



April 2020

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HELP THOSE IN NEED

Our villages are facing up to the Covid 19 emergency with support and help being offered to elderly residents most at risk.

Firbeck Parish Council has set up a link with a Tickhill grocery store which has agreed to deliver shopping orders to over 70s and those with underlying health issues.

Meanwhile at Letwell the parish council is urging villagers to maintain close contact with their elderly neighbours, and ensure they are safe and well during the crisis.

On the wider front in Rotherham, 650 volunteers have stepped forward to help the isolated and vulnerable with shopping, collecting prescriptions, daily dog walking and other essential services. Those in need in Firbeck and Letwell should phone 01709 807319 or visit www.rotherham.gov.uk and follow the Covid 19 links.

With a third of its staff unable to work, Rotherham council have suspended the garden waste collection service, and has also closed all four of its recycling centres, including the one nearest to us at North Anston. The council said the decision was made after visitors to the site ignored safety advice about social distancing.

Events at the two village halls at Firbeck and Letwell have all been cancelled, and plans for Letwell summer fayre, due to take place on Saturday July 4th, were in the balance as FLAG went to press.

THEY'RE NOT HOMELESS ANYMORE

The ducks at Letwell have finally got a smart new des. res.

Villager Sally Bell built the replacement house after the old structure was swept away by the floods last November, but then suffered countless difficulties planting her handiwork in the middle of the pond.

Sally, husband Matt, and a friend, finally managed to do the job by negotiating the mud and slime in fishing waders!



FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL: KEEP CALM AND STAY AT HOME

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all our residents who have stepped up to help at this very difficult time. Social distancing in a village as sociable as ours has seen novel ways of keeping in contact, from swapping poems by emails in the Poetry Appreciation Group to the Yoga group continuing to prac-tise through the Zoom app. (though I must say Zoom and Yoga somehow seems anomalous!). Our grateful thanks go to Cllr Caroline Jopling for personally contacting shops in Tickhill to set up food deliveries to the over 70s and those with underlying health issues. We also applaud all who have stepped up to volunteer to help others in need at this time and all those who are keeping in touch with each other to make sure all are okay. The kindness and care people have shown reminds us all about what is really important in life.

Some of you may already be getting regular updates from RMBC about the current crisis. If you would like to register for these updates, go to the Home Page of the RMBC website and click on the coronavirus link. As well as the measures in place in Firbeck outlined in recent leaflets to residents and through firbeckonline, RMBC has their heroes programme which people can access.

Our thanks and best wishes go to Cllr Anita Butcher who recently resigned from the Parish Council (PC). We would like to welcome Cllr. Yolande Tose who has now been co-opted. Any expressions of interest from residents who might be considering putting themselves forward for the council would be very much appreciated.

PC meetings are currently suspended, but at our last meeting the budget was discussed. The Treasurer of the Village Hall Committee requested the council consider restoring an annual grant to the Village Hall to help with general maintenance. This was agreed by the council to be reviewed on a yearly basis. Money was also allocated to a new 'Village Maintenance' reserve, initially to look at improvements to the Kidd Lane junction. It was agreed to include funds for one-off projects to renovate the phone box and commence a neighbourhood plan. This last was as a result of an informative talk from Andrew Towleron, an experienced planner and National Planning Advisor to the Society of Lo-cal Council Clerks, who provided councillors with an overview of neighbourhood plan processes and benefits. He outlined areas a neighbourhood plan for Firbeck could focus on and funding sources for such an undertaking.

Following the flooding earlier this year it was recognised that Salt Hill and the Yews areas were the worst affected. Severn Trent has worked hard to resolve the blocked sewer problems which caused much of the issues, but it remains to be seen whether they have been totally successful.

It was also noted that the village footpaths and bridlepaths were in their worst ever condition and res-toration was required working with RMBC. The PC would like to undertake an audit of all protected trees in the village recognising their potential to help in times of flooding.

How lovely to hear people clapping their appreciation of our NHS workers and all our other wonderful key workers on a Thursday evening!

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton

LOOK OUT FOR THE FLY-TIPPERS

Fly-tipping is bound to be on the increase now that Rotherham council have closed their four recycling sites.

The gates at the North Anston site had barely been closed when the first consignment of unwanted rubbish arrived by the bench on Gildingwells road at Letwell.

Six bags of builder's rubble were abandoned, but thankfully Streetpride sent out a lorry to collect the waste within a day or so. At a cost to us ratepayers, of course. As ever nobody caught sight of the culprit or his vehicle.

One benefit of the lockdown is that there's been a noticeable absence of empty lager cans littering the verges alongside Ramper Road.

Last time the parish council cleaned up there were over 30 cans scattered either side of the road.

Presumably, the white van man, who uses the route as his personal dumping ground, is currently parked up at home while the emergency runs its course.

Talking about the numpties in our midst serial graffiti artists Alan and Roxy have been busy again vandalising trees and gates around Firbeck and Letwell.

The pair have recently carved their names on various trees in the wood to the west of Thwaite House Farm at Firbeck as well as on the farm gates near the Gally Knight estate. The bridleway access gate close to St Peter's church has also come for the same treatment.

Their handiwork remains visible at Langold lake, and by the side of the Chesterfield canal 8 miles away at Turnerwood.

Attempts by South Yorkshire police to trace the troublesome couple are continuing.

FOUR MEN ARRESTED IN POACHING SWOOP

While the majority of us are in lockdown the police never rest.

There has been much unrest in the farming community about the rising number of poachers hunting deer and other wildlife in the countryside in and around Firbeck and Letwell. The poachers come armed at night in 4x4s, and have been known to threaten landowners, who dare to confront them.

The South Yorkshire Police Commissioner promised action when he responded to complaints at an open village meeting at Letwell in January.

Nottinghamshire police appear to have got the message because FLAG hears that four men were caught poaching on land near the Letwell/Firbeck border just a couple of weeks or so back.

The Notts force were involved in an operation close to the county boundary when they chanced upon the men in 4x4s. The arrested men, from Maltby and Sunnyside, near Rotherham, now face court proceedings in the near future.

Let's hope for more action from the police to protect our precious wildlife.

FROM LOCKDOWN IN SPAIN TO LOCKDOWN IN THE UK

After six sunny weeks in Southern Spain, on 14th March we were due to fly to Gran Canaria for two weeks. Our gut feeling ... 'DON'T GO!!' So, we decided to cancel our flight and rebook our return ferry to the UK for the next available crossing.

It turned out to be a good decision as the Spanish lockdown was announced resulting in the airline cancelling our flight. We extended our stay in the apartment and lived under strict lockdown for a week. The same rules as we now have in UK, but in addition not allowed 'out' to exercise! Adherence was checked regularly by Police patrols, helicopters and drones.

We were aware that numerous ferries were being cancelled as our departure date approached. Later discovering that our crossing was the last passenger ferry to UK ! Phew! We chose to drive the 10hr journey from Mijas to Santander in one day.

The 6 am start was preceded by an overnight thunder storm and poor sleep! Within an hour we had heavy rain, then thick fog, reducing our speed to 50 mph. At that speed we might not make the ferry! Gulp! Then, a dashboard warning light for low ad-blue appeared. The manual gave no indication of distance before the engine would stop working. Yikes! Luckily, we managed to top up at the next fuel station... could anything else go wrong ?

We arrived with PLENTY of time to spare, as the ferry was running 3 hours late. Instructed to remain in our vehicle until boarding! In total we spent 17 hours in our car that day, good job it's got comfy seats ! Once on board we were confined to our cabin for 25 hours. The crossing was calm and complementary food was delivered to us. During disembarkation we noted that many people appeared oblivious to the distancing rules, with chatting and hugs before getting into separate cars !

We were tired, but relieved to finally be on the four hour drive home to Letwell and planning our two weeks in self isolation. There's no place like home !

Vicky and Martin

PLEASE CLEAN UP

FLAG is a self confessed dog lover, but some owners let the doggy kingdom down.

Residents at New Road, Firbeck, were on warpath some time ago when their verges resembled a doggy toilet.

The latest location to suffer is the track at the bottom of Barker Hades road at Letwell.

The parish council will be posting warning notices unless pet owners clean up after their animals! It's not so hard to do - so why do so many people not do it??

WHY ...

Strange goings on at Kidd Lane, Firbeck, where dozens of empty cans have been planted on top of canes holding the newly installed hedge in place.

The cans - which stretch from the bottom of the lane virtually to the top - have been removed twice, but new ones keep re-appearing. It's an odd world out there!!

LAND ROVER STOLEN

FLAG urges readers to remember that thieves are still out there in spite of the Covid 19 emergency.

Two men descended on Letwell in the early hours of Monday March 30th and stole a treasured Land Rover from a locked garage at South Farm.

Having broken in the garage, the pair pushed the vehicle out of the yard so as not to make a noise, then drove it over open land at the rear of the farm towards Gildingwells road. Other accomplices were waiting there to help drag concrete blocks from a field entrance so the men could escape with the truck.

Police inquiries are continuing.

PANDEMIC WRECKS WEDDING PLANS

Matthew Boyes and his bride to be Emma spent two and a half years planning their big day only for the country to go into lockdown within a few days of them tying the knot.

Letwell boy Matthew, 30, and Emma, 27, had no choice but to call off the ceremony at the Hazel Gap wedding venue near Ollerton, and postpone their honeymoon trip to Japan.

Eighty guests had been invited to the wedding, including relatives from Canada and Australia. Fortunately they heard the news in the nick of time.

Matthew's mum Heather admits it was a traumatic experience for all concerned.

"It was the worst kind of thing that could happen, especially as Matt and Emma had been carefully arranging things for something like two and a half years.

"I couldn't have imagined us having to postpone things in my wildest dreams, but In the end we had no choice at all...."

The wedding has been re-arranged for November 19th. Meanwhile, the couple are planning to go on honeymoon next year...so Emma will see the cherry blossom in Japan after all!!

RED QUARRY ALERT

There's concern at Gildingwells over developments at the contaminated dumping site at Red Quarry.

Locals were horrified when plant hire contractors arrived at the location and started flattening the area - the scene of illegal toxic and asbestos dumping which led to a series of Crown Court prosecutions some eight or ten years ago.

The work resulted in the public bridleway - which crosses the site - being blocked by a 10ft high wall of soil and waste. The bridleway sign also disappeared at same time.

Letwell Parish Council alerted the public rights of way dept at Rotherham, who ordered the owners to restore the route. The planning dept later held talks with the owners of the site - believed to be an investment company based in London.

DAVID WRIGHT PRESENTS HIS LATEST EDITION OF NATURE REPORT

I begin with some worrying news about a species that was once our most common bird, the chaffinch; its UK population has fallen by a staggering 30% in the last 11 years. The BTO is on the case, intending to try to find out what's driving this decline so that targeted conservation action can begin before it's too late. A programme of research has been developed to investigate possible factors leading to the decline. £100k is needed and the BTO welcomes donations.

The latest assessment of the size of bird populations in the UK has recently been published and shows that our commonest bird in recent years, the wren, continues to hold the title with 11 million pairs. Robin comes next with over seven million pairs.

Moving on to local matters and a Firbeck resident has told me of several recent sightings of red kite in the airfield area. Another Firbeck resident was delighted to hear two tawny owls calling in her garden recently and equally delighted to see a goldcrest feasting on a feeder. Yet another Firbeck resident has reported two pairs of (likely) tree sparrow in his garden.

Spring migration has begun, with birds such as Chiffchaff, Sand Martin and Wheatear amongst the earliest to arrive. And of course, millions of birds that have wintered with us will have left to return to mainland Europe by the time FLAG is published. We always think of birds such as fieldfares and redwings as flying east, but birds from many more species do it, such as blackbird, goldcrest, hawfinch, robin, short-eared owl, song thrush, starling, woodcock, etc.

Continuing with migration, in late March I noticed a large number of fieldfares and starlings congregating together in the sheep field at Lingodell. I've seen this before, but I was interested to note a comment on twitter from someone in North Yorkshire who'd just seen the same thing. So, it seems to be the case that these two species regularly associate as their eastern migration begins.

Finally, I can recommend twitter for fabulous wildlife photos. You just need to follow the right people.

01709 813360 - davidandgwenneth@gmail.com



Male Chaffinch

UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

Valerie Oxley recalls the historic link that connects Firbeck Hall with the opening of the Nightingale Hospital in London - which has been set up to cope with the Covid 19 pandemic in London.

“The new Nightingale hospitals reminded us of the connection with Miss Nightingale and the Jebb family, some of whom lived at Firbeck Hall.

Sir Joshua Jebb, the brother of Frances Miles, was the first Chairman of the Nightingale Fund Committee. Joshua Jebb and his sister Frances were the children of Joshua and Dorothy Jebb of Walton, Derbyshire. Their mother, Dorothy was the daughter of General Henry Gladwin of Stubbing Court, Derbyshire. Their neighbours were the Nightingales.

In December 1855 Eliza Miles, who lived at Firbeck Hall with her sister in law Frances Miles, sent 3 guineas to Miss Nightingale, this would be well over £300 today. Eliza was responding to a public appeal.

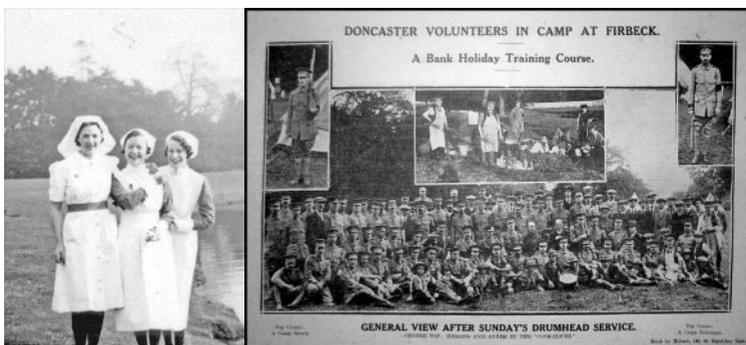
At the end of 1855 a public meeting was held in London to recognise the work of Florence Nightingale in the Crimea. A large sum of money was raised in her honour through public subscriptions, concerts and other fund-raising activities, soldiers who had fought in the war gave a day's pay. The original plan had been to present Miss Nightingale with a gold or silver object as a token of thanks.

However, so great an amount of money had been raised that it was decided to set up a Fund for the training of nurses. By 1860, £50,000 had been collected and the Nightingale School and Home for Nurses was established at St. Thomas's Hospital.

Florence Nightingale corresponded frequently with Sir Joshua Jebb and some of their letters are in the National Archives.

Trained nurses played a huge part when Firbeck Hall became a hospital during the Second world war, and they changed the hall from a luxurious Country Club into a functioning hospital in a very short time.

The fund still exists to give financial support for course fees to nurses, midwives and community health nurses. It also supports health care assistants.



Nurses and soldiers on duty at the Hall

WE'LL BE BACK...

Those hot Scotch eggs and scrumptious home made pies are a memory of happier times....

Firbeck's Black Lion has taken on a deserted air in the last few weeks, and nobody knows when it will open its doors - and its busy kitchen - once again.

Meanwhile, we're all saving money and catching up on classic TV.

Still, providing we keep calm, stay at home and abide by those social distancing rules, then we'll be back at the Black Lion before you know it.



Closed for now

CLAP AND CHEER FOR THE NHS

Thursday nights will never be the same again.

Villagers at Firbeck and Letwell have responded magnificently and turned out in growing numbers to clap and cheer for the NHS at 8 pm every Thursday night.

Some residents have entered into the spirit of things with gusto standing on the doorstep beating pans with metal spoons.

If you haven't joined in so far, come out and clap, cheer and bang a saucepan for the NHS next Thursday at 8. The more noise we make the better....

It's the least we can all do in the current state of emergency.

AREN'T WE FORTUNATE....

In these challenging times the beauty which surrounds us at Firbeck and Letwell is re-assuring to say the least.

A bright blue sky with fields of oil seed rape glowing bright yellow in the distance lifts the spirits and reminds us that we are fortunate to live where we do.



BUS TIMETABLE CHANGES

Bus route number 20 - which runs through Firbeck and Letwell en route to Dinnington and Rotherham four times a day - is reverting to a Saturday timetable during the present crisis.

FLAG suggests travellers should check with South Yorkshire Passenger Transport help line, but it appears that the changes will cause the minimum of disruption. In future the bus leaving Firbeck at 3.15 in the afternoon will only journey as far as the interchange in Dinnington, and won't travel as far as Rotherham bus station. Otherwise services remain unaltered for the time being.

VILLAGE HALLS CLOSED

All the classes and club meetings are shelved for now, and Firbeck Village Hall stands empty and forlorn.

Gatherings have also been suspended at Letwell, and the programme of live music has been called off for the time being. The July visit from Sheffield band Boy On A Dolphin, a highlight in the village calendar, is now in doubt.

The shutdown at Firbeck Village Hall is due to run until the end of May in the first place, but it's anybody's guess when the doors will re-open for business.



Closed for the time being...

MANY THANKS TO FIRBECK MOTORISTS!

I have recently taken to using a wheelchair, which has greatly improved my mobility, enabling my partner and I to enjoy our village and environment, particularly in these restricted and difficult times.

Following some access issues and subsequent discussions I am grateful that residents are choosing not to park on the pavements in the village.

Driving onto pavements causes them damage as they were never designed to carry heavy traffic. For pedestrians with prams or pushchairs, the sight impaired and wheelchair users, vehicles parked on the pavement do cause difficulties and potential danger. Footpath users may be forced onto the highway and into the path of moving traffic, whilst having to negotiate high kerbs.

The parking on pavements was banned in London in 1974 and in Scotland last year, recently there have been several calls for such legislation to be rolled out across the rest of the country.

Where there are narrow roads motorists understandably mount the kerb in an attempt to assist traffic flow but in Firbeck parked vehicles on the highway can help to slow the passing vehicles which is a benefit to safety and makes for a more pleasant environment.

I'd like to thank those who have readily responded to my requests and hope we can keep our pavements clear from both cars and delivery vans in the future.

Ian Barkley



It's a tight squeeze for Ian

NEWS FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WI

We started this year's programme with gusto...with Phil Ryland and his 60s music in January, our AGM and Pie and Peas in February...and then everything has ground to a halt!

With the coronavirus reaching pandemic proportions, everyone has gone into Lockdown and meetings and events have been cancelled. But our members are still keeping in touch with each other by telephone or email and making sure that everyone is well and safe.

Many are keeping themselves busy by doing crafts - quilting, knitting and painting and drawing. And I think there will be lots of extremely clean, de-cluttered and tidy houses and immaculate gardens - but that might be wishful thinking!!!

As soon as restrictions are lifted and we do return to normal service (and everyone will give a big cheer or have a party), information of our varied programme will be announced.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Secretary on 01909 540751 if you would like more information of future events.

OPEN LETTER FROM LETWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Coronavirus Update

During this unprecedented time, the Parish Council would like to offer some words of encouragement and reassurance to all the villagers of Letwell.

We strongly advise that everyone follow the government and Public Health England's guidance on social distancing. Only leave your homes when absolutely necessary, and should you display any new symptoms, such as a cough or high temperature, you should isolate for 7 days, and all other members of your household should stay indoors for 14 days. If anyone else begins to show symptoms during this time, they should then isolate for a further 7 days. Also, be sure to keep a sensible distance away from anyone you may see when out and about.

Things are certainly going to be challenging for the foreseeable future, but we can all try to make things a little bit easier for each other by rallying together as a village. Try to stay in touch with your immediate neighbours, either by phone or even over the garden wall! If you have neighbours who are self-isolating or are particularly vulnerable, check in to see if they need anything from the shops. These are potentially lonely times, so a friendly hello or a bit of small talk can go a long way towards looking after our mental health as well as our physical health.

These are difficult and uncertain times, but as a village we can get through it together stronger. And we can all come together for a proper party when it's over!

From your parish councillors: Alan Nettleship, chairman, Duncan Biggins, Matthew Bell, Jenny Straw and Martyn Sharpe.

BUILDINGS CLOSED - BUT THE CHURCH IS STILL IN BUSINESS

During the current epidemic, the instructions from the Church of England Archbishops are very clear - all churches are to remain locked. Therefore, as well as public worship being suspended, St. Martins and St. Peters are now closed.

This is a huge loss to the congregations, but our worship of God and our care for each other continue.

For all of those who are missing our regular services or are just feeling in need of a little spiritual support at this time there is a lot of material available on the internet. However, there is also a lot of seriously dodgy stuff on there as well, so be careful.

Here is a safe link to the Church of England's online resources:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online>

There is some lovely stuff on there. Also, I am sending out emails with other links and some services written by Rev. Judith Trickett and anything else helpful.

Currently these are going out to the people who regularly worship in our churches, but I will send them out to anyone who might like them, so please contact me if you would like to be added to my list. I will delete your email address from my records after the virus has passed if you wish.

The focal ministers/churchwarden can be contacted by telephoning

Christine Martin 01709 769465, Enid Bailey 01709 815075, Nicky Blyth 01909 730217

In such times we are reminded that Jesus said:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength . . . Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”

Christine Martin

