



January 2018

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HIGH SPEED BROADBAND - ALMOST HERE

Promises of a high speed broadband connection haven't materialised yet with officials admitting that further work is necessary at both Firbeck and Letwell in the next few weeks.

Openreach predicted an end to our painfully slow broadband speeds when questioned by FLAG many months ago. With the engineering work well advanced the company announced that the new connections would be place before the end of November.

But with download speeds still hovering around the pitiful 1-2 mark Openreach have now told customers at Letwell that the green cabinet installed on the corner of Gildingwells road isn't yet "fibre enabled."

They say that the difficulties won't be resolved till the end of February.

Meanwhile, the Government funded body Superfast South Yorkshire, remains more pessimistic declaring that it could be the end of April before new ducting is installed to clear blockages affecting what they call "the fibre spine."

At Firbeck, Openreach say that underground ducting issues have hampered progress. Spokesman Graham Hughes said: "The problems are the most we have ever seen."

One area of collapsed ducting - close to St. Martin's Close and the Black Lion - will require the road being dug up, but David Burke - brought in by the parish council to monitor developments - believes that Openreach are now "90 to 95 per cent of the way there with the project."

Two green cabinets - one near the entrance to Firbeck Hall and the other at the opposite end of New Road - will service properties throughout the village.

Openreach forecast that villagers living within 1.5 km of the cabinets will benefit from download speeds of around 10 MG once the work is complete.

Families living further away are being encouraged by Openreach to take advantage of options provided under the Community Fibre Partnership Scheme.



Christmas Tree Festival at St Martins Firbeck

THE LATEST FROM FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

The Friends of Firbeck Hall group have been informed by Mr Ashley Wildsmith, owner of the Firbeck Hall estate, that the Planning Application for the restoration and development of Firbeck Hall and accompanying enabling development, is due to go before the RMBC Planning Board on Thursday January 25th 2018. We will let our Friends group know as soon as we hear the result of the application.

The Friends of Firbeck Hall is a voluntary group dedicated to encouraging the sympathetic restoration of this beautiful 16th Century building. We produce a newsletter 3 times a year detailing progress with the current development initiative and publishing articles of historical and social interest. If you would like to join the Friends group, have information you would like to share with us about our campaign, or the history of the Hall, we would be very pleased to hear from you – please email us at: friends@firbeckhall.net

We continue to be concerned about the condition of the fabric of the building as we pass into the new year. Early in November the group urged the owners to take extra precautions to protect the building over the coming winter months.

FoFH are delighted to announce that a new talk has been compiled by Valerie Oxley and Julia Colver highlighting life on the Firbeck Hall estate during the nineteenth century, when Mrs Frances Harriott Miles, affectionately known by the family as ‘Aunt Fanny’ was in residence. Frances married William Miles, a wealthy Bristol Merchant, but she was widowed early in her married life and sadly there were no children. Frances bought Firbeck Hall after the death of Henry Gally Knight and his wife Henrietta and moved there with William’s unmarried sister Eliza. Valerie and Julia have been able to piece together what life was like for Frances and Eliza managing a huge estate and that of their neighbour Col John St Leger who lived at Park Hill with his large family, but was often away from home.

Join us for a journey back in time when the estate was a hive of activity and industry, when ‘Aunt Fanny’ played host to her nephews during the long summer holidays when they were home from school. Hear about how the harum scarum boys devised pranks to annoy the Butler, John Wells, and his reaction and retaliation.

A special presentation of the talk for the Friends group and friends of Friends will take place on Friday evening 16th March 2018 in Firbeck Village Hall. Please make a note in your diaries! On this occasion we will also display updated historical folders and other information about Firbeck Hall that we have collected since the group formed in 2009, plus the latest information about progress at the Hall and development of the site.

Valerie Oxley

CRISIS OVER AT ST. MARTIN'S

The congregation at St. Martin's are looking forward to happier times after calamitous electrical problems led to the cancellation of services there during the Christmas period.

The Nativity Play was moved to the village hall as contractors worked to resolve the issue. Arrangements were put in hand to hold the Christmas Eve Holy Communion service at St. George's Church in Woodsetts.

Churchwarden Mrs. Rosmary Mason was optimistic that things would soon be back to normal as FLAG went to press.

She said: "The problems happened at the worst time of the year, but occasionally these things happen. I was working all through the Christmas period to get the problems sorted.

"It was the main electrical cable that goes into the church, but we're nearly there now getting it sorted. We've had everything tested, and we're just waiting for the final written confirmation from Church House. I've not had it yet, but I think it's likely to come in the next few days."

Future services between now and Easter should hopefully not be affected in any way.

MAKEOVER FOR OLD RED PHONE BOX

Letwell's old red phone box - which now serves as the village lending library and the local egg pantry - has undergone a makeover in recent weeks.

The parish council brought in a glazier to remove all the badly scratched, damaged glass, and then set about getting the listed structure re-painted using the authentic undercoat and final top coat gloss as supplied by a specialist company in Surrey.

The glass had to be detached from all the frames - which proved a laborious and time consuming task - and then each frame had to be cleaned individually to remove all the grime which had built up over the years.

The glazier from Brinsworth Glass was about to start the painstaking job of re-installing all the restored frames and fitting the new toughened glass as FLAG went to press. In all, there are 72 panes - 24 large ones set on three sides of the kiosk, and 48 small ones.

A massive task, and a first for the glass firm!!

*The egg pantry - which has been a big success with Louise keeping villagers supplied with produce from her flock at Peppersfield - suffered a blow before Christmas with some low life numpty stealing the cash boxalong with the heavy block to which it was attached. The box held around £3 at the most.

Thankfully, Louise is determined to carry on. "They're not going to win," she said. "I'll find a way to overcome the problem however long it takes."

In the meantime, villagers are being asked to pay Louise at the house.

SARENTINO STRINGS CHRISTMAS CONCERT AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH

The audience of about 40 music lovers was given a virtuoso display of string playing starting with that old favourite Eine Kleine Nachtmusik followed by a less well known piece, Puccini's 'Crisantemi', and after that by the wonderfully evocative 'Winter' from Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons'. After the communal singing of 'Ding dong! Merrily on high' the first half ended with a lively version of 'Carol of the Bells'. The Christmas spirit was then fortified by interval refreshments.

The second half began with John Rutter's charming 'Star Carol'. The string playing then reached its peak with a version of Correlli's Christmas Concerto which brought out all its contrasting dynamics. Tchaikovsky's music from the 'Nutcracker' was played with verve, leading to a tremendous climax which brought out the excellent acoustics of the church.

After another carol the concert ended on a high note, the string players clearly enjoying playing Tim McCarrick's 'Fiddle like Dickens' and Leroy Anderson's 'Sleigh Ride'. Our thanks go out to these talented players, Hannah, Lucy, Natalie, Jonny and Jonathan. We look forward to hearing them again. Letwell is rapidly gaining a reputation for encouraging different types of music in its two spaces, the Village Hall and St. Peter's Church.

Long may this continue.

Steve Woodward

NO TO FRACKING

Letwell Parish Council voted unanimously to object to the threatened fracking operation at Woodsetts which could see Inoes installing a 180 ft. high drilling rig, and operating round the clock for the next five years.

The council called on the Rotherham planning board to reject the application citing environmental issues and the closeness of the development to residential housing. Damage to air quality, the loss of prime farm land, and the impact of HGV lorry movements in and out of the village were also specified as serious contributing factors.

PARISH NEWS!

The Revd Jackie Lidgate has left the parish after two years of dedicated service. She conducted numerous baptisms, weddings and funerals as well as regular church services.

We thank her sincerely for her work in our community and wish her all the best for the future.

Church services will continue in their normal pattern (see notice boards and the Parish Magazine for dates/times), and be covered by the preachers from our Mission Partnership (i.e. Dinnington, Laughton and Anston).

To book baptisms, weddings or funerals please contact your Church Warden.

WOW – WHAT A SIGHTING

David Wright chances upon a rare visitor in the latest edition of his ever popular Nature Report...

I was about to start this report when my neighbour rang the doorbell to say he'd just seen a Little Egret in Firbeck. Eh? He pointed me in the right direction, and there it was. Wow! I did a little research and established that Little Egrets have been seen recently at Carlton-in-Lindrick. And then, three days later on 6 January, two Firbeck residents were excited to see two of these spectacular birds in the village.



Little Egret

The Little Egret is a small white heron with attractive white plumes on crest, back and chest; black legs and bill and yellow feet. It first appeared in the UK in significant numbers in 1989 and first bred in Dorset in 1996. Its colonisation followed naturally from a gradual range expansion into northern and western France. It now winters in the UK.

I'm reliably informed that a female Hen Harrier is back with us in the Firbeck area. Whether it's last winter's bird we'll never know for certain, but she's certainly frequenting the same area.

Another Firbeck resident reported she was delighted to see a Goldcrest in her garden for the first time.

An interesting sighting came in the form of three drake Goosander at Lingodell on 23 November. These birds tend to arrive at Langold Lake in January, but I've never seen them before as early as November, or indeed at Lingodell.

There was a most unusual spectacle at Firbeck in late November, when a huge flock of Rooks congregated to feed in a field with abundant food. These were not the usual village Rooks - there were probably a thousand or more - an incredible sight. How did all those Rooks from far and wide find out about the food source? My wife, Gwen, suggests a little birdie may have told them!

Finally, I mentioned in my last report that Fieldfare and Redwing are now with us for the winter. It's perhaps worth mentioning that four thrush species can be seen here in the UK in winter. As well as the winter visitors we also have our resident Mistle Thrush and Song Thrush. Other rarities pop up from time to time.

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REILLY, NITIKMAN AND THE SNAKE ARE COMING

Live music continues at Letwell with a return visit from long-time favourites John Reilly and Lewis Nitikman on Saturday February 17th. If you've never heard the pair then you might wonder why they're just about the first names on the Letwell calendar year after year. Go to a gig and all is explained!!

Vocalist John and Canadian keyboards player Lewis - song writing partners for the past five years - deliver the perfect formula. Great music and fine lyrics put together stylishly with the odd classic cover track thrown in for good measure.

Next up on Saturday April 14th are Snake Davis and the Burden of Paradise. First time at Letwell, the four piece band ooze quality. Sax player and frontman Snake boasts an astonishing pedigree having worked alongside just about some of the biggest names in music.

The list includes mega stars from Tom Jones to Ray Charles, George Michael, Beyonce, Cher, Paul McCartney and Tina Turner. Take it as read then that Snake knows how to blow that sax. The rest of the band have quite a history too.

Vocalist Helen Watson has mixed company with Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt over the years. Rhythm guitarist Mark Creswell has shared the stage with Mark Knopfler and Ray Davies of the Kinks among others. Bass player Dave Bowie Jnr. meanwhile counts Martha and Vandellas among his conquests.

Tickets for both shows are already going fast. Phone Martyn and Andy on 01909 731626 and 540694 before they're gone.



Beautiful new image of St. Peter's Church Letwell - photo by Paul Gregory

HELLO SAILOR...

Some readers may be aware of the existence of Firbeck Sailing Club, founded in 1976 at Langold Lake and now located at Rother Valley Country Park but, who would have expected a boat builder's yard to be nestling in that same, pretty little village, albeit on a very small scale? On the stocks at the moment is the 17 feet long catboat "Lorelei" a two-thirds replica of a 1915 original that still survives, now on display in the Long Island Maritime Museum (LIMM), West Sayville, New York State.

It was produced by Gil Smith, a well known builder of over 400 wooden boats during the late 19th early /20th centuries. His earlier craft were working 'shell fish' boats operating in South Bay, but these waters eventually became so depleted that he turned to building pleasure/racing craft of which Lorelei is a good example.

A chance internet find of line drawings/offsets for this boat were enough to prompt a Firbeck resident to seek working plans/drawings that would allow him to build a replica. He soon discovered that none existed but luck was on his side when a volunteer at LIMM offered to provide detailed photographs and measurements of the original. This was enough to enable some basic plans to be produced and work was started in March 2017 with hopes of a launching this year.



Replica Catboat Lorelei Takes Shape at Firbeck

For those with a technical bent, Lorelei is a single sail, gaff rigged catboat of which there were many and varied examples. The beautiful sleek hull of this replica is constructed by using long thin strips of bead and cove edged, Western Red Cedar on 27 conventional ribs. The boat is held together by epoxy glass/resin, as is the rest of the structure. It is only the second and probably the last boat to be built here, the first being another USA design (c.1884), a 16 feet gaff rigged Melonseed Skiff called "Mallard" completed in 2009 which now sails on the Solent.

The builder would prefer to remain anonymous although the 'cat' may have already been let out of the bag. However, there can be few village folk who know the precise location of the boatyard that must surely find a place in the annals of local history... Firbeck Hard!

Need to know more? Then go to woodenboat.com, forum, building/repairs, The Gil Smith catboat 'Lorelei'.

CHRISTMAS GOODWILL

Goodwill abounded in the days and weeks before Christmas with carol singers hard at work in both villages.

December 19th saw what has now become an annual Carol Singing evening at the Black Lion. The event was co-ordinated by David Burke under the Village Hall umbrella. As ever David Chettleburgh led the singing with his usual mix of enthusiasm and humour, and was ably supported on piano by Jenny Tolhurst.

We are very grateful to Christina, Joe, Becky and the staff at the Black Lion for their support and hard work, and supplying excellent food and drink. The place was packed and the event raised £319.88, which will be donated to Bluebell Wood Children's Hospice.

A big Thank You to all who contributed and hope you all enjoyed it as much as we did.

Letwell's hardy band of carol singers took to the village streets on December 22nd ably accompanied by Keith Martin on melodeon and friend Glyn on guitar. Choosing to belt out two and even three numbers at each door the volunteers were hoarse by the time they reached Barker Hades Road.

Villagers might be encouraged to ease the vocal chords with a festive drink or two next year.

A hefty £125 was raised for St. Peter's Church, and everybody had a great time with Keith's speedy rendition of Joy To The World voted Letwell's festive No 1.

Nicky Blyth's annual Christmas card collection service proved a financial hit too raising another £45 for Letwell church funds.

The Letwell carol service at St. Peter's was well attended. A makeshift choir performed wonders supported by former villager Anthea France, who thankfully returned from Bawtry to play the piano, and take charge of the solo efforts.



Santa Lands at Firbeck

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL FIRBECK RESIDENTS FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Christmas spirit certainly came to Firbeck on Advent Sunday. Fourteen smaller Christmas trees lined both the church and the village hall footpaths. These were all sponsored and decorated by different community groups and residents. Children and their families arrived at the big tree (kindly organised by Cllr. Julie Dunker, her husband Brian and a small band of willing helpers) to add extra decorations before going into St. Martins church for a carol concert. Music was played by the excellent ukulele band. As families came out of the church, Father Christmas arrived on his sleigh accompanied by his fantastic elf helper. They both gave sweets to the children and then Santa magically turned on the big tree lights. Everyone followed his sleigh down to the Village Hall for sherry, drinks and nibbles. The wonderful nibbles were donated by residents. Thank you! The Parish Council would also like to offer a big thank you to all those people who helped to make it such a lovely occasion. Special thanks go to Cllr. Andy Shiel who coordinated the whole event.

At an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council in October and following talking to many residents, councillors prepared a response to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) about the proposed Conservation area. We stated we were against the conservation area as currently proposed as it had proven to be divisive in the village and, indeed, some had taken offence. The main sources of difficulty centred round the sudden appearance of the proposal without any notice or consultation and the limited area the proposal covered. There was, however, a feeling that a wider conservation area, covering the whole village or something akin to the proposal made in 2011, would be more favourably received. So far, there has been no response from RMBC.

At our last meeting Firbeck Parish Council unanimously agreed to send in an objection to the planning application by Ineos to construct an exploratory well site on land adjacent to Dinnington Road, Woodsetts. This company has planning applications to drill, at both Harthill and Woodsetts and, if successful, will certainly look to spread out to other areas. The Parish Council objected on the grounds of large scale industrialisation of the countryside, the visual impact of a 60 metre high drilling rig, the closeness of the site to Woodsetts, the large increase in HGV movements in the area, affects on air quality and the operation of an industrial facility producing noise and light pollution.

Cllr Stanton reported that the application for development at Firbeck Hall is likely to go to the planning board in January. He is awaiting a response from the developer on three points:

- The developer's view of the progress of the application
- What, if any, safeguarding works were necessary and/or planned to secure the building for the winter
- A date to meet to discuss routes for a footpath with himself and Cllr Jopling.

Cllr Stanton also reported on letters from Yorkshire Water referencing the supply issues experienced by the Yews. Yorkshire Water's recent on-site testing had established that there was ample flow and pressure to supply the present connections but no capacity in the present system for new connections. It is understood that the developer of Firbeck Hall will install a new water main to supply the development.

Cllr Hamilton thanked all contributors to the Village Action Plan Group for their valuable time and work on producing a draft action plan which has been circulated to all councillors and will be discussed at the next meeting.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton

TOURING AROUND EUROPE

How were we going to cope? The camper was packed, the ferry was booked. We had 12 weeks ahead of us in a space 6m x 2.4m, visiting countries where our language skills ranged from poor down to non-existent. We had been on shorter trips mainly to France but this would be a real test visiting Spain and Portugal. Here are some unforgettable moments....

In France at the pretty village of Talmont, I tested my language skills whilst enjoying the local cuisine. I ordered a "cravat" of water !! The waitress was very polite and decided to only bring me a "carafe" of water, no tie required ! My embarrassment was reduced when friends told us of their own experience in Spain, ordering "dos servicios" (toilets) instead of "dos cervezas" (beers).

Trusting our sat nav we encountered a couple of tight squeezes. A surreal moment at Biganos in France, as we approached a low bridge (too low !) during rush hour with a single carriageway in each direction. The local commuters became somewhat impatient when we had to stop the traffic in both directions in order to reverse onto the opposite carriageway, then continue backwards for 150 meters to turn around.

Another sat nav moment was driving from Spain into Portugal at Tui. As we turned onto the bridge that permitted 3.5 tonne vehicles (which we are), we felt oversized as there was no central white line. Gulp ! We pulled the left wing mirror in just before a van skimmed past ... Phew ! ...then the right mirror slammed against the side of the bridge uprights. Oh dear ! As we emerged at the other end we were able to relax and breathe out, luckily no damage done.

While supermarket shopping in Santiago de Compostella, the assistant spent several minutes trying to explain to us that we had mistakenly picked up a box of 6 hard boiled eggs instead of fresh ones!!

A "Last of the Summer Wine" moment when I tried to help three well seasoned mature locals on the coast in Galicia. How many men does it take to manoeuvre a boat and trailer away from the sea? Well four was not enough ! Multiple attempts and plenty of head scratching only resulted in getting closer to the sea - so they just gave up.

Since arriving home it has taken a while to adjust to the luxury of space. We are constantly losing things because they are not within a 4 foot reach!

We have thoroughly enjoyed our adventure, it has reminded us that the simple things in life are definitely the best!

Martin Horn - Letwell



Four Men and a Boat

LET'S NICK THE DRINK DRIVING LITTER BUG

Volunteers spent an enjoyable morning spring cleaning the village pond at Letwell. Tangled undergrowth was cleared, trees were pruned, and a mass of bulbs were planted. Doreen Bussey made everyone a warm drink, and later set fire to all the debris!!



Meanwhile, the uneven cobbled path beside the village hall was re-laid by the king of paving Bill Marsden. Money well spent by the village hall committee!

*The parish council are urging villagers to watch out for motorists dumping litter on the Ramper. A recent clean up revealed dozens of abandoned plastic coffee cups and countless Foster lager cans littering the verge. Let's try and get a reg number!! RMBC are now handing out fixed penalty tickets like confetti elsewhere in the borough.

NEWS FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WI

Happy New Year to All

We had a very crafty November doing silk painting and a successful Craft Workshop with other members from other Institutes and where everyone had a great time painting a slate plaque (very professionally, I might add) plus doing other crafts. Everyone who attended this Workshop thoroughly enjoyed themselves and wanted to do more! More details later.

Our Christmas meeting had us seeing photos of "Christmas in the Dales" with Andrew Firth and took many of us down Memory Lane with, of course, food being served!

We start 2018 with Val Oxley telling us about Mrs. Frances Harriott Miles of Firbeck Hall (who was well known in Bristol, Rome and Firbeck). Our AGM is in February and members only are allowed. In March we will find out how a play is put on with two of our 'thespian' members - we might find a few more "actors" amongst us after this!

Michael Fowler, author, will be telling us about how he writes his detective novels in April which will be very interesting. Also in April we will be holding another St. George's Day lunch. Last year proved to be very popular and it gave visiting members a chance have a stroll round Letwell too.

It is our Resolutions meeting in May where we vote on the resolutions being put to members at the AGM in Cardiff in June. It should be quite a lively meeting especially with the cheese and wine being served to help us decide.

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

FACEBOOK ARRIVES AT LETWELL VILLAGE FAIR

Very slightly more than half of the UK population are on Facebook.

It's where we go to catch up with friends, post pictures of cats in comic costumes and, crucially, discover information about what's going on in our local area.

Letwell Village Fair has been a staple of the community's calendar for more than half a century, but 2018's event will be the first to have its own Facebook presence.

Regulars at the event will look forward to spotting the same old faces, year after year. They're the people who see the notice boards at the side of local roads, jot down the date in their diary then show up to spend on the bottle stall, cake stand and splat the rat.

The Village Fair's Facebook page is going to let more people know that the fair is on July 7 2018. We hope they'll realise what they're missing and decide to come along.

That means more money for Letwell Church, and a more vibrant, packed and exciting event for everyone who volunteers or visits.

And we need YOUR help to make it all work.

Facebook relies on 'Likes' and 'Shares' – the more you click on a post, the more people see it.

Please visit the page – just type www.facebook.com/LetwellVillageFair into Google – and click LIKE and FOLLOW.

Then every time you spot a post from the Letwell Village Fair page on your Facebook News Feed, click LIKE again.

Simple as that.

With your help we can bring Letwell Village Fair into the 21st Century, and make sure the event's as popular in 2023 as it was in 1953.

Nick Sharpe



VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN EVENT

I am interested in putting on a vegetarian and vegan tasting event in Firbeck Village Hall around the time of vegetarian week in May. There is the possibility of a small grant to help fund this. If anyone would be interested in helping please contact me. Thank you.

Wendy Hamilton wendyhamiltonbarkley@hotmail.com