



# Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 13 April 2012

## Chairman's Report

I am pleased to report that there has been a considerable increase in activity over the last few weeks, beginning with the submission of the planning application for the re-development of West Lodge and improvement of the entrance to Firbeck Hall. We welcomed the submission of the plans as evidence of progress, demonstrating that the owner possesses the appetite to tackle the project of restoration and improvement. Firbeck Hall has been waiting for positive action for a considerable period of time. We are therefore disappointed to learn that the planning application has recently been withdrawn. The usual rumour mill is hard at work however as part of our commitment to deal only in facts, at the time of writing we are seeking official comment from both RMBC and Mr Cooper regarding this. Our limited understanding is that these plans will be revised and resubmitted shortly following their amendment. As always we will keep members up to date via interim email bulletins as we learn more about the situation.

This event has naturally created a great deal of interest and has prompted some discussion about the role of Friends of Firbeck Hall in the planning process. Whilst we have developed an excellent working relationship with both the owner of Firbeck Hall and the planning and conservation department of RMBC, we wish to make it clear that the Friends group possesses insufficient resources and expertise to become drawn in to encouraging support for or objections to individual planning applications. Indeed we wish to make it absolutely clear that this is not our role. The raison d'être for the Friends group is to encourage the sympathetic restoration of Firbeck Hall and see the building saved and brought back to regular and maintained use. How the detail of this process is managed and controlled is clearly a matter for the owner and official authorities and I am pleased that we are working more closely with Firbeck Parish Council in this regard. We believe that adopting an

impartial role enables us to maintain these relationships and gain a detailed understanding of the issues involved, allowing us to learn about the constraints and ambitions of all parties. The role we will certainly continue to fulfil is in keeping our members informed about these developments and the issues that surround them as they arise, disseminating the key facts about the redevelopment process as we learn them as well as researching and publishing the history of Firbeck Hall as we discover it.

Whilst we now understand a great deal more about the complexity and challenges of the task in hand, we are disappointed that there is no visible progress at the Hall, particularly around West Lodge and the main entrance as we are aware that the main approach to the Village would benefit greatly from tidying up and improvement. We know that recent surveys of the main site have been undertaken by both RMBC and the owner as part of working towards the cost plan for enabling development, however progress remains slow in this area.

In the light of the recent substantial hike in the cost of postage we would like to ask any members who may have access to the internet but choose to receive a paper newsletter if they would now consider switching to the emailed version to enable us to minimise distribution costs. As always, donations to support this activity are very gratefully received and we would like to thank members who have contributed recently.

I am pleased to announce that we have also recently adopted a new email address: [friends@firbeckhall.net](mailto:friends@firbeckhall.net) which should enable much more efficient handling of our email correspondence.

Simon Drohan – April 2012

**MICHAEL ANGELO TAYLOR and his wife FRANCES ANNE TAYLOR of PARK HILL, FIRBECK**



© Trustees of the British Museum

**T**he 19<sup>th</sup> century cartoon above shows a diminutive Michael Angelo Taylor holding a horse whip to drive the Frederick, Prince of Wales towards a window, the scars of his lashings are seen on the Prince's leg. Through the bedroom door we can see Mrs Taylor in her night dress, beside her is a canopied bed.

The Prince of Wales is dressed only in his nightshirt and slippers, he is holding his coat and breeches. The signpost outside the window says 'To Hartford' an allusion to the Prince's infatuation for the Lady Hertford. The Prince is represented as Falstaff and the quotes are from the 'Merry Wives of Windsor'

Michael Angelo Taylor was a friend of the Prince but a breach occurred between them in 1811. The seduction of his wife Frances Anne Taylor was said to have occurred when the Prince was a guest in Taylor's house, possibly at Ledston Hall, Yorkshire after the 1806 election.

But what have Michael Angelo Taylor and his wife to do with Firbeck? The first reference to them we have found is in Amelia Stanyforth's journal written at Firbeck Hall. '26<sup>th</sup> January 1791: Mr and Mrs Taylor walk'd here and stay'd with Mrs Worsley near an hour' the next day Amelia records '25<sup>th</sup> January 1791: Tuesday morning Miss Worsley rode to Parkhill, went in to see Mrs Taylor and stayed a little.' On the 10<sup>th</sup> June there is another reference to the Taylors 'Friday morning went to Parkhill, sat with Mr and Mrs Taylor above ½ an hour.'

Joseph Hunter's book 'South Yorkshire' written in 1828 states 'Mr Michael-Angelo Taylor resided for some years at Park-hill.'

The Taylors would have rented Park Hill House from Lt-Col John Hayes St Leger, who inherited it from his uncle, Major-General Anthony St Leger in 1786.

Michael Angelo, so named as a possible classical play on words by his father who was interested in sculpture and architecture, was educated at Westminster School and called to the bar at seventeen. He received his MA from St John's College Oxford in 1781. He was an effective Member of Parliament with Whig views and his house in Westminster was a popular meeting place for members of the party. Walpole famously described him as " a pompous barrister, with a little body and a big voice."

Michael Angelo (1757 – 1834) married Frances Anne Vane in 1789, much to the fury of her father who, as landed gentry, considered the marriage a poor match, he disinherited his daughter and banned his son-in-law from his house. He was 32 and she was 20. They had no children and Frances is said to have remained devoted to her husband, she died 6 months after his death in 1834.

Valerie Oxley

**[More history of Park Hill and Firbeck Hall](#)**

Those members who have access to the internet may like to look at the Doncaster History website where two articles have been posted concerning Park Hill and Firbeck Hall.

Simply go to [www.doncasterhistory.co.uk](http://www.doncasterhistory.co.uk) click on Local History 2 and from the drop down menu choose Firbeck Hall or Park Hill.

**Notes on a Meeting with Mrs Sue Clifton, former District Physiotherapist at Firbeck Hall Miners' Rehabilitation Centre**

*by Julia Colver and Valerie Oxley*

I was delighted when Mrs Clifton agreed to meet Valerie Oxley and myself to talk about an era in Firbeck Hall's history that we don't know too much about. Members told us they enjoyed reading Mrs Freeman's reminiscences of her time there as an amputee waitress in our Newsletter 8, so it was even more fascinating to hear about the running of the Rehabilitation Centre from a management point of view.



Mrs Sue Clifton

Mrs Clifton was the District Physiotherapist reporting to the Chief Medical Officer, visiting Firbeck Hall on a weekly basis for about 5-6 years until its closure in October 1991. Services were then transferred to the purpose built Park Rehabilitation Centre in Rotherham which opened on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1992.

Firbeck Hospital was set up principally for injured miners and steelworkers from the South Yorkshire region to receive intensive rehabilitation, that had been referred by orthopaedic consultants who visited to assess their progress and readiness for work. Some of the patients were amputees. In those days it took a relatively long time to recuperate compared with today, there were different treatments then and patients often had additional health problems such as bronchitis. Mrs Clifton's base was Rotherham District Hospital and she visited Firbeck one day per week to oversee such things as staffing problems, making sure the cockroach infestation was under control and checking the records were up to date. The patients were taken home in buses on a Friday evening and returned on a Monday morning but families were allowed to visit during the week. At this time both the mining and steel industries were in decline and patient numbers had dwindled to about 25-30 residential patients. There were about 100 patients in the hospital's heyday accommodated in dormitories and single rooms. The amputees were on the ground floor as there was no lift, Mrs Clifton recalls that Firbeck Hall was not an easy building for disabled patients to negotiate.

They were difficult times in the years before closure as costs of running the building and grounds were high, and fewer patients needed the full range of therapies.

In the early days a military style regime dominated with strict discipline mainly to overcome problems which arose from patients looking for evening entertainment and drinking at the Working Mens' Club in the village, often returning the worse for wear. The hospital only admitted male patients and was very sparsely furnished. When it was decided to admit women patients the decor had to be improved.

The treatments consisted of physiotherapy, remedial gymnastics, walking, cycling and crawling through purpose built tunnels in the grounds. Seeing groups of patients in navy blue overalls cycling round the village with a member of staff became a familiar sight. There was an indoor heated pool, light and heavy workshops, and for recreation there was a bowling green, bowling alley in the stables, billiards and putting green.



Fig. 11. An advanced patient leaving the "airway"

Residential care ended in the late 1980's and the facilities were made available to a wider range of patients including women. Evening groups were run for those with conditions such as Ankylosing Spondylitis, but the problem of distance and lack of public transport remained. Kenneth Clarke promoted the first reorganisation and consultants from Rotherham and Doncaster visited Firbeck.

Before Firbeck Rehabilitation Centre closed there was an important meeting in Maltby when Kevin Barron spoke in favour of it remaining open. He also spoke against its closure in the House of Commons in January 1988, his speech is well documented in Hansard. The closure became political and uncomfortable, but as soon as Services became available at the new Park Rehabilitation Centre, Firbeck was not forgotten but the problems and arguments were over. When the Centre in Firbeck did in fact close all the records were sent to the Archives Department of Rotherham Library.

Mrs Clifton recalled that there were only three Miners' Rehabilitation Centres in the UK one at Etwell in Derbyshire, one in Northumberland and Firbeck Hall.

When the Rehabilitation Centre finally closed the patients were moved to the Park Rehabilitation Centre in Rotherham which was officially opened by the Princess Royal.



**Right royal treat**

The Princess Royal was greeted by widow Mrs Phoebe McGovern as she entered Park Rehabilitation Centre in Rotherham on Tuesday. Mrs McGovern (66), of Broom Valley Road, Rotherham, has been a patient at the Centre since having her left leg amputated below the knee. She was chosen by staff to present Princess Anne with a bouquet. Full story and more pictures Page 8.

**Mrs Clifton (centre) meeting HRH Princess Anne at the opening of the Park Rehabilitation Centre, Rotherham**

## Tree Preservation at Firbeck Hall by Derek Bailey

### **A brief account of the Management of the Hall grounds over the past 50 years**

Our son was born in 1963 and my wife and I, along with Joy Davidson (néé Roebuck), pushed our prams along Chestnut Walk and by Carl Speddings' house to the green wooden house where Joy's parents lived. The building may have been officers' accommodation during the war. On the right hand side of Chestnut Walk was a concrete pad on which had stood a small church, possibly Catholic denomination, for the Polish airmen. A tall cast metal urn also stood there. This item was stolen one night.

The grounds were well known to members of The Rotherham Naturalists' Society and Rotherham District Ornithologists' Society for its varied wildlife, fauna and flora. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust also had an interest in the site. A joint approach was made to the Hall management committee for a Wildlife Trail to be established. The proposal was accepted and a trail set up. Members of the Rotherham Naturalists' Society surveyed the plants and trees. Members of the Rotherham District Ornithological Society recorded their bird observations. The findings were recorded as part of the new system established at Clifton Park Museum. All records are still available from RMBC. Mr Cyril Stocks recommended tree preservation orders on a number of the more mature trees. A visitors' leaflet was printed showing the trail and points of interest. Four wardens were appointed representing the groups involved. All activity ceased with closure of the facility as a rehabilitation hospital. The consequences are that the site is now in need of management and under storey clearance.

My college course included lectures in forestry practices and preservation for timber production. In 1960 I was fortunate to stay at the residential forestry centre at Lyndhurst in the New Forest where instruction was given by the then Head Forester Mr Gayle. I find it very interesting that the November 2011 'Arbicultural Survey, Firbeck Hall, Firbeck' has been carried out by methods that have changed very little since 1960. In my opinion this is the first document that is useful and relevant. It forms part of the present application for the refurbishment of the Lodge and is normally available to view on the RMBC planning website.

Events that have occurred in the grounds during the past forty years have not been best forestry practice for either commercial or landscape value. Changing management and ownership of the Hall have involved random actions depending on the whims and fancies of the current expert at any one time. Shrubs, trees and bushes were arbitrarily cleared without a proper management plan.

The grounds received a 'Britain in Bloom' award in 1989 thanks to the excellent gardeners of that time. The hospital closed in 1991.



Preparations for Britain in Bloom, Firbeck Hall

The officers responsible for arboriculture and its planning implications in and around Rotherham can be contacted at the RMBC planning office.

Leaflet cover  
the nature  
booklet  
→



for  
trail

We are most grateful to two Friends of Firbeck Hall members, Mr & Mrs Dennis Hogetts, who kindly sent in a beautiful photograph of Firbeck Hall that they purchased in a post-card sale in Doncaster. They have kindly allowed us to share this picture, we think dated around the early 1900's.



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