



Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 11 August 2011

Chairman's Report

Over a year has passed since Firbeck Hall was acquired by a new owner, Jason Cooper.

We have successfully maintained a good working relationship with both Mr Cooper and the Conservation and Planning Department at RMBC, who also acknowledge Mr Cooper's commitment to the project. Earlier in the summer, both RMBC and Mr Cooper indicated that a planning application was expected for work to West Lodge. We have expressed our concern to both Mr Cooper and RMBC that this submission has not yet been made, and also the broader concern of the general visibly poor condition of the Hall.

Mr Cooper has responded by letting me have sight of plans for West Lodge which are ready to be submitted pending final agreement on some details with RMBC. He continued to explain that the work required to the roof, windows, floors and treatment of dry rot required at Firbeck Hall is now fully costed. He assures FoFH that he is committed to these improvements subject to planning approval.

Mr Cooper highlighted that he has invested a great deal of time and money in the project to date, and confirmed that his architect and structural engineer report that the fabric of Firbeck Hall remains sound. He related his experience at Loversall Hall, where it took more than 2 years to bring the main project out of planning and into the site phase. Mr Cooper has also agreed to meet with the Committee in September to provide further details and we welcome this development.

Valerie Oxley and Julia Colver have continued their excellent work on writing up the diaries of Amelia Stanyforth, providing further glimpses into 18th Century life in Firbeck Hall. A valuable feature of this has been the discovery of accurate weather records, which we have shared with the National Meteorological Archive.

We are also delighted to be lending our support to the installation of the RAF Firbeck Memorial which has generated a great deal of interest. The memorial cairn is almost complete and we are all looking forward to the ceremony. More information is given below and we hope you will be able to join us for the ceremony and fly past.

Simon Drohan
August 2011

RAF Firbeck Memorial

The project to fund and erect a memorial at former RAF Firbeck is now well under way. A recent auction in the Black Lion raised a healthy £590. This, together with other public and private donations pushed us to nearly £1000 (before expenses already incurred). Other gifts have and will be in kind including, we hope, one of the flypast aircraft and also some of the materials for the build. We are most grateful to Russ Briscoe from Firbeck who is currently doing a wonderful job on the stonework for the memorial cairn. However, we cannot rest on our laurels and we still need more help to ensure the completion of the project. The plaque is being engraved and the dedication date is on Thursday August 25th at 13:00 followed by an invitation only reception at the Black Lion from 2.15 pm.. Donations can now be made on-line through PayPal via our web site: www.firbeckairfieldmemorial.co.uk

Many Thanks!! Chris Percy, Sheffield. Firbeck Airfield Memorial Fund (Project Treasurer)

Opening of Firbeck Hall Country Club 1935 by Julia Colver

We are delighted to share with you the following photo kindly sent to us by Mrs Joye Powlett Smith, the niece of Mr Cyril Nicholson who bought Firbeck Hall in 1934 and transformed it into a luxury Country Club which was opened by Miss Florence Desmond, the famous actress and impersonator at midnight on 27th April 1935. Mrs Powlett Smith's father, Mr Hubert Nicholson has written on the back of the photograph the names of the gentlemen pictured which are listed under the photograph.



Mr Nicholson writes "Opening of Firbeck Hall Club 1935
L to R

Col R Thompson DSO
A J Blanchard (Ald)
W Kayser
Santos Casani
C A Nicholson
Campbell Black
Henry Horne
Lord Fielding
H C Nicholson
Sir Arthur Winder
H Crossley
A V Aspin
Buck"

To give you a flavour of the times when the Country Club opened, below are quotations taken from the 27th April 1935 editions of various papers. From the Daily Dispatch:

“£40,000 PLANE FOR CAMPBELL BLACK

Four Bids at Records to Start in Yorkshire

When Miss Florence Desmond, the actress and impersonator, opened the £100,000 Firbeck Country Club, Sheffield, just before midnight tonight, it was announced that her husband, Mr Campbell Black, the airman, would attempt four record breaking “weekend” trips by aeroplane from Firbeck during the summer.

These will be

The first in July to Capetown and back,

The second to Canada and back;

The third to the Far East;

Fourth, destination not yet known

The flights are being financed by Mr Cyril Nicholson of Sheffield.”

From the **Sheffield Telegraph** of the same date a paragraph reads:

“Bride’s Gracious Act

Tonight, Viscount Fielding presided over the opening, at which 200 people were present, the guests including Viscountess Fielding, the Earl and Countess of Lincoln, Mr Henry Horne, Mr and Mrs C A Nicholson, Santos Casani, Charlie Kunz, Sir Ronald and Lady Matthews and party, Mrs Darley and party, Colonel and Mrs Seaman and party, Colonel and Mrs Haywood, Mr and Mrs John Rankin, and Mr and Mrs Mark Firth.

Captain and Mrs Campbell Black are finishing their honeymoon at Firbeck, but Florence Desmond, Captain Black’s wife, has had to work, for tonight she was persuaded to give some of her character impersonations, and she, appropriately, chose a study she made famous in the recent London revue – the flight over the North Pole.

In addition, Charles Kunz played some of his scintillating syncopated pieces, and afterwards directed the Firbeck Hall dance band.”

From the **Sheffield Independent** we have:

“£100,000 Club Opens Its Doors

Soft changing lights, dancers whirling round in a mirrored ballroom and the quiet notes of a piano swelling and softening to the rhythm of music played by Charlie Kunz, the famous dance band leader, were features of last night’s opening of the Firbeck Hall Club, near Worksop.

This £100,000 luxury club which has been transformed by a Sheffield man, Mr Cyril Nicholson,

is one of the finest of its kind and is declared to beat anything even in America.

Captain Campbell Black, the famous airman, and his wife, Miss Florence Desmond, who had broken their honeymoon to be present, were among the guests.”

Miss Amelia Staniforth’s Journal, Firbeck Hall 1782 – 1785

The journal of Amelia Staniforth continues to fascinate us.

May 3 1783

Saturday morning Henrietta and Amelia busy about mixing shrub. Mrs White and Miss Fanny came from Wallingwells and sat in the dining Parlour with them. When that was done Miss White and Miss Amelia walk’d down the walk, went to see the Raisins pressing for wine, they had chocolate in the little Parlour and stay’d till ½ past two – afternoon Henrietta mix’d the Brandy shrub, after tea finish’d book, night Deuxdril.

The ‘shrub’ that the sisters prepared would be made from mixing orange juice and brandy. The oranges would be pared and pressed to extract the juice, water added and the mix left for about three days with occasional stirring. The mix would then be strained, sugar added, and brought to the boil. When the mix was cool the Brandy would be added. There are a number of references to the mixing of shrub, paring oranges, adding water and then the brandy throughout the journal.

We know from references in the journal that oranges were grown in pots by the sisters, along with ‘mirtles’. There is also a reference to the ‘*oranges and mirtles*’ being taken to the ‘hot house’ at Parkhill, the home of Col. St Leger, in March. Many large houses grew oranges and myrtles in their glass houses and it would be interesting to gather more information about this custom.

Amelia and Miss Fanny White “*walk’d down the walk*”. There was an avenue of yew trees at Firbeck Hall known as the Dark Walk, could this be the walk along which Amelia and Miss White took their perambulations?

The May 1783 extract from the journal also mentions the drinking of 'chocolate'. The sisters mainly drank tea and there are endless references to taking tea with various friends and visitors. Coffee is mentioned occasionally, particularly when gentlemen visit. There are six references in the journal to drinking chocolate. During the eighteenth century techniques for grinding cocoa beans were improved, and by the end of the century chocolate was prepared with milk and sugar. The chocolate would be less sweet than today and grittier. Spices were sometimes added and in earlier times chillies were a major ingredient in chocolate drinks.

Finally our short, but interesting extract records the words *'finish'd book, night Deuxdril'*. Henrietta and Amelia were avid readers and almost every night they read out loud from the latest novel or play. One such play they read was *The Critic or a Tragedy Rehearsed*, which was a satire written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, first staged at Drury Lane Theatre in London in 1779.

Depending on how many people were staying with the sisters at Firbeck Hall, the card game *Deuxdril*, *Troisdril* or *Quadril*, was played by candlelight at night. These were French card games which were popular in the 18th century, but were superseded by whist as the earlier games were quite complicated.

The 18th century is under-recorded, if anyone has any knowledge of this period, or any further information of any of the families who have lived at Firbeck Hall since the 16th century we would be delighted to hear from you.

Valerie Oxley and Julia Colver
[valerie.oxley @btinternet.com](mailto:valerie.oxley@btinternet.com)

Firbeck Hall – August 2011

Recent pictures of the Hall passed to FoFH indicate the apparent poor condition and scale of the task faced to restore it. It appears that more windows may have been broken and we have shared these concerns with the owner.



Committee Contacts

Simon Drohan (Chairman & Membership Sec)	01909 732191
Derek & Enid Bailey (Environment)	01709 815057
Julia Colver (Meeting Sec, Newsletter)	01709 812982
Sid Ellis (Press, Publicity & Gen Sec)	01709 813330
Una Ellis (Asst Sec)	01709813330
Valerie Oxley (Treasurer)	01709813451

Email: FoFHmembers@aol.com

Website: www.firbeckhall.net

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