



# MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

## No. 30 - November - December 2024



Welcome to the 2024 pre-Christmas edition of the newsletter! It's a 5-page edition this time, with information about what's going on in the community over the Christmas period, including all the church services and other events.

As well as the regular contributions, there are a couple of interesting pieces from readers. The first is from our regular reader, Kaye Forster-Hill, whose ancestral family lived in the Matfen area. Her paternal grandfather, Robert William Thomas Forster, emigrated to Hamilton, New Zealand in 1911 where Kaye lives today. The second was written by Olga Samusieva, from Ukraine. Olga and her family have lived in Matfen for the past two years, arriving as refugees from the war in their country. Both pieces are warm and engaging, and Olga's, in particular, is very moving. It reminds us that behind all the depressing news of seemingly endless conflicts round the world, there are individuals and families with the same feelings and desires as the rest of us.

Thanks go, as ever, to all the regular contributors - there's always space for more! Get in touch if you'd like to offer something, via [contehjean@gmail.com](mailto:contehjean@gmail.com). Happy reading!

**Matfen village hall** is home to many community activities and events, and individuals and groups can book it by email: [matfenvillage@gmail.com](mailto:matfenvillage@gmail.com) or phone: **07817 375237** or via the website at: [www.northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/matfen-village-hall](http://www.northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/matfen-village-hall) Here's some of what has been going on in the past few weeks:

**Matfen Karate Club** is pleased to report that several students were successful in November's grading, which took place in Stannington, where the club also has a class. New belts were awarded at several grades and it was great to see that the Tait family all got new belts, Abigail now achieving a senior grade, 3rd Kyu brown belt.



We've had some new members join recently and are always happy to see new folk of all ages, we train **every Friday at Matfen village hall from 6-7 pm**. You can contact Andrew/Harry via [Matfen.srka@gmail.com](mailto:Matfen.srka@gmail.com)

There's also **Body Flow and Fitness** with Jo Stichbury on Mondays from 9.30-11am: [jostichburyfitness@gmail.com](mailto:jostichburyfitness@gmail.com)

**Pilates** with Jill on Wednesdays from 9.30-11am and Fridays from 1-2.30pm: [jillie.g@live.co.uk](mailto:jillie.g@live.co.uk)

and **Yoga** with Ruth on Wednesdays from 6-7pm: [ruth@namayay.co.uk](mailto:ruth@namayay.co.uk)

The new **Matfen Book Club** is going strong, meeting in the hall every six weeks or so to share ideas on an interesting and eclectic list of books chosen by members of the group. The third meeting took place last Thursday, with a discussion of 'On Chapel Sands' by Laura Cumming. The next meeting will be on **Thursday January 9th**, when '**Trespasses**' by **Louise Kennedy** will be the book of the day. If you would like to join the group, please read along and come in January to share your thoughts. If you would like a full list of the books the club will be discussing over the next few months, contact Jenny Osborne via email – no obligation to read every book or attend every meeting, and everyone will be made very welcome: **Jenny Osborne: [jennyosborne196@gmail.com](mailto:jennyosborne196@gmail.com)**





**Great Whittington and Matfen WI** are having a Christmas social in the hall on December 3rd, then taking their usual winter break in January. The first meeting of 2025 is in **February, Tuesday 4th, at 7.30pm** in **Matfen village hall**. As well as regular meetings, there are lunches, walks, outings and even a book club. New members and visitors are always very welcome – please contact [contehjean@gmail.com](mailto:contehjean@gmail.com) for more information.

**Year's End in the Community garden – notes from Liz Bishop**

Christmas is coming - leaves carpet the ground.  
 Is the garden decorated? Have a look around.  
 Snow berries in the hedges, golden crabs on an apple tree,  
 Red hips on thorny roses, Christmas colours plain to see.



Leafless twigs make a tracery across our skies similar to frost patterns on windows. There is a bronze carpet of chestnut leaves which will feed the soil and protect smaller plants from frosts. Autumn tidying added to the compost heap and also adds warmth in lower layers. A neighbourhood cat checks the scents – are there small creatures inside enjoying warmth during chilly days? One small creature certainly enjoyed a feast on a late, large strawberry.

Many plants die down during the coldest months. Some continue to bloom late into the year. Sedums, the ice plant, hold up their pink heads of many tiny flowers. Cowslips have made a second blooming – will they flower again next Spring? A vibrant scarlet Hesperantha, autumn flowering native of South Africa, made a cheerful display late into the year.

Many more plants have been added around the garden this year. Look out for orange clusters of fox and cubs plants and more geraniums of various colours. Tall iris may take another season to settle but Spring will bring faithful snowdrops, whatever the winter weather. Thanks to all, our garden is filling for the future. Best wishes for 2025.



**Winter in the bird world – Alan Todd**

After suggesting to look for 'grey' geese in the last newsletter, my first skein, Greylags, eventually appeared on the 4th November, followed by Pink-footed on the 11th! Wintering Thrushes, Redwing and



Fieldfare, also arrived over the same period - weeks later than usual. Was migration delayed by milder weather? Nevertheless, Grey Partridge coveys (population recovery or released?) were occasionally sighted. Golden Plover and Lapwing settled near Kearsley for a few days, with about 30 Teal at a nearby pond. But all proved elusive once icy conditions set in. A Little Egret dropped in at the village green, golf course, and at Whittington Bog. Widespread at coastal sites in recent years, and now more frequent inland, if you see one, try to spot its yellow feet!



**Thanks to Peter Parker for the Fieldfare and Redwing photos**





## News from Parish and County Councils

The latest **Matfen Parish Council meeting** was held on November 26th, in the village hall. The draft minutes will appear soon on the PC website: <https://matfen-pc.gov.uk/> There was initial discussion of the idea of developing a Neighbourhood Plan, and if this is of interest to you, look out for further information and maybe think about attending future PC meetings.

**A couple of highlights from the County Council's monthly Climate Change update (you can join the mailing list by emailing [climate@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:climate@northumberland.gov.uk)):**



There's a call for volunteers to become 'digital champions to support people in rural Northumberland to get online and take advantage of digital technology. This project is being run by the National Innovation for Rural Enterprise (NICRE), who will train volunteers to offer drop-in support from village halls and other community spaces and to work with local businesses and community groups. This sounds like a great opportunity for young people with time to spare – you can find out more via <https://nicre.co.uk/projects/partnership-projects/rural-digital-inclusion-project/>

**Farmers** have been in the news recently, and sometimes not for the most positive reasons. As an antidote, there's an event at **The Sill, Twice Brewed, on Saturday 7th December beginning at 2pm.** It's about Regenerative Farming, which is all about reducing the use of chemicals and working with nature. The event will include a panel discussion with local farmers and a screening of the film *Common Ground*, made by Netflix. Tickets are free and can be obtained from the Sill website: <https://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/whats-on/regenerative-farming-up-north-panel-discussion-7th-december/>



## Memorial to RAF Tornado pilots, Sean and Dicky – 14th October



It was a privilege to attend the memorial event, which marked the 25th anniversary of the Tornado crash that killed Sean Casabayo and Dickie Wright when they lost control of their plane in bad weather and crashed into farmland near Kirkheaton in 1999.

It was a beautiful, cold and clear morning and the quiet road between Kirkheaton and west Belsay was transformed for a short while into a parade ground as immaculate RAF squadrons presented their standards to the Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland and local church representatives led a brief act of worship, supported by a small military band and watched by a group of local dignitaries and residents. There

was a minute's silence, and then, at the exact time of the crash, a single Tornado flew over, inspiring awe and scattering the cows in the field with its noise.

There is a simple, dignified stone memorial at the gates of Mount Huly farm, the nearest accessible spot to the crash, where you can pause and ponder for a while, of the two young men who lost their lives nearby, and also of the reasons why the armed forces need to maintain their presence and standards of expertise in the world we live in today.

**Olga Samusieva had to leave her homeland, Ukraine, with her family when it was invaded by Russia. She has lived in Matfen for almost two years with her husband and three children, and she has written this reflection on life in England for the newsletter.**



When we arrived in England, we were overwhelmed with stress after everything we had been through. We stayed with our sponsors, Charlie and Kate Hoults. They were truly sent from above to help our family. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart, again and again. I couldn't believe how English people could invite strangers into their homes, without knowing who we were! I thought to myself, could I do the same? I'm not sure... English people show so much kindness and warmth, while still keeping their boundaries. Honestly, I don't feel a big difference between our mentalities. Everything felt so similar, and from the first days, I didn't feel like a stranger. Of course, everyone's experience is different, but that's how it was for us.





The main difference between us, perhaps, is that we Ukrainians tend to be more persistent, emotional, and sometimes impatient. Our land has given us energy, boldness, and a strong inner freedom, which we are always ready to defend. Ukraine is a modern country, with advanced technology and rich lands. We Ukrainians, are all different, but we share a spirit of victory.



Since childhood, I've felt the energy of places and people, and here in England, especially after the stress, my senses seemed to sharpen. To me, English people symbolize spirituality and love. I realized that Hexham is truly a town of love. Believe me, Northumberland is a place where peace has been preserved, while the world is filled with aggression.

I was in London in 2010 to take my insurance broker exams and I felt a sense of tension there. Here, the energy is completely different—much calmer and, I would say, softer. Perhaps that's something that's more common in the north of England.

Matfen is a place of tranquility, where the mind, body, and soul come together, and you feel restored. I believe someone guided us from above, as living in the Blackett family's house has truly been a gift of fate, for which I will always feel gratitude. Our sincere thanks go to Sir Hugh and Anna for welcoming us into their home and giving us the chance to rent it. And when when our local 'Big Ben' in Holy Trinity Church began to ring again, I made a wish for peace to come and for everyone to live well.

This house, the tree planted for King Charles' coronation, the picnics, and Matfen Hall will always remind us of the great support the Matfen

community has given to Ukrainians. People are different and perhaps not everyone has accepted us, but I would love to thank everyone, regardless of opinions or experiences.

I've recently become a blogger about England (in English). If anyone is interested in AI technologies, local history, self-development, or the energy of places, feel free to visit my Instagram blog: [@olhasamus](#)

### ***Christmas in New Zealand - Kaye Forster-Hill***

Although there are many similarities, Christmas is different in New Zealand, with December being the start of our summer. The coastal Pohutukawa trees are usually showing their red blossoms and have come to be called the New Zealand Christmas tree. But the Christmas trees we decorate in our homes are likely to be modern, artificial trees or a branch of young Radiata pine, which is very different from northern conifers – not so many spruces or firs are found here.

Some folk indulge in the traditional British-style Christmas dinner, while many people enjoy BBQ meals of meat and salads, followed by cold desserts like pavlova, trifle, fruit salad, ambrosia and ice-cream. Personally, I enjoy staying the night of Christmas Eve with my children and grandchildren on the other side of our city of Hamilton. After dinner, when twilight falls at about 9pm, we go for a wander along their street which is well-known for its house decorations.



Once back home, we get the two excited children off to bed with the warning that Santa may not come if they do not go to sleep right away.

On Christmas morning, they wake us at about 6am to share in the fun of checking their bulging Christmas stockings. So some things will always be the same.





**History Corner - Sally Urwin found some interesting snippets in the local press of Christmas in days gone by**

**From The Newcastle Courant, Tuesday 3rd January 1832:**

Christmas Benefactions: On Christmas Eve, Sir Edward Blackett, Bart., of Matfen, with his usual liberality, distributed a large quantity of beef and loaves to 46 poor families in the village of Matfen, and the surrounding neighbourhood; he has also presented many of them with coats, stockings, clogs, etc. Her Ladyship has also inquired into the necessities of the people and presented a number of them with warm stuff gowns, stockings, clogs, etc.



**From The Hexham Courant Saturday 8th December 1907:**

On Christmas Eve the Hon. Lady Blackett. entertained the school children and their mothers and other friends to a splendid tea in the Reading Room. After doing ample justice to the good things provided, all retired to the schoolroom where a magnificent Christmas tree, beautifully decorated and loaded with many nice presents was set up. Her ladyship distributed the presents to the children and also made a present to all the others. Songs and carols were sung by the children during the evening, and at the close the Rev. W. S. Wrenford asked that three hearty cheers be given to Lady Blackett for providing such a splendid treat and so many handsome presents. This was enthusiastically responded to.



**Christmas services in our local churches**

Christmas is already underway in the churches, with the traditional Advent service, which was celebrated in Ryal Church on the 2nd.

Here are the details of all the services that are coming up over the Christmas season:



**Carols by candlelight, St. Mary's Church, Stamfordham, Saturday December 21st, 6pm**

**Christmas Family Service, Ryal Church, Tuesday December 24th, 5pm**

**Christmas Night Mass, Holy Trinity Church, Matfen, Tuesday December 24th, 7pm**

**Christmas Day Holy Communion, St Mary's Church, Stamfordham, Wednesday 25th December, 10.30am**

**And there's also a Christmas Service for Stamfordham Primary School in St Mary's Church on December 16th at 9.30am, with coffee beforehand so that those dropping children off in school can go straight over to the church**



**And finally ...** many thanks to Revd Rachel for distributing the newsletter by email, as usual. Any comments, suggestions and ideas for future newsletters are always very welcome: get in touch via [contehjean@gmail.com](mailto:contehjean@gmail.com) And if you know of anyone who would like to be added to the email list, or who would like a paper copy, please let me know. The next newsletter will be in January 2025

*Have a very peaceful and happy Christmas!*

