



# Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 6, March 2010

## Chairman's Report

From the first few days of the year we have had increased interest in our campaign, taking our membership to a current total of 215. Early in the year we were contacted by a freelance journalist, Rachael Clegg, who submitted several articles for the Sheffield Star and Yorkshire Post. The main focus of her interest was the Firbeck Hall Club period, however the articles raised the issue of the current perilous state of the building and along with it the profile of our campaign. The press interest led to the appearance of various committee members on BBC Radio Sheffield and Trax FM to discuss the situation at Firbeck Hall, which in turn has increased membership enquiries.

Rachael also put us in contact with the amenity societies, which is a group of bodies each having a particular focus on history, restoration and preservation depending upon the era, region and context of the situation. We have had productive meetings with representatives from The Georgian Group and The Yorkshire Building Preservation Trust, each of whom have given good advice and direction to our group. It is clear that there is a great deal of experience among the wider heritage, restoration and preservation groups who can act as points of reference to our campaign and help to keep it on the right track. Through such contact and our own research we are developing a good understanding of the legal issues involved as well as comparing the circumstances we have in Firbeck to other cases.

We are pleased to report the continued support of English Heritage who remain very interested in the site and are particularly keen to see West Lodge returned to good and habitable condition.

A great deal of responsibility and power resides with RMBC, and naturally the primary focus of our campaign is to strongly encourage RMBC to take robust action on Firbeck Hall. We are meeting senior council executives to discuss their strategy and position in the coming days and we will outline our own views. The developer interest is still alive and we are aware of some negotiation between the interested parties and the owners, but there is no positive news to report at this time. There is rumour of other possible interest in the Hall and we are hopeful that a new and motivated owner can be found at the earliest opportunity. 2010 has started well for Firbeck, we have new life in the Black Lion and building work is underway at the village hall. Redevelopment of Firbeck Hall could have a further positive effect on our community and the Friends group is doing everything it can to support and encourage this.

I am pleased to report that we have decided not to renew individual memberships at the nominal £1 fee as we have scrapped the idea of an annual membership. Membership will therefore continue indefinitely for all those

who have already joined FoFH and we will continue to generate income from new memberships and donations to cover our campaign expenses. Members have been particularly generous in assisting with our expenses and we are very grateful for this continued support. We have also moved our website to a new domain – [www.firbeckhall.net](http://www.firbeckhall.net) – we encourage you to take a look at the new ad-free site where we will continue to publish pictures and articles and we also aim to have a discussion forum in due course.

Our AGM is scheduled for **Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> April** at 7.30pm in the **Black Lion** Restaurant which landlord Phil has kindly made available to us in the absence of the village hall. We intend to have an informal and brief review of the year's progress and there will be a display featuring many pictures and of course our growing number of press cuttings to browse. I hope you will join us for a pleasant evening.

Simon Drohan

### **Hitting the Headlines** (*Sid Ellis*)

**T**he success of any campaigning organisation is almost invariably dependent on publicity, so we are always grateful for any coverage we obtain which highlights the plight of Firbeck Hall. So the start of 2010 was particularly pleasing.

The Rotherham Advertiser has maintained an ongoing interest in the condition of the Hall, no doubt due to the diligence of their locally based (Letwell) reporter Tom Sharpe. He has conducted his own campaign dating back to well before the formation of our 'Friends' group and was early off the mark on the 8<sup>th</sup> January with a full page article.

But even we were somewhat overwhelmed by the deluge of attention which followed with an extensive and double edition cover on successive days in the Sheffield Star (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Jan) and full page treatment in the Yorkshire Post (22<sup>nd</sup> Jan). On that very same day our local Dinnington Guardian also provided full page treatment. There followed an appearance on Radio Sheffield and more recently, on Trax FM. The basis of this upsurge in interest emanated from Julia Colver's wonderful collection of memorabilia relating to that glorious but short period in the 30s that saw the blossoming of the famous Firbeck Hall Club that has been featured in our last

three Newsletters. It was inevitable that the subject concerned would appeal to any aspiring journalist. Indeed, the two lady reporters concerned were fascinated and enthralled, as I believe is revealed in their writings. From our point of view, the most important factor in all these articles was the contrast they make between the glamour of the famous country club and the current perilous state of Firbeck Hall.

To top it off and put the 'icing on the cake' (or 'snow on the Hall') was the February edition of our Parish Newsletter which featured a beautiful photograph (by John Colver) of a snowy Firbeck Hall on its front cover accompanied by a full page and less edifying picture of West Lodge inside.

Finally, Julia's daughter tells us that the amount of media space we have attracted would cost a normal business a small fortune. Certainly more than we could ever afford, but at least we know that the subject is worthy of it!

• *Watch out for the May edition of 'Period Living' (out in April) which contains a Firbeck Hall feature*

### **Vogue Magazine, June 1935** (*Julia Colver*)

**F**ollowing on from Newsletters 4 and 5 showing wonderful pictures of models posing both inside and outside Firbeck Hall in 1935, there are two remaining pages left to show you. The first one on the following page shows a familiar photograph of the frontage of the Hall and the start of the golf course. The picture below it shows a model posing on the diving board of the outdoor heated swimming pool. The article mentions the other sporting facilities as including an 18 hole golf course, hard tennis courts, squash court, 18 hole putting course, riding lessons and an aerodrome under construction.

The picture below that shows the dining room, (there was also a grill room upstairs). The chairs were covered in a zebra print that matched the full length curtains. The dining room could accommodate 400 table d'hote diners.

The final picture on the right shows a model by the cocktail bar in a nappa leather flying suit. The smaller photograph shows the same model posing in front of an aircraft.

Now a pensioner, the 60s were very much my decade and I thought then how much freedom and equality we enjoyed, but it is interesting to see how the women were seen flying in to Firbeck piloting their own aircraft and were involved in all the sporting activities.

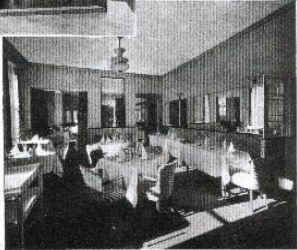


*Introducing*

## FIRBECK HALL CLUB

*The latest of the luxury Sports Clubs*

*at Firbeck, near Wakesop  
on the borders of  
Nottingham and Yorkshire.*



Firbeck Hall, first built in the early 17th Century and rebuilt in the late 18th Century, has now been transformed once again. Under the guidance of Mr. Robert Cawkwell, A.R.I.B.A., the Hall and grounds have been converted into a Sports Club on the most modern lines.

The Hall now comprises a Restaurant—Grill room—Cocktail Bars—Lounges and Card rooms; a superb Ballroom; a suite for private parties and, of course, changing rooms for the various sports are provided. The whole of the interior decoration has been in the capable hands of HEATON TABB & CO., LTD. LONDON & LIVERPOOL.

The Sporting facilities include an 18-hole Golf Course, Hard Tennis Courts, Squash Court, an 18-hole Putting Course and a large ultra-modern Swimming Pool. Horses are available and the keen rider has several thousand acres of parkland at his disposal. For the air minded an aerodrome of 30 acres is under construction.

Upon the following pages models dressed by the leading fashion houses in the North and in London are seen in the beautiful surroundings of Firbeck Hall Club.

JUNE 12, 1935

FIRBECK HALL CLUB SUPPLEMENT

HEATON TABB & CO., Ltd., were responsible for the very modern and attractive interior decoration, carpets and curtains at the Firbeck Hall Club, and Hadfield and Cawkwell, A.R.I.B.A., Sheffield were the Architects.

### FLYING TO FIRBECK

For air-minded members a 30-acre aerodrome is being laid out under the direction of Captain T. Campbell Black, joint winner of the Mildenhall-Australia Air Race.

A member arrives by air at the aerodrome and takes a cocktail in the very attractive Cocktail Bar which, of course, was executed by HEATON TABB & CO., LTD.

Wearing a good looking suit of supple white nappa by Leathercraft, she finds it windproof and waterproof and knows she looks catered and smart. She says, "this suit with 'stoppers' before going up."

cocktail bar by  
HEATON TABB & CO., LTD., LIVERPOOL AND LONDON

model by  
LEATHERCRAFT, 42, BERKELEY STREET, LONDON, W.1

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

**WINTER HELIOTROPE OR FRAGRANT BUTTERBUR**  
*(Derek Bailey)*



These Vogue pictures have captured a lot of publicity this year alone and have generated wonderful publicity for Friends of Firbeck Hall and I hope strengthen the aims of all our members to bring back this amazing building to its former glory.

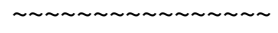
The Nature Conservancy Council along with the Yorkshire Naturalists Trust, approached the management of Firbeck Hospital in 1981 with a view to establishing a nature reserve on the hospital site. In October 1988 this came to fruition when Anthony Baker, chairman of Rotherham Health Authority, officially opened Firbeck Nature Reserve. The site was open to the public at weekends only so that the daily running of the hospital was not disrupted. The Rotherham District Ornithological Society and the Rotherham Naturalists Society played a large part in the formation of the reserve.

As secretary of the RNS, I was invited to become a warden with botany as my special interest. During late autumn and winter, bird watching was the main attraction but there were flowers to be found. One of these was Winter Heliotrope. Winter Heliotrope smells just like marzipan! While not common, it also grows in Letwell churchyard and on Maltby Crags. Winter Heliotrope is in the Butterbur family. The name Butterbur refers to the big leaves in which butter pats were wrapped, in the past, to be taken to market. Gerard, a herbalist, wrote, 'The leaf is of such a widenesse, as that of itselfe it is bigge and large enough to keep a man's head from raine, and from the heat of the sunne.' Indeed the Dioscoridean (Greek) name for a particular kind of wide brimmed hat is 'petases'. The botanical name of Winter Heliotrope is *Petasites fragrans*. Gerard also wrote, 'Butterburre doth bring forth flowers before the leaves as Coltsfoot doth.' The appearance of the flowers before the leaves gave rise to an old name, 'Son before the Father.' When the flowering stems break through the soil they look like small button mushrooms of a livid and unusual colour.

The medicinal use of the plant, according to Gerard, is to be taken against fever, especially plague to provoke perspiration and to drive 'from the heart all venom.'

There are many local names for Butterbur, some of them referring to rhubarb e.g. Gipsy's Rhubarb, Poison Rhubarb and Snake's Rhubarb. Other names include Umbrella Leaves, Kettle Dock and Capdockin. In Germany Butterbur is called Pestilenzwurz.

*Thanks to Bill Ely for his help with the historical information and his excellent records kept during his long period of office as keeper of biological records for Rotherham.*



### Greetings Cards



To help raise funds for Friends of Firbeck Hall, the committee have decided to sell some beautiful greetings cards (blank inside) showing photographs of Firbeck Hall in all its splendour. These will be on sale at our AGM, the Black Lion and from Committee Members after the AGM. We are presenting them in small packs of 4 (2 designs each) at £2 per pack and large packs of 4, showing two different designs at £4 per pack. Please give us your support by purchasing these lovely cards that have been kindly printed for us by a lady who used to live in the village.

*The observations and opinions expressed in the various articles in this Newsletter are those of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or of the FoFH committee, and their accuracy cannot be verified.*

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