

# Autumn 2021

Edition 9

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# *Rennington and Rock Community News*



## From the editors

Hello once again and welcome to the Autumn 2021 edition of the R&R Community News. In order to reduce printing costs and save on paper, there have been some further design and layout changes. We hope you like them.

This edition sees the inclusion of the Newsletter's first advertisement (see page 6). Dovecote Northumberland is an artisan enterprise based in Rennington parish. Their products are lovely, so if you are looking for that special Christmas present which is locally made then look no further. I can personally vouch for their candles! We thank them for their support.

In this edition there is news, information and stories from both established and new contributors. Thank you once again to everyone who has taken the time to send us copy. Do you have something that you would like to share? Could the Newsletter be the place to tell your story? If so, please get in touch. We intend to introduce a change of editorial policy in future editions. Distinction will be made between contributions that provide news and information of community interest and that which clearly promotes activities which provide a direct commercial benefit to the originator. The latter will be considered as advertising and such copy will be subject to advertising charges as shown on the outside cover of the current edition.

We are still seeking volunteers to help secure future production, editing and distribution of the Newsletter. Can you help? Please contact the editors if you would like to be involved.

Jane and Robert Dixon, Editors

## Parish Council news

### **Rennington Village defibrillator (automated external defibrillator)**

The Rennington Village defibrillator, which was originally installed as an outcome of fund raising by Peter



Purdom (a Rennington resident), is installed on the outside wall of The Horseshoes Inn and can be easily seen and accessed from the front car parking area. The device is housed within a green coloured, temperature controlled secure cabinet that can be opened by a digital lock. In an emergency situation, members of the public can access the code when making a '999' telephone call to the ambulance services.

The defibrillator has been managed by Peter with the support of the Stephen Carey Fund and a second village resident. After many years of dedicated volunteer service to the community, Peter has decided it is time to pass this 'guardian' role on to others. The Parish Council has now assumed responsibility for the defibrillator and agreed to provide funding for its maintenance, and for future basic and refresher cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training to residents. Day to day support and maintenance of the device will be provided by a small group of 'defibrillator guardian' volunteers.

If you would like to join the defibrillator guardian volunteer group, please contact the Parish Clerk at [renningtonpc@gmail.com](mailto:renningtonpc@gmail.com)

### **Rennington North Farm development**

The North Farm development story continues.

Key battles with the developer and planning authority in respect of Phase 1 have been lost, eventually by a political casting vote at North Northumberland Local Area Council Planning Committee. The Parish Council continues to have dialogue with both parties on details relating to the outstanding works.

Meanwhile, new residents have already moved into the development, and we welcome them to the parish. We trust they will find that Rennington offers them a happy home.

You will remember that Northumberland Estates were developing plans for North Farm Phase 2. Earlier this year, they placed a pre-planning enquiry with the NCC Planning Authority for comment on their outline plans. The Planning Authority has responded in detail with considerable negativity towards the plans. In effect they have said wrong place, too many properties, and significant potential loss of traditional rural vistas. Northumberland Estates have sought to review this response with the Parish Council and discussions will commence during October.

Robert Dixon, Chair, Rennington Parish Council

## Neighbourhood Development Plan drop-in session



Many thanks to all of you who came. It was because of you, your comments and thoughts that the event was so successful. The numbers of residents attending surpassed our expectations.

Neighbourhood planning is important as it gives us all the opportunity to develop a shared vision for the Parish and shape the development, growth, and future changes to our area.

All your comments will be added to the feedback from the Neighbourhood Development Plan Questionnaire, and together will form the basis when designing draft planning policies that support the views of residents.

Once your input, either through the drop-in session or the questionnaire, has been analysed, the results will be published on Rennington Parish Council's website.

The drop-in session and questionnaire are the first part of the consultations that Rennington Parish Council will be holding to ensure that it is the views of residents that form the basis of policies that will make up our plan. The next consultation, probably in spring next year, will be to ask your views on a draft Neighbourhood Development Plan which we will produce with the help of a planning consultant.

Stephen Baggott, Chair, Neighbourhood Plan Working Group

## Church news



We would like to thank the several households from Rennington who gave to our Harvest collection of food for The Peoples Kitchen in Newcastle.

Judy and I delivered the items the next day. Also we respectfully ask people not to put glass vases or other glass containers on

graves or headstones. Thank you.

Paul Weston, Church Warden

# DOVECOTE

Dovecote Northumberland would like to introduce itself to our local community.



We are a small local business based on the Lee Moor Business Park in Rennington.

[www.dovecotenorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.dovecotenorthumberland.co.uk)

We produce artisan, handmade candles, wax melts, room diffusers, sprays and Hand/Body wash and Moisturising Lotion. The whole ethos of the company is to provide people with a way to create a relaxing and calming environment in their home. We intentionally craft all natural, botanical products including soy wax and wood wicks.

We are very lucky to live in a beautiful and rural part of the country. Every time we step outside there is a heady mix of sights, sounds and smells. All of these experiences are poured back into Dovecote Northumberland.

We would like to offer all local residents an introductory offer and free local delivery using the code "local20"



DOVECOTE NORTHUMBERLAND  
Unit 6D-F, Lee Moor Business Park  
Alnwick, Northumberland. NE66 3RL

+44 (0) 1665 577576  
[deb@dovecotenorthumberland.co.uk](mailto:deb@dovecotenorthumberland.co.uk)

## Summer wildlife in my garden and around our parish

### In my Garden:

Summer warmth arrived late this year, and it seems as though many of the birds and other wildlife may have had a difficult season.

Many of the finch family, particularly goldfinches, were found dead in spring and early summer and the promising numbers seen around in June soon disappeared and then only the odd bird seen. Several neighbours also reported finding dead finches.

The early nesters such as blackbirds, song thrushes and robins each raised broods throughout summer and didn't seem to be affected like the finches.

Heavy rain in July affected many young birds and the spotted flycatchers nesting under my roof eaves were put off their nest and deserted it. Swallows hatched 4 young on 21<sup>st</sup> June, each one successfully fledging. A second clutch of eggs was laid and hatched, with another 4 youngsters successfully reared though they were reluctant to leave the nest as the weather changed. Nearly all the swallows left on 15<sup>th</sup> September however the last one stayed for 2 additional nights before leaving.

The waterhens hatched broods regularly throughout summer with six chicks being the biggest clutch I saw. Sadly the broods diminished over coming days and often the mother was left with only 2 or 3 young.

I've only seen one family of blue tits foraging through my orchard trees, together with a family of great tits and a family of coal tits.

Wrens successfully bred too.

Many young starlings appeared in early July and numbers built up to several dozen birds throughout the month.

Wood pigeon and collared doves have bred well again.

A female sparrow hawk has visited my garden every few days this summer, consequently the small birds often 'disappear' for a few hours.

Several robins have stayed through the summer months and now have spread about seeking their own feeding territories, with young robins slowly gaining their colour for winter.



A pair of bullfinches have continued to visit my garden daily throughout the summer and I've seen them in the village on several occasions.

Occasionally a chaffinch has been seen though I don't think they have bred in my garden.

Hedgehogs seen in early summer seem to have dispersed and no scat found. Unfortunately, 3 have been killed by cars in and near to the village.

Rabbits have thrived again this year, much to gardeners' annoyance. In the last few weeks diseased rabbits have been seen.

Toads and frogs are appearing more frequently now, especially on wet nights, with several wee froglets and toadlets hopping frantically.

Bats seemed to have fared well this year and can be seen most warm evenings. They are mainly pipistrelles although the occasional larger bat appears.

In the last few weeks I've been entertained by a family of tawny owls hooting throughout the nights. The young ones are screeching, perhaps to let the parents know where they are and hoping to be fed? Soon the adults will hoot to seek a mate and pair up before winter.

Bees and butterflies have been less numerous this year. Many butterflies didn't appear until mid-summer and even then, in small numbers. Cabbage whites didn't appear in my garden until August. Several red admirals can still be seen. I have 7 'red' butterflies that have chosen to roost in my coal house in readiness for winter. Moths are numerous, though I'd like to hear from someone more knowledgeable than I am on how the moths are faring.

In August a stoat hunted through my garden and several neighbours spoke of seeing it hunting in their gardens off Church Road. I was treated to a very

close view after it caught a young pigeon squab and dragged it across my terrace to take its intended meal to a more concealed place to consume. The numbers of small rabbits diminished too.

### **In the Parish:**

A pair of water rails seem to have bred in or near to Rennington village as young rails were spotted regularly by several in Church Road.

Barn owls could be seen regularly as dusk approached in early summer though I've not been lucky enough to spot any lately.

In late July, at dusk, mallards could be seen flying into the 'tram lines' of arable crops for a free feed of grain.

Several feral greylag geese were flying regularly in the evenings throughout August, trying out their new feathers following their annual moult.

In early September the migratory geese started arriving in large numbers. On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> several large skeins of pink-footed geese could be seen flying over heading to the southwest.

Curlew have been flying onto recently cultivated land. Perhaps those that have been flying over to Rennington Moor have bred successfully.

Hares seem to have bred well this summer and appear to be numerous throughout the parish and more easily seen now that the crops are harvested.

A pair of kestrels have been seen regularly, suggesting that they have nested close to the village. Occasionally a buzzard has been seen hunting the fields.

A few grey partridges can be seen on the short stubble fields. Pheasants are also seen more often now that harvest is completed.

Bats are frantically foraging alongside the hedgerows in the evenings, as weather allows, no doubt feasting in readiness for their torpid 'sleep'.

Again, I look forward to hearing and reading of what others have seen, both in gardens and when out in the parish.

John Watson



## County Councillor report

### Healthwatch, Northumberland

Healthwatch Northumberland is *your* local health and social care champion.

As an independent statutory body, it has the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers

listen to local feedback and improve standards of care.

Healthwatch Northumberland is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. It is entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with them is confidential.

Healthwatch use your feedback to better understand the challenges facing the NHS and other care providers and make sure your experiences improve health and care for everyone, both locally and nationally.

Your feedback will help to improve people's lives. So, if you need support or information, or you're ready to tell your story, they are there to listen.

Write to: Healthwatch Northumberland, Adapt (NE), Burn Lane, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3HN - Call: 03332 408 468, Text: 07413 385275.

Email: [info@healthwatchnorthumberland.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchnorthumberland.co.uk)

### Your experience of NHS services

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) welcome feedback about NHS services, both positive and negative. If you are unhappy with the treatment or service you, a relative or someone you care for has received from your local NHS, you have the right to make a complaint, have it looked into and get a response. The NHS aims to make sure all complaints are handled well and that appropriate action is taken in order to try and resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction.

### Can my issue be resolved without formally complaining

You can raise your concerns immediately by speaking with the staff involved.

This might give you the response you require without having to take the

matter further.

You can also contact the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) who can provide confidential advice and support to help you resolve queries and concerns about your NHS care within an NHS trust informally without having to make a formal complaint.

You can find the nearest PALS office on the NHS website. You can also ask your GP surgery, hospital or phone NHS111 for details of your nearest PALS.

### **Where do I send my complaint**

If your complaint is about a hospital, community or mental health service or independent provider you should send this to the NHS organisation involved.

If your complaint is about CCG commissioning, a funding decision or a service provided by North of England Commissioning Support, you should send it to:

Complaints Team, North of England Commissioning Support Unit

John Snow House, University Science Park. Durham, DH1 3YG,

Tel. 0191 374 4218

[necsu.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:necsu.complaints@nhs.net)

Face to face meetings can be arranged with the Complaints Team by appointment only. This service is not offered on a drop in basis.

### **What happens if I prefer to complain directly to the commissioning organisation**

The commissioning organisation pays for the healthcare services in your area.

The responsible commissioner will vary depending on the NHS service you are complaining about.

- If your complaint is about services such as hospital care, mental health services, out of hours services and community services such as district nursing, you should send your complaint to NECS who will coordinate the complaint on behalf of the CCG
- If your complaint is about primary care services such as GPs, dentists, opticians, or pharmacy services, NHS England is responsible for

investigating the complaint

- If your complaint is about a public health organisation (which provides services that prevent disease, promote health and prolong life), your local authority will investigate.

### **What can I expect in response**

Your complaint will be fully investigated in a manner that is fair to both you and the staff involved.

If failings are identified during the investigation, any necessary improvements will be made to the quality of services.

You will receive a written response to your complaint which will include information on any service improvements.

### **What happens if I am unhappy with the response**

If you remain unhappy with how your complaint has been handled following the conclusion of local resolution, you can ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) to review your complaint. You can contact the PHSO at the address below:

PHSO, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP

Tel: 0345 015 4033 Email: [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk)

[www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)

### **Return of free waste bags for Green Dog Walkers**



The Green Dog Walker scheme is run by Northumberland County Council and has over 3,000 members of the public signed up to it. Under the initiative, dog owners are encouraged to sign the Green Dog Walkers

pledge ‘to always clean up after their dog and put the bag in a bin and to use a friendly approach to encourage other dog walkers to do the same.’

For further information about the Green Dog Walker scheme and to sign up online visit the council's website:

[www.northumberland.gov.uk/greendogwalkers](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/greendogwalkers)

Or email: [greendogwalkers@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:greendogwalkers@northumberland.gov.uk)

### **Smokers urged to quit in Northumberland**

At a time when staying healthy is even more important, smokers in Northumberland are being urged to take the step and give up cigarettes for good.

The pressures of coping with the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have contributed to an increase in the number of people smoking cigarettes. Smoking is the biggest preventable cause of cancer and is known to cause at least 15 different cancer types. By stopping smoking, the lungs are given the chance to repair, meaning breathing becomes easier.

Evidence shows that people are three times more likely to quit for good if they have support from their local NHS stop smoking service.

There are lots of support options available:

- Contact your local stop smoking service, Northumberland Stop Smoking Service, on telephone (01670) 813135 and at [www.northumbria.nhs.uk/stopsmoking](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk/stopsmoking)
- To learn more about how to stop and smoking aids to manage nicotine cravings go to [Stop smoking treatments - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

Wendy Pattison, County Councillor

email: [wendy.pattison@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:wendy.pattison@northumberland.gov.uk)

mobile: 07779 983072 Facebook: Cllr Wendy Pattison



## Rennington Village Hall

### news

After 18 months of on-off Covid-19 restrictions the hall is now fully open for business with all regular user groups returning during August and September. For anyone new to the parish, information about activities in the hall and relevant contact details can be found on our website [www.renningtonvillagehall.co.uk](http://www.renningtonvillagehall.co.uk) or on the notice board outside the hall. It is also available to hire for private functions.

We have, at last, been able to hold a long overdue Annual General Meeting to approve our annual accounts and to elect a Management Committee for the year ahead. All existing members were re-elected and we were pleased to welcome Karen Lomas as a new member. For anyone interested, the Annual Report to the AGM can be found on the website.

As ever we would very much welcome any new members wishing to join the Committee or anyone willing to help out with organising activities in the hall or supporting events. If you are interested please email us on: [renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com)

### Film Club

A new attraction for the dark autumn and winter evenings is our monthly Film Club. The first well attended meeting of the Club took place at the beginning of September and going forward Films will be normally be shown on the last Thursday of each month, doors opening at 7pm.

November 25th

“*Gran Torino*” Drama-comedy directed, produced and starring Clint Eastwood. Disgruntled Korean War veteran Walt Kowalski sets out to reform his teenage Hmong Chinese neighbour after he tries to steal his prized possession: a 1972 Gran Torino.

December 30th

*Seasonal Film* - Ask the Audience - suggestions please!

Advance Booking advised. Please email Laurence on:

[renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com)

No charge for entry to film nights but donations in support of the village hall will be gratefully accepted.

\*Requests/Ideas for future film nights also welcomed\*

### **Memoir Evening, Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> November 7-9pm**

Local husband and wife team Sue and James Elliott invite you to a presentation of their recently published memoirs followed by discussion and a chance to explore the processes involved in compiling a memoir.

The presentation will cover three personal stories; 'One Family, Two Wars', 'Nurse' and 'Troubled Times'.

Admission £5 to include refreshments (wine/soft drink and nibbles). All proceeds to Rennington Village Hall. Email [renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com) for tickets.

N.B. copies of memoirs will be available for sale at £10 per copy if desired, proceeds of sales towards publication costs.

### **Christmas Bingo, Friday 26<sup>th</sup> November 7pm**

By popular demand our Christmas themed, seasonal fun-packed fundraiser is back! Prizes include turkeys, puddings, crackers, wine and gifts galore!

Donations or Christmas themed prizes will be gratefully received ahead of time and should be given to Wendy Swinney or to arrange collection email: [renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com)

### **Christmas Tree Switch-On! Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December 6.30 for 7pm**

Join the Village Hall committee for mulled wine, mince pies and seasonal celebrations. All Welcome! No charge but donations in support of the village hall gratefully received.

## Singing Group, Thursdays 4pm-5.30pm

No experience necessary, this informal group is always in need of enthusiastic new members to enjoy the benefits of singing together. Please email Carole on: [renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:renningtonvillagehall@gmail.com) for more information.

Laurence Dent, chairman

## Bailiffgate Museum and Gallery

Bailiffgate Museum and Gallery welcomes back international artist Jose Snook with her new exhibition which opened on 12<sup>th</sup> October. **In Memoriam** is an exhibition of Jose's new work, made in response to the current environmental crisis and the mass extinction of animal and plant species.

The exhibition is in two parts. 'Resurrection' is a series of beautiful, haunting photographs depicting solitary animals suspended in ice, oblivious to their predicament. The work seeks to draw attention to endangered species of mammals and the causes of their loss, and the role frozen zoos may play in the conservation of animal species.

'Imposters' is a series of evocative faux-vintage photographs of replicas of plants and animals, which are displayed alongside selected artificial and organic plant and animal specimens. The trick is to spot which ones are the imposters. The work explores the replacement of lost plant and animal species with synthetic replicas, and is inspired by an event that happened in the Lake District in 2007. Daffodils flowered too early for the tourist season so to avoid disappointing visitors a holiday park planted hundreds of artificial daffodils.

Jose Snook was brought up in the Cheviots in rural Northumberland. She left the hills of her homeland to study Zoology, completed further study in photography, earned her Masters in Fine Arts and then returned to Northumberland in 2004. Her photographic work and sound work have been

exhibited in solo, group & juried shows and arts festivals across the UK, Australia and North America. Jose has also received a number of International awards and commendations for her work.

In Memoriam runs from 12 October to 28 November. Bailiffgate is open Tuesday to Sunday: Adults £4; Concessions £3; Children 5 - 16 £1; Under 5s free; Friends free.

For further information contact Deb Still, Press Enquiries: 01665 602099 or Vivien Kay, Museum Coordinator: 01665 605847

[ask@bailiffgatemuseum.co.uk](mailto:ask@bailiffgatemuseum.co.uk)

14 Bailiffgate, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1LX.

Tel 01665 605847

Website [Bailiffgate Museum & Gallery](http://Bailiffgate Museum & Gallery)



## Bird watching notes, autumn 2021

Writing this at the end of September, the Indian Summer is over and cool autumnal weather associated with sequential Atlantic fronts and their associated winds has commenced. The swallows and martins have left, moving southwards towards their wintering areas in Africa. Chiff chaffs have been feeding regularly in the birch tree outside our bedroom window but have now gone, as have the other warblers. In their place the waders have returned, with large numbers of redshank, dunlin, turnstone, ringed plover, sanderling, bar-tailed godwit and curlew being present on the shore, especially at Hauxley, Druridge, Boulmer, Newton, Newbiggin and Holy Island. Large flocks of golden plover can be seen flying over the rocks and coastal fields at Boulmer. The migratory geese are also returning with regular skeins of pink-footed geese flying over as they move southwards and the pale-bellied brent geese are back at Holy Island. They are a defined sub-species of brent, which

breed on Svalbard in the summer then overwinter on the mud flats surrounding Holy Island, feeding largely on eel grass. The dark bellied brents, the more common form, breed in Siberia and Northern Russia but overwinter in East Anglia and along the south coast, although they are being seen around Holy Island in increasing numbers. We await the arrival of the migratory thrushes, redwing and fieldfare. They will appear over the next few weeks, as will the whooper swans as they escape from the Scandinavian and Icelandic winter weather.



Male chaffinch

In the garden the British blackbirds have diminished in number, having bred here but will shortly be replaced by an influx of European blackbirds, which overwinter here. The finches are regular visitors to our gardens and bird feeders. Numbers of

chaffinches seem to have gone up over the last couple of years. They are one of the most common garden birds and are also widely seen in a variety of natural habitats. In the wild they live predominantly on insects and seeds, in the garden they tend not to come directly to feeders but to hop around on the ground underneath them picking up food that falls onto the ground. In the spring and early summer the males sing loudly. Males have a grey cap and neck with a chestnut brown cheek, breast and back and white shoulder patches. When they fly they have characteristic white flashes on the wings and tail. Females and young birds have more muted plumage, being a more yellowish brown on the side of the head and breast, their shoulder patches are less distinct but still seen in flight.



Greenfinches are the second most common finch that we see in the garden. Their numbers have fluctuated markedly over the last 20 years. Recently they have declined significantly as they appear to be particularly prone to a parasitic disease called Trichomonosis. This is easily transmitted between birds, especially at bird feeders. It causes oral ulceration which in turn causes the bird to be unable to feed, resulting in

their demise. To minimise the risk of this condition it is important to clean and disinfect bird feeders regularly. Greenfinches are roughly the size of a house sparrow and are stocky birds with a stout bill. They are an olive green colour on the back with a yellow line along the edge of the wing which is visible in flight as well as when perched. Females are a more grey-green colour with less striking yellow colouration.

Siskins are another finch which may be confused with greenfinches and which come regularly to our gardens and feeders. They have increased significantly in numbers locally in the last couple of years and now appear to be breeding in the area rather than just passing through. Slightly smaller and less stocky than a greenfinch with a smaller bill, the overall impression is much more



of a yellow bird than a greenish one. They have prominent yellow bars on the wings and males have a black chin and cap which is not present in females.

Goldfinches have increased markedly in number over the last twenty years. They are striking small birds, most commonly seen moving around in little flocks. In the autumn they are commonly seen feeding on patches of scrubby land on small seeds from teasels, ragwort and dandelions. Once these food



Goldfinch

sources are exhausted they move into our gardens and come to feeders, where they are particularly partial to sunflower and niger seeds. They are ginger-brown above, paler underneath, with striking black and yellow wings, a black crown, white cheeks and a red face. There isn't a great deal of difference between males and females.

The final finch which is seen fairly regularly is the bullfinch. They are more solitary and tend to move around in pairs. They may come to feeders but also feed on berries in hedgerows. In the spring they can devastate fruit bushes by eating the developing buds. A striking bird, they look plump and have a thick bill. The male is a rather splendid sight with his orange-red breast, black cap and grey back. The female is similar in habitus but a more grey-brown colour down the breast.



Male Bullfinch

Although the weather may be turning colder there is plenty going on in the avian world and there are many different species to observe and enjoy through the autumn months in the locality.

With thanks to Peter Fawcett for some of the photographs.

Tim Walls

## Tales from the milliner

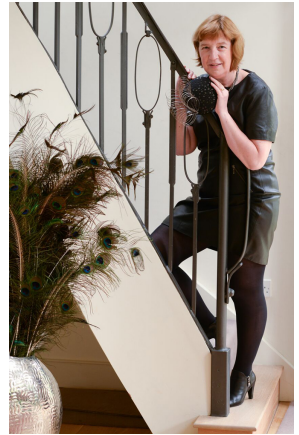
### Part 1 - The millinery butterfly is confined to home

In February 2020 I was still working from my home studio at Doxford Newhouses leading my popular millinery beginners' workshops around my kitchen table, as Covid-19 began to impact. Millinery classes are only one aspect of my one-woman business, which includes making couture hats and headpieces to commission; a ready-to-wear range; accessories;

and like a brightly coloured butterfly, I love enthusing about my love of millinery, especially when delivering talks to special interest groups. In March 2020 with the closure of most businesses, the instruction to work from home where possible and the cancellation of all social events such as weddings etc, sources of work for creative people, including couture milliners, dried up overnight.

As the roller coaster of the pandemic continued through the late spring and early summer months of 2020 my husband Simon and I spent lots of time in our garden and to our delight discovered new local walks in the vicinity. Weekly grocery visits to the "Ship Shop" at The Ship Inn, Low Newton became a regular highlight for us. Contrast this with my varied creative pre-pandemic life which was characterised by my passion for the entrancing colourful art of couture millinery. Like everyone, we found our lives were pared back to basics, confined to home. Thank heavens the weather was so kind.

Gradually the need to wear face masks accelerated and I realised I was ideally placed to add these to my exalting couture standards. I have for most of my adult life been fascinated by the design qualities of Liberty of London fabrics and so turned to Liberty as the source of classic English and William Morris style prints. Researching the various design options available, testing and



making adaptations to suit my requirements is an important aspect of making couture hats, so I applied these techniques to face masks too.

I was taken by surprise at the level of interest and our dining room rapidly became a production line. Finding I was left with beautiful Tana Lawn off-cuts I created miniature crazy patchwork squares. Once cut they became appliqués for drawstring storage pouches. Instantly the mask package (masks, filters, nose wires and the storage pouch) became a gift line, proving it was still possible to be elegant in the face of adversity. This led to a discovery that there was a commercial appetite for “his and hers” face mask sets. (The female partner always got the storage pouch, I fear!)

The next problem was how and where to post them out. I had already discovered the “Click and Drop” service, however as orders started to pour in from all over the world, I found rather disconcertingly that the size of letter slots on our local vintage post boxes varies hugely! Soon I had a regular afternoon walking route to the only local post box that had a big enough opening to take the gusset envelopes I used for my despatches.

Meanwhile, Zoom calls and the like kept us all connected with the outside world. For the business person working from home, there was a dilemma when personal styling was a consideration and access to hairdressers became a distant memory. As everyone’s hair became more unruly, I realised I could use my beloved Liberty fabrics to help here too. Applying the same strict design principles, I created a new line of effortless wired head wraps, which instantly solved such styling challenges. Not only were they “letterbox friendly gifts”, when not wearing your headwrap at your desk, you could wear it in the garden too!

So, with “proper” hat-making showing no sign of a return I was delighted in September when an Edinburgh friend contacted me. She was concerned that she would not easily be able to buy a Remembrance Day poppy and asked if I would make her one. I sourced a range of brightly coloured 100% wool felt and

set about designing an interlocking style four-petal layered poppy. She was delighted and ordered more as keepsakes for absent friends. We both made donations to the Salvation Army, and my “His and His” poppy options naturally followed. So, in no time at all, I had a themed letterbox gift collection of handmade felt flowers based on seasonal blooms, each flower having four contrasting felt petals.

If this tale of millinery confinement has been of interest, you can read the second half of the story covering how I emerged from Covid-19, in the next edition. Millinery talks and workshops will be restarting from October, as long as restrictions allow, so please do get in touch if you are interested in any aspect of my millinery work.

[www.margaretwoodliffwright.co.uk](http://www.margaretwoodliffwright.co.uk)



*Finally...*

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**Friday 7th January 2022**

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