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## POLICE COMMISSIONER INTERVENES AFTER 101 CALL FIASCO

The Police Commissioner for South Yorkshire has offered villagers the hope of an improved relationship with the force amid complaints about a lack of police cover.

Dr Alan Billings volunteered to attend an open meeting at Letwell village hall after the parish council tried to report an incident to the force - and waited 50 minutes without getting a reply from the over-stretched 101 phone service..

Apologising for the inadequate response, the Commissioner admitted that problems still needed to be overcome at the force's call centre, but said that around 80 per cent of calls were answered within three minutes. The force aimed to answer 999 calls within 10 seconds.

Dr Billings told the well attended meeting that SYP had lost some 600 officers due to austerity measures in the last 10 years, but new Government policies were now allowing the recruitment of 500 new constables within the next year or so. "We're recruiting as fast as we can do it," he said.

The Commissioner was questioned at length about the ever-present menace of rural wildlife crime and the threat of quad riders and off road bikers tearing along village streets and footpaths.

He promised support from the force's rural wildlife unit and said the force was committed to curbing the quad riders and unlicensed bikers putting lives in danger.

In response, a new unit had been formed with 10 full time police bikers and 27 officers working part time to specifically deal with the threat to public safety.

Dr Billings clearly enjoyed his first ever visit to Letwell and Firbeck having dined at the Black Lion with his secretary before the meeting.

In an email, thanking the parish council for hosting the meeting, the Commissioner wrote: "I hope we can visit again - an excellent excuse to visit the Black Lion..."



## WREATH MAKING WAS A SELL OUT

Helen Taylor's wreath making event in the run up to Christmas was such a success the event's already booked up for next December.

Market gardener Ron Moore brought along all the necessary greenery and directed operations at a crowded Letwell Village Hall.

Helen and her friends have raised a huge amount of money with a series of charity events during the past five years.

Over £10,000 has gone to cancer care groups in the UK, and further big donations have supported hard-pressed communities in Ethiopia.

The former gourmet chef from Stone hosted the wreath making as a thank you to supporters who bought tickets for a lunch and floral workshop at Tickhill - which raised £1400 last summer.

Helen told FLAG: "The wreath making wasn't about making money. That wasn't the intention. It really was a way of thanking everyone who has helped raise funds over quite a long period of time.

"It was an absolutely fantastic day. We had more people this year than last, and we're already booked up the next year's event at Letwell on December 19th."

Helen, remembered by many for her years running The Forge restaurant at Tickhill, was delighted with the support from villagers at Letwell.

"I was thrilled that quite a few people came along from the village. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. Thanks to Ron, the wreaths turned out really well."

## NEWS FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL!

Our December meeting was cancelled due to the Election but we all enjoyed our Christmas Lunch at Styrrup Golf Club!

We also had a very good time at our Workshop in November. We decorated a wreath, did silk painting, made lovely table decorations, button cards and cute gift bags. Everyone had a great time chatting as well as learning new skills. And we start 2020 with music and fun. Phil Ryland with his 60s music and beyond will be entertaining us on 16th January. Come and join us at our belated Christmas Party! Our AGM is in February and it is a members only meeting, We are still organising our 2020 programme and will let you know about events in future reports.

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. Our meetings start at 7.30pm on the third Thursday in the month.

## RIFF REIGN

Since retiring from his local government career, Firbeck resident (and Flag nature columnist) David Wright has returned to his musical roots and in 2014 formed recording band Riff Reign. His fellow band members live in Derby, Retford, Rhodesia, South Anston and Worksop. The band has released seven full albums, a blues rock EP and two Christmas singles. It's now working on its eighth album.

Almost all the band's songs were written by David in a wide range of genres: Americana, blues, country, disco, folk, funk, jazz, pop, rock and the band's own indie style. Their latest album 'In My Time' includes a song 'Time' written by David in celebration of his and Gwen's recent Golden Wedding Anniversary.

Riff Reign is played daily on New York internet station Jango Radio, where it has over 7,000 fans in 161 countries, 44% in the USA. The band is regularly played on internet stations Lonely Oak Radio and Radio Wigwam, and has been played three times on BBC Introducing East Midlands. It was recently featured in the Worksop Guardian. Local presenter Dave Underwood regularly plays the band on his Wednesday night Spreader show.

Several songs are USA influenced. In 1963 Gwen, got herself a New York pen friend, Danielle, through the Beatles Fan Club. Their friendship has led to David and Gwen travelling extensively in the USA with Danielle and husband, Harvey, taking in 34 states.

David loves to welcome guest artists on Riff Reign recordings. Firbeck resident Keith Martin has featured on mandolin and melodeon; Nottinghamshire's Colin Wilson on acoustic 12-string guitar; Lincolnshire's Dave Hunt on harmonica; Derbyshire's John Sanderson on tenor sax and flute and North Carolina's Richard Groce on Latin percussion.

The band records at Swanyard Music, Carolgate, Retford.



## LAUREN, BILLY AND BOB ARE NEXT UP

Lauren Housley, regarded as one of the most notable new voices in Britain, brings her four-piece band to Letwell Village Hall on Saturday February 22nd.

The home-grown Rotherham girl arrived on the music scene in 2016, and has released two albums since then, and opened shows for major names including Van Morrison and Jack Savoretti. Notably, the band have also appeared on the same bill as Tom Jones.

A fusion of Americana-style country, old school pop and rock with a slight tinge of the blues, Lauren's music has a wide appeal influenced by many great musicians, including Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Otis Redding.

Lauren shares the stage with her long time songwriting partner Thomas Dibb, guitar and vocals, co producer Mark Lewis, bass and vocals and Billy Bragg's trusty sidekick C J Hillman on pedal steel guitar.

Tickets for the show are priced at £14, and are available from Martyn and Andy on 01909 731626 or 540694.

Legendary Geordie pair Bob Fox and Billy Mitchell are heading for Letwell on Saturday March 28th.

Billy spent eight years as front man of Lindisfarne till their retirement in 2003. In the seventies he founded the seminal Jack the Lad. He's acted and sung all around the world, and most recently completed two sell out tours with The Lindisfarne Story.

Bob Fox has twice been nominated as Folk Singer of the year at the BBC Radio 2 Folk awards. Ralph McTell, no less, is one of Bob's greatest fans. Speaking of Bob he said: "As soon as I heard him sing I realised he must have one of the best voices in England...."

Bob was invited to join the National Theatre's production of Warhorse in London's West End in 2011, and subsequently toured the UK, Ireland and South Africa with the show playing the role of Songman.

Tickets (£14) are available from the usual numbers listed above.



*Lauren Housley*

## CAROL SINGING

Carol singers took to the streets at Firbeck and Letwell in the run up to Christmas - raising notable amounts for church and charitable funds.

The revellers at Letwell were in fine voice - that's what they told FLAG to say!! - earning £126 in double quick time. Though the turn out was much reduced at Firebck villagers were equally as generous.

Nicky Blyth's Christmas card delivery service at Letwell proved as popular as ever raising £78 for church funds.



*Carollers take a rest  
at Firbeck's Yew Tree House*

## WHERE'S OUR NEW DES RES

Villagers are struggling to install a beautiful new duck-house at Letwell.

The old structure sank beneath the waves after a huge torrential downpour struck the village in November. The level of the village pond at the bottom of Barker Hades road rose 12ft or so in a matter of a few hours, and when the flood finally subsided the two resident ducks found themselves homeless.

Talented handywoman Sally Bell set to work building a new des. res. for the pair, but the finished product - resplendent in pastel colours - still hasn't been installed.

Villagers aren't queuing up to venture forth with the new house. Older residents know why.

One told FLAG: "Step into the pond, even when the water level's low, and there's a real danger you'll end up waist deep in the mud.



*Letwell pond near to overflowing*

"The joiner who installed the last duckhouse in the middle of the pond was wearing a pair of big fishing waders, but the mud pulled him down and he almost got stuck fast. It was quite scary, and he's not the only one it's happened to so there aren't many volunteers to do the job."

The parish council, meanwhile, are investigating the possibility of floating the duckhouse into place.

"It'll be a much safer course of action," said a parish councillor.



# TELLING THE STORY OF LETWELL'S HISTORY

Letwell's new information panel has now taken pride of place close to the village notice board and bus shelter. The board - put together by specialist company Shelley Signs - aims to provide visitors with a brief history of the village flagging up points of interest.

The parish council took the initiative on the basis that "countless people walk through the village every year and leave without knowing a thing about the place."

Praise should go to the Letwell Art Group who spent weeks producing an array of paintings which adorn the panel.

The Dovecote, St Peter's Church and the restored buildings at North Farm are among the village landmarks singled out by the group. One painting re-creates an ancient sketch of the village hall in its original form as a malt-house. Parish council chairman Alan Nettleship installed the oak-mounted frame with the able support of his neighbour Colin Parrish. The parish council is grateful to RMBC's Dinnington ward councillors, who backed the project with a financial grant.

## LETWELL

Letwell is a historic conservation village largely unchanged by the passage of time. Legend has it that Oliver Cromwell surveyed the village while visiting his ally Sir Ralph Wingfield in the c.1600s and told his troops: "Let well also is..." However, most historians believe the village owes its name to the 19 wells which would sometimes dry up - giving rise to the words let well meaning "flooded flow..."



St Peter's Church, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



North Farm and Dovecot by 1600



Stone Archway, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



St Peter's Church, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



St Peter's Church, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



St Peter's Church, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



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St Peter's Church, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



St Peter's Church, Dovecot & Dovecot by 1600



Artwork: Community Letwell Art Group  
Funded by: South Essex Council, RMBC, West Essex Council

## FIRBECK NATIVITY PLAY

'The Innkeeper Remembers' was received enthusiastically by a very appreciative audience. First there were carols led by our Ukelele band and then the younger children sang Baby Jesus Fast Asleep and The Little Drummer Boy. That was a wonderful start.

The first scene of the play takes place outside the inn at Bethlehem twenty years after the birth of Jesus. The innkeeper, Thomas Ellis, describes what happened to his friends, a potter, Matthew Ansley, and a blacksmith, Joe Lalley. These talented young actors were utterly convincing in their portraying of these characters. They captured the attention of the audience.

The supporting children in the cast are also developing their acting skills and provided some entertaining moments. Invisible camels ridden by the kings, Luke Oakley, Luke Lally and James Ellis, brought smiles to our faces. The terrified shepherds, Zach Reynolds and Thomas Bundy, peered over their blankets most realistically. Jacob Bourne, the Miller's son (Yes we had a windmill!!) played his part beautifully.

Of course, there were older people in our all-age play and we are very grateful for their continued support and their acting ability. This year's procession of the angels to the accompaniment of a brass band playing 'When a Child was Born' made an atmospheric beginning to our play. It was wonderful to have Sophie and Nick who were married in St Martin's in October to be our Mary and Joseph.

Since we began rehearsing we have had the most amazing support from everyone involved and would like to say a big "Thank you!"

Enid and Derek Bailey



*Firbeck Nativity Play*

## **CHURCH MEETING**

Efforts to install toilet facilities at St Peter's Church at Letwell are still continuing.

A sub committee appointed by the PCC were due to meet representatives from the Diocese at Letwell as FLAG went to press.

The sub committee have been investigating all options, and visited a farm at Nether Langwith some weeks ago to inspect a composting toilet.

A designated church architect has already drawn up plans to build a small extension on the north side of the building, but precise costings have yet to be identified.

## **TREES, TREES AND MORE TREES!..... HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL**

Firbeck Parish Council would like to thank Julie and Brian Dunker and all those who helped them for organising the big Christmas tree in the village once again this year. It always brings such light, colour and magic to the dark evenings.

Echoing that were the smaller Christmas trees which lined the path to the church, bringing a real touch of sparkle to the festive season. We are very grateful to all those who sponsored these trees and to everyone who helped look after the trees which were regularly battered by high winds. Firbeck Christmas Tree Festival got underway on Advent Sunday with the carol concert in the church accompanied by the fantastic ukulele band. This was followed by the arrival of Father Christmas on his sleigh accompanied by his elf helper. They lit up the tree lights and then led villagers and their friends and families down to the Village Hall for sherry and mince pies. It was lovely to have such a willing group of helpers for this event, we are very grateful to them.

Staying on our theme of trees, we are grateful to Cllr. Caroline Jopling for her persistence in liaising with RMBC to ensure the planting of the 8 Rowan trees along New Road.

RMBC have agreed to maintain the trees (pruning etc) for ten years and for the first two years they will nurture the young trees through watering. As it is the dormant season at the moment nothing needs doing to the trees. However RMBC are encouraging us to supplement watering in the height of summer to ensure the trees do not dry out and the Council will be looking at how best to organise this in time for the growing season. Cllr. Anita Butcher has been liaising with members of the Village Hall committee to look at the possibility of replacing the large notice board outside the hall. They are looking at providing quotes for good quality wooden (tenuously back to trees!) noticeboards to replace the current board which is now very shabby and weather damaged.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton



## NATURE REPORT

Birds give us so much pleasure. A Firbeck resident phoned me in October to tell me of her delight at seeing a nuthatch on her feeder. Dr. Kate Plummer, a research ecologist, recently wrote an article for the BTO concluding that, in addition to the pleasure we get from feeding our garden birds, there's no reason to suggest that feeders cause birds to lose their ability to forage for food.

Staying on the subject of food, it was interesting to see huge numbers of rooks in the Firbeck area shortly after the sugar beet harvest on the airfield. I don't know what they were feeding on, but they surely found it; it's amazing how birds travel to find food. Here's another example: the new fishing pond on Eastfield Lane, Laughton-en-le-Morthen has recently been stocked with fish; it didn't take very long for cormorants to locate their new food source. I recently saw three on the pond and a couple of days later I saw four fly in.

Other interesting sightings in October were good numbers of meadow pipits and linnets on the airfield. A late swallow flew over the airfield on 9 October. In November I was pleased to see a flock of around 30 mallard at Lingodell and a single great crested grebe. On 23 November there were at least five goosander present there.

On a negative note, it only occurred to me recently that it's several years since I saw a Marsh Tit. These birds were once quite common on the roadside along Kings Wood. Let's hope they're living deeper in the wood.

I had an interesting day out in October at Filey and Flamborough, including attending a ringing session at South Landing, Flamborough. Birds ringed included blackcap, chiffchaff, dunnock, goldcrest, lesser redpoll, redwing, robin, song thrush and wren. Goldcrests weigh just 6.5 grams, same as a 20 pence piece, yet they migrate here over the north sea. Some people suggest they piggy back rides on larger birds, although I think it highly unlikely.

01709 813360

davidandgwenneth@gmail.com



*Cormorant*

## WEIGHT WATCHER TWIGLET'S A STAR

Twiglet, the 30 stone pot bellied pig, who found a new home at Peppersfield animal rescue centre at Letwell after living in a flat at Dinnington for the last two years, has become something of world wide celebrity.

Countless newspapers across the globe have followed up the story since it first appeared in the pages of FLAG three months ago. Twiglet's fame spread as far as America and Australia.

Closer to home, the porker even made a guest appearance on the front page of the Rotherham Advertiser over the festive period.

It's worth noting that Twiglet's looking a lot leaner these days...thanks to a healthy diet imposed by Louise and Chloe at Peppersfield.

## MEGSON AT FIRBECK

Folk duo Megson make a welcome return to Firbeck Village Hall on Friday 27th March.

Four times nominated in the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards and double winners of the Spiral Earth Awards, Megson are husband and wife duo Stu and Debbie Hanna and they bring an infectious mix of heavenly vocals, lush harmonies and driving rhythmic guitars. They have gained fame on the British folk scene, not only for their arresting & intelligent songwriting, but for their exquisite musicianship and northern humour.

For tickets priced at £14, contact Nick Wilson on 01709 709406 or [nwilson33@hotmail.com](mailto:nwilson33@hotmail.com)



## FIRBECK HALL COMING BACK TO LIFE

Natalie Johnson from One Construction Ltd., the company involved in the re-development of Firbeck Hall, has released new images of the work going on at the site.

The two pictures below show the new roofing timbers in place at the hall.

Continuing on the back page there's a remarkable picture capturing the transformation which has gone on at the stable block.



## TRANSFORMED



## UPDATE FROM FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

The owners of Firbeck Hall, One Construction Group, are pressing ahead with restoration in spite of winter weather conditions which inevitably interrupt activities.

Following some initial work on the Stable Block, main attention has turned to the Hall itself with roof structure assembly well underway.

How many seasons before the fortunate new residents will be able to enjoy the wide spread of snowdrops, which annually adorn the Hall grounds in late January/early February, we do not know. On such a major project involving both restoration and redevelopment, it is difficult to provide any reliable completion date, but all the indications suggest that work is progressing on schedule - and we do know that the owners retain their enthusiasm for this challenging enterprise.

We will endeavour to keep readers regularly updated of the progress at Firbeck Hall in future editions of FLAG.

Meanwhile, if you are not already a Friend of Firbeck Hall please consider joining us. One time subscription in only £1.00 for which you will receive our regular newsletters which include historical articles of local interest about the Hall and it's long association with the village of Firbeck.

Contact is our Treasurer Valerie Oxley, - on [valerie@mvoxley.co.uk](mailto:valerie@mvoxley.co.uk)