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STAND TOGETHER CALL IN FRACKING FIGHT

Campaigners at Letwell, Firbeck and Gildingwells have banded together - and urged villagers in the three neighbouring communities to stand together in the fight against fracking companies Ineos and IGas.

An open meeting with Ineos in November ended unhappily with accusations that the company had treated residents with disdain. Officials gave an undertaking initially that the potential site of any seismic survey would be made available to Letwell Parish Council - but Ineos later reneged on the promise and said they would not reveal any of the locations publicly.

Many local landowners have pledged their opposition to fracking, which can be hazardous to health, and can cause serious pollution, and have refused the company access to their land. Major Letwell landowners the Arnold Laver Trust were among the first to voice their opposition and join the boycott.

Two public meetings were due to go ahead at Letwell Village Hall as FLAG went to press with a presentation by Frack Free South Yorkshire on January 12th followed by a question and answer session. Ineos CEO Gary Haywood and Operations Director Tom Pickering were due to appear at a further open meeting on Monday January 16th.

Look inside FLAG for more information from campaign group nofracking@letwell.plus.com

IT'S ALL HAPPENING



Santa meets the children at Firbeck Christmas Party

January 28th. Famed opera singing busker Maxwell Thorpe will open the show backed by keyboards player Lewis Nitikman. Top country rock duo Zervas and Pepper - recently returned from a trip to LA and a concert tour with mega stars Deacon Blue - appear at the Village Hall on Saturday February 25th.

See inside for ticket details and more information.

There's lots to look forward to in the next few weeks with some outstanding events pencilled in the diary at both Firbeck and Letwell. This year's Firbeck Winterfest takes place at St. Martin's Church on Saturday February 25th with the Hallam Sinfonia providing the entertainment. Acclaimed poet and BBC broadcaster Ian McMillan will present "a hilarious night of words, music and glee" at Firbeck Village Hall on Friday March 31st supported by Olympic composer Luke Carver Goss.

Letwell, meanwhile, welcomes former European Song contestant Lindsay Dracass on Saturday

LETWELL DAD JAMES HALL CLIMBS THE ALPS - ON TWO WHEELS

A year after completing the Marmotte in the French Alps, after saying to anyone who would listen that it was the most demanding thing I have ever done and promising myself that I would never do it again, there we were planning another ride on an almost identical, albeit harder, route. This time, however, we were doing it to raise money for the Willows School, a specialist school in Rotherham for children with moderate learning difficulties, and a school that my son Thomas attended. It was, therefore, a no brainer!

Steve Ellis, whose son also attends the Willows and I organised the trip together with another 10 like minded fools, setting off to the Alps last September. If anyone has ever sat down in front of the TV and watched a mountain stage of the Tour de France then the Marmotte is an amateur's equivalent. Four massive climbs lay in front of us starting with the Col du Glandon, a 21.3 km climb with an average gradient of 7% followed afterwards by the Col du Telegraphe, which was a mere 12 km long.

Two climbs gone, but the most difficult still to come, the mighty Col du Galibier, rising to 2645 m above sea level, then the long descent to arguably the most iconic climb in Tour de France history, the Alpe d'Huez, 21 bends of sheer agony.

Altogether we rode 174 km and climbed 5200 m (two thirds of Everest). It was, I think, all worth it in the end, given that we raised nearly £4000 for a very good cause, and hopefully helping with the purchase of a minibus for the school.

I will never be so foolish again....until next year!



*Handing over the cheque
at Willows School*

FROM THE POPPY APPEAL ORGANISER

The 2016 Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal ended on November 11th and in Woodsetts District, which also includes Firbeck, Gildingwells and Letwell, we collected £2419 of which £1243 was from house to house collection, £812 from unmanned collection points as well as £364 in donations. Thank you to those who gave so generously via collecting boxes and also to organisations including Parish and Parochial Church Councils, Scouts, Brownies and the Lindrick Golf Club, which made donations. Many thanks to our 12 volunteer door to door collectors, who have all been collecting for between three and sixteen years, and to our local school, Churches, pubs, café, clubs and shops for providing 11 static collection locations.

Although next year's appeal is a long way off I am always pleased to hear from people who would be willing to help next year.

Chris Stanton cdstanton@hotmail.com

IMAGES OF FIRBECK HALL

Between 1905 and 1935, E.L.S, EDGAR LEONARD SCRIVENS (1882 – 1950) took countless postcard views of Doncaster and many surrounding towns and villages. His photographs were of an exceptional

quality and he kept the negatives neatly filed and recorded at his premises. Unfortunately when he died and his business closed, no-one thought to keep his negatives. The actual postcards do exist and are sought after as collector's items. The lovely photo above is one of a number he took of Firbeck Hall. It is likely to have been taken when Captain Sidney Gladwyn Jebb was in residence. He was the last person to live at Firbeck Hall when it was still a private residence.



Using the photograph by Edgar Leonard Scrivens, I have been able to identify the rather

faded photo above of Firbeck Hall taken by WILLIAM WESTOBY (1850 – 1936) a photographer who had premises at St John's Street, Goole. This photograph is in the archive of the Turbutt family of Ogston Hall, Derbyshire. The aspect of this photograph which is intriguing is the location of a building to the left of the Hall, which is likely to be the Palm House where many exotic plants were grown. In the schedule of the 1909 sale of the property is described 'a large Conservatory or Palm House with stokehole adjoining.'

In an even earlier image of Firbeck Hall, this time a lithograph from a painting attributed to JAMES WALSHAM BALDOCK, (1825-1898) we can see a faint image of a building to the left of the Hall amongst the trees, this too is likely to be the Palm House. This image is also in the archive of the Turbutt family and is the one the Friends of Firbeck Hall use for their Newsletter heading.

Valerie Oxley



ENID BAILEY LOOKS BACK ON A MEMORABLE FIRBECK OCCASION

On Christmas Eve excited children and their families arrived at St Martin's Church for the Nativity Play. In the fading light decorated Christmas trees lit their path to the church door. Fairy lights and baubles sparkled and the smallest children were entranced. They stood gazing into the branches, able to touch the decorations, their eyes full of wonder. So thank you to Firbeck Parish Council, and especially to Andy Shiel who worked so hard to give us this joyous start to our play.

Coming into the church most people paused to look into the crib, lovingly and artistically prepared by Rosemary Mason. Everyone squeezed into the pews and filled the extra seating at the back of the church. On the platform our young ukulele players, led by Keith and Christine Martin, played carols. People began to sing along and there was an air of anticipation. Reverend Jackie welcomed everyone and invited the children to take to the stage. At least 17 climbed up in their costumes and sang Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem, accompanied by ukuleles. Little groups had practised in their own homes and children from North Anston Methodist Girls Brigade joined in too. They had never sung together before but they did well and no one had stage fright! They all "jumped for joy" in the last verse, but then hushed for Away in a Manger.



Firbeck Nativity Play

When all the children had returned to their proud parents the story of the Nativity began related by our choral speakers. Our main actors performed amazingly well and the expressive movement by Mary and the Angel Gabriel was highly praised by many people afterwards.

Special thanks are due to Martin Ellis, who stepped in bravely when we needed a Joseph. He acted his part with enthusiasm. So did our two Roman soldiers Matthew Ansley and Thomas Ellis. They could be heading for the Royal Shakespeare Company!

Our two youngest actors James Ellis and Thomas Bundy had to improvise because they had never been able to rehearse together, but they carried this off with calm aplomb. The choral speakers transformed into Kings and shepherds seamlessly and Lucy appeared with her star at just the right moment. Congratulations to Lisa Shiel, who was choral speaker, innkeeper, angel, scene shifter and "a multitude of the heavenly host." She remembered everything!

My favourite moment was when our audience joined in and called out "Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth peace, goodwill toward men!" This year we tried to tell the story of the Three Wise Men's visit more truthfully. This took place when Jesus was three years old, and to do this we needed a toddler, and not surprisingly, none of our toddlers were reliable! So I visited a clothes shop in Worksop M & Co and they loaned us a headless mannequin, which I managed to make into a head - and then we had our boy Jesus. Many thanks to M & Co.

Our play finished with the cast and congregation singing O Holy Night, and as always, we are grateful to Anthea France - we would be lost without Anthea on the piano, and the Reverend Jackie, who doubled as commentator and angel, and gave us a Christmas blessing as we left church.

Thanks also to Chris and Anita Stanton, who organised our platform, and to everyone, who helped in so many ways.

It was - as they say - "alright on the night."

FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

On November 1st 2016, the architects Building Link Design of Doncaster, staged a Public Consultation in Firbeck village hall to share the current plans for Firbeck Hall with the public. The developers, Ashley Wildsmith and Mike Gibbs were present throughout the afternoon, and the event was well attended by village residents and the Friends of Firbeck Hall group. The Friends group staged a display, with folders showing different phases of the Hall's history since the 16th century, and records of the Group's efforts to safeguard its future. Particular interest was shown in the Country Club, the years it was a Hospital, and the time when Sheffield Aero Club and then the RAF were based at Firbeck. The whole event was a wonderful opportunity for people to learn more about the history of Firbeck Hall and to speak to the architects and developers about their plans for its future. The plans are on the Development page of the Friends of Firbeck Hall website at www.firbeckhall.net. It is anticipated that a planning application will be submitted this spring.

In late December 2016, the Friends group was given permission to make a photographic record of the outside of the listed buildings on the site, the Hall, the stable block and the bridge over the lake, all Grade II listed. West Lodge, also Grade II listed is owned separately.

Firbeck Hall woodlands and some surrounding grounds - covering some 11 Hectares, are designated as a Local wildlife Site by RMBC. This is a non-statutory designation meaning that it doesn't afford the same legal protection as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, but it is protected through the planning system.

In October 1988, Firbeck Park Nature Reserve was opened; this was a short term agreement with Rotherham Health Authority, due to the lifespan of the hospital being limited. It ceased being managed as a nature reserve in 1990.

Biological records for Firbeck Hall woodlands have not been kept as rigorously as in the past and records for the site have gradually dwindled. The Friends group are in contact with the new Biological Records Officer at RMBC, regarding the Local Wildlife Site, and it is hoped to continue this dialogue. The worry is that the site, along with others in our area, may not now meet the selection criteria for a Local Wildlife Site due to the lack of recent records.

The Friends group are still actively updating their records regarding the history of Firbeck Hall and items of interest are published in their Newsletter, issued three times a year. If you are interested in Firbeck Hall and wish to receive our regular Newsletter, please email friends@firbeckhall.net

Valerie Oxley



Firbeck Hall, December 2016

FIRBECK CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL



What a magical Sunday!

Santa and his fantastic elf helper arrived by sleigh and travelled up New Road to switch on the lights of our village Christmas tree. They both spent time talking to the children and giving out sweets. It was wonderful to see so many families and friends gathered together enjoying the excitement.

People were also delighted by the beautiful pathway of lit Christmas trees leading up to St. Martin's Church. Many thanks go to all the local organisations that sponsored and decorated these trees. The twinkling lights set against the blaze from the church windows were truly magical. Sherry and nibbles were enjoyed in the church and it was lovely to see the building so full. Residents kindly contributed food to share and our rector, Jackie, welcomed everyone.

Special thanks go to all who worked to make this such a joyous occasion, but especially to Councillor Andy Shiel who took the lion's share of the organisation and co-ordinated all the different aspects of the event so brilliantly.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton



LEAD THIEVES

Thieves stripped the lead from the roof of the bus shelter at Letwell last month - while the village slept.

Almost two thirds of the lead disappeared overnight with the ridge and the hips of the building almost entirely stripped. The guttering was damaged too in the process.

It's the second time the bus shelter has been attacked since it underwent a major refurbishment - winning an architectural award from the Council for the Protection of Rural England. The thieves were caught in the act last time they tried to swipe the lead, and were forced to pay £1000 compensation to the parish council when the case went to court. But nobody heard a thing this time round.

The council have now decided to solve the problem once and for all by removing the lead completely. Contractors have been engaged to clad the ridge and hips in tiles - matching those covering the roof. The work should be carried out in the next few weeks.

*The lead had been treated with Smartwater which should be detected by any scrap dealer when it's handed over - but nobody has raised the alarm as yet.

LETWELL, GILDINGWELLS AND FIRBECK: THE FRACKING THREAT



Mock Up of Drill Rig Overshadowing Letwell

Shale gas companies INEOS & IGas have secured Petroleum Exploration and Development licences (PEDL's) to drill for shale gas by high volume hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' close to Letwell, Gildingwells and Firbeck. INEOS has PEDL 304 which covers land to the south of Letwell and Gildingwells, IGas has PEDL 200 which covers Letwell, Firbeck & beyond. Details of licence blocks and activity can be found at www.drillordrop.com.

Fracking is an industrial process used to extract gas from shale rock by injecting large volumes of water and chemicals into the ground at high pressure to fracture the rock releasing the gas.

The government backs the industry claiming it is safe, clean and risk free however over 450 academic research reports document potential and actual risks to health and wellbeing including:

- Air pollution
- Water pollution
- Tremors or earthquakes
- Thousands of heavy vehicle movements
- Excessive dust
- Noise and light pollution from 24/7 generators

An Action Group has been formed by local residents to fight this threat and protect residents and landowners' rights. An information leaflet has been distributed with dates of two meetings for residents

to be held in Letwell Village Hall taking place as FLAG went to print:

January 12th 7.30pm Frack Free South Yorkshire on the impacts of fracking.

January 16th 7.00pm the INEOS Shale Chief Executive and Operations Director will answer residents' questions about their planned activities. The press, radio and BBC Look North have been invited.

It is in the interests of all residents to attend these meetings to learn about the effects of this potential industrialisation and to question INEOS Shale about their plans.

Another meeting is planned with IGas to question them about their intentions for Letwell village and Firbeck. Leaflets will be circulated with details.

We have to stand together to fight this threat! If you would like more information or wish to receive email updates please contact : nofracking@letwell.plus.com

An excellent report from Medact on the health effects of fracking can be found at: <http://s234523623453.medact.org/2015/resources/reports/health-and-fracking/>

More information can be found at: www.drillordrop.com and www.frackfreesouthyorkshire.co.uk

HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL

We are pleased to welcome our new clerk to the council, Alistair Evans, and look forward to working with him in the future. Thanks go to Angela Harrison for her work with the council and best wishes to her in her new post.

The Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council, working with other groups in the area, organised a fantastic Christmas Tree Festival on the first Sunday in Advent-see the separate article.

We have thanked RMBC highways department for their work on New Road and Penny Hill, especially for the way they worked with the community to ensure the least disruption to the village. There is still some concern about verge damage on Penny Hill and that some small pot holes have appeared on both St. Martins Close and Kingswood Close. RMBC are to be approached about these issues and also about the possibility of chevrons/clearer safety markings near Haven Lodge to further highlight the tight right hand bend.

At the recent meeting in the Village Hall about plans for Firbeck Hall, a proposal was put forward to the planners about a possible footpath through the estate. Cllr. Caroline Jopling is to produce a plan to be circulated to all members of the Parish Council before submission to the developer, with a view to the PC presenting a number of options for the developer to consider.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton attended an open meeting in Letwell on 10.11.16 with INEOS (a company seeking to use high volume water fracking). The presentation by INEOS was poor, delivered by someone who did not know the area and had no idea what access is like ie narrow rural roads. Great concern was raised over extremely heavy traffic if exploration occurred. There was also concern that INEOS had approached some landowners to position seismic sensors on their land without consulting the parish council first, a matter that was proving divisive. A number of buildings/landmarks in Letwell do not have foundations and any damage from vibration would be a civil matter. A representative of Igas stated at the meeting that there were no plans for Firbeck 'at the minute'. Firbeck PC have agreed to ask Yorkshire Local Council Association, if they have an up to date presentation about fracking, and Igas to attend separate future meetings (YLCA first) to keep villagers informed.

Firbeck Parish Council would like to wish all residents a very Happy New Year.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton

MID WINTER'S HERE - AND THERE'S LOTS TO SEE

David Wright presents the latest edition of his popular column Nature Report

A Firbeck resident was recently thrilled to spot a party of three Roe Deer in the Flag area. It's always a pleasure to see these beautiful animals. I'm reminded of an early morning walk many years ago along the Chesterfield Canal towpath near Kiveton Park, when I rounded a corner and encountered a Fallow Deer walking along the towpath towards me. I don't know which of us was the most surprised!

An interesting November bird in Firbeck was a Merlin, seen in a garden, although usually a bird of open country. The Merlin is a small, dashing falcon. This isn't the first time I've seen Merlin in Firbeck gardens, so they must be finding something good to eat. Their diet consists mainly of small birds, so it's perhaps the small birds using feeders that are the attraction.

On the subject of birds of prey, I'm told a Hen Harrier has been seen this winter in the local area. We're fortunate to get one or two most winters. Hen Harriers are in danger of becoming extinct in the UK through illegal persecution because of their liking for Red Grouse.



Goosander

A nice November bird for me was a Wigeon at Langold Country Park - only the second time I've seen Wigeon there. The Wigeon is a medium-sized duck with a round head and small bill. Males are brightly coloured, having a chestnut head and neck with yellow forehead, pink breast and grey body. In flight they show white bellies and large white wing patch. As usual with ducks, females are less showy. Although Wigeon breed in the UK, many birds visit in winter from Iceland, Russia and Scandinavia.

Langold Country Park is a great place to see waterfowl, especially in winter. You'll always see Canada Goose, Coot, Great Crested Grebe, Mallard, Moorhen Mute Swan and Tufted Duck, but you may be lucky to see other duck species, including Gadwall, Goosander, Pintail, Pochard, Ruddy Duck, Shoveler and Wigeon, and who knows what else. As I write, on 5 January, there are six Goosander on the lake, including two stunning males. Early January is always good for Goosander.

Finally, a reminder that the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch is on 28-30 January.

David Wright

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HE'S BACK AGAIN



Sitting not so pretty

item - a safe with door missing - in the field-side ditch. South Yorkshire Police were due to recover the item as FLAG went to press.

Meanwhile, RMBC are thinking about planting hidden cameras at the scene. The council say that cameras are currently in short supply, but they could be in place before too long.

Wouldn't it be great to see Mr Dump It in court!

Mr Dump-It-And-Run has been as busy as ever in recent weeks - leaving behind still more unsightly debris at the lay by on Lamb Lane.

The prize exhibit this time round was a complete three piece suite. The bright red settee was left perched on the soil bank at the side of the road while the two matching chairs were tipped unceremoniously at the side of the adjoining field.

Streetpride despatched a truck and a couple of men to remove the offending items after a while, but left behind another abandoned

NEWS FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

After all the Christmas and New Year festivities, we are starting our year as we mean to go on by being thrifty and de-cluttering. We are re-cycling an old T-shirt in January and I'm sure there will be lots of ideas! And after learning what NOT colours to wear in November, there will be plenty of old clothes that will need recycling now.

Our AGM is in February and alas only members allowed. In March there will be a talk on the family history of Punch and Judy with Patsy and in April we will learn the history of the Sand House in Doncaster.

After our very popular Mosaic Workshop with Rosie Burke in Firbeck Village Hall, we are hoping to have another one in March. All who attended this Workshop thoroughly enjoyed it and wanted to do more! More details later.

Our May meeting is when we have a debate on the Resolutions to be voted on at the AGM in June in at Liverpool. Should be a lively meeting.

Are you looking to make 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. We would love younger members who could put their ideas and input into our programmes. Anyone wanting further information please contact the Secretary on 01909 540751.

CALIFORNIA SOUNDS COME TO LETWELL

The sunny sounds of California are heading for Letwell with an acclaimed duo - with a background of appearances alongside James Blunt, Deacon Blue and Smokey Robinson - bound for a concert at the village hall on the night Saturday February 25th.

Zervas and Pepper have won countless plaudits from leading figures in the music world - with their close harmonies mirroring the beautiful sounds of West Coast America.

Likened by many to James Taylor and Joni Mitchell, Paul Zervas and Kathryn Pepper flew to LA to record their latest album *Abstract Heart* meeting one of their heroes David Crosby - from all conquering 80s band Crosby, Stills Nash and Young - in the process, and collaborating with some of his closest friends during the production process.

Highlights in their career so far have included concert tours with mega band Deacon Blue and folk star Seth Lakeman as well appearances at Glastonbury and Hyde Park Live accompanying the Manic Street Preachers.

Praise for the Cardiff duo has come from Stuart Maconie on Radio 2: "So sweet are their harmonies you owe it to yourself to check them out..." Reviewing the latest album fellow broadcaster Mark Radcliffe said: "Just fantastic..." Lauren Laverne from BBC Six Music agreed: "We're just loving Zervas and Pepper so much." The Guardian, meanwhile, said their music was "some of this year's best country rock."

Tickets, priced £12, are available from Martyn and Andy phone 01909 731626 or 540694.



Zervas and Pepper

*Opera-singing busker Maxwell Thorpe has been added to the line up for Lindsay Dracass's show on Saturday January 28th. The young tenor - usually found at work outside Mothercare in Sheffield - won successive standing ovations when he sang at Sheffield Cathedral and the City Hall just before Christmas.

WELL DONE THE WARBLERS

Carol singing proved to be both popular and profitable with one or two sweet voices - and some dodgy ones as well - touring the streets of Letwell and Firbeck just before Christmas.

Keith Martin led the fun and games in each village playing his beautiful old melodeon. Friend Glyn brought along his guitar with Sandra Simpson adding to the musical element in Firbeck.

The proceeds in Firbeck amounted to a very creditable £180 44p. The funds went direct to Shiloh - the homeless refuge in Rotherham. The Letwell warblers raised a healthy £140 with half the funds going to St. Peter's Church and the remaining half to Shiloh. Well done to all concerned!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT FIRBECK VILLAGE HALL

The Annual Firbeck Winterfest will be held on Saturday February 25th. The Hallam Sinfonia will be performing in St Martin's Church at 7.30pm, and this will be followed by a meal at the Black Lion. Tickets can be obtained for both the concert and meal or just the concert. Prices £12 or £5 (Children £9 or £2)

Friday March 31st will see Poet, Broadcaster & Comedian Ian McMillan and Olympic Composer Luke Carver Goss appearing at Firbeck Village Hall. To use their

own words they will "present a hilarious night of Words, Music Glee and Delight, climaxing in a brand new musical created from the neighbourhood". Doors open at 7pm for a 7.30pm start. Price £12.50.

Tickets for both events can be obtained from Anita Stanton 01709 818927, Sharon Collins 01709 817327 or David Burke 01709 819171.



Ian McMillan and Luke Carver Goss

WATCH OUT FOR THE GIANT BIRD

FLAG has heard recurring rumours that a mighty eagle owl - standing 30 inches tall with a giant wingspan measuring up to 6ft - is at large in the woodland between Letwell and Langold. Locals believe the bird has escaped from captivity. There have only ever been around 80 confirmed sightings of the species in Britain.



Eagle Owl

An eagle owl was apparently spotted in the grounds of Firbeck Hall some 10 years ago. At the time there were claims that the bird was killing pet cats.