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RESTORATION WORK STARTS AT LAST

After many delays and much frustration, work has finally started on the restoration and extension of West Lodge. This is expected to lead on to the construction of a new ornamental gateway entrance into Firbeck Hall. Apart from some remedial work to the roof and tree removal, this is the first positive action to take place since the Hall's days as a hospital and rehabilitation centre.

With regard to Firbeck Hall and the stable block, we are still hopeful of an early planning application in respect of the revised redevelopment scheme. This is expected to feature 8 substantial dwellings with the possibility of 2 further house conversions within the structure of the Hall itself. Alternatively, the Hall may be converted into an unspecified number of apartments.

Anyone with an interest in the history of the Hall and who cares about its future is invited to join Friends of Firbeck Hall. Subscription fee is only £1.00. Contact our Membership Secretary, - telephone 01909 732191 or email friends@firbeckhall.net Visit our website at www.firbeckhall.net

Sid Ellis



Restoration Work Starts at West Lodge



Here's West Lodge In Its Heyday

SUNSHINE FAYRE

Letwell summer fayre proved a big success with early morning rain giving way to lots of glorious sunshine in the afternoon. Visitors to the annual show were as generous as ever with over £3,000 raised on the day for St. Peter's Church. See full report inside.

POTHOLE BATTLE GOES ON

Re-surfacing work on one of the main roads leading to our villages will take at least another two years or even more to complete depending on budget cuts.

Highway officials at Streetpride have told FLAG that they can't afford to renew the remaining heavily potholed section of Lamb Lane in one go as they would have wanted.

Instead, the work is being phased over two years with the next section - from Kidd Lane to Salt Hill - scheduled for next summer, and the most heavily damaged stretch from Salt Hill to the county boundary not being re-surfaced till the summer of 2016.

Both schemes, even then, could fall victim to future cuts in Rotherham's highway budget programme.

Figures provided by the council to a FLAG reader - who had written to the authority complaining about delays in completing the project - reveal that the work undertaken so far has cost the authority £250,000.

Re-surfacing the section from Leys Lane to Penny Hill, which was carried out in June 2010, cost £100,000 alone. The council spent £80,000 re-newing the road from Penny Hill to Ramper Road in May last year, and then another £70,000 on the latest scheme in June - tarmacing the length from Ramper Road to Kidd Lane.

Streetpride's Stephen Finley says: "We want to re-surface Lamb Lane completely right to the county boundary, and we have done around two thirds of the road as things stand.

"We cannot afford to complete the work in one go, and the scheme is scheduled at the moment to be carried out over two years. However, everything is budget led, and we can't say what would happen if there were significant cuts next year."

Streetpride will continue to monitor the damaged section of highway on a regular basis. Mr Finley added: "One of our officers walks the road once a month, and we will deal with potholes on an ongoing basis."

SCHOOL FOOD.... PARENTS: SAVE £360 A YEAR

Rotherham school meals service has asked FLAG to spread the word about the new scheme offering free lunches for all infant children from September onwards. Here the service details just some of the facts...

"As a child moves through school there are lots of decisions for parents to make, including what their child eats at lunchtime. Rotherham School Meals Service aims to make this decision as easy as possible by providing tasty, nutritious lunches children will enjoy and will help set them up for the rest of the day."

To make things even easier, from September 2014, all children in Reception Y1 & Y2 (4 – 7 years) are entitled to a free school lunch. There has never been a better time to introduce children to the benefits of a tasty, nutritious school lunch.

"School food in Rotherham has come a long way - and school lunches are now better than ever. Rotherham School Meals Service work hard to promote healthy eating by providing well balanced menus which meet strict national standards making sure children get a tasty, nutritional meal to fuel a day of work and play. Did you know... only 1% of packed lunches meet the nutritional standards that apply to school food? Families could also enjoy savings of up to £360 a year per child if their child takes up a free school lunch. That's a lot of extra money for days out or just helping with the cost of living.

Did you know... on average parents spend 150 hours a year preparing packed lunches? This is a universal offer and free school meals are available to all Reception Y1 & Y2 children, regardless of the family income."

NEWS FROM FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL

The Annual Parish meetings were held on the 28th May with two extraordinary Parish Council meetings held on the 11th and 27th June.

Residents who attended the Annual meetings received reports from local organisations and the local church highlighting the events within the village over the last 12 months. The Chairman additionally delivered a report which advised of the work being undertaken by the Parish Council with the planting project, Christmas tree and current grants to the Church and Village Hall set to continue in 2014-15.

The members were pleased to note that the village telephone box had been repainted in June and is currently being used as a seed bank for residents.

Many residents attended an extraordinary meeting of the Council on the 27th June to provide their views on the latest planning application in respect of the Black Lion Public House. A decision is now awaited by the planning department regarding the redevelopment of the site. Members of the public and the Parish Council reiterated their hopes that the public house would continue to be successful and remain an important feature of the village.

The Parish Council were delighted to welcome Mr Marcus Fasey onto the Council. Mr Fasey was co-opted onto the Parish Council at an extraordinary meeting on the 11th June. The Council still currently has one casual vacancy. If anyone is interested in becoming a Parish Councillor and would like to discuss what it means and how they might get involved then please contact either the Clerk to the Council, Angela Harrison on 01909 239911 or Chairman James Charlesworth on 07774 212175 or email clerk.firbeckpc@hotmail.co.uk

STRAWBERRIES, SCONES...AND GLORIOUS SUNSHINE

Jenny and Alan Tolhurst once again kindly opened their beautiful garden at Firbeck to a busy crowd for this year's Strawberry tea which served as a fundraising event for St Martin's Church.

There was a small entrance fee, a cake and plant stall and a raffle. In total the event raised just shy of £500, but the village hall management committee topped up the total to a round £1,000! Simon Copley controlled the entrance and commented that a lot of people were very generous and paid over the advertised £3 entrance fee. Children were admitted free of charge.

The tea, strawberries, scones and cream were delicious and complemented greatly by the idyllic surroundings and glorious weather.

The heating fund target for St Martin's church had already been reached before the Strawberry tea, but the funds raised will surely be put to great use. Alan tells us that work will hopefully soon begin on the new system once the red tape has been navigated. Once underway the work will only take a few days to complete so it looks as though church will be nice and toasty this Winter.

COME AND SEE THE BILLETS DOUX

Live music at Letwell continues on Saturday September 13th with a visit from Glastonbury favourites Polly and The Billets Doux, that's Polly and The Love Notes to you and me..... who boast a brilliant blend of pop, rock, soul, folk and country!!

The band from Bristol have built up a big following on the festival circuit with performances at the eternally-muddy spot in Somerset as well as energy-filled appearances at The Big Chill, Larmer Tree and the prestigious Cambridge Folk Festival.



Polly and The Billets Doux

Lead vocalist Perry Perry fronts the band with Andrew "Steeny" Steen playing lead guitar and helping out with the vocals alongside bass guitarist Dan Everett and drummer/percussionist Ben Perry.

Expect a cool, laid back evening if you're in the audience. The band decided to go unplugged after sizing up the dimensions of Letwell's beautifully acoustic little hall. Should be a night to remember.

Limited tickets are now on sale priced £12 from Martyn and Andy on 01909 731626 or 540694. Doors open 8 pm.

Don't leave it too late to book. Demand has been outstripping supply in recent times.

John Reilly, the voice of Sheffield favourites Boy on A Dolphin, who filled the hall to overflowing on two successive nights in early July, returns with Canadian pianist and songwriter Lewis Nitikman on Saturday October 18th. Tickets are again priced at £12,

HOT NEWS FROM ST. MARTIN'S

An improved heating system should be in place at St. Martin's Church, Firbeck, before next winter.

The Rev. Canon Judith Trickett, says the appeal for financial support to install new radiators was a great success. The Rector says: "The Parochial Church Council would like to thank most sincerely those who made generous donations. The total achieved amounted to £4,160, which will make it financially possible for the work to be undertaken before next winter.

"Although we recognise that a huge building such as St Martin's will never be 'cosy' we feel we can certainly improve things from freezing.

"Once again a heartfelt 'thank you' to all who have generously supported our efforts."

SCARECROW TRAIL SEPTEMBER 13TH

There has been an enthusiastic response to the request for scarecrows in Firbeck, but it would be helpful if everyone planning to produce one could please contact me again to confirm.

Telephone Anita on 01709 818927 or Email stantona50@yahoo.co.uk

If you prefer, add your name to the list on the noticeboard in the village hall.

SCARECROWS can be any style or size, but please include a fruit or vegetable somewhere.

TRAIL COMPETITION entry forms are £1 and will be available at the village hall from 10 am until 3pm on 13th September. A prize will go to the first correct trail entry drawn at the HARVEST SUPPER on Monday 15th September. As it will be impossible to try to choose the 'best scarecrow' there will be a second draw from the trail entries for a scarecrow winner.

DRINKS AND HOME-MADE CAKES will be served from 10.30am until 3pm.

All proceeds will go to St. Martin's Church.

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FIREBECKWATCH

Caroline Jopling, the chair/co ordinator of Firbeckwatch, the new neighbourhood watch scheme which was set up in 2012 to serve the wider Firbeck community, tells FLAG that the group now have our own page on the new Firbeck web site - www.firbeckonline.co.uk

Caroline is inviting readers to keep in touch and check out the latest information on a regular basis.

FLAG COLUMNIST LETS ROCK

FLAG columnist David Wright - who writes the nature notes in the magazine - took a break from bird watching last month and let fly with his guitar to raise cash for Bluebell Wood hospice. A gig featuring David and his band the East Side Rhythm Aces raised a whopping £1142 for the charity at the Lyric theatre in Dinnington. In case you're wondering David's the guitarist in the red shirt....



David rocks at The Lyric

"I mentioned in the previous edition of FLAG that Nuthatches had been in short supply over the winter. Well, I don't know where they've been, but they're back. Several people have stopped me to tell me about them, and I've seen them too. The Firbeck couple who've kept a garden record for many years tell me that one was in their garden on the final day of their winter recording season, thus ending the winter Nuthatch drought!

"Still no new species for me, but the elusive Red Kite has put in another appearance, this time at The Yews in April. I assume this is the same bird that's been gracing our local area in recent years? Mustbe! "And some excellent news about Cuckoos. A reliable source tells me one was calling in Firbeck on 27 April – confirmed a short time later by another reliable source. I've not heard a Cuckoo calling for three summers, so this is great news indeed. "A Cuckoo lays its single egg mainly in the nests of the Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail and Reed Warbler. In the last 40 years, Cuckoo numbers have dropped by 65%. The reason isn't known, but it's been suggested that declines in these host species, or climate-induced changes in the timing of their breeding, could have reduced the number of nests that are available for cuckoos to lay their eggs in. Other possible reasons for the decline include reduced prey (caterpillars) and deterioration of conditions along migration routes and over-wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Bullfinches continue to do well locally, and a Firbeck resident was delighted to see five of these beautiful birds on her roof in April.

"Yellow Wagtails returned to the Firbeck airfield site in late April, and are present at the time of writing. This builds on their presence last year, and more or less confirms they're breeding there – which is excellent. Skylarks also have a firm foothold there.

"I was very pleased to receive a report of a family of Goldcrests nesting in Firbeck. The Goldcrest and (much-rarer Firecrest) are the UK's smallest birds. They're very distinctive, sporting a bright black and yellow stripe on their heads. Beautiful little creatures."

David Wright 01709 813360 davidandgwenneth@gmail.com



Goldcrest

GREAT DAY FOR THE VILLAGE - AND MI-SHELL

Another successful summer fayre was chalked up as the people of Letwell - well a goodly number of them anyway - came together on a wonderfully sunny afternoon to celebrate and have fun on the village street.

Just as many visitors as usual flocked to the event - drawn perhaps by the traditional mix of attractions. Not a double glazing salesman to be seen anywhere, and long may it continue.

There were the odd gaps this year with the men of the Civil War re-enactment group missing, but there was plenty to occupy young and old alike with Thurcroft Brass Band in fine form, home made teas in the village hall doing a roaring trade and the coconut shy, pot smashing and splat the rat stalls busy all afternoon. The snail racing was as popular as ever with queen of the track Mi-shell - that's her name, honest - beating all comers from various gardens in the parish.

Members of the Sitwell Rotary Club manned the zany Human Fruit Machine, and the children from Aston C of E Junior School danced stylishly round the maypole. The display of the giant tractors and combine at South Farm were truly a sight to behold.

It was a great day, and testament to the strong sense of community spirit in the village itself.

Thanks to the organising committee, and John and Bert Hollingworth for their valued help on the day.

*In all the fayre raised over £3,000 with one or two bills to be paid out of the sum.

LETWELL'S CORONATION MEADOW

Letwell churchyard has been designated as a People's Meadow under the Coronation Meadows project - which was dedicated by Prince Charles to the Queen to commemorate her Golden Jubilee in 2013.

A meadow rich in flowers and grasses was selected in each county, and these meadows will serve as seed donors to other recipient People's Meadows such as Letwell.

While the churchyard has a rich diversity of flora and fauna on the south side - including Star of Bethlehem, orchids and betony - the north side and areas where Winter Heliotrope have become dominant would benefit from re-seeding.

The designation confers no rights or obligations - but it is a recognition of the important status of the churchyard.

View more information at coronationmeadows.org.uk/region/s.yorks

The church's old organ has finally been pensioned off, and was waiting to find a new home on Ebay as FLAG went to press. It went up for sale at £20, but there were no immediate takers with a week to go.

A new organ - at least a new second-hand model obtained from a Methodist chapel in Wales - has now been installed.



Orchid blooms in the churchyard

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

2014 is the centenary of the Diocese of Sheffield and various outdoor celebrations are being held throughout the Diocese. Our local event will take place at Roche Abbey on Sunday September 7th from 2pm to 5 pm.

Each of the celebrations will include activities for all ages, teaching by Bishop Stephen and an act of worship. Light refreshments will be available, but people are also very welcome to bring their own picnic.

Rector Judith Trickett suggests that the energetic might want to meet at St. Martin's in Firbeck at 12.30 pm and walk to the Abbey. She says: "A warm welcome awaits everyone."

Phone 01909 540193 for further details.

VALERIE'S BACK HOME

Popular long-time Firbeck resident Valerie Oxley was struck down five months ago by a rare and serious condition affecting the peripheral nervous system - which left her on a life support machine paralysed from the neck down.

Husband Mike is full of praise for the care Valerie has received at Rotherham General Hospital, and is now looking forward to his wife continuing her recovery back home.

Speaking to FLAG Mike said "I am delighted to say that Valerie has been discharged from Rotherham General Hospital after almost five months of treatment. Valerie is now convalescing at home in Firbeck and will be regaining her strength over the coming months.

"On St Valentine's Day - 14th February - Valerie was admitted to hospital with what was diagnosed as Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS), which is a rare and serious condition of the peripheral nervous system. It occurs when the body's immune system attacks part of the nervous system.

"Valerie has had a very severe case of GBS and in less than a week from admission she was paralysed from the neck down and on a life support system in the Royal Hallamshire Hospital. To enable Valerie to breath she was given a tracheostomy and attached to a ventilator, which meant she was unable to speak for a month.

"Valerie was transferred back to Rotherham and has made her recovery by way of pneumonia and a deep vein thrombosis (not unusual with GBS). The recovery process involves a lot of physiotherapy as the peripheral nerves regrow and Valerie regains the use of her

limbs. "The care Valerie has received at Rotherham General Hospital has been excellent." On behalf of everyone FLAG wishes Valerie well in the weeks and months to come.



*Valerie collecting fungi in Clumber Park
as a subject for a painting*

TAKE YOUR DOGGY-DOO HOME

Dog fouling remains a problem in Firbeck - with Darren Straw threatening to take photos so he can name and shame offenders who refuse to clean up after their pets.

Darren's truly fed up of the verge outside the council houses in New Road being covered in doggy-doo.

He told FLAG: "It's absolutely disgusting. There's an official notice nearby warning people they can be fined £1,000 for not cleaning up after their dogs, but it doesn't seem to make much difference.

"One of my neighbours was so sick of it he made some signs, laminated them and put them on the verge with the message: 'Pick Up Your Dog Poo - Children Play Here.'

"Someone then went and stole one of the signs - it's shocking."

Darren says he won't be leaving it there. "We'd like to get a photograph of the offenders - they deserve to be named and shamed!"

RARE COIN FIND

FLAG's resident metal detecting sleuth Christina Warr has struck lucky again - uncovering a rare groat which dates all the way back to the time of Philip and Mary, who reigned between 1554 and 1558.

The find in a field at Letwell re-inforces evidence about habitation of the village going back almost six centuries.

Christina says: "A groat was worth four pennies, and one bearing Mary's head is quite rare, particularly as she was on the throne for such a short period so long ago.

"It's in good condition considering how long it's been beneath the ground. I'm quite proud of it - it just shows that people were living here way back in the 1500s. It does make you think about the history of Letwell..."



The Groat alongside a 50 pence

FUND RAISING SUCCESS

Thanks go out to Mike and Rita Harrison for hosting the annual Shepherd's Pie lunch - which was a great success raising £187 for the summer fayre fund. Mexborough Male Voice Choir raised a further £209 with their concert at St Peter's Church.

WELL DONE BECKY

Congratulations to Letwell equestrian Becky Gribben, who took second place in the Horse of the Year Connemara class at the Great Yorkshire Show with her 8 year old pony Charlie following up previous success at the Lincoln County Show with stable pal Benjie.

Becky's promising to leave her jodphurs at home on August 25th.... when she marries William Wright at St. Peter's Church.

Meanwhile Becky's dad Mike is at war with Rotherham council over the overgrown state of the bridleway leading from Letwell to Langold. Mike, now the proud owner of a beautiful all-terrain mobility scooter, says: "I'm getting cut to pieces every time I go down there...."

THE SUN SHINES ON FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL W.I.

It's looking like summer might have arrived and so that we can dazzle in the sunshine, in July, we have Elaine Hawley to tell us all about how she makes her jewellery – and we hope to be able to buy some of it too!

Members have been busy baking cakes and serving teas and coffees at the Strawberry Tea in Firbeck and at the Letwell Village Fayre. Both beautiful sunny days! These have put us in good stead for when we hold our Annual Coffee Morning on the 21st August (10.30am- 12 noon) in Firbeck Village Hall. There will be cakes, plants and produce stalls plus a nearly new stall together with tombola. So please come along and browse among the stalls then have a cup of coffee, cake and natter in pleasant surroundings.

In September we will learn about “Autumn Glory” with Mrs. MacKay. Also, on the 20th September, we are having a Table Top Sale - £5 a table – 10am-12 noon in Firbeck Village Hall. If anyone is interested in wanting to hire a table to sell their wares please contact the Secretary.

At our October meeting we will be learning about Paper Craft with Sarah Lightfoot and be shown how to make the unusual items - and find out who has the most nimble fingers amongst us!

Of course we will be having our usual craft days in November making articles for Christmas – dates to be announced.

Why not join your local WI? Make new friends, enjoy great outings, listen to interesting speakers and discussions and learn new crafts. Anyone wanting further information please contact the Secretary on 01909 540751.

DE-FIB GO AHEAD - THANKS TO ELVIS AND HIS FRIENDS

Campaigners are close to installing a life-saving defibrillator at Letwell after a bunch of hardy villagers bravely took the stage of the village hall for a sell out show which saw them imitating their favourite stars.

The fund raising evening featured memorable performances from an glittering array of performers - including Tina Turner plus backing dancers, as well as Sonny and Cher, Frank Sinatra, Kenny Rogers, Bob Dylan, Lulu and a stand in Elvis with a dodgy pair of legs and an unforgettable stage presence.

One long-time villager summed it up perfectly in a sentence. "I've lived here 40 odd years," said the man, "but I've never known a night like it. Fantastic...." The event itself raised a stupendous £1200 with donations from Letwell Parish Council and other generous villagers boosting the coffers even further.

Organiser Rita Harrison, who doubled as Tina on the night, told FLAG that the group was now in a position to order the defibrillator. No final decision has been taken about the location for the equipment, but the exterior side wall of the village hall remains the favoured option.

Rita added: "We are hugely grateful to the village community as a whole for their wonderful generosity. Everyone will be invited in due course to a fact finding evening presented by Emma Scott from the Yorkshire Ambulance Service, where questions can be asked and people can learn more about the defibrillator, and how to use it."

Letwell's budding showbiz stars are under pressure to repeat the performance next year. Rita says: "The event really brought everyone together. It was a lot of fun, and we've had people wanting a repeat performance next year....so who knows what might happen!"



Stars in your eyes at letwell

FIRBECK 2015 CALENDAR PHOTOGRAPHS

Don't forget to keep taking those snapshots of Firbeck (or looking for your old ones). The photographs can show any aspect of our village life.....events, family fun, buildings, views, in fact almost anything!

One budding young photographer was seen earlier this week making the most of the glorious sunshine.

Please add your name to the list on the noticeboard inside Firbeck village hall if you want to enter some pictures and please have them ready by September 1st. Entry forms are available from Anita Stanton 01709 818927

or Email: stantona50@yahoo.co.uk

ALL WINNING PHOTOGRAPHS WILL BE PRINTED IN THE 2015 FIRBECK CALENDAR

All proceeds will go to St. Martin's Church.

WHERE'S MY JINXED CAT?

Una Ellis waved goodbye to a pot cat at a jumble sale in Firbeck 30 odd years - and she'd love to know if it's still causing chaos.

One cat-astrophe followed another after Una and husband Sid brought the ornament home from a holiday as a gift for Sid's mother. She had colds and bronchitis, then cut herself on a knife, and finally flooded the kitchen and a fitted carpet by leaving a tap running.

Mrs. Ellis put the mishaps down to the black-eyed moggy - and jumped at the chance when Sid and Una offered it a home.

Things just fell apart for the couple from that moment on. Sid dislocated his neck, then Una broke a tooth, and her engagement ring split in two. She ended up in bandages after her ankle swelled to twice its usual size without warning, and her car broke down in the midst of it all.

Sid's watch stopped after 25 years continuous service. His car conked out twice with an alternator problem, and suffered a puncture while parked in the garage. Then the spare tyre suddenly deflated when Sid fitted it. And the foot pump fell to pieces when he tried to use it.

The local radio station who taped the story had to re-interview Una when the first tape turned out to be blank. Una can't help wondering what happened to her jinxed cat. "I'd love to know if it's still living in Firbeck...and what it's been up to in the last 30 odd years!"



Una with the Jinxed Cat in 1978

LETWELL ALONE - IT'S THE POLICE MOTTO

Our villages are relatively crime free and quiet compared to the goings on in Rotherham and Sheffield on a Friday and Saturday night so the events at Letwell a few weeks ago caused a mighty rumpus - more so as the police didn't ever bother to respond.

Families living on Barker Hades Road woke up to find that a car parked overnight on a drive had been covered with vile obscene graffiti and graphic drawings. Most of the bodywork - as well as the headlights and the garage door - were covered with bright red paint.

The offenders had also struck at the neighbouring house scrawling graffiti all over two doors. They'd also entered a garage across the road, and ripped a wing mirror from a parked car apparently to check out diesel connections beneath a truck.

Outbuildings at another property nearby were also searched by the intruders at the same time.

All those involved contacted South Yorkshire police thinking they'd turn out to collect a torch and the offending aerosol can as evidence - but no-one showed up.

Our community officer - yes we've got one!! - arrived two weeks later to offer an apology. They'd been short staffed as ever, he said, and the strange serious of events had slipped through the system unnoticed.

Makes you wonder why we pay Crime Commisioner Shaun Wright £80,000 a year and more besides....