

# MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 11 - July - August 2021



We're at the height of summer, and I'm always surprised how quickly we reach that point in the year when there are already whispers of autumn in the air. It seems to have come earlier this year - the rowan berries are beginning to turn red, while the first brambles are tempting us to look for more in the hedgerows. Welcome to Newsletter no. 11, and thanks to all the contributors, especially voices from earlier issues such as Alan from North East Red Squirrels. It's good to have plenty of community information in a form accessible to those who - like me - don't go in much for social media.

Thanks, as ever, to Rev Rachel for emailing the letter out. There'll be a few paper copies available in the shop and also in the Book Swap box. If you know of anyone who doesn't do email and would like to receive a paper copy, please let me know. Any comments on what you read in this letter would be most welcome, as would any suggestions or contributions for future newsletters

Thank you! ... [contehjean@gmail.com](mailto:contehjean@gmail.com)

**Matfen village hall** has been the venue for a few activities over the summer, and we are always ready to welcome more. We are very grateful to local councillor, Veronica Jones, who organised a grant of £2,500 to meet the final costs of the audio-visual installation, which meant that we didn't need to use our reserves. Local artist, James Robert Mathie, ran a children's art class, where he taught the children how to explore a variety of mediums including pencil, water-colour and pastels over six weeks. This resulted in some fabulous creations from the next generation of budding young artists, as you can see from the examples here. James is hoping to host a series of adult art classes in Matfen, so if you are interested, please contact: [matfenvillage@gmail.com](mailto:matfenvillage@gmail.com) - and that's the email to contact the hall if you wish to make a booking or have an idea for an activity or event.



**Matfen Seiken-Ryu karate club** has been back in full swing after lockdown and members have been very successful in recent gradings. This year the club has been running right through the summer at the village hall on Friday nights 6-7 pm, and new members are always welcome! Contact Sensei **Harry Waters** for more details **07775 726240** or email [matfen.srka@gmail.com](mailto:matfen.srka@gmail.com)

Clifton Thompson has also been running a regular **Zumba** class on Thursdays from 6.30-7.30 pm. Contact Clifton on [thompson.clifton@aol.com](mailto:thompson.clifton@aol.com) or **07747 024844** to book a place.

## Footpaths round the village

You may have seen on the village Facebook page or read in the Hexham Courant about the fences erected in the Matfen Hall Hotel car park, which prevent people walking between the hotel and the village and along to the Great Whittington junction. Arthur Murrell has been trying hard to find ways to keep these walking routes open, and appreciates those who have been sending supporting comments. He reports that not much progress has been made yet, but a meeting with the owners of the hall to discuss the footpath through the woods is being organised. He's also trying to meet with Matfen Estates and to pursue the issues with Northumberland County Council, which may lead to the routes being added to official maps. If you can support Arthur's efforts for the village, get in touch on [arthur.murrell@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:arthur.murrell@yahoo.co.uk) or go and knock on Arthur's door for a chat.

## A message from Brigid Dennison, Treasurer of Matfen PCC

Hello everyone! Our parish churches in Matfen and Ryal need your help. Holy Trinity and All Saints churches are still very much part of the fabric of the community, despite being closed over much of the past 18 months. They are both Grade II listed and the running costs have to be met despite the loss of income. During the lockdowns, fundraising opportunities were greatly reduced, and we would be very grateful for your assistance in supporting our ancient buildings, the vicar and ministry. Can you help by making a one-off donation or regular monthly donations? Donations can be made in various ways:

- By bank transfer to: Account Name: **PCC of Matfen**, Sort Code: **30-94-19** Account No: **00113381**.
- Cheques need to be made payable to **PCC of Matfen**,
- Or you can donate via the Upper Pont Churches JustGiving page: **Upper Pont Churches COVID appeal - JustGiving**

The churches are also registered with easyfundraising, which means you can raise FREE donations for us every time you shop online, at no extra cost to yourself! These donations really mount up and make a BIG difference to us, so we'd really appreciate it if you could take a moment to sign up and support us. It's completely FREE and only takes a moment. You can find our easyfundraising page at: [https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/upperpontchurches/?utm\\_campaign=raise-more&utm\\_content=gs-e1](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/upperpontchurches/?utm_campaign=raise-more&utm_content=gs-e1)

[www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/upperpontchurches/?utm\\_campaign=raise-more&utm\\_content=gs-e1](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/upperpontchurches/?utm_campaign=raise-more&utm_content=gs-e1)

Thank you so much! ... [brigiddennison@btinternet.com](mailto:brigiddennison@btinternet.com)

**Raise FREE donations** for us every time you shop online.

Over **4,000** shops and sites will donate!



**Great Whittington and Matfen WI** is getting back to indoor meetings from September. We'll be meeting as usual on the first Tuesday of every month in Matfen village hall until Christmas, then moving over to Great Whittington in the New Year. At the first meeting, on **Tuesday September 7th, from 7.30**, Karen Coleman will be showing us how to do **Kusadama**, a form of Japanese paper folding, and there'll be refreshments and plenty of time to chat. New members and visitors are always welcome - just come along, or for more information, get in touch: [contehjean@gmail.com](mailto:contehjean@gmail.com).

It's that bumper harvesting time of year for **GO Local**, or as some members refer to it - 2 bag weeks! We are all enjoying potatoes, broadbeans, garlic, onions, cabbage cauliflower all grown at Vicarage Corner. We still have room for more members, so if you're interested in joining, look on our website: [www.golocalfood.org.uk](http://www.golocalfood.org.uk)

**LASTLY**, we have a request ... to ensure we continue to get bumper crops, we are looking for a supply of well rotted manure ... If you can help us find a local supply let us know: [admin@golocalfood.org.uk](mailto:admin@golocalfood.org.uk)





The big success of the season at the **Cricket Club** is the newly formed Matfen women's softball cricket team, who have had plenty of cricketing action this summer. Sponsored by the Black Bull, the squad of 30+ women and girls train every Friday evening 6-7pm at the club

and play in softball festivals and friendly matches all around Northumberland. Softball is fun, friendly, active and social, and we always welcome new starters. Please contact **Lisa** for details **07484777494**. Here's the team in their splendid blue kit, thanks to the Bull.

**The Saturday team** has enjoyed playing in the West Tyne League again this season, with an excellent team spirit on the field and some good evenings at the Black Bull. We have held weekly outdoor net sessions throughout the summer, and new players are very welcome. Anyone keen to join us, please contact the club Facebook page or **Alex** on **07974 803520**.

The future looks bright for Matfen junior cricket, with 17 kids from the local area having enjoyed the free training sessions provided on Sunday mornings during the summer term.



### Red Squirrel Conservation Update August 2021 - Alan Worthington, Senior Ranger

In my role as Ranger for North East Red Squirrels (NERS), August has always been a good time for me to sit back and reflect on the year's progress so far. With intimations of autumn and the promise of a bountiful harvest from oak, beech, hazel, blackberry, wild apples etc our work controlling the grey squirrel becomes ever harder. August is also an important time for the pheasant shoots. The timing of the release of the birds

is aimed at ensuring that they are mature and fully adapted to their environment by the time shooting commences in late October or early November. This makes the covert woods a sensitive area with the need to keep disturbances to a minimum.

Although I can get called out across much of south west Northumberland, even as far as Blanchland, my primary patch is around Matfen, Fenwick, Milbourne, Ouston and Ponteland. Overall the squirrel news from around the district has been quite positive. There have been several reported sightings of red squirrels, along the Tyne riverside, Close House, Belsay and the most recent near Hexham a month ago.

Although still too early for any official figures to be available for this year, my personal grey control numbers are well down when compared to last year. This seems to be reflected in sporadic reports of low results from other trappers, though we won't know this for certain until all this year's data has been collated early in the spring of next year, but I "live in hope". One of the most promising projects for this year is the progress of The Animal Plant and Welfare (APHA) UK Squirrel Accord's research into a fertility control for grey squirrels. Once established, this will offer a non-lethal management method to control grey population densities and support eradication efforts.

2021 has been a good year so far for NERS. For the second time, we were successful in being awarded funding from the Postcode Lottery, this has secured our work at its current level for the next 12-18 months. NERS has also been selected by The Postcode Neighbourhood Trust to be featured in their public trust strategy document as a "great example of a charity supported by the trust", published in early August. A recent restructuring of NERS Trustees has created a more dynamic and pro-active management of the charity, the new format has generated the synergy needed to provide the best opportunities for our ongoing successes.

Our accomplishments and achievements would not be possible if it were not for our team of dedicated volunteers whose time and commitment is vital to our very existence. As we expand we are looking for volunteers who can offer their skills and time to help us carry out our ever growing work load. As well as trappers, we are currently looking for volunteers to help in:

**Recruitment ... Social Media ... Marketing ... Events ... Secretarial, Community Involvement ... Resource and Funding Procurement**

If you feel you would like to get involved and make a difference or just want to know more about us, please visit our website: [www.northeastredsquirrels.co.uk](http://www.northeastredsquirrels.co.uk) or email us at [northeastrs@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:northeastrs@yahoo.co.uk).

NERS would like to take this opportunity also to voice our appreciation to all the landowners, land managers and local people all of whose support makes our project viable at all.

Finally, if you are lucky enough to see a red, try and get a photo - the one here is from Belsay. No matter how good or bad, please email to the above address or call **Alan Worthington - 07743718228**. Please report any grey sightings too as it all helps us to focus our resources.



### History Notes: some interesting facts about Matfen railways - with thanks, as usual to Keith Atkinson

In August 1898, an Act of Parliament allowed the Newcastle and Gateshead Water Co. to construct a new tunnel to feed water from the Hallington reservoir to emerge at Matfen. The Act also allowed them to build a narrow gauge railway from Matfen, at the eastern end of the tunnel, to Wylam, on the River Tyne, via Whittle Dene.

A working site was established at the eastern end of the tunnel, with huts, offices, a canteen, spoil heaps and sidings for the railway. By 1903, one-third of the tunnel had been completed, and it was finished in 1905. Once the works were completed, the railway between Matfen and Whittle Dene was lifted. All Saints' Church at Ryal contains a memorial to those who died during construction of the tunnel - more about this in future newsletters.

During the 1920s, north east of Ingoe, the Wallridge Mineral Railway ran from Darras Hall to Belsay Colliery, north of Kirkheaton. It crossed the road at Wallridge, where the cottages were built to house miners, and where you can still see signs of the track.

The photo shows the trough by the roadside at the rear of Douglas Cottages. Whittle Dene watercourse is on the right. Just beyond the bridge, the watercourse emerges from a long tunnel bringing water from Hallington Reservoirs.



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