

To be considered, you need to complete an application form, available at https://form.northumberland.gov.uk/form/auto/warm_homes_fund or email warmehomes@northumberland.gov.uk





You may remember information in Newsletter numbers 23 and 24 about the tragic Tornado crash that happened on farmland near Kirkheaton in 1999. **FltLt Dicky Wight** and **FltLt Sean Casabayo**, were both killed in the accident.



Retired Tornado navigator Martin Wintermeyer has been working on a plan to erect a memorial to them close to the crash site, and his aim is to hold an event to install the memorial on **Monday October 14th 2024**, the 25th anniversary of the crash. He's opened a Go Fund Me page for donations to the project: <https://www.gofundme.com/manage/jsy9ra/edit>

The goal is to raise up to £25,000 to install and maintain the memorial, and remember the two young airmen appropriately.

If you'd like to attend the event, you can express interest via <https://forms.office.com/e/aUZrMsPYqL>. There's also a Facebook page for pictures and memories: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556635486374>

Easter Week in the local Churches

The traditional, busy round of services for Easter Week begins on Palm Sunday, 24th March and ends with the Easter Day service and celebrations on Sunday March 31st.

Here are details of all the services:



Palm Sunday, March 24th: 9am Morning Prayer in Matfen
10.30am Holy Communion in Heddon
10.30am Morning Prayer in Stamfordham
4.30pm Holy Communion in Stamfordham

Maundy Thursday, March 28th: 4pm Holy Communion in Heddon
6pm Holy Communion in Stamfordham

both services include foot washing for those who wish to (usually only a small number take part in this symbolic act) and are followed by stripping of the altar.

Good Friday, March 29th: 10am in Heddon
11.30am Church on the Green, Stamfordham

Easter Saturday, March 30th: 7pm Easter Vigil, beginning in Matfen village hall, moving to the bonfire outside the church and then into the church for the stations of the Resurrection.

This is the beginning of the Easter celebrations and welcoming the Easter light into the church

Easter Day, Sunday March 31st: 9am Matfen
10.30am Heddon
10.30am Stamfordham

Happy Easter ... There will be Easter chocolates!

And finally ... many thanks, as ever, to Rev Rachel for distributing the newsletter by email, to all the loyal contributors and our new contributor. Comments, suggestions and ideas for future newsletters are always very welcome: get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com The next newsletter will be in May.