

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 27 - May - June 2024



Welcome to Newsletter number 27, and many thanks to the loyal group of regular contributors. There's always space for more, so get in touch if you'd like to offer something, via contehjean@gmail.com. Happy reading!

This photo of the river Pont at Dewlaw, taken in mid-April, is a reminder of the tumultuous amounts of rain we had this year as winter turned into spring. At the time, it seemed as if the rain would never end, but the floods were quickly gone and the occasional days of sunshine we have had in the past few weeks have meant that we've been enjoying colourful displays of wild flowers and grasses in the

roadside verges, including the bluebells, which are my favourite and which this year seem to have been much more plentiful than usual. Their flashes of blue on the verges and among trees in almost every patch of woodland are always a source of delight.

At this time of year, the verges in our area can be really beautiful, but their maintenance can be a source of debate. PC Chair **Sarah Greaves** has written a piece for the newsletter hoping to encourage people to contribute to the County Council's ongoing review of grounds maintenance.



Matfen village hall is a well-resourced community space in the centre of the village. It can be hired by individuals, community groups or anyone wishing to start a regular activity. You can 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

One of the longest-standing regular hall users, **Matfen Karate Club**, continues to thrive, with a good mixed-age group of members, from younger members up to retired members who still like to train hard. The club always welcomes new participants, and it's very good value for family members, the more of you there are the better value it is.



The first inter-club competition of the year has just taken place at Prudhoe West First School on Sunday 19th of May and there was a good turnout of our members – fingers crossed that there'll be a photo of trophy winners in the next newsletter!

The club meets every Friday at 6pm at Matfen village hall, no need to book, just turn up and enjoy! You can contact Andrew/Harry via Matfen.srka@gmail.com

Fitness expert, **Jo Stichbury**, is another hall regular. She runs two popular classes on Mondays; **Feel Good Pilates** at 8.45 and **Legs, Bums and Tums** at 9.30. Jo can be contacted on **07855 247063** or jostichburyfitness@gmail.com for further details.

Great Whittington and Matfen WI are still going strong, with 24 members registered for 2024-2025. Meetings take place in Great Whittington over the summer months, and the next one will be on **Tuesday June 4th in Great Whittington village hall, 7.30pm**. The speaker will be Alan Hiscox from the British Horse Society talking about **My Life with Horses**. Alex heads the 'dead slow' campaign for the British Horse Society and is a former mounted police officer. New members and visitors are always welcome – just turn up on the night or contact contehjean@gmail.com for more information.

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INSPIRING WOMEN

Were you at the **Matfen School Reunion** last year? By all accounts, it was a great success, with 26 former pupils, some with their better halves, meeting in the Coffee Shop for a good gossip. So the organiser, **Betty Renwick**, is planning another one this year. It's on **Friday July 19th, 3-5pm in Matfen Store and Coffee Shop**. Please let Betty know before July 10th if you wish to attend –

01661 824095 or b.renwick108@btinternet.com



Exciting news – **Matfen Fete** is back for the first time since 2018, thanks to Revd Rachel. It will be on **Saturday 13th July, from 1pm**, and volunteers are needed to help in all sorts of ways, from setting up on 12th July in the early evening and 13th July in the morning, to packing up after 4pm on the 13th. Other tasks include:

- helping with teas, coffees and refreshments
- baking for both the cake stall and also for the refreshments
- helping out for part of the time on a stall eg. a fete game or raffle

If you would like to set up a stall yourself, pitches are available for £15. Let Revd Rachel know if you'd like to get involved in any way: whatsapp **07916 681128**, and check out the dedicated Fete Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559126439505>

All proceeds will go towards the church funds.

The Community garden: notes from Liz Bishop

Yellow gorse and dandelions along the Ingoe road reflect recent sunshine. Traditionally, dandelions were picked on St George's Day for making dandelion wine. This flush of flower may indicate a slow start to Spring. Farmers have been resowing great patches of fields washed out by the winter rains.

On Matfen village green, the rowan tree planted to mark the King's coronation is carrying 9 blossom heads. Some sunshine, insects busy when the flowers open and there should be colourful berries come autumn. The late Queen's Jubilee chestnut leaves have burst open shedding sticky scales over the community garden surface.

Cowslips in the top garden corner are almost over and will be spreading more seed for next year's flowering. Around them, a carpet of small seedlings promises different flowers and colours as summer arrives. Nearer the seat, bright tulips and blue grape hyacinths lead the eye towards tiny blue brunnera flowers and bluebells near the side hedge.

Some donated spring prunings of geranium and heuchera have been tucked into the soil. Like so many of our donated plants they continue to look lively and should produce pink and coral flower colours in time. The sedum heads which stood through winter were tidied away and the plants are producing new leaves and bushing. One of these was planted by a very young lad with his mother two seasons ago. That young boy sat with his grandad on the bench recently, enjoying the peace and colours in the garden.



Spring birding along Millers Lane - Alan Todd



Millers Lane, just south of Dewlaw, is a favourite birding site. From late March, our first spring migrants are in song: 'onomatopoeic' Chiffchaffs, then 'melancholic' Willow Warblers and 'fluty' Blackcaps set up territories in a mixed plantation, joining resident Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Dunnock and Wren. Here, woodland management occasionally provides sparser canopy cover, attracting Tree Pipit. Nearby, a conifer strip holds diminutive Goldcrest, Siskin, and various Tit species. Towards Whittington Mill there's other songbirds: Redstart at Ash, Yellowhammer and Whitethroat on hedgerow and Reed Bunting from rushy pasture. Later soon after dusk, a Tawny Owl 'hoots', before shifting 'squeaks' and 'grunts' overhead reveals a silhouetted Woodcock in fading light. **The photo is of a male Redstart © Alan S Jack**

Memorial for Tornado Crash Victims – a message from Martin Wuntermeyer

Dicky Wright and Sean Casabayo came down in their Tornado jet near Kirkheaton in 1999, and plans are progressing well for the memorial event on 14 October 2024. But engagement has been quite slow so far. You can find all information at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/jsy9ra> Please do let Martin know if you intend to come along – contact details on the gofundme page.



News from Parish and County Councils

The next **Matfen Parish Council meeting** will be held on **Tuesday May 28th** in the **village hall, 7pm - 9pm**. The agenda will appear soon on the PC website: <https://matfenparish.org>. The meeting, as usual, is open to all residents of the parish, and there will be an opportunity for anyone to raise matters of concern to the community.

One matter that may be of current concern is the condition of our roadside verges, and PC Chair, **Sarah Greaves**, has written a short piece setting out the issues:

The Controversial Issue of Roadside Verges

At this time of year, hedgerows and roadside verges can look absolutely beautiful, if managed sensitively.

And they're not just beautiful – carefully maintained verges can make a huge contribution to biodiversity and the well being of pollinators and other insects, all crucial to sustain our Northumbrian wildlife.

A welcome development is that the County Council is about to start a grounds maintenance review which will look at their approach to cutting grass and maintaining hedges and other vegetation in order to explore ways to increase biodiversity net gain in the county. This is a two-year process and is linked to

the government's environmental improvement targets. A vital element of this process is engagement with key stakeholders (such as Town and Parish Councils) and residents to test principles of the process to help us plan our future approach.

Would you be interested in contributing to this review? I would like to get as many thoughts and opinions together as possible so we can all help the council develop the best possible strategy, one that takes into account all the varying factors - including of course, road safety, and our countryside looking cared for and well maintained. If so, please email me: sarah.a.greaves@gmail.com

Highlights from the County Council's monthly Climate Change update:

For the Council's wildlife rangers on the **Space for Shorebirds** team, spring is a busy time of year. Last year saw a great team effort of volunteers, residents and landowners all supporting a record number of shore nesting birds. Ringed plover is the most widespread beach nesting bird on the Northumberland coast, where they lay their eggs directly onto sand and shingle. They are a species in serious decline and are red listed as a species of conservation concern, and so it is especially important that they are protected. Senior Wildlife Ranger Richard Willis writes:

Ringed plover chicks are amazing, tiny little balls of fluff that find their own food from the moment they hatch, so as you can imagine this makes them vulnerable to predation and also trampling by people. The Space for Shorebirds team create small fenced refuges where they can safely nest and we ask everyone to help the chicks by giving these areas lots of space, especially if a dog is present ... we've been blown away by the level of support we've had – people do understand about the fragility of a little nest on a beach.

It will be a very challenging breeding season for beach nesting birds because of the exceptional storms and spring tides that have changed the beaches, losing height in key areas means space for nesting is more restricted than ever.

If you would like to know more about the shorebird nesting season on the coast please visit **Space for Shorebirds** or follow the team on social media at **Facebook, Instagram or X**



Affordable Housing is a matter of concern in our local area – some thoughts on the issues from Rural Service network's chief executive Kerry Booth:



Affordable housing is crucial for maintaining local support networks and community ties, especially for younger residents and those with deep-rooted connections. The shortage challenges rural businesses in retaining essential workers and impedes the recruitment of key professionals like healthcare workers and educators. Moreover, the prevalence of older, inefficient properties in rural areas exacerbates health risks, underscoring the need for immediate housing improvements.

Kerry concludes with a message for the next government:

Ultimately, we need a political party that embraces the 10 million residents living in rural England, and commits to design policy to suit their needs, only then will our rural communities thrive.



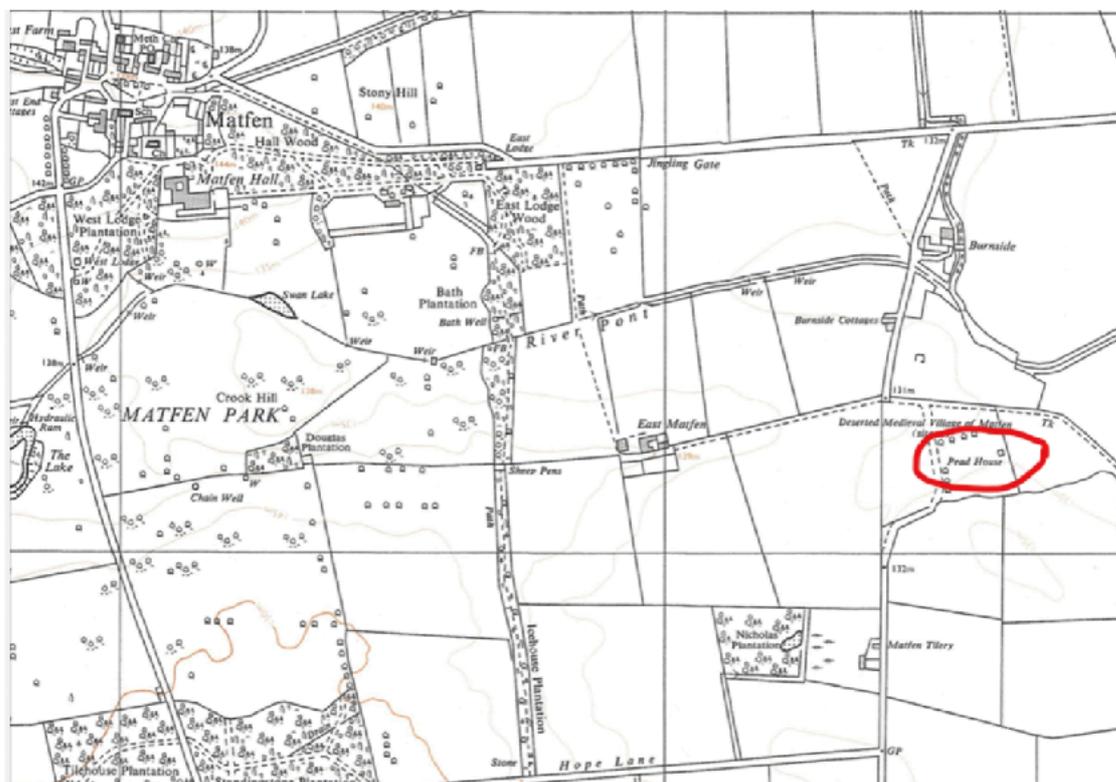
You can read the full essay, and the others in the collection, via this link:

Rural Affordable Housing – Understanding Rural Needs

If you or your organisation is interested in seeing rural affordable homes developed in our local community CAN's Rural Housing Enabler is here to help. Contact them by email at: info@ca-north.org.uk

History Corner – a conundrum from Sally Urwin

I'm the sort of person that loves to scour old maps investigating the local landscape. A while ago I spotted a building called "Pead House" on maps from 1845 and 1868. It's situated in the old Medieval village of East Matfen (that was cleared of inhabitants in the mid-to late 17th century). You can still see the remnants of the old building. Historic England notes that *"The ruined remains of Pead House at the centre of the south row of the village indicate that at least one of the original medieval plots continued in use into the post-medieval period."* But I can't find anything explaining the name or how long it's been abandoned. I've checked the censuses and newspaper archives. I know "Pead" is a surname, but apart from that I've drawn a blank. Or maybe I'm missing something obvious – is the name a misspelling? Here's a snippet of the old map with the location ringed in red. If anyone has ever heard anything mentioned about it, I'd love to know.



And finally ... many thanks, as ever, to Revd Rachel for distributing the newsletter by email. Comments, suggestions and ideas for future newsletters are always very welcome, and if you know of anyone who would like to be added to the email list, or would like a paper copy, get in touch via contehjean@gmail.com The next newsletter will be in July.