



July 2019

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NEW OWNERS TAKE OVER AT FIRBECK HALL

We've said it before....but it looks as though the long awaited re-development of the Firbeck Hall site is finally going to materialise at long last with new owners now in place and keen to press ahead with the project.

Campaign group Friends of Firbeck Hall say that David and Natalie Johnson and Natalie's brother Jason Shrimpton of the One Construction and Building Group "fell in love with the hall and its environment as soon as they saw it."

The new owners had been searching for a suitable site to develop luxury retirement apartments for the over 55 age group for some time. Crucially, the company has experience of working on other schemes involving Grade 2 star listed property.

The owners have already met the FoFH committee, and endured what was described as a "polite grilling" with "openness, composure, warmth and charm."

The campaign group say the response was "refreshing," and a "surprise and relief to us after years of hopefulness and promises, followed by disappointment."

The change of ownership will almost certainly see the original plans being tweaked. Eight large houses, which were part of the enabling development, will now become semi detached properties each divided into two separate dwellings which will be more affordable for people wanting to down-size.

A restaurant - which would be open to the public - will take the place of two of the original ground floor apartments. Plans for a spa and swimming pool - on the site of the new derelict open air pool - are also being proposed.

There's more information from Friends of Firbeck Hall inside FLAG.

FAYRE SUCCESS AT LETWELL

Letwell Street Fayre - blessed with sunshine and no conflicting England football match this year - proved a big success with takings on the day plus donations totalling an impressive £3175.

Profits amounted to a little over £2500 once the running costs - mainly the band and the expenditure incurred staging the flower festival at St. Peter's - had been accounted for.

Organisers were due to meet for a de-brief as FLAG went to press.



Having Fun at Letwell Fayre

UPDATE FROM FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL

Cllr. Chris Stanton was unanimously re-elected as Chair for this year at May's meeting of the Parish Council. He updated us on what is happening at Firbeck Hall. A bat survey has now commenced and scaffolding has recently been erected inside the main building. There has been a change of ownership of the hall and this is likely to result in the development being targeted to the over 55 market and there being much faster progress than previously envisaged.

As many of you will have noticed 'Not suitable for HGV' signs have now been installed at both ends of the village to deter HGV traffic in the future following problems earlier in the year. Concern has also been raised about residents parking on the grass verges along New Road. We would respectfully request that this be stopped to prevent any further damage to the grassy areas which so enhance our environment. Additional dog bins have been requested from RMBC but this has unfortunately been rejected due to budgetary constraints.

Cllr. Jopling has been working hard looking at ways to replace trees on New Road. A grant application to the RMBC Ward Budget for the full projected cost of £735 for three trees has been successful. An order has been placed and RMBC has confirmed planting in the next planting season and, with some priority promised, we can possibly expect our new trees in October.

Thanks go to Cllr. Jopling who is also liaising with local farmers so farming information is now on the council's website and on Firbeckonline. This will be updated whenever new information is available.

We understand that the appeal against refusal of planning permission for the drilling of an exploratory shale gas well at Woodsetts has been "called in" for decision by the Secretary of State, under powers given to him in law, rather than by the planning inspector.

Firbeck telephone box had been inspected and is felt to be mainly 'sound' except for some frames which required replacement. It also needs a full clean and re-paint. Part of the door has rotted and options to repair and restore this are being investigated. Future use of the box will be for displaying useful local information while continuing with the seed bank on a reduced basis to allow space for the information display.

FIRBECK ONLINE

Information about Firbeck Village events, activities and meetings is shared on our website www.firbeckonline.co.uk. Some of you will already use the site, but for those who don't, why not go online and have a look. Most of our events are additionally advertised by flyers, but only within the Village itself.

If you want to be kept informed, go on to the website and click on the Mailing List option, give us your name and email address and you'll be notified of all new postings.

We are currently looking at ways to make better use of the site and broaden its appeal.

40 YEARS AS CLERK

There was a major surprise for Letwell Parish Council clerk Martyn Sharpe when he was asked to pop along to the duck pond on Barker Hades Road after the village's Street Fair (writes a former journalistic colleague of our esteemed FLAG editor).

Martyn's parish council colleagues had decided to mark his 40 years as clerk by inviting him to plant a commemorative Acer tree.

Chairman Alan Nettleship told an audience of fellow villagers it was fitting that such a long and valuable stint of public service should be honoured.

Martyn's life-long friend and former Rotherham Advertiser colleague Roger Brooks said the huge and wide-ranging voluntary work Martyn undertook to everyone's benefit was an inspiration to others and was greatly appreciated, epitomising the old adage that if you wanted to get a job done, you should give it to a busy man.

'All of us who have the privilege of living in this lovely village owe Martyn our deepest gratitude,' he added.



Planting at Letwell pond

SALLY'S A BLOOMING STAR

Letwell resident Sally Bell has almost single-handedly transformed the village pond in recent weeks carting tons of stone from a nearby field to build a bank of pretty terracing now planted with perennial flowers and shrubs.

FLAG managed to persuade Sally to take it easy for a few minutes. Here she describes what drove her to take on the challenge...

"I started trying to spruce up the pond a few weeks ago. It had needed a bit of TLC for a while and as it attracts so many passers by to stop and have a look at the resident ducks it felt like a challenge worth taking on.

"It has been slow and steady work building the dry stone walls to terrace the slope at the side of the pond. My wheelbarrow has taken a battering (and so has my back!) moving the stone from a nearby field to build the walls.



Before and after the make-over

SALLY'S A BLOOMING STAR (CONT.)

There have been a couple of occasions when I have been tempted to throw the towel in. There was a very stubborn tree stump and a stone that wouldn't budge, but help always appeared at just the right moment from a handy neighbour!

"Planting of the beds has started and I'm overwhelmed by the kindness of people who have already donated plants to fill the space. Any donations will be gratefully received - feel free to send any unwanted or divided plants my way and add a bit of your garden to the village pond.

"We already have the fantastic addition of a beautiful Japanese maple lovingly planted by Parish councillor Martyn Sharpe in recognition of his 40 years service to the parish.

The eventual plan is to create a little haven for wildlife, especially pollinating insects. And not forgetting the ducks who's new wooden home is in progress. I'm hoping it will bring a bit of pleasure to those of us who walk past the pond every day and anyone visiting the village."

NEWS FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WI

On one fine day recently, some of our members had a lovely time at Doddington Hall with the Chantry Group. We had a very informative and entertaining guide - apart from the history of the house, he also told us of some of the gossip about the ancestors of the place - which we loved to hear!

Our meeting in July has Val Oxley and Julia Colver telling us about The Firbeck Landscape and this is an open meeting - so all are welcome to join us - it's free entrance and you can always have a coffee/tea and cake afterwards.

We are holding a Wine and Cheese Evening in August at one of our members' house - let's hope the weather keeps fine for us.

After all the summer excesses (ice cream, cream teas etc.) we have Sarah Maloney in September trying to get us fit with Flexi sitting exercises - (the sitting bit sounds good). And then we start our Autumn programme in October with Rhythmic Rhyme and Poetry with Mike Smith. Our Quiz Team will be entering once again the South Yorkshire Federation Quiz in October. We won our area's heat last year ---so no pressure for this year!

As is now our annual event, we will be having our Craft Day in November at Firbeck Village Hall and we will no doubt be making some Christmas items.

If you are interested in any of the above and would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretary on 01909 540751.

NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

Firbeck Hall has new owners!

David and Natalie Johnson, and Natalie's brother Jason Shrimpton of One Construction and Building Group Ltd have bought Firbeck Hall. We have discovered that these talented young people from Chesterfield have many skills and building experience already under their belts.

Natalie told us that they have been looking for a suitable site to develop into Luxury Retirement Appartments for the over 55 age group for some time; they fell in love with Firbeck Hall and it's environment as soon as they saw it!

They are fascinated by the history of the Hall, particularly the glamorous years of the 1930s. Natalie told us they would like to recreate the 'style' of those years, combining beautiful luxury retirement Appartments in the Hall with sweeping views of the lake, mature trees and countryside beyond.

To the FoFH committee, these are grounded young people with a vision and long term commitment to fulfill their dreams. They have already successfully completed several building projects and have worked on Grade II* listed property. They endured a polite grilling from the FoFH committee with openness, composure, warmth and charm, which was refreshing, and particularly a surprise and relief to us after years of hopefulness and promises, followed by disappointment.

Building Link Design, Doncaster will continue as Architects; they have been associated with the site since 2010. We are pleased that they are able to use their considerable experience to bring this project to fruition.

Planning Permission was granted last December. but there will be several tweaks. It is envisaged that the eight large houses, which are part of the enabling development, will become semi-detached properties, each divided into two separate dwellings. These will be more suitable and affordable for people wishing to 'down-size' to a smaller and more manageable property.

Included in the plans is a restaurant in the Hall, taking up two of the originally planned ground floor apartments. The restaurant would be open to the public. It is envisaged that bi-fold doors would open onto a terrace reminiscent of the Firbeck Club days! There are also plans for a spa and swimming pool on the site of the now derelict open-air swimming pool; this would be constructed in stone to match the Hall.

Several of our concerns were answered, including our unease about the results of the original tree survey. We are pleased to hear that a new tree survey has been undertaken by a trusted company and some of the older trees will receive surgery rather than removal.

The Hall is the priority, it needs to be made safe and watertight. The bat survey is holding everything up, but it has to be completed.

Perhaps at last, we can begin to see a real and sustainable future for Firbeck Hall?

Sid Ellis

MORE GREAT MUSIC

Firm Letwell favourite Lindsay Dracass returns to the village hall on Saturday September 21st to celebrate the launch of her long-awaited and appropriately named debut album titled *Waiting For You*.

The one time Eurovision song contestant has spent two years collaborating with renowned Sheffield songwriter and multi instrumentalist Julian Jones. The weeks and months of hard work have resulted in a classic mix of soul and jazz.

Lindsay's first single from the album, *Not Mine*, proved a big success soaring to number 6 in the iTunes R&B/Soul charts. Joined on stage by some of Sheffield's finest musicians, including Julian Jones on guitar, piano/keyboards, Nicola Farnon on bass, Piero Tucci on saxophone and Aidan Thompson on guitar, Lindsay's return promises to be a night to savour.

The Letwell team were blown away when they attended the launch party in Sheffield earlier in the year.

Booking early is essential. More info from www.dracass.com

Two of the UK's finest singer songwriters mark the end of their 25th anniversary tour with a visit to Letwell on Sunday October 27th.

Chris While and Julie Matthews founded their partnership back in the early 90s as members of the legendary Albion Band, and have spent the last quarter of a century touring every continent from Europe to America and Australia. Beth Nielsen Chapman, who has written countless hits for major US stars such as Emmylou Harris, Crystal Gayle, Bonnie Raitt and Bette Midler - is one of their greatest fans describing the duo as "two of my favourite singer songwriters in the whole wide world...."

James Taylor, a huge name in the music world, is full of praise too. "They light up the room," he says, "with their amazing energy."

There are plaudits from Richard Hawley as well. "They are," he declares, "truly gifted human beings."

Voted best duo at the BBC Folk Awards and nominated for the award nine times, Chris and Julie blend close harmony vocals with guitar, mandolin, violin and banjo combined with percussion, dulcimer, bodhran and bouzouki. Their original songs cover a whole range of styles from the haunting to the rocky. Expect also lots of great banter and storytelling.

Tickets for both show are priced £12, but it's essential to book early to avoid disappointment.

Tickets are available from Martyn and Andy on 01909 731626 or 540694. Email inquiries martyndsharpe@aol.com



Lindsay's heading for Letwell

SKYLARKS A PLENTY

David Wright presents the latest edition of his ever popular Nature Report....

I'll begin this article by discussing the Skylark. I've lived in Firbeck 25 years and the species has always done well on the Flat Lane fields during that time. This is encouraging given the decline in the species which is now red-listed. The population fell by 54% between 1970 and 2001, mainly due to the move from Spring to Winter cereals, plus intensified grassland management. Our local success may be down to farming practices that give the Skylark a chance. I see the RSPB gives advice to farmers on how to provide for Skylarks.

There have been some other good birds on Flat Lane this quarter. In April I saw a gorgeous male Wheatear just in from Africa. Yellow Wagtails (another summer visitor from Africa) continue to do well there. An interesting late June sighting was a Pied Wagtail and a Yellow Wagtail feeding and flying together. Good to see a Whitethroat. Also in late June I had a terrific sighting of a Little Egret. House Martins and Swallows are present, but numbers seem to be down this year.

Speaking of wagtails, it's been great to see juvenile Grey and Pied Wagtails in the garden this Summer. We've also had successful hatchings of Song Thrush and Mallard along Lamb Lane Dyke.

Just outside our patch, at Leger Lakes, I had stunning views of a Red Kite in May. The bird was hunting low and at first sight I actually thought it was a kite of the man-made variety!

My neighbour was delighted to find a Great Spotted Woodpecker in his garden recently, and he also reported sighting of a Little Owl on the edge of the village.

I've recently mentioned birds we never hear or see any more in our area. Another has sprung to mind, the Willow Warbler, yet another Summer visitor from Africa. We still have its near relative the Chiffchaff with us, but it's been several years since I heard the beautiful cascading call of the Willow Warbler.

Some late news just in - 4th July - a Peregrine Falcon in a Firbeck garden tonight!

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Skylark

LETWELL - A NEW STUDY OF THE VILLAGE HISTORY

Andrew Willey, grandson of Letwell parish councillor Jenny Straw, has chosen to study the history of Letwell from the Neolithic period to the 1700s as part of his studies at Lincoln University - and has unearthed some fascinating facts along the way.

Letwell, it appears, was a settlement far back in the mists of time. Arrowheads, flints, borers and flint chippings have all been unearthed within the village suggesting the land was first ploughed some 4000 years ago. Hoes and picks from deer antler would also have been used to break up the ground.

Andrew found that signs of the Roman invasion are also apparent with archaeological evidence of Roman cropmarks and double-ditched enclosures visible from aerial photography. A Roman villa at Oldcotes could have been responsible for control over the settlement, and used the land as a source of income.

Although no evidence exists to support the settlement continuing in Viking times Andrew points out that some local names bear Scandinavian meanings. The field to the North of St. Peter's Church was once known as Kirk Field and the smaller field to the South Kirk Hill Flatts with Kirk translating from Scandinavian as Church - implying that a Scandinavian building could have existed before the present church was built in the 14th Century.

The stream at the bottom of the hill is called Storth Thwait Brooke with Thwaite translating from Old Norse as Clearing or Meadow. Storth itself translates as Woody Place - strengthening evidence of a Viking presence in the village.

The earliest written record of the village goes back to 1160 when a sergeant at Tickhill Castle - named Thomas De Lettwelle - took possession of one acre of the Castle lands and enclosed it with a wall. The accounts of the castle show he was given an allowance of threepence halfpenny a day for feeding hounds over winter. It was during this period that many acres of land were cleared for farming, and the first archaeological signs of housing are evident.

Most of the population were housed in simple clay walled huts. However, the traditional feuding system relying on labourers to farm the land broke down, it appears, after three successive plagues decimated between a third and a half of the village between 1348 and 1375.

The bottom of Barker Hades Road turns out to be the oldest part of the village with Lane End Cottage - which was built on the same site as the Norman manor house and garth - identified as the oldest house still evident. The original 16th Century timber framed building was clad in stone in the 18th Century.

Andrew's study casts light on some of the rather strange sounding street names. Barker - as in Barker Hades Road - celebrates the name of the landowner in times gone by. Hades was once, says Andrew, the word given to the area of headland set aside for turning a plough.

LETWELL - A NEW STUDY OF THE VILLAGE HISTORY (CONT.)

Ramper - as in Ramper Road which leads from the village to the top of a hill - translates from Norman French to "Crawl Up" or "Climb."

Andrew spends some time focussing on Sir Ralph Knight, who took over ownership of the local lands in 1662. Knight was a Colonel in the Parliamentary Army, and one of Oliver Cromwell's trusted allies and friends. According to local legend, upon seeing the beauty of the village Cromwell told his troops "Let well alone....."

Sir Ralph died in 1691, and was buried at Firbeck Church.

The Firbeck Scarecrows



Saturday 14th & Sunday 15th SEPTEMBER

Fundraising for Firbeck Village Hall, Rotherham Hospice and Lost Chord

It's Sports Day in Firbeck!
Come and See the Scarecrows on Display

Fun for All the Family

Sandwiches and Home Made Cakes on Sale in the Village Hall
Keep Fit & Tai Chi Demonstrations
Music in St Martin's Church
Children's Crafts Storytime Corner

TRAIL MAP AND PRIZE DRAW ENTRY AVAILABLE FOR £1 FROM THE VILLAGE HALL

Further information can be found at www.firbeckonline.co.uk in August
or contact Sharon Collins 01709 817327 s.collins1234@outlook.com

DON'T SMASH THAT TEAPOT!

Letwell street fayre produced a healthy profit - and lots of laughs in the process!

The pot smashing stall, always a trusty favourite with the visitors, was busy all afternoon with participants young and old letting off steam. But not everyone wanted to blow the crockery to smithereens.

One man was so concerned at the prospect of some beautiful old teacups and teapots biting the dust that he insisted on buying them from the stallholder. He told the bemused volunteer that he couldn't bear to see them shattered into pieces, and he was going to use them as a centrepiece for a bird table! As they say, it takes all sorts....

Another pot smasher explained that he was treating the game as a form of therapy.

"I've been diagnosed with hyper tension," explained the man, "and I reckon smashing pots is really good for me...."

Maybe the NHS ought to think about installing a pot smashing stall outside Bassetlaw Hospital...

It's worth remembering that the younger generation enjoy the fayre just as much as the older members of the community.

One little boy of six went home and told his Letwell grandad the next day that he'd had a wonderful time.

"It was," he said, nodding his head, "the very best day of my life...."

Think the street fayre committee should hire the little boy, and put him on TV!

Meanwhile, FLAG salutes all those hardy villagers who work wonders every year to keep the fayre alive.



VISIT FROM THE BISHOP

The Bishop of Sheffield Pete Wilcox conducted a communion service at St Peter's Church on June 23rd to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the re-opening of the church following the disastrous fire which destroyed much of the building in the 1860s.

Later the Bishop joined the congregation for refreshments at Letwell village hall.

The anniversary was also marked with volunteers staging a flower festival and art show at the church on the weekend of the Letwell street fayre.



Bishop meets members of the Congregation

MIRANDA AT FIRBECK'

Miranda Sykes, the acclaimed singer and bassist with award-winning folk powerhouse 'Show of Hands', is heading to Firbeck Village Hall on Friday 20th September 2019.

After a career spanning over 20 years, during which time she has played with many of the top musicians and singers within the folk world, she is touring as she started out: one woman, one bass, and one guitar. Building on the success of her 'Borrowed Places' tour, Miranda Sykes returns with a completely new project and album *Behind The Wall*.



Miranda Sykes

For tickets, price £12.00, contact Nick Wilson on 01709 709406 or at nwilson33@hotmail.com

TANNIE & TANNIE

Advance notice of a play being performed at Firbeck Village Hall on October 26th.

Tannie & Tannie is a new play by Claudine Bennent. Performed by Claudine Bennent and Melanie Crawley. Directed by Sarah Spencer.

Tannie and Tannie are leaving. Escaping the damned earthquakes and the water that bursts into flame. The cantankerous aunties will leave their home – a place once strong and flat and stable – and embark on a journey like their ancestors did before them. Before they go, there's just time for a story or two about ghosts and Gods and the bleddy British, then, off they'll go on their trek. But, not every trek can be a Great Trek.

Details will appear on the Firbeck Online website nearer the time.



Tannie and Tannie

ALL THE FUN OF THE LETWELL FAYRE

