

**Matthew Baker MBE**  
**Doctor of Science**  
**Durham Cathedral, 10 January 2025**

Matthew Baker MBE is a renowned television presenter. He is deeply committed to the countryside and to farming, is a champion of North East England, and recognised for his charity work. He was an accomplished gymnast, a world record holder, and perhaps most significantly, runner up on the 2010 series of Strictly Come Dancing!

Matt was born in Easington, County Durham. Aged 10, his parents moved to a farm west of Durham, and it was here that Matt inherited his mum's passion for farming. The farm remains their family home and is the focus of the popular TV series 'Our Farm in the Dales' that Matt presents with his family.

From the age of 5, Matt was a keen dancer and began competing as a gymnast whilst at school. He was North of England champion for 8 years and joined the British squad aged 11. Sadly, he was forced to give up at 14 after being diagnosed with anaemia, although he switched to acrobatics and ended up as British junior champion. He has spoken openly about how his obsession with gymnastics led to him being bullied at school, and the challenges of standing up to the aggressors. But he continues to communicate his passion for gymnastics through commentating, including on the Olympics, and was an Olympic Torch Bearer carrying the flame into Durham City in 2012.

Matt attended Easington Village School and then Belmont Comprehensive School. He took A-levels in Drama, Biology and Sports Science at Durham Sixth Form Centre. He wanted to be a physiotherapist, but, as he puts it, "did really badly in [his] exams". Inspired by his debut as a T-Bird in a college production of Grease, and on the advice of his teachers, he attended Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, as a drama student. It was during this period he got his big break in television with the children's programme Blue Peter, which he co-presented from 1999 to 2006, winning two BAFTAs for Best Children's Presenter. Matt was a natural fit, with his gymnastic background helping with the physical challenges including joining Judy Leden for a world record-breaking tandem hang glider flight in 2003.

Matt co-hosted BBC One's prime time The One Show from 2011 to 2020, a programme focussed on topical issues that also takes an active role in events such as Comic Relief, Sport Relief and Children in Need. Matt began working with Children in Need in 2009 and is now a Trustee. In 2011 he famously rode a Rickshaw from Edinburgh to London, raising £2 million in the process. In recognition of his ongoing efforts, Matt was made MBE for charitable and voluntary services to fundraising in the 2022 New Year's Honours List.

Matt has presented BBC One's Countryfile since 2009, highlighting rural, agricultural, and environmental and sustainability issues. He is an advocate for how people can get a connection to wildlife and the landscape. This was evident throughout 'Our Farm in the Dales' which provided an authentic representation of farming and family challenges. His strong commitment to his roots in the North East, and his family, is further showcased in his 'Travels with Mum & Dad', promoting the regions landmarks including this iconic Cathedral and Durham Castle.

For many, the setback Matt experienced in giving up his gymnastics dream would have been difficult to overcome. But lessons he learned about how dedication and "putting in the hours" will get you a result have inspired him to make enormous contributions to television, charity, the environment and the region.

Chancellor, I present Matthew Baker MBE to receive the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.