



Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 10 April 2011

Chairman's Report

Progress at Firbeck Hall appears limited, however we are pleased to say that significant activity is taking place, moving forward towards a planning application. The owner continues to remain in contact and assures us that he is actively developing plans for submission to RMBC and the intention remains to develop it into a private home.

RMBC have confirmed that they are very satisfied with the progress and have also indicated that they are in productive dialogue with the owners' representatives. RMBC have previously indicated that there are areas of the site that could be earmarked for enabling development and recently the conservation department have suggested that options are currently being discussed which have Firbeck Hall as a private residence as the key element. We are therefore confident that our information is accurate and RMBC and the owner are working towards a logical and considered plan. The inference is that working in this way should lead to an acceptable submission as the planning and conservation departments are involved in the process.

In anticipation of a planning application we have decided to postpone our AGM until later in the year. Our organisation has in the meantime reflected on our role as the vigorous campaigning phase has diminished. The committee is satisfied that Firbeck Hall currently has an owner who is taking responsibility for it, however we remain concerned for the future of the building and whilst not pressing aggressively for urgent action we have the future interests of the building at heart and will remain close to developments.

The committee however remains a hard working lot and the pause in active campaigning initiatives has enabled us to concentrate on developing our knowledge of the history of the estate. The committee has recently had the opportunity to review the 1782 to 1785 journal of a Miss Stanyforth who lived at Firbeck Hall. Valerie Oxley and Julia Colver have worked together for hours to decipher and type up this volume, which has revealed fabulous human insight into local life in the 18th century such as the 2 hour 5 minute journey time from Firbeck to Doncaster town centre by coach! Valerie and Julia lead the research into building a broader picture of the life and times of the estate and in doing so to have embarked on a significant project that our organisation embraces.

It is now almost 2 years since the group formed and we have not approached the membership for renewal fees, however we note that the cost of postage (along with everything else!) is soaring and is now a significant overhead. With this in mind any donations to enable us to continue to send newsletters by post are much appreciated. We also request that if you are in receipt of a Newsletter via post and you have an email account would you please let us know your email address so we can send the newsletters to you electronically.

Thank you for your continued interest and support for Friends of Firbeck Hall.

Simon Drohan - April 2011

My Years at the Hospital by Martin Shelton

In 1971 the Coal Board moved me to South Yorkshire, and after a few weeks of house hunting, we moved into 5 New Road, Firbeck, on 1st April that year. An unexpected feature of my new job involved responsibility for allocating funds to local Miners' Welfare Schemes in the various colliery villages around the area, but I was excited to find that I was also nominated to join the Hospital Management Committee at Firbeck Hall.

I discovered that Firbeck was one of seven Miners' Rehabilitation Centres that had been established at the end of the second World War by the Miners' Welfare Commission. The Commission had been created by Act of Parliament after the First World War with the job of promoting the social well-being of mining communities. Financed by a small levy on coal production, it set up sport and leisure facilities in mining villages, provided university scholarships for miners' children and later built pithead baths and medical centres.

All these facilities were overseen by joint management and trade union committees, including the rehabilitation centres until they were transferred to the new National Health Service in 1951.

Hospitals at that time were administered by a number of Regional Hospital Boards and each Hospital was run by a Hospital Management Committee. Firbeck, which came under the Sheffield Regional Board, had a Committee whose members were predominantly nominated by the NCB and the mining trade unions.

The committee met once a month. It was always a pleasure to enter the grounds. Plenty of water fowl lived in the lake, their diet supplemented by kitchen scraps. The grounds were beautiful, especially in the spring. I was particularly taken by a Siberian crab tree, with profuse blossom and rich foliage. Sadly, the cuttings which one of the gardeners took for me must have come from the root stock as the two specimens I planted in my garden developed dirty green leaves, boring flowers and inedible grapefruit-sized fruits.

The hospital only stayed open five days a week. There were no permanent medical staff: all the patients had to be referred by orthopedic consultants who would usually visit their patients once a week. NCB doctors also attended regularly to see patients from their Coal Board Area. A matron provided nursing cover, and there was a permanent staff of physiotherapists, remedial gymnasts and

occupational therapists. Maintenance, cleaning and catering staff made up the complement. There was a heated swimming pool for hydrotherapy and workshops for woodwork and metalwork. A modest comforts fund, partly financed by the Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire Areas of the NUM, was mainly used, as I recall, for medicinal supplies of beer for the patients.

The Management Committee's main challenge was that the hospital was running below capacity. Since it had been set up, coal industry manpower had fallen from some 700,000 to fewer than 300,000. The industry's safety record had also improved: the rate of serious injuries per 100,000 manshifts had fallen by 30% by 1971. So the available pool of patients had fallen considerably, and some orthopedic consultants were unconvinced that referring a patient to Firbeck was worth the demands of a weekly visit to a distant place. The hospital was eventually allowed to admit non-miners referred by the few enthusiastic consultants, and, later, NCB doctors were allowed to refer patients directly. A proposal to open the hospital to stroke patients was vetoed by the medical establishment, but a special unit for the rehabilitation of lower-limb amputees was set up with the enthusiastic support of a Sheffield-based consultant.

Soon after I joined the committee we learned that it was to be abolished under new legislation proposed by the Heath Government. All Regional Hospital Boards, Hospital Medical Committees and local authority public health departments were to be replaced by Regional, Area and District Health Authorities. Firbeck was to come under the Rotherham Area Health Authority. In a late concession to the mining industry lobby, the Government agreed that the coal industry should be allowed to nominate two members of each new Authority that had a miners' rehabilitation centre within its boundaries. It thus came about that the outgoing Firbeck chairman, Jack Leigh of the NUM, and I became members of the new Rotherham Health Authority which was to begin its formal existence in April 1974.

In the period leading up to this, however, politics were to play a part. After a miners' overtime ban began in the autumn of 1973, the Government imposed a three-day week on the whole of industry, and when the NUM voted to go on strike in the following February, the Prime Minister called a General Election, the outcome of which was not as he had hoped. By the time the new NHS organisation came into force there was a new Labour Government from which the NUM expected some payback. Firbeck's then MP, Peter Hardy, was made

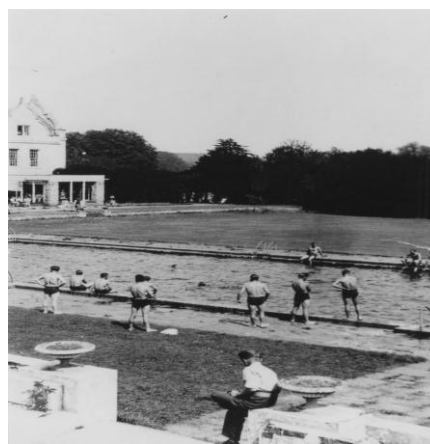
Parliamentary Private Secretary to the new Health Secretary, Dr David Owen, who made an early visit to Maltby Colliery and undertook to see whether anything could be done to preserve a special arrangement for Firbeck and the other centres without unpicking the entire new NHS organisation which was only just bedding in.

After long gestation, the Department of Health proposed that Rotherham and the other authorities concerned should set up new committees to oversee the miners' centres. In legal status the committee would be a sub-committee of the health authority, and therefore had to be chaired by an authority member. By the time this structure could be set up however Mr Leigh's term of office on the authority was over, and although several NUM members sat on the authority in their capacity as local councillors I was the only authority member connected with the mining industry prepared to take on the chairmanship of the new committee, and my appointment was duly confirmed.

The Yorkshire NUM had nominated their President, Arthur Scargill, to the new committee, and he expected to replace his Union colleague as chairman. He was unprepared to co-operate with my appointment and persuaded his area council to withdraw their support for the comforts fund. As usual, Mr Scargill's pronouncements received widespread publicity. Arriving at the hospital one morning, I found an anonymous letter from an old-age pensioner in Hampshire enclosing a pound note in the hope that it would help the hospital to remain open. As the Yorkshire NUM's contribution however had only been £250 a year, the hospital continued as normal. I met all the NUM patients, and they happily continued their treatment as before.

The long NUM strike of 1984/85, an event in which Mr Scargill was also involved, inevitably took up much of my time, but the hospital was not affected to any great extent. When the miners eventually returned to work however the Coal Board decided to move me away from the Yorkshire coalfield and my association with Firbeck sadly came to an end. My wife and I had already moved out of the village in 1978.

The health authority eventually decided that it was uneconomical to keep Firbeck open, but by now there was widespread recognition that intensive rehabilitation of the kind carried out there needed not only to continue but to be integrated more closely with the district hospital. They therefore built the new Park Rehabilitation Centre on Badsley Moor Lane in Rotherham to develop the Firbeck legacy. Both my wife and I have recently undergone post-operative therapy there, and a painting of Firbeck Hall in the porch there ensures that its 40 years service as a hospital are not forgotten.



Two photos of the miners enjoying the outdoor swimming pool

[The History of Firbeck Hall – please help us!](#)

“Let us walk a little in front of the glass door, sit a little while upon the honeysuckle bench and watch the barley being led in.....” Firbeck Hall 1784

The history of a building is as important as bricks and mortar when considering its preservation, listing and heritage status. To this end we are continuing to compile the history of Firbeck Hall and in particular the history of the families who lived there. Presently we are looking at the period from **1750 – 1800**, the second half of the 18th century. This is the Georgian period, when the first St Leger race was run, the first theatre in Doncaster was built and when travel by the local gentry was on horseback, by chaise or by coach.

We know the two Staniforth sisters, Henrietta and Amelia who lived at Firbeck Hall at that time were part of a large social group, the White

family at Wallingwells were particular friends, General St Leger at Parkhill was a frequent visitor and the Boridge family at Tickhill Castle were called upon, as were the Mellish family at Blyth Hall, the Suttons at Scofton Hall, the Lumleys at Sandbeck, the Galways at Serlby Hall, the Athorps at Dinnington Hall and the Hewetts at Shireoaks Hall to name but a very few!

If you have done any local research yourself, or have any information about the families above, particularly during the period of our research, the 18th century, we would be very pleased to hear from you. Any piece of information however small will be appreciated.

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Gladwyn Jebb (1900-1996) of Firbeck Hall and his connection with The Dowager Duchess of Devonshire by Julia Colver



Gladwyn Jebb	Deborah Devonshire
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Gladwyn Jebb, who became 1st Baron Gladwyn and had a distinguished political career was born at Firbeck Hall. The Jebb family owned the Hall from 1878 to 1934. It went up for sale in 1909 but, being unsold, was then rented out until the whole estate was finally disposed of in 1935.

Whilst reading the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire's latest book 'Wait for Me' which gives an amazing insight into her family's varied life I came across a reference to Gladwyn Jebb. The Dowager Duchess is the last remaining one of the famous Mitford sisters. One of her sisters, Diana, married aristocrat and writer Bryan Walter Guinness at a grand society wedding in 1929 and left him in a great scandal of 1933 for British Fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley. She was interned in Holloway Prison in 1940, was released in November 1943 and remained under house arrest for the remainder of the war. Throughout her life she never renounced her belief in Fascism. The following is a passage from the book which I found particularly interesting:

"What happened to Diana and my brother-in-law is well documented. What is less well known is that the day after Diana was arrested Gladwyn Jebb, private secretary to Sir Alexander Cadogan at the Foreign Office and an acquaintance of Nancy (*Diana's sister*), summoned Nancy to his office. He wanted to know whether she thought Diana's friendship with Hitler and other high-ranking members of the Nazi party made her a threat to the country, and asked her if she knew the purpose of Diana's visits to Germany. Nancy told Gladwyn that she thought Diana 'an extremely dangerous person'. What she based this statement on I do not know – Diana never spoke politics to Nancy – and why she agreed to be questioned about a subject of which she admitted she knew nothing, I shall never understand. Diana had always been generous to Nancy and they loved each other's company, which makes Nancy's denunciation all the more inexplicable. But I do know that her underlying jealousy of Diana, which went back to childhood, was still very present. It had been exacerbated by Diana producing four healthy boys and Nancy being unable to have children following an ectopic pregnancy. Diana did not learn of Nancy's action until 1985, twelve years after Nancy's death. It must have been a fearful shock, however well she thought she knew Nancy, such duplicity being entirely foreign to her own nature."

(Extract from 'Wait for Me' kindly reproduced by kind permission of the publishers John Murray Publishers, Euston Road, London).

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