

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 37 – January - February 2026



It's snowdrop time again – always the first sign that winter won't last forever, although the weather may be telling us something different at the moment. But the gradual increase in daylight early in the morning and in the evening shows that spring is slowly on the way. Newsletter number 37 may have something of a wintry theme, but also looks forward to the forthcoming seasons and – let's hope – warmer weather to come. There's information about church services and activities for Lent and Easter, as well as other activities in the village.

Thanks go, as ever, to all the regular contributors to the newsletter. New ideas and contributions are always welcome; get in touch with any comments and suggestions: contehjean@gmail.com – happy reading!

Matfen village hall is home to many community activities and events, and has also been the venue for family parties and special celebrations. You can book it as an individual or representative of a group in one of these ways:

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

And you have a chance very soon to meet the volunteers who run and maintain the hall, and find out how you can get involved – come to the **Matfen Village Hall AGM**:

- Date: **Monday 9th February**
- Time: **6:00 PM**
- Location: **Matfen Village Hall**

This is your opportunity to hear about how the hall operates and perhaps to join – the committee would love to see you there. If you have 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.

Email matfenvillage@gmail.com



Matfen SRKA Karate Club meet in the village hall every Friday at 6pm, and new members are always welcome.

Contact Matfen.srka@gmail.com or **Harry on 07775 726 240** or **Andrew on 07747 024844**.



Students from the club will be taking part in ***War on the Floor*** on Saturday 28th February from 6pm in the Queen's Hall, Hexham. This is Seiken Ryu Karate Association's biggest night of the year. Once again Matfen instructor Sensei Harry Waters is vice-captain of the red team, which was victorious last year.

This is the club's annual exhibition and competition all in one. Two teams take to the stage and battle it out in a fast tag team style of sparring, with demonstrations of all other things karate mixed in. Tickets on sale now! £15 each – contact Peter on 07912 533164

Great Whittington and Matfen WI got 2026 off to an excellent start with a very interesting meeting featuring a talk from member Liz Bishop about her **Childhood in India**. With the aid of photos and other artefacts – and some tasty Indian treats – she brought to life her rich and fascinating personal experiences as a child growing up in India.



The next meeting is on **Tuesday March 3rd in Matfen village hall, beginning at 7.30pm**, when members will be having a go at Tai Chi with local teacher Kathryn Libby. As well as the regular meetings, the WI also organises lunches, walks, and a reading group. New members and visitors are always very welcome – to find out more, contact contehjean@gmail.com



Matfen Cricket Club are applying for a premises licence for their club house, which should help raise funds for them as well as enhance all those summer activities. You can read the application at the end of the newsletter.



Here's some news about an interesting course that's happening in the village hall from May onwards, running over three weekends until September. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) will be training volunteers to restore those traditional metal signposts that we often see along many of our rural roads, usually in a bit of a dilapidated state.

There's still just time to apply, if you're quick – closing date is Monday February 9th. For full details about how to apply, email Annie.CPRE@gmail.com.

Armed with their new-found knowledge, the volunteers will be restoring the fingerposts in Stamfordham and Aydon.

Matfen Book Club is becoming an established event in the diaries of regular members – a group of 8-10 meets every six weeks or so to discuss a book chosen by one of their number. Newbies are always very welcome. The plan is simple: everyone chooses a book, and convenor Jenny Osborne puts together a programme. The group meets in various venues, including each other's homes and local pubs (it would be great if the Black Bull were open!).



Book choices have ranged across memoir, true crime, political scandals and novels from American classics to new releases. The most recent book, 'Blackwater Lightship' by Colm Toibin, set in his home area of Wexford in Ireland in the 1980s, proved to be universally popular. The group will be meeting next on **Thursday February 26th at 7pm** to discuss **Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow**, a 1992 novel by Danish author **Peter Høeg**, an international bestseller and early example of Scandi Noir. Come along to see if you'd like to join; it doesn't matter if you haven't read the book. If you want to know more, get in touch with convenor Jenny on jennyosborne196@gmail.com

Matfen Community Time is held on the 4th Wednesday of the month in the village hall, from 3-5pm. The last get-together was on January 28th when cherry scones were baked and enjoyed by all comers. A huge thank you to everyone involved.

Thanks also to the Church and Community Partnership charity for their generous support; through their kindness, MCT now has a wide range of children's toys and equipment, along with baking equipment for adults and young people, and funding for the hall hire over the next few months.

MCT is a relaxed space for everyone any age, any background — with drinks, cake, conversation, and activities. If you haven't been yet, especially if you're a young family, please do come along. The poster alongside gives the dates for future MCT gatherings, so get them down in your diary now!

And some information about forthcoming events in the local churches:

As we move through February, we begin to look ahead to **Lent and Easter**, with opportunities to gather, reflect, and celebrate together as a community

The first event is **Afternoon Church for young families** on **Sunday 8th February at 4.30pm**, at **St Mary's Church, Stamfordham**. This relaxed, all-



age service is especially for families with young children. We'll be thinking about Lent, followed by a cheerful pancake party. Everyone is very welcome.

Ash Wednesday falls this year on **Wednesday 18th February**, and marks the start of Lent. There will be a service at **10.30am at St Andrew's, Heddon**, and another at **6pm at St**

Mary's, Stamfordham — gentle, reflective services that all are welcome to attend.

MATFEN Community Time
 All sessions are 3 - 5pm
 in Matfen Village Hall

Save the Date!

28 th January	22 nd April
25 th February	27 th May
25 th March	24 th June

A chance to come together for a cuppa and a natter, organised by Holy Trinity Church, everyone welcome.
 for more information please contact Roy's Rachel on Whatsapp 07916 68 11 28 or email r.scheffer@newcastle.anglican.org
 Supported by Church and Community Partnership

Looking ahead to Easter, the **main Easter service in Matfen** will take place on **Saturday 4th April at 7pm**, beginning in **Matfen Village Hall**. We'll hear Old Testament stories, and gather around a lit fire outside **Holy Trinity Church**. Then we'll move inside the church, beautifully decorated for Easter, to hear the story of Jesus' resurrection.

Signs of Spring in the Community Garden – notes from Liz Bishop



A chilly, foggy morning at the end of January reminds us that winter will be with us another month or so, say weather forecasters. Reliably, snowdrops are making an appearance in our gardens. Those in the photo are beneath the Jubilee chestnut with green bluebell leaves pushing through beyond.

The corner of species grasses looks colourful amongst the browns and greys of winter. Once the weather warms and soil is drier, grasses with red and deep bronze leaves will be transplanted to this area. Fox and cub flowers, in bright orange bunches will appear later along the hedge lines.

Newly arrived in the garden from the playing field is the top rail of an old set of swings. Lettering along its length is for the late Queen's 1977 Jubilee. At present the rail is laid on gravel but, with help and once the soil is workable, the aim is to 'plant' it to mark the origin of the garden.

Once weather allows, there is a lot of tidying to be done: buddleia to be cut hard back; winter wind pruning to be collected; the gravel to be raked and weeded. Any plants no longer needed in your own gardens can be given a home.



Also, if any one would enjoy working in the garden, please feel free to get in touch, via the newsletter editor if you wish.

New Year and News of Geese – Alan Todd

Venturing out on an early New Year's Day 'Owl-Watch', I returned home after suffering over an hour of bitterly cold weather and blustery winds without a single addition to my 2026 bird list! Local birding proved difficult for days

However, as our cold wet January dragged on, observers reported an unusual arrival of rare Geese around the UK, no doubt influenced by freezing conditions beyond our shores.

Here, typical wintering flocks of Greylag and Pink-footed Geese at Whittle Dene Reservoirs included a minimum of 3 'Taiga' Bean Geese, 1 'Tundra' Bean Goose, and 3 'Russian' Greater White Fronted Geese - the latter rising to over 20 individuals towards the end of January. A few dead Greylag Geese, probably affected by Avian Flu, were recently seen at the reservoirs — you or pets are advised not to approach any sick birds.

Named after a historical feeding preference for Bean stubble, further studies of their morphology and genetics elucidated two major species of Bean Goose; with discrete breeding distributions within the Subarctic Taiga or Arctic Tundra bioregions of Eurasia. Hence providing suitable descriptive English species names! Incidentally, migrant 'Russian' Greater White Fronted Geese also originate from Eurasian Arctic Tundra.



On the left: Two Greater White-fronted Geese showing typical pink bills of the Russian subspecies.

On the right: A 'Taiga' Bean Goose behind a Greylag (photos © Elis Simpson % 'Wader Quest' Charity: www.waderquest.net)



GO Local Food – looking forward



A new year, a new cropping plan, new plans for events and lots of chances to meet up. In common with all growers we are wondering what kind of year this one will end up being; too hot, too wet, too windy; too many slugs and pests, mould and mildew? There will no doubt be plenty of challenges. Reflections on last year's challenges and details of plans for this year can be found here <https://golocalfood.org.uk/news/>

News from Parish and County Councils

Matfen PC meets every two months on a Tuesday evening in the village hall, and the next meeting will be on **Tuesday, March 17th**, from 7-9pm. The agenda will appear on the PC website: <https://matfen-pc.gov.uk/> before the meeting. All residents of the parish are welcome to attend, and can raise matters of concern to the community. For further details, or if you wish to raise an issue before the meeting, you can get in touch with the PC clerk, Mandy Senior, on clerk@matfen-pc.gov.uk or phone 07950 297634

Northumberland County Council: Climate Change Update and News

Every month, **NCC** put out by email **Northumberland Net Zero**, with updates on their Climate Change Action Plan, events and activities, funding opportunities and lots more. Get your own copy by emailing climate@northumberland.gov.uk

There's news this month of the **Northumberland Environment and Climate Fund**, which offers grants ranging from £250 to £5,000 for projects aiming to help the environment and tackle climate change. Projects can include insulation for community spaces, active travel schemes, LED lights, solar panels, and heat pumps. The deadline is 27th February, and there are drop in (online) Q&A sessions on February 11th and 18th if you'd like to discuss your application before submitting. You can read all the details at: <https://www.northumberlandnetzero.uk/apply/climate-fund>

History Corner

Our local history expert, **Sally Urwin** is out of action at the moment — get well soon, Sally.



Meanwhile, here are a couple of interesting snippets taken from the **Northumberland Name Books**, which were compiled around the 1860s by Royal Engineers Surveyors and their civilian assistants. They were sent out in groups by the Army to trek round the countryside collecting information from locals about places, buildings, farms, roads, archaeological sites, and so on.

This all became the First Edition Six Inch OS maps, the first maps of the whole of the UK. The surviving Name Books have all been digitised by volunteers in a project begun in 2016. They contain short 'Descriptive Remarks', which are fascinating and bring life to the whole project. you can browse the Name Books on <https://namebooks.org.uk/>

Just to whet your appetite, here are a couple of entries you might recognise, though I'm sure that the quality of the residents in Waterloo has improved greatly since the entry was written:

Standing Stone:

A large stone erected by the Druids which gives the name to the adjoining farm house ... it is about 10 feet high, with about 20 inches wide ... in a field on the East side of the vista is a Circular mound with a round cavity in the middle, of the form of the Celtic Tumuli or Temples, An upright stone or Pillar standing by it 9 feet high above the ground.

Waterloo:

11 chains South of Ingoe Mill. A small Hamlet, one of the cottages has been a public house it appears it had been kept very irregular and many bad characters attended there to have Prize fights from which circumstances it takes its name.

Whittle Dean Water Course:

These water works are in the course of formation and will not be completed for some time (the name applies only to the Water Course as that is visible the remainder being under ground)



And finally ... many thanks, as ever, to Revd Rachel for arranging to email the newsletter round the whole community. 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. Comments, suggestions and contributions for future newsletters are always very welcome: get in touch on contehjean@gmail.com

LICENSING ACT 2003
APPLICATION FOR A CLUB PREMISES CERTIFICATE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT Matfen Cricket Club has submitted an application for a Club Premises Certificate in respect of:

Matfen Cricket Club, Cricket Pavilion, Matfen, NE20 0TG

A record of the application may be inspected at the offices of Northumberland County Council at:

Licensing Department, Public Protection Service, West Hartford,
Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 3JP

Or online at:

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Business/Licences/Alcohol-entertainment.aspx>

TO PERMIT:

Supply of Alcohol (on & off sales)

16:00 to 22:00 Monday to Friday 12:00 to 23:00 Saturday to Sunday

Any objections to this application must be sent in writing stating grounds of objection to The Chief Executive:-

Licensing Department, Public Protection Service, West Hartford,
Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 3JP

Not later than: 3rd March 2026

Dated this: 3rd February 2026

NOTE: It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application and the maximum fine for which a person is liable on summary conviction for the offence, will apply.