



Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 2, June, 2009

Welcome to our second Newsletter and an update on our endeavours to save Firbeck Hall.

Our first Friendship meeting on 11 May might have been better attended if it hadn't clashed with the televised Sheffield United playoff match but we still had a good 'questions and answers' session. Through the questionnaire, it was revealed that the majority of our members would not only be willing to pay for permits allowing walking access through the grounds, but also to take part in regular or occasional voluntary work on projects there. Most importantly, a unanimous decision was made for us to demand immediate action on the part of RMBC to prevent the demise of Firbeck Hall.

Copy of letter below...

"A well attended presentation on the history of Firbeck Hall provided an opportunity for local residents (and others) to express their concern for the deteriorating condition of the building. This led directly to the formation of Friends of Firbeck Hall, a group devoted to the saving of the Hall. Within six weeks our membership exceeds 140 and is still growing.

The council is aware that Firbeck Hall is a Grade 2 Listed building. Application of the regulations appertaining to the upkeep and maintenance of such properties are the responsibility of the local authority. This led us to early discussions with your Conservation Department in order to establish the current situation and we understand that since its acquisition in 1996 no planning proposals whatever have been submitted by the owners in respect of the property. This cannot but create greater concern for the future of the Hall.

The removal of roof lead and other damage resulted in the actions you authorised in 2005 in respect of temporary repairs and security. We were not aware of any follow-up since that time until now, but we understand that following a recent meeting with the owners, an official inspection of the site is now pending. In the intervening period since 2005, we are aware that Firbeck Hall has deteriorated considerably to a degree where it is now in serious jeopardy. We share very clear and recent photographic evidence of this.

Our members are demanding immediate and urgent action, but unlike the previous temporary works carried out under Section 54, which were clearly ineffective in preserving the building, we consider that a Repairs Notice under Section 48, 'to bring the building back into condition as of the date of listing', to be more

appropriate. In this context we enclose the relevant extracts Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

We are of the opinion that Rotherham Borough Council has been overlooking its responsibilities in respect of Firbeck Hall, but note that it does have the power and authority to resolve the situation and save the Hall even at this late date.

Firbeck Hall has been a significant part of our village for over 400 years. Its long and fascinating history continues to unfold with more recent events that include a unique art deco country club and a place of rehabilitation that will long live in the hearts and minds of many coal miners in the region. Their myriad stories of danger and bravery have yet to be recorded but still echo in that place of healing. Firbeck Hall also tells its own grand story of architectural development of period styles and for this reason alone, must not be allowed to crumble.

Urgent and immediate action on the part of your Council is vital if Firbeck Hall is to be saved and you can rely on us to provide full backing. We will not be forgiven if Firbeck Hall is allowed to be destroyed. Failure to act at this very late hour is not an option."

Please note that an inspection of the property has now taken place. We await the outcome.

The Mysterious 'Tissington Trail'.

On the 22 January this year, an auction took place at Christies, London, of a collection put up by Sir William Fitzherbert of Tissington. One painting (c.1720) depicting a young boy described as 'Jonathan Stanyforth, son of Disney Stanyforth' went to a South of England bidder for the hammer price of £19,000. It is doubtless that the painting had its origins in Firbeck Hall but what was it doing in a collection belonging to the incumbents of Tissington Hall, Derbyshire?

Three generations of Stanyforths lived at Firbeck Hall between 1676 & 1792, of which Jonathan was the last male survivor. Like his three sisters, he remained unmarried and the dynasty passed away with their deaths. Through a distant relative, the Hall was sold to the Gally Knights of Langold and it seems quite possible that at least some of the Stanyforth 'trappings' may have been left for disposal by the new owners. There would have been quite a considerable amount of material to clear after some 116 years of Stanyforth ownership but some explanation is necessary to solve the mystery.

Another painting sold at the auction from that same collection was of a very attractive young woman who is described as Selina Fitzherbert and she is the link in our story. This lady was to become the wife of Henry Gally Knight and would have been familiar with any Stanyforth items that may have been left to be disposed of after the sale of the Firbeck property.



Jonathan Stanyforth c.1720 (by kind permission)

No doubt, the painting that is the subject of our story would have made a fine gift to any member of Selina's family at Tissington, a sort of antique curiosity. It is certainly difficult to imagine any other explanation that would place Jonathan's portrait on a wall at Tissington Hall as there seems to be no other family connection.

Along with the rest of his Family members, Jonathan now lies below the floor of St. Martins Church and we can only hope that one day the painting will come back home to hang once more in its rightful place. That is a tall order but well within the bounds of possibility. However, the Friends of Firbeck Hall have a bit of work yet to do before that can happen. It only requires determination and enthusiasm...oh! and we might need a few duckets, just to oil the works.

Firbeck Hall is about to Fall... ...unless we do something about it !

The people who can save Firbeck Hall (**Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and its current owners, Cambs Construction Ltd.**) need to be constantly reminded of their personal responsibility for its future safety and made aware of their own culpability if they fail in this duty. You must lobby them at every opportunity so please speak to them, write to them, hound them and make them listen. Firbeck Hall and its history has much to do with the feel of what our village is about today. For that same reason, it must always remain a part of its future.

Flora & Fauna.

By kind permission of Biological Records (RMBC), Derek Bailey has now received a CD containing over 2,000 records (lists) of plant and animal species observed during field studies carried out in the grounds of Firbeck Hall between the years 1963 and 1996. Monks Hood, Travellers Joy, Crossbill, Hawfinch and Water Vole are but a tiny sample of the natural life that has abounded there. It is only hoped that these and all the others still flourish in that place.

"My name is Legion, for we are many" Mark 5:9

Our Membership Secretary, keeps a fine database and operates the system by which we receive new members. Our numbers have grown quickly in the first nine weeks and already exceeds 150 new Friends. We hope that they will all make an effort to help the cause by actively seeking to swell that number. That is a very important part of the strategy in our campaign to save Firbeck Hall. Our strength is equal to our growth in numbers and our voices must be equal to the call. Together, we shall win.

We know who the Sinners are !

We await a response from Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) and others, to our letter. It will also be interesting to see if they respond to an Article that appeared in the Rotherham Advertiser on Friday, 29 May.

It should be noted that this article was not generated by FoFH even though it mentioned but misquoted a committee member. Although it used a whole page, there was very little effort to further our cause and no contact details. It used information picked from a five year old file and photographs that were even older. It seemed to be more of an attack on personalities rather than an aid to our 'heritage saving' campaign.

Communications

Members decided by vote at our first meeting on the 11 May, that general meetings will only be called when strong issues need to be resolved or the situation warrants it. Otherwise, the **Newsletter** would be our normal means of spreading the word. Members are invited to contact any member of the committee when further information is required.

Friends of Firbeck Hall Committee

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- Julia Colver (Hon. Sec.)
- Sid Ellis (Publicity)
- Simon Drohan (Membership)
- Valerie Oxley (Treasurer)
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