

MATFEN COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

No. 13 - January - February 2022



Welcome to the first Matfen Community Newsletter of 2022. I hope the year has got off to a good start for you, after all the problems and uncertainties of 2021. Apologies for the lack of a newsletter before Christmas - it was one of the many casualties of Storm Arwen. There are still many signs around the countryside of the destruction the winds caused on the weekend of November 26th. I hope that, if you were one of those affected, you have been able to recover and were warm and comfortable long before Christmas. And if you haven't heard yet about the public meetings organised by our MP, Guy Opperman, to review the response to the storm, there are details below.

Matfen village hall has stayed open through the changes in rules and advice about covid during 2021, and our regular weekly activities of Karate and Zumba are still taking place with Andrew and Harry Waters, and Clifton Thompson. Here's a reminder of times and contact details:

Karate runs on **Fridays from 6-7 pm**. Contact **Harry Waters on 07775 726240**

Zumba runs on **Thursdays from 6.30-7.30 pm**. Contact **Clifton on**

thompson.clifton@aol.com or 07747 024844

And **Clare Burns** is keen to re-start **Hatha Yoga on Mondays**. So if you are interested in joining the class, contact **Clare on 07956 407905** or email **hopeyoga2018@outlook.com**

The hall is available to book by groups or private individuals, and you can book via the website: **www.northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/matfen-village-hall**, or by email: **matfenvillage@gmail.com** or phone: **07817375237**



On **Wednesday January 26th, at 6.30 pm** the hall will be the venue for the committee's **AGM**, which the trustees are required to hold as part of their responsibilities in running the charity. The hall is owned by the Matfen Estate, and the trustees manage it through a Lease and Trust Deed from 1975, which is the governing document, registered with the Charities Commission. One important thing that will be done at the meeting is the appointment (or election, if need be) of trustees for 2022. Current trustees are Rachael Dempsey (Chair), Phil Chaffer (Treasurer), Struan Wilson, Richard Szweda and Jean Conteh. Trustees act as 'guardians' of the hall, and oversee:

Finances, Administration, Maintenance, Strategic planning, and Policies and procedures

All trustees stand down at the AGM as the period of office is one year, but can all be re-appointed or elected onto the committee if they wish. There is no maximum number of trustees, but there must be a minimum of three. The election of the officers (chair, secretary and treasurer) takes place at the first committee meeting, immediately after the AGM.

Trustees are supported by volunteers. Together our aim is to encourage and provide activities and events that improve the use of the hall for the benefit of the parishioners and the wider community. Anyone can volunteer, and support is always welcome. If you would like to know more about becoming a Trustee or a volunteer please contact the chair, Rachael, on **rachbruce@gmail.com**

Matfen Parish Council will be holding their next regular bi-monthly meeting in the hall, just before the AGM. It's not on the normal Tuesday, for this month only. It's on **Monday January 24th, at 7 pm**. The meeting is open to all residents of the parish, and the agenda will appear on the PC website: **https://www.matfenparish.org**

There will be a brief discussion of community response to Storm Arwen and lessons for the future. And on that topic, there are public meetings being organised across the constituency by our MP, Guy Opperman, to ensure local people have their voices heard by representatives of Northern PowerGrid and Northumbrian Water, and that there are proper community representations in the Ofgem investigation. Further details on: **https://www.guyopperman.co.uk/StormArwen**



As usual, **Great Whittington and Matfen WI** are moving over to Great Whittington hall for their next few meetings, and their first gathering of the year will be on **Tuesday February 1st at 7.30 pm**. There'll be a talk entitled **'Digging up the Corchester Playing Fields'** (come along to find out what that's about), and refreshments and time to chat. New members and visitors are always welcome - just come along, or for more information, get in touch: **contehjean@gmail.com**.

Supporting GO Local Food...

This year - from April in fact - we'll have been growing veg in the area for 10 whole years! Over those years we have gone from 1 acre at Ovington to 4.5 acres on 2 sites - now in Matfen too - annually growing around 10 tonnes of veg. And what do we do with all that veg? It's eaten by around 90 crop and work shares. Lots of reasons to celebrate our growth and survival! Soon we'll be announcing a timetable of special events. In the meantime, you might be interested in supporting us as a member? Go to **www.golocalfood.org.uk** and/or bag yourself a posh new celebration shopper. For further information, get in touch: **admin@golocalfood.org.uk**



Walking round Matfen

You may remember reading in previous newsletters about the efforts of **Arthur Murrell** to have popular walking paths in the village designated for public use after changes made by the new owners of the hall. Here is Arthur's update on the situation:

Since Matfen Hall was sold recently, many people have been disappointed by the closure of two routes through the Estate that have been blocked to villagers who often used them as routes for short walks. The PC, for various reasons, decided against pursuing the issue with the two owners (the Estate and the hotel). A small delegation met with both parties separately to request restoring access to the paths, but the request was declined for various reasons.

The two blockages are at North Cottage, where a very high wooden fence blocks access from Great Whittington across roads into the hall's overflow car park, and a small fence at the far side of the new car park into Hall Wood. One of the reasons both parties declined the request was the continuing problem of dog fouling on a fairly consistent basis. It is hardly surprising that the owners object to this and would want to exclude people from access when it is an ongoing problem. It would also seem that people are still walking their dogs in the grounds and leaving mess and — even worse — bagging it and throwing the bags around.

Despite this, and in the hope that dog owners will discontinue the disgusting practice, a number of people have made application to Northumberland County Council to have the routes declared permissive walks based on historic, continuous use over a period in excess of 20 years. Unfortunately, it seems that this may take a considerable time as NCC seem to have a backlog of applications and insufficient staff. In the meantime, let's hope that dog walkers behave a bit less selfishly and the owners soften their stance.



History Corner

Two interesting items this time: the first is from **Sally Urwin** of High House Farm, who has been researching her husband's family history. She came across a fascinating piece from 1898, which might strike a chord in this time of pandemic, isolation and opposing viewpoints. It's a letter, written by David Young, schoolteacher in Matfen at the time, and published in the **Newcastle Journal on Saturday 16 July 1898**. In it, David talks about how an outbreak of small-pox was dealt with in the village. The only person to suffer was Mr Urwin, of Matfen, Burnside. We are told that he may have picked up the disease in Newcastle or Hexham. The letter goes on:

'... small-pox was first noticed on 1st June, when Urwin's house was visited and strict orders given for isolation. Disinfectants and instructions were also given, and on the 3rd of June, as soon as lymph could be had all the persons in the immediate neighbourhood were vaccinated. Only one case occurred in Matfen which was immediately removed to the Burnside, and the house disinfected the same day (that is the 10th June). There have been no cases since.'

The promptness of action on the part of the Hexham Rural District Council was commended, but: *'their readiness to find fault with other local bodies and private individuals is not so praiseworthy'*. So, not much change there, perhaps! After describing a subsequent meeting where heated words were clearly exchanged, Mr Young closes his letter with the stern comment:

'While finding fault for laxity in performing duty, the Hexham Rural District Council should not fail to perceive that there may be very great laxity in making statements on matters without sufficient data. — I am, &c., D. YOUNG. Matfen, 14th July, 1898.'

And some interesting memories from our regular correspondent, Keith Atkinson:

Keith recalls his friendship with Rev. Victor Rowland Hill, Vicar of Matfen from 1931 to 1957 (you may remember reference to Lorna Hill, the Vicar's wife, in Newsletter no. 6). Rev. Hill had strong views on marriage, and wasn't hesitant about expressing them:

My experience of life in Matfen is based on childhood visits to my grandfather and involvement with the cricket club after becoming the scorer at the age of ten in 1949. At about that same age, I was asked, out of the blue, to read a Lesson at Evening Prayer at Holy Trinity Church. The invitation came from the Vicar of Matfen, the Revd V. R. Hill, MA, Dip Th, a generous if somewhat eccentric clergyman. Victor Hill became Vicar of Matfen in 1931 and served his flock until 19 October 1957 when he and his wife, Lorna Hill, retired to Brockleside, Keswick. No doubt any incumbent will have taken note of the Blackett patronage. Throughout the period, Sir Hugh Blackett, 8th Baronet (1873 – 1960) lived at Matfen Hall, the last member of the Blackett family to do so. On Sunday mornings, one expected to see family members in the Blackett box pew in the south east corner of the nave. Hymns were accompanied by Mrs Hill on a harmonium near the west end of the nave.

Victor Hill's views on marriage in church made the national press in 1954, when the Daily Mail quoted him as saying that *'too many young people'* were *'making a mockery of the marriage service and insulting God'* by asking to be married in the church when they had not attended regularly. That no doubt caused a stir among the Matfen community of the day. He could be a powerful preacher if the mood or the text aroused him. It was all very dramatic, leaning out of the pulpit with waving arms and flying surplice sleeves! It may have represented one aspect of his eccentric nature.

Rev. Hill often stopped on his way home to watch a cricket match in progress and on one Saturday afternoon he arrived by car. After watching for a while, he must have decided to walk home. When the match ended, I realised that his car was still at the cricket field – but that he wasn't. I walked to the vicarage to tell him which may have avoided panic on the Sunday morning.

I always found Victor Hill to be a kind man and his invitation to read a Lesson by one so young stood me in good stead in later life. He knew that I was going to university in October 1957 and gave me a book which was useful in my studies. In it, he wrote *In memory of a very valued friendship. V. R. Hill. 30th September 1957. Matfen Vicarage, Northumberland.*

And, to close

There's always plenty of information about village activities on the village Facebook page, but this newsletter is intended to reach those who don't always access online information. It is put together on behalf of the Matfen village hall committee and sent round by email by Rev Rachel. As ever, sincere thanks are due to her for this great community service, which means that the newsletter costs nothing to produce and distribute. Thanks are also due to the contributors to this edition. Any comments on the contents would be most welcome, as well as suggestions and contributions for future newsletters. Emailing copies ensures a good outreach, but if you know of anyone who would like a paper copy, please let us know. You can get in touch about anything to do with the newsletter at contehjean@gmail.com

