

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 31 – January - February 2025



Welcome to Newsletter no. 31 and a belated Happy New Year! Despite the fact that we still have quite a long way to go before the end of winter, there's already beginning to be a bit more light at the start and end of the day, and the green and white spears of snowdrops are beginning to show through the earth. I started putting the newsletter together on 'Blue Monday', January 20th, which is meant to be the most miserable day of the year – it may just be a coincidence that there was also a presidential inauguration going on elsewhere! But I hope that reading the newsletter will help to cheer you up and show that there are lots of things to be happy and hopeful about. If you're a fan of the late Michael Mosely and his Radio 4 programme 'Just one thing', you may have heard the recent repeat of the one talking about how doing someone else a kindness is one of the best ways to make you feel better yourself. That feels like a positive idea and something well worth a try.

There's an intriguing piece about new beginnings from Olga Samusieva, who gave us a lovely reflection on her time in Matfen in the last newsletter. Thanks to her and to all the regular contributors to the newsletter. There's always space for more, so get in touch if you'd like to offer something, via contehjean@gmail.com. Happy reading.

Matfen village hall is home to many community activities and events, and individuals and groups can book it in one of these ways:

- emailing: matfenvillage@gmail.com
- phoning: **07817 375237**
- via the website at: www.northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/matfen-village-hall

The hall's Annual General Meeting is just around the corner, and everyone is warmly invited to attend. Whether you're a regular user of the hall, new to the village or just curious about what's going on, the trustees would love to see you there:

Matfen Village Hall AGM

Sunday, 2nd February

6:00 PM

Matfen Village Hall



This is your opportunity to:

- Hear about what's been happening at the village hall over the past year.
- Share your ideas and feedback on how we can improve and grow.
- Get involved with future plans and events.
- Meet fellow villagers and contribute to the heart of our community.

Currently, the trustees are eager to find a new **treasurer**, so if that's something you feel you could do, get in touch on the phone number or email above. No qualifications are needed, but if you have experience of keeping track of accounts, that would be very helpful. Also, if there are any specific topics you'd like raised at the AGM, please get in touch ahead of time so they can be included in the agenda.

First meeting of 2025 for Great Whittington and Matfen WI:

Tuesday February 4th, beginning at 7.30pm. As usual, there will be a talk and also plenty of time for refreshments and conversation. The talk this month is about an incident that happened near Otterburn in the 1930s, which still raises feelings and gets people talking. It involved a local woman called Evelyn Foster, who was found one cold January night seriously burned on the moor. She later died of her injuries – was she murdered, or was it a suicide attempt? Come and find out more: visitors and new members are always welcome, small donations on the night are happily received. The WI also does lunches, walks, theatre trips and outings. To find out more, contact contehjean@gmail.com.

Matfen Book Club meets regularly in the hall; here's convenor Jenny Osborne's account of the last meeting:

Matfen Book Club met last week to review their third book, which was chosen by Jill Lloyd. 'Trespases' by Louise Kennedy was a big change in genre from the previous two reads. It is a number 1 bestseller (*The Times*), and winner of various prestigious awards. Classed as historical/political fiction, it is set in Northern Ireland during the troubles of the 1970s and tells the story of a love affair between a young Catholic woman and an older married Protestant man.

The book was enjoyed and positively reviewed by the majority of the group, though there were questions raised regarding how the troubles were presented by the author. Nevertheless, we valued gaining an insight into how difficult life was for those living with sectarianism and the ongoing relentless threat of violence and murder which prevailed in Belfast at this time. The characters in the book were interesting, with the romance between the main characters portrayed with a gritty realism which we all knew was likely to be doomed. Overall the book was, perhaps, compelling rather than enjoyable.



The club will be meeting again on **February 20th at 7pm** and we will be reviewing **'Mrs Bridge' by Evan S. Connell**. If you can't make this but are fancying joining in, the next meeting after that is **3rd April** when we will be reviewing **'The Little Coffee Shop of Kabul'** by Deborah Rodriguez. Everyone very welcome. Get in touch with Jenny if you want to know more about the club: jennyosborne196@gmail.com

Matfen Cricket Club are delighted to announce that five of the current junior players have been selected to represent Northumberland at age groups from under 12 to under 15!



Congratulations go to Cole, Jacob, Ellie, Pippa and Martha – testimony not only to their ability and attitude to learning, but also their willingness to work hard and strive to improve.

Four of the players live in Matfen and one lives just outside of the village, which makes this an extra special achievement for the club and the community. We look forward to others following their example, and see this success as a result of the growth of the club as a whole, which is going from strength to strength. The senior captains can plan ahead with interest at our talent coming through the ranks, and it is great to see them all playing with smiles on their faces and enthusiasm for the game.



You can find out more about the club and how to join in at: <https://matfen.play-cricket.com>

An exciting development at GO Local Food:



Up till now, crop share members have had to collect their vegetables from the growing fields in Ovington. In an exciting development for 2025, from the beginning of April, they will have the option of collecting their fresh, seasonal vegetables from a brand-new collection point in Hexham. Bringing veg closer to crop share members is about convenience, and also about aligning with GO Local Food's shared environmental goals. Reducing the distance travelled helps us all lower our carbon footprint. This move also addresses a recurring challenge, which is that potential members are sometimes eager to join but unable to reach Ovington easily. With Hexham as a new hub, the door is open to new members in the community.

And this is just the beginning! If all goes well, GO Local Food hopes to expand further, bringing collection points even closer to more members. Could Matfen be next? GO Local Food have wanted to start growing in Matfen for a while, and this may be the time.

You can contact the co-operative and find out about how to join at veg@golocalfood.org.uk, or through their website: <https://golocalfood.org.uk/>

Winter in the Community garden – notes from Liz Bishop:

The New Year has begun with a range of weather: rain, snow, fog and warmth with some welcome sunshine. Through all this, only those plants which cope will be on show for our enjoyment through the year.

At the base of the roadside wall, where soil is warmed by the sun, daffodil leaves are already showing. Inside the garden in the shade below the wall and hedge, three foxglove rosettes show frost but will be producing spires of flower in summer.

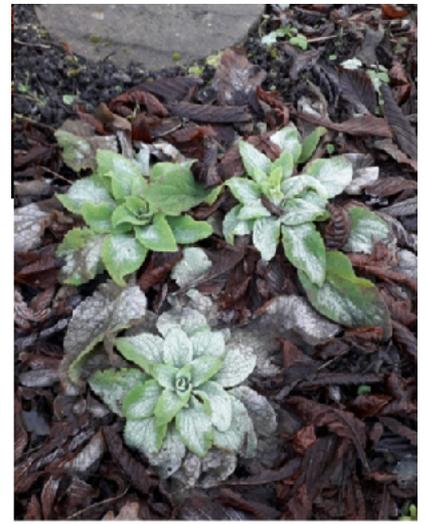


Where sunshine passes through the chestnut branches, bunches of grass will become more colourful – yellow, bronze, green and white – in warmer conditions.

Along the gravel boundary, grape hyacinths have their leaf spikes above ground. A sedum holding its winter form carries frost on its old flower heads. Freddie and his Mum planted this sedum as a smaller piece 3 years ago.

Snowdrops will be showing soon. Donated geraniums giving different flower colours have all made good growth. Other plants are still hiding under leafy blankets. Seed sowing time approaches.

Your spare plants are always welcome; thank you. There is much to anticipate in the garden year ahead.



January Freeze in the Bird World – Alan Todd:

The Tawny Owl, perched roadside near Matfen Hotel at dusk on 2nd January, appeared to watch the weather with fearful apprehension. Temperatures fell, as did my bird tally. A few snow covered gardens held Tree Sparrows, Bullfinches, Great Spotted Woodpecker (heard ‘drumming’ on frozen mornings) and Starlings huddled in night time roosts. ‘Cold snaps’ may bring Scandinavian Brambling; brown and orange upper-parts, thin white rump and ‘buzzsaw’ call, help separate them from similar Chaffinches.

Ponds near Great Whittington and around Matfen Golf Course froze over. On the 16th, Mallard, Teal and Moorhen returned to a thawing Whittington Bog. The Golf Course was re-occupied by over 100 Canada and 2 Greylag Geese, Mute Swans, Mallard and Moorhen, plus a single Little Egret, notably joined by another 5 days later!

This year’s RSPB ‘Big Garden Birdwatch’ was on 24-26 Jan – did you take part? If you did – and enjoyed it – consider an alternative Citizen Science project that runs all year: British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) ‘Garden Birdwatch’ (www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw). I enrolled during COVID lockdown, and continue to this day!



Left:

Brambling - a winter plumaged male

(© Peter Parker)

Right:

Tree Sparrow

(© Alan Jack) - note ID features: russet crown and dark cheek patch



News from Parish and County Councils:

The next **Matfen Parish Council meeting** will be held on **Tuesday February 11th** in the **village hall, 7pm - 9pm**. The agenda will appear soon on the PC website: <https://matfen-pc.gov.uk/> As usual, the meeting is open to all residents of the parish, and there will be an opportunity for anyone attending to raise matters of concern to the community. For further details, you can contact the PC clerk, Mandy Senior, on clerk@matfen-pc.gov.uk

Northumberland County Council is part of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) Transport Consultation. The consultation is due to close, but you can still contact them in other ways, to make sure you express your views and contribute to the future of transport in our region. For more information, check the website

<https://www.northeast-ca.gov.uk/localtransportplan>

If you're interested in the cycling campaign, the links on the left will take you to more information.



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Olga Samusieva offers some interesting thoughts on the coming year:



I'm not a prophet, but I can confidently say that we are heading for deep and powerful transformations. The old ways – beliefs, thoughts, and habits – will start to fade away. If they don't change, a large part of humanity will suffer.

I don't rely solely on astrology when exploring these topics, but I'll mention something interesting. Right now, a rare event is

happening – six planets are aligning, creating a unique astronomical phenomenon that occurs once in a lifetime. This happened on January 21st. And there will be seven-planet alignment on February 28th. These planetary movements affect us deeply, bringing old patterns to the surface so we can release them.

I believe that cosmic events this year are linked to major energy shifts. This is a time of incredibly powerful energy, and everyone should look within themselves, let go of outdated beliefs, and embrace change. Those who are spiritually connected can already feel this shift happening.

Right now, I call myself an “energy advisor” – I help people transform the old into something new. When we remove the “stones” of old, stagnant energy, we unlock incredible inner resources – but you need to know how to do it. I can see this process clearly and, of course, my second degree in ontopsychology supports my work. I don't give advice (especially not for free!), but I do recommend letting go of the old in every possible sense of the word.

History Corner

Sally Urwin is busy with other matters this month, but she will definitely be back in future newsletters. So I thought it would be interesting to include a few facts about All Saints' Church, Ryal, the little church on the hill just a couple of miles from Matfen. All Saints' is a chapel of ease, which are small chapels built within the bounds of the parish for those who can't conveniently reach the parish church (at the time, St Mary's Stamfordham). The Ordnance Survey Object Name Books of the 1860s reports that All Saints was,

An old chapel belonging to the Church of England. It is partially ruinous and is not and never will be used as a Chapel again, a new one having been erected recently [1842] in the village of Matfen.

Despite this, All Saints' Church, Ryal, thought to date from the 12th century, was restored in 1879 and still serves as a place of worship for the community. There's more to say about this beautiful church – look out for more information in future newsletters.



And finally ... many thanks, as ever, to Revd Rachel for emailing the newsletter round. Comments and suggestions for future newsletters are always very welcome: email 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 March.