



July 2015

Copy Deadline for next issue October 10 2015

FAYRE SUCCESS... NOW FOR THE SCARECROWS

The summer weather may have been disappointing but a rare afternoon of warm sunshine brought the visitors flocking to Letwell for the annual street fayre.

Takings amounted to £3,000 plus in all with the organising committee looking to bank a healthy profit once all the bills have been settled.

The ingredients remained much the same as ever, but the steel band and the country dancers making their first visit to Letwell added to the flavour of the day as did the wood lice racing - which proved a surprise hit.

The car parking crisis was solved at the last minute with John and Bert Hollingworth setting to work so that visitors could park safely at the back of the farmyard.

The day ended with around 50 volunteers and villagers enjoying a meal on the grass outside the village hall. Many remained there till almost midnight. It truly was a day to remember!

Last summer's successful Scarecrow Festival at Firbeck is set to be repeated next month with the organisers urging villagers to rally round and join in the fun.

Two days have been set aside for the festival this time round - Saturday and Sunday August 15th and 16th.

More details about the event are published inside the pages of FLAG.



Crowds watch the country dancing at the fayre



Ice cream heaven at the fayre

NEWS FROM FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL

Following local elections on the 7th May the Annual Parish Council Meeting was held on the 15th May 2015.

Seven candidates contested the parish council election with new councillors Christopher Stanton and Wendy Hamilton being elected along with Julie Dunker, Caroline Jopling and Marcus Fasey.

The new members were welcomed at the May meeting and particular thanks were given to former councillors James Charlesworth and Richard Potts for their time and dedication to the Parish Council. Councillor Caroline Jopling was elected chairman for the ensuing year with Julie Dunker as vice-chair.

Members agreed to the purchase of a grit bin which would be located at the Village Hall and litter picking equipment which would allow for regular clean ups in the village. A seasonal litter picking event was additionally considered with grant funding being sought to cover the initial equipment costs. The annual planting project was also approved with Cllr Dunker kindly volunteering to purchase and arrange the planting.

It was noted that there had been little progress in the designation of the village as a conservation area, due mainly to manpower issues at RMBC. It was agreed that steering group be set up to assess the area that might be designated and which aspects of the village ought to be included for consideration. Any residents who are interested in being part of the group should contact the Clerk to the Council on 01909 239911

Members were keen to improve communications with residents and therefore a copy of the previous meeting minutes will now be available at the Village Hall as well as on the Council and Firbeck Online websites.

Finally the Annual Parish Meeting, which was held on the 20th May, was very well attended by residents. Representatives from the Police, Village Hall Committee, Friends of Firbeck Hall and St Martins Church contributed to the event together with a number of local organisations and groups and thanks is given to everyone who helped ensure the event was a great success.

The next Meeting of the Council will be held on the 29th July 2015.

SPOT THE STRANGE NEW CREATURE

There's rare sightings, disappearing Mallards and strange new creatures abounding in the latest edition of David Wright's popular Nature column...

A Lapwing was a rare local sighting near Firbeck on 26 May. The Lapwing is also known as Peewit because of its distinctive call. This farmland bird has disappeared over much of the country in recent years due to changes in agricultural methods. It is now a Red List species.

Good to see that Yellow Wagtails are still with us at Firbeck, suggesting these summer visitors from Africa continue to breed in the FLAG area.

We're fortunate at Firbeck, because we have all three wagtail species present with us – the other two being the very-common Pied Wagtail and the scarcer Grey Wagtail.

A pair of Common Terns fishing at Langold Lake was a nice sighting on 4 July, as was a Green Woodpecker. Our friends the Canada Geese seemed to have bred exceptionally well there this year, as have Great Crested Grebes, and it's good to see a family of five Mute Swan cygnets resident on the lake.



Seen in Firbeck - but what is it??

I mentioned in the previous issue that there's a problem with disappearing Mallards at Firbeck. Almost all the females have gone, and I've only seen one small party of four ducklings this year.

Moorhens have also had a torrid time along Lamb Lane Dyke in recent years. I suspect their failure to rear chicks is mainly down to Grey Squirrel predation, but cats, rats, Carrion Crows, Grey Herons and Magpies may also be involved. Anyway, there's some encouraging news insofar as, on 4 July, a Firbeck resident observed a parent bird with six chicks, plus a juvenile from an earlier family clutch. I don't know if anyone's noticed, but juvenile Moorhens from earlier clutches often take over parental duties.

A rare sighting at Barnby Moor at the end of June, by a Firbeck resident, was a black Weasel. The gentleman concerned has no doubt it was a Weasel.

Another rare sighting – in a Firbeck garden in late June was the creature pictured in this article. The family who sighted it has asked me not to speculate in this article as to what it is, but to leave readers to form their own opinion.

NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

We have had encouraging discussions with Firbeck Hall's new owner Ashley Wildsmith. He confirmed that the development scheme we previously reported, submitted to RMBC by the last owner Jason Cooper will continue, subject to ongoing discussions with Planning and Conservation departments.

In accordance with conservation area requirements, the new development will be restricted to the 'brown-field' area immediately behind the Hall (to West & Northwest), the previous site of the gym, in-door pool, country-club accommodation units and car parks. It will consist of just 6 large houses.



Firbeck Hall

Firbeck Hall in it's glory days

There will be two other houses; another new substantial dwelling in the original walled kitchen garden and the old stable-block (grade 2 listed) which will be converted into a single dwelling. As anticipated, the Hall itself will be converted into several luxury apartments, although the actual number has yet to be determined.

With its ancient and varied woodland (most trees are 'protected'), flora & fauna, lakes, birds, mass displays of snowdrops and

daffodils - Firbeck Hall is destined to become an outstandingly beautiful location for all those fortunate enough to live there.

However, new development cannot commence until such time as the Firbeck Hall has been restored to an acceptable degree consistent with its Grade 2 listed status.

Unfortunately, it seems that this is likely to be a long term project and our concern continues in respect of the ongoing deterioration of the basic fabric of the structure.

If you too care about Firbeck Hall or are interested in its history - its various functions and roles over the centuries - and the fascinating people who have lived there - then join us and become a 'Friend of Firbeck Hall'.

For just £1.00 you will receive our regular newsletter and updates on the progress of our campaign.

To contact our Membership Secretary telephone 01909 732191 or email friends@firbeckhall.net For more information, please visit our website www.firbeckhall.net

Sid Ellis.



The Stables

IT'S A DREAM COME TRUE

Paul and Sarah Smith are building a beautiful new home for themselves and their two young daughters at Gildingwells Road in Letwell. Here the South Yorkshire firefighter and former parish councillor tells FLAG about the trials and tribulations which have finally seen two houses turned into one...

Where do I begin? I am not a writer, so I guess I will just start at the beginning, wing it and see what happens, a bit like building a house.

In 2005 we put our money where our mouths were - we bought an un-mortgageable 'Airey' house in a lovely village called Letwell. We had to take out personal loans and borrow off relatives. We also knew that unlike the rest of the property market our house would not go drastically up in value due to the fact that it was un- mortgageable.

But it was in a beautiful location with a big garden, and if we managed to buy the neighbour's house, which we knew would be coming on the market at some point, then we would have lots of options, the main option being to build our own home.

Fast forward 10 years. After various other loans we had purchased the house next door and rented it out, helping us to work and save hard for the project now firmly placed in our heads, to build our own home.

The second architect delivered the design we liked and Rotherham planning delivered delays and finally positive planning permission, the bank delivered us a mortgage, and a massive hammer gave the bank account a devastating blow. We opted for a timber frame for a speedy initial build, and had seen a specific stone on a local house so we knew which quarry to source it from. We also opted to manage the project ourselves with help from a family friend, purely as a way to save money.

It would have been nice to hand over some money and turn up later to find a finished house, but it wasn't "doable" on our budget. So after a stressful few months dealing with architects and planners, our project was finally on the brink of starting for real. We had a house design we loved and builders in place, all we needed to do now was demolish our old houses, decide on kitchens and bathroom furniture and spend some money right? Er, not quite!

Paul will continue his story in the next edition of FLAG.



From this... to this in three months

JOE GRUNDEY - A VOICE OF REASON

St. Peter's Church was full for Joe's funeral on June 9th - a fitting tribute to him, his wife Pat and their four children, who moved into their smallholding down Gildingwells Road in 1966. Joe and Pat stayed in Letwell until 1996, when for family reasons they moved to Shireoaks.

Joe was a prominent member of the community, serving on the Parish Council for some years and for even longer as Churchwarden. His was a voice of reason and calm. Many will remember his care of the churchyard and churchgoers will recall how before the service every Sunday he would take off his cap in the porch before entering the church, placing his cap in exactly the same position every time.



Joe Grundey

He would then walk over to the tower and ring the bell seemingly with his fingertips, a skill I myself have never mastered. Joe and Pat were out in all weathers tending their vegetables, fruits and flowers, whose quality was known for miles around, and somehow the pair of them were organic to the whole village.

Even though it is nearly twenty years since they left, their memory remains.

Steve Woodward

STRAWBERRY TEAS HEAD FOR COVER

Firbeck's annual Strawberry Tea survived unscathed in the spite of the inclement weather.

The event was moved indoors from Alan and Jenny Tolhurst's garden to the village hall, but still attracted plenty of visitors resulting in a healthy profit of £430. The proceeds were donated in turn to St. Martin's Church.

Alan told FLAG; "It was touch and go the week before with the weather so a decision was made to play safe and go indoors at the village hall. I think most people prefer it when the strawberry tea's are outdoors, especially when you can look round the garden, but things turned out okay in the event, and the takings were healthy at the end of the day."



Strawberry Tea defies the weather

ALL ABOARD FOR THE ART SHOW

Art has arrived at the bus shelter in Letwell!

A large new frame has been installed inside the building, and pride of place has gone to a range of paintings focusing on village scenes.

The art group - which meets at the village hall every Wednesday morning - have homed in on several historic landmarks, one of them Swiss Cottage which used to stand in splendour in the the woods near the Gally Knight estate, but is now sadly long gone.



Long gone Swiss Cottage

One painting depicts the elopement of the vicar's daughter on horseback from the Rectory which was re-enacted at the village fayre in the 1950s. Another captures the 1800s featuring South Farm and the village hall in its original form with an oast house added as part of the structure.

The art group is staging a show at the village hall on Saturday and Sunday October 3rd and 4th with some of their paintings on sale.

Refreshments will be available on both days from 10 am until 3 pm.

Anyone wanting to join the group should call Jenny Straw on 01909 730635.

WHERE'S OUR TARMAC GONE?

Motorists at Firbeck and Letwell were left short changed by the men who re-surfaced the potholed section of Lamb Lane in May.

The tarmac crews completely missed out the area at the junction of Lamb Lane and Kidd Lane believing that it didn't need to be renewed.

Officials at RMBC Streetpride - who financed the scheme - only found out what had happened after the contractors had left the scene.

Streetpride have told FLAG that the particular section of road will get a make-over in May next year when the final part, and certainly the most heavily damaged part of Lamb Lane is re-surfaced right up to the county boundary beyond the junction with Haven Hill.



Needing some attention... our forgotten potholes

FIRBECK SCARECROWS AUGUST 15TH & 16TH 2015

The 'Firbeck Scarecrow Day' was so popular last year that we have decided to make it a weekend event this year. Put the date in your diary now.

We had about thirty entries last year and hope to have even more this time. There will be a trail to follow and home-made refreshments available in the village hall.

If you want to take part in this fun event it isn't too late. The theme is 'Characters from a Book' so design and make your own scarecrow as large or as small as you wish. Even if you are not a Firbeck resident we will find a place for your scarecrow.

Please contact me, Anita, if you want to take part as I need to know where they will be situated in order to produce the scarecrow trail. I am to be found at the Monday coffee mornings held at the village hall between 10am & 12 noon.

stantona50@yahoo.co.uk telephone: 01709 818927



MAKE WAY FOR THE KING OF SWING

Sheffield's very own King of Swing John Naylor makes a long overdue return to Letwell Village Hall on the night of Saturday September 5th with his talented and hugely entertaining four piece band The Dizzy Club.

The band's repertoire suits all tastes - ranging from 40s swing to soul and Sinatra tinged with lots of Latin rhythms and plenty of cheeky Yorkshire banter.

John heads the line up on vocals and rhythm guitar with Patrick Walker - whose CV includes a spell supporting Irish singer song writing legend Christy Moore - on violin and vocals. Mike Fleming adds his unique style on double bass. Caroline Boaden, who has played all over the world with major names including Take That, completes the line up on drums and vocals.

John Reilly, lead singer with Sheffield band Boy On A Dolphin, who played two sell out shows at Letwell in early July, returns with song-writing partner and star keyboards player Lewis Nitikman on Saturday October 17th.

Tickets for both shows are available from Martyn and Andy on 01909 731626 or 540694 priced £12. Doors open at 8 pm as usual.

All proceeds go to support the village hall - which is due to be re-decorated in August. The paintwork was last renewed 13 years ago by Letwell boy Tom Sharpe and his pal during a break from university - and it's held up pretty well ever since!

HELP PLEASE!

The management committee of Firbeck Village Hall are keen to re establish a mother and toddler group within the village. The very successful group ran by our own Una Ellis provided 7 years of service to our community and with new arrivals in the FLAG area, it has been missed since its closure at the beginning of this year.

The committee would like to get behind any willing mum (or grand mum) within the FLAG readership who would be interested in establishing a new group by waiving the hall rental fees.

There are art supplies, toys and children's furniture at the hall from the last group which would be available for use and the committee are also on hand to support the group during its initial stages.

If you are interested in this venture or would simply like to find out more information then please contact Jody on jbeighton82@gmail.com or 0782 558 7323.

SUMMER STRINGS AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH, LETWELL

Churchwarden Steve Woodward reviews an uplifting afternoon's music which featured past and present students from the Rotherham Music Service.

The full house audience was treated to some wonderful string playing, not to forget Stephen Bradley's crisp and clear rendering of the Rondo from Mozart's Horn Concerto in E flat, one of the highlights of the afternoon. Another highlight was Elliot Bailey's performance on the cello of Max Bruch's Kol Nidrei, which had everyone spellbound and close to tears.

Hannah Thompson-Smith, who along with Anthea France was responsible for organising the concert, was very busy as soloist in pieces by Telemann and Vivaldi and as accompanist to other soloists, who included the accomplished violinists Ceiridwen and Anthea Blakesley, Charlotte Pinder and Anthony Croft and the cellist Nathaniel Blakesley, who treated us to the Prelude from Bach's Cello Suite in G Minor.

The youngest performers were Georgina and James Hindle, who gave a spirited rendering of the Hornpipe from Handel's Water Music. Variety was provided by a folk medley performed with gusto by father and son Martin and Anthony Croft and the concert ended with lighter pieces: Theme from the Game of Thrones, Entrance of the Dragon and Bare Necessities, played by the whole ensemble. We all left happy and uplifted



LIVE A LONG AND HEALTHY LIFE - AT STONE

Your man at FLAG doesn't get down on his knees half as much as he should, but a visit to Letwell church for the United benefice service was a revelation in more ways than one.

Sermons can be dull, but it was obvious that the Rev Stuart Matthews had clearly done his homework as he began to talk about St. Peter, or The Rock as he was known in the scriptures.

It turned out that Stuart had delved into Joseph Hunter's renowned 1830 History of South Yorkshire for a little bit of background information about the aptly named hamlet of Stone just down the road from Firbeck, and had unearthed some astonishing facts about one family living there long ago in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

According to the book, one particular lady called Isabel Robinson was buried in Firbeck Churchyard in November 1694 having lived to the grand old age of 111. Upholding the family tradition her son James Robinson passed away on July 24th 1730 - aged 109.

Sounds truly incredible doesn't it. Were the inhabitants of Stone healthier in the 17th and 18th Centuries than today??

FLAG hasn't had time to scour the churchyard at St. Martin's for signs of the headstones that were said to have marked the two graves in the 1830s - but if you're interested why not take a look.

Hunter, interestingly, records that Firbeck Hall was in the ownership of one Disney Staniforth in the 1770s with "three old maids and their brother" living there. The family were said to have spent much of their time pleasantly practising Handel on the violin.

Happy days indeed!

PICK ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO



Firbeck had its troubles with dog poo not long ago. Fed up resident Darren Straw was so incensed that he contacted FLAG threatening to photograph the guilty owners walking away and leaving their mess behind.

Well, the disease seems to have reached Letwell now. The lane at the end of Barker Hades Road has become something of a doggy disgrace at times. Visitors to the village might be to blame, but FLAG's isn't convinced. Letwell Parish Council are asking dog owners to pick up after their pets in the meantime.

FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

It now looks like summer has arrived! After our successful Amble round Letwell Village and trip to Breezy Knees Gardens and Burghley House (and a couple of members going to Buckingham Palace Garden Party), we have been busy make cakes and serving teas and coffees at the Strawberry Tea in Firbeck and at the Letwell Village Street Fayre. All great days. We are certainly not letting our feet touch the ground for we are joining in with the Centenary Celebrations at Woodsetts WI – there will be food through the decades and no doubt some dressing up.

Sheila Dyson gave a very interesting talk in June on “Flight of a Thousand Eyes” of her adventurous flight in a Cessna 182 from England to Australia in aid of the charity ORBIS that delivers ophthalmic training to doctors and nurses in developing countries and operates a Flying Eye Hospital.

In July we are having a Flower Arranging Evening with Maureen Banks using flowers from the garden (not shop bought). So no need to just plonk them in a vase anymore!

We are holding a Wine and Cheese Evening on the 13th August at The Coach House, Haven Farm, Lamb Lane, Firbeck –tickets £5 to include wine and delicious nibbles and canapés. We will be having craft, cake, nearly new and plant stalls and a raffle. All welcome – including men!

At our meeting in September we will be Rummaging in Grandma's Drawers with Julie McLean and our own Centenary Celebrations are in October. Lots to look forward to.

If you are interested in any of the above events, please contact the Secretary.

Are you looking for new friends? Inspiration to learn new skills? Campaign on issues that matter? Have fun? You can have this and more by joining the WI. Our meetings are held on the third Thursday in the month and start at 7.30pm in Firbeck Village Hall and new members and visitors are always very welcome. Anyone wanting further information please contact the Secretary on 01909 540751.



Jokers from Rotary having fun at the fayre

VE DAY - 70 YEARS ON

Celebrations marking the 70th anniversary of VE day took place at Letwell with more than 40 people getting together for a lunch at the village hall. Everyone ventured up the street at 3 pm for two minute's silence beside the flagpole.

A cornet player then sounded the Last Post - which brought a tear to many an eye. With three other brass bandmen providing the music the gathering produced rousing rendition of Abide With Me followed by the National Anthem.

The event was deemed a big success. Thanks go to the village hall committee for funding the celebrations and the parish council - which invested in a special commemorative flag.

The occasion brought back poignant memories for long-time Letwell resident Mike Gribben - who'd been a little boy back in 1945, and remembered celebrating at a VE party on the street where his parents lived at Darnall in Sheffield.

Mike recalls that there wasn't much food to go around at the time.

"I think there was some jelly for the children, but not much more because food was still in short supply.

"It seems a long time ago now, but I remember my dad lifting me up one night and pointing at a German doodlebug in the sky above our house. It sounded like an old motor bike as it went by, and it dropped not far away at Swallownest...."



*Mike Gribben (second child on the left)
at his street party in 1945*