



Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 4, September/October, 2009

Chairmans Report

Friends will be forgiven for thinking that everything in the garden is rosy after reading the last Chairman's Report. The reply from Mr. Roger Stone (Council Leader RMBC) to our first letter was promising but left a lot of questions unanswered. We therefore followed up with a second letter (copy below) sent on the 18th July. It poses a number of very searching questions but remains, so far, unanswered.

"Dear Sir,

I must apologise for the delay in response to your letter of 26 June, 2009 on the subject of Firbeck Hall and its future. I have been away from home for the past two weeks and trying to catch up on developments. However, the delay may have been fortuitous in respect of the most recent calamities to befall the property. I refer to the fire which destroyed part of the building during the early evening of Friday, 10 July. I have eye witness accounts of this event which do not make for very satisfactory reading with regard to the difficulties experienced by the Fire Services when they arrived, some perhaps of their own making and others concerning access to the property for any Emergency Services. This serious anomaly needs to be addressed immediately. (Copy of our Newsletter 3, with article of eye witness account, enclosed).

On behalf of the Friends of Firbeck Hall I very much welcome your detailed account of RMBC's involvement with FH and its plight but would question the idea of any monitoring having taken place since 2005 until very recently (March, 2009). The vast amount of damage to the Hall has occurred during this period of inaction. As you well know, the Owners were required to carry out temporary repairs in 2005 pending the submission of Planning Permission which never materialised and subsequent to recent inspections it seems that the whole process could be about to be repeated, despite the direct involvement of English Heritage (Mr. Giles Proctor). Some clarity would be much appreciated in respect of just what your Authority has demanded of the Owners as a result of two recent inspections that could not have failed to reveal massive deterioration over the past five years.

Specifically, I would ask what written undertakings have been given by the Owners of FH in respect of the Warning Notice No.1 (dated 1 May) that they received from RMBC? It is known that some temporary repairs have taken place in the very recent past but what are their intentions with regard to the requirement of that Warning Notice to 'properly preserve the building'? Have the Owners satisfactorily complied with that warning now that those two months grace (1 May to 1 July), have expired? Have the Owners ever committed to any kind of written reply in acceptance of the notice that has been served upon them? Was there ever a requirement for them to do so? Have we now reached a point where Warning Notice No.2 is to be served that will lead to Compulsory Purchase proceedings? Some action is required immediately otherwise the Owners will rightly assume that your authority, once again, is both hollow and meaningless. FoFH cannot accept this. A minority of our membership advocate that we go

public, a course of action that I have successfully fending off until now and will continue to try to do so. I have never been keen on the Press!

All that our members ask is that you and your staff carry out their duties to the full. They are well aware that you have all the powers that a Local Authority require to demand full compliance with the notice that has been served. Once again, I can assure you of full backing on the part of FoFH. We have a considerable amount of talent and expertise in our midst that may be there for the asking on a voluntary basis and perhaps even some ability to raise funds that would aid your future course of action.

The Rt. Hon. Kevin Barron MP has sent me a copy of the Council's letter to him which makes for interesting reading. I am very pleased to hear that '*A re-grading to 2* would have significant implications as it would make the building eligible for Grant Aid by English Heritage. This is a process that has now been set in motion. I will keep you informed as to its progress*' (my underlining).

Lastly, I am pleased that you have advocated a close working relationship between FoFH and your Planning/Conservation staff. Such a bond can only result in the best course of action with regard to the saving of this, our very important piece of local Heritage despite the latest horror story. You can certainly rely on our membership to fully back any positive steps you take in this direction.

Yours faithfully,

On behalf of Friends of Firbeck Hall"

AN OLD FLAME (Geoff Hall - FoFH)

The article in the last newsletter about a recent fire at Firbeck Hall reminds me of another occasion when flames were seen rising into the sky from the Hall. It was in about 1923 or 1924, when the Hall was occupied for the last time as a private residence.

As a small child, I was abruptly awakened by my mother early one morning crying "The Hall is on fire! The Hall is on fire!". We were living at Home Farm at the time and the Hall played a very significant part in the life of the village, and was the most imposing building locally, especially to a young child. I quickly dressed and was taken in the dark by my mother through the farmyard and the kitchen garden belonging to the Hall. I remember that, as we emerged from an avenue of yew trees, we suddenly saw flames rising from the Hall roof. To a young child the sight was spectacular and the presence of two, modern fire engines in front of the Hall, added to the excitement.

The fire engines had come from Rotherham and Retford and the firemen were playing water from hoses onto the roof to douse the flames. I recall the long hoses snaking

down to the lake from the Hall and people rushing about trying to save precious items, some of which were being thrown out of windows. One memory is particularly vivid. Someone had thrown a silver cigarette case out of a top window and the cigarettes had scattered on the ground. And there was the chauffeur scrabbling around picking up the cigarettes and placing them back in the case, before putting one in his mouth and promptly lighting up. Strange what things are important to some people in an emergency!

It was said that the fire had started in the maids' quarters, which were on the third floor of the Hall. In those days the Hall was one of the first properties to have an electrical supply. A huge bank of batteries was housed in the stable yard and supplied a direct current to the Hall. The cause of the fire was not firmly established but it is thought that a short-circuit had occurred in the roof space and, as the Hall residents were asleep in bed at the time, the danger was not noticed until the fire had caught hold.

The excitement lasted until it was daylight, when the firemen seemed to have got the blaze under control. As my mother and I were walking back to Home Farm, a steam-powered fire-engine, with brass gleaming from many hours of polishing, and drawn by four sweating, frothing horses, was driven at breakneck speed down the back-drive towards the Hall. The appliance and crew had come all the way from Worksop and had unfortunately arrived too late for the excitement. I have no doubt that the Rotherham and Retford fire crews ribbed their antique-equipped colleagues from Worksop for a long time after the event!

Vogue Magazine, June 1935 (*Julia Colver*)

I am delighted to share with you a few photographs from this magazine that I remember we had at home as a child and when it was time to sell the house after my parents died, the magazine was not to be found. I had made attempts to find out about this article on Firbeck Hall several years ago without success but I did not know the name of the magazine or the year.

I mentioned the lost article in a Friends of Firbeck Hall Committee meeting and Valerie Oxley said she had copied it many years ago from our magazine so then we were able to ascertain which magazine it was and which month. The photocopies were not very clear and it has taken a lot of searching for the June 1935 Vogue and gaining copyright permission to use these much better reproductions and I hope you enjoy seeing how Firbeck Hall looked in its heyday.

Firbeck Hall Country Club was in being from 1935-1939 and was owned by Mr Cyril Nicholson, brother of Mr Hubert Nicholson who lived at Lake House, Firbeck.

It is a wonderful glimpse of the haute couture of the 1930's and what particularly took my eye on the swimwear page (below) was the sketch on the right. The swimsuit costs 6½ guineas (about £6.52). The approximate value in today's money would be £176 and a year's subscription to Firbeck Hall Club for gentlemen was 7 guineas which entitled them to full use of the Hall and Grounds, including the swimming, tennis, squash, putting and dancing, but did not include golf or riding.

SWIMMING AT FIRBECK



THE most modern swimming pool—below a flagged terrace and surrounded by lawns, enables one to swim and sun-bathe.

THE plant, unique in this country, ensures that the filtered water—of course its heated—charged with ozone. Above the modern facade, disguising the changing cubicles, is a sun-bathing terrace, looking down upon the turreted diving board.

THE SWIM-WEAR illustrated is by LILLYWHITES, LTD.

In the photograph, the figure on the left is wearing one of the new "KROCH-TROCH" three-piece rubber SUITS available in White, Dark Green, Turquoise or Black—2 Guineas.

On the right is shown a Backless open-back wooden SUN-SUIT. In Sky, White or Turquoise.

TWO EXCLUSIVE MODELS FOR 1935 are also illustrated.

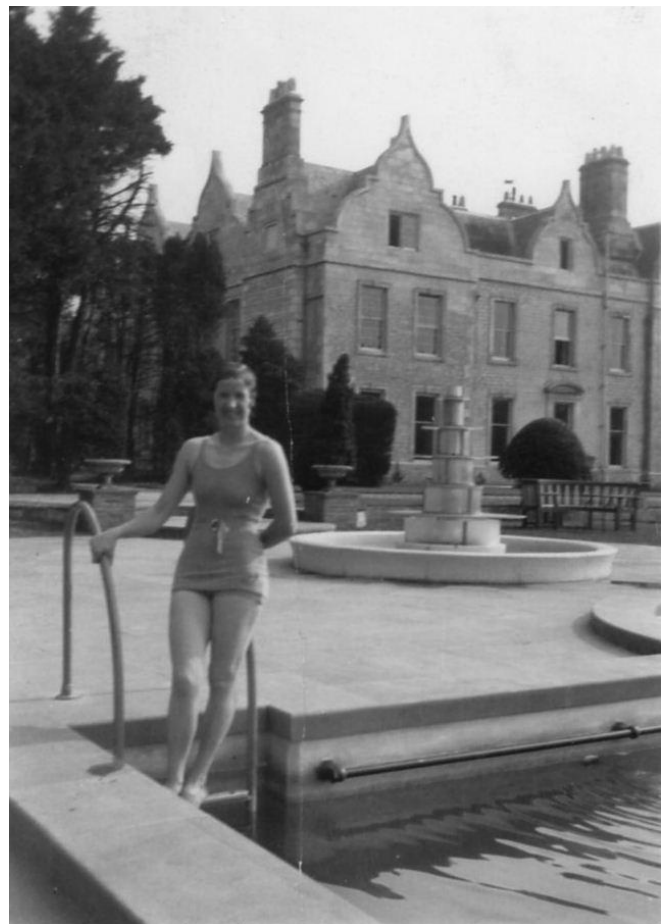
"SCANDAL" In Tallastone, lined collarless. Feather-weight, etc. priced 4 Guineas. Navy or Navy.

"TUMBLER" In "Clapper" material. Pure Silk, woven or Knitted. Navy, in White, Navy or Nigger. 2 Guineas.

These two models cannot be sent as separate. Illustrated Brochure "FOR BEACH & SEA" Post Free.

SWIM-WEAR BY LILLYWHITES LTD. OF PICCADILLY CIRCUS, V

This is a poignant photo for me as I have a photograph (below) of my late mother (Mrs Ethel Batty) who lived at The Yews, Firbeck, taken in exactly the same place. Note the beautiful fountain in the background of both photos which was part of the 'Ozanair' water purification & filtration system.



The Vogue photograph below shows two models in the reception area with the art deco clock and sweeping staircase. Inset is a picture of another model on the stairs. The caption for the dress on the right reads, "White and royal blue cellophane is the intriguing material of Miss Nash's dress. She is pleased with the detachable bustle which can be worn on the shoulder." What I am not sure of is whether what they called 'cellophane' in 1935 is what we call cellophane today, used for wrapping sweets etc, and pretty flammable, is actually one and the same! It would be pretty noisy to walk about in.



EVENING AT FIRBECK

A drive through the avenue of trees brings you before the Hall, a photograph of which is shown on the previous page, and so into the inviting Reception Foyer. Walls of light stone, luxurious terra-cotta carpet, really comfortable furniture are distinctive examples of decoration by HEATON TABB of LIVERPOOL and LONDON. The scene depicted above shows the chic models of Samuels to advantage.

On the left Miss White, talking to the attendant, is wearing a graceful ornamental white gown of crepe roman, studded with crystals.

White and royal blue cellophane is the intriguing material of Miss Nash's dress. She is pleased with the detachable bustle which can be worn on the shoulder.

MODELS BY SAMUELS, KING STREET, MANCHESTER

We have more pictures to bring you in subsequent Newsletters and we hope this has whetted your appetite. If anyone wishes to see these pages in full, please contact me. Also, if anyone has pictures from Firbeck Country Club days we would love to see them.

Vogue photographs shelfmark N.17503v.58 reproduced by kind permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

RECENT FIRE AT FIRBECK HALL (Sid Ellis)

This is a copy of the 'Follow Up' letter sent to South Yorks Fire & Rescue Command in response to their report on the Fire which took place at Firbeck Hall on Friday, 10th July.

"23rd July, 2009.

Your Ref: CS/1818/KS

Dear Sirs,

Incident Report – Incident No. 23826091

Thank you for your report of the 17th July 2009. I have noted the contents with interest but would appreciate any information you can give in respect of the following; -

Item 2.1 Time of Call: 17:13:44

Item 2.5 Time of Stop Message: 21:16:50

Item 5.2 Ignition to Discovery Time

With the addition of 30 minutes to 2 hours we assume that this indicates a total duration of well over four hours. Is this

feasible with a fire confined to a relatively small roof area? (i.e. What would 'feed' a fire for this duration?).

Item 7.1 No delay in commencing fire fighting actions.

There were reports of 'dry' hydrants which would surely have delayed effective fire fighting? There is no mention in your report.

Item 8.22 Extent of fire & heat damage.

Item 8.24 & Item 8.25 Fire/Total damaged area at stop.

Does 'Roof space only' and '101 – 200' indicate that an area of 101 to 200 square metres confined to the roof space is the total extent of the fire and subsequent damage?

We are also aware of the difficulty in locating and gaining access to Firbeck Hall (Hospital) due to the barricading off of the main entrance on New Road, the only access being via a difficult route to the rear. Did this not in fact cause delays? There is no mention in your report.

Firbeck Hall is a Grade 2 Listed building currently the subject of close attention by English Heritage, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and potential developers. Do listed buildings receive special attention or treatment by Fire & Rescue Services?

Friends of Firbeck Hall are obviously gravely concerned about the Hall and its future and your early comments would be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully"

To date, we have received no reply to this letter but the question of Emergency Services access to FH and the blocked main entrance has also been raised by the Parish Council. The barricading is not only an eyesore but may also be illegal. It is believed that the threshold to the main entrance gate is part of the public highway. Saddest of all is the attention this draws to the awful plight of West Lodge (also a Grade 2, Listed Building). It would seem that no attempt has ever been made to maintain this structure and survival is now questionable.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Derek & Enid Bailey)

Firbeck Hall stands in approximately 44 acres of land, a small remnant of its former glory. At present, the flora and fauna cannot be assessed but the area is comprised of a variety of habitats where many flowers and creatures should thrive and used to flourish. The northern side of the hall was and still is divided by an access track and years ago a green wooden cricket pavilion stood on the side nearest the hall. Facing it, on the opposite side of the track was the village cricket pitch, the traditional scene of men in whites watched by their regular spectators. Games were still being played there in the seventies. Since there was no playing field for the children, provision was made for them to use the area on one evening each week provided they were supervised by an adult. On no account were they allowed to run on the hallowed cricket pitch!

Adult volunteers were not always available and the lack of a safe footpath to this rather isolated area meant that this was a very limited opportunity for the children. Sadly the closure of Firbeck Timber Company reduced the number of players in the cricket team to six and this led to its eventual demise. The whole area became overgrown and has now reverted to a



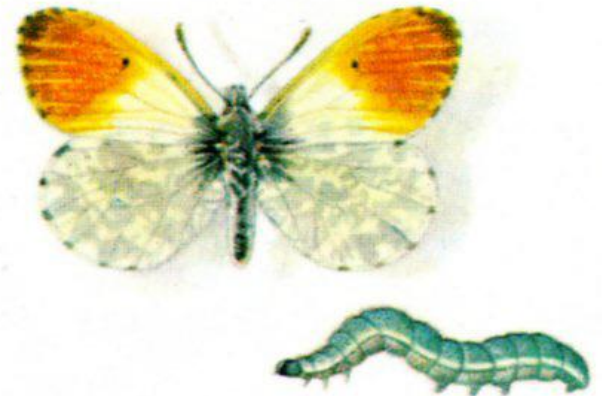
Aerial photograph (Feb. 2009) of old cricket pitch area (light coloured field). Firbeck Hall can be seen in the centre of top left quarter. (DWS)

grassland plot with False Oat Grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) as a dominant species. Colin White has found several orchids there in recent years.

While the hall was still a rehabilitation centre the woodland edging the main drive of the hall was still tended but now there is a thick undergrowth of various brambles and Dogs Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*).

At the end of May this year, Enid cycled down the access path in search of food for a batch of Orange Tip butterfly caterpillars (*Anthocharis cardamines*). Rearing butterflies and moths from eggs or larvae is her hobby. Just inside the entrance to the track was an abundance of Jack-by-the-Hedge or Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) on which Orange Tip caterpillars feed. Enid was delighted to find more eggs laid on the plants. While gathering the food plants she discovered Milkmaids or Cuckoo Flowers (*Cardamine pratensis*), also host to Orange Tips, growing close by. These flowers, along with Ragged Robin, show that this must be a wet area.

The Orange Tip caterpillars were all kept and fed in separate containers as, unusually for caterpillars, they have cannibalistic tendencies! Gradually, each one turned into a pupa attaching itself by a safety belt to the base of a branching stem. The pupa is a small, graceful arc, green at first and then fading with the stalk to a perfect camouflage. The butterflies should emerge in April or May of next year. The undersides of their wings will be hardly visible against the flowers of *Cardamine pratensis*, *Alliaria petiolata* and other crucifers.



Orange Tip butterfly (male) and caterpillar

Communications

For the foreseeable future, this Newsletter will be the primary means of communication with our Membership. Meetings will be called as and when required but our Friends are invited to contact any member of the committee by telephone when further information or clarity is required.

Friends of Firbeck Hall Committee

c/o 8 Kingswood Close, Firbeck, Notts. S81 8LJ
e-mail FoFHall@aol.com

Don Scott (Chairman)	01709 814450
Julia Colver (Hon. Sec.)	01709 812982
Sid Ellis (Press & Publicity)	01709 813330
Simon Drohan (Membership)	01909 732191
Valerie Oxley (Treasurer)	01709 813451
Derek Bailey (Environment)	01709 815075