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Friends of Firbeck Hall

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 32

Spring 2019

Committee Report

Spring is here and for several weeks now village residents have been excitedly reporting activity at Firbeck Hall!

At last, new life is being breathed into this once beautiful and much-admired building.

Substantial gateposts and gates have been erected at the entrance to the site and the existing fencing has been improved and made more secure.

It has been a long wait for the Friends of Firbeck Hall. The group, which was formed in 2009, now has nearly 400 active supporters.

The owner, Ashley Wildsmith, has kept in regular contact with the Friends group since he bought the property in 2015. He remains optimistic for the future.

We were delighted to be able to report in late December 2018 that Planning had been approved, albeit with one or two 'conditions' but nothing untoward and no setbacks envisaged.

However, as we all feared, the Hall is in a dreadful state. We are encouraged that Mr Wildsmith has acknowledged his duty of

care for the Grade II listed buildings on site. His team are now busy clearing rubble from the interior rooms of the Hall, in order to make it a safe environment for the much needed renovation work to take place. It is a huge task!

Many ceilings and interior walls have collapsed onto the floors. The floors are unsafe and the upper floors and the roof above are in a dangerous state.

We can only watch and wait, it is an exciting, as well as an anxious time for those of us who would like to see the Hall restored to its former glory.

As reported earlier, one of the conditions is the completion of a bat survey and we have been assured that this will take place at the appropriate time.

The Talk about the Twentieth Century and Country Club years on 15th March, is fully subscribed. Don't despair, we are hoping there will be a repeat of the talk in the village later in the year.

Thank you for your continued support and interest in this important building in our lovely village of Firbeck.

Simon Drohan and the FoFH Committee

The Mystery of the Missing Vault

Compiled by Valerie Oxley

*“To lose one body
may be regarded as a misfortune;
to lose five looks like carelessness!”*
With apologies to Oscar Wilde

Morning Post, London 1877

“The remains of Mrs Frances Harriott Miles, of Firbeck Hall, in the county of York, and of Manilla Hall, Clifton, Bristol are to be interred at noon this day in the chancel vault of Firbeck church, in the presence of many relatives and neighbours and her principal tenantry, the service being read by her nephew, the Rev. Canon Ellison, the late vicar of Windsor, and reader to the Queen.

Mrs Miles was the widow of the late William Miles, of Manilla Hall, Clifton, Gloucestershire., where she was well known, as also in Yorkshire and in Rome, where she passed several winters, and from whence she purchased and collected at Firbeck many rare pictures, statues, coins and gems. She was the translator of “Flowers of German Poetry” (1870) and other works.

The deceased was the sister of the late Joshua Jebb, R.E.,K.C.B., and processed large real and personal property absolutely. Her death occurred at the age of 78, in Onslow Crescent, London, early on Saturday morning last, after being in delicate health for more than a year.

Mrs Miles purchased the estate of Firbeck Hall, which lies between Welbeck and Sandbeck, the property of the Duke of Portland and the Earl of Scarbrough, from the trustees of the late Henry Gally Knight in 1850. This property, it is stated is left by the deceased lady, who died without issue, to members of her own (the Jebbs) family and Manilla Hall, Clifton, has been devised by her to Sir Philip Miles, Bart.”

REGISTER OF GRAVES.							
<i>In Chancel of Church</i>							
No.	Description of Grave or Vault.	If Purchased No. of Burial in Register of Buried Graves.	Name of Person Buried.	Age.	Date of Interment.	Amount of Fee paid at each Interment.	No. and Name of Burial Plates.
	Family vault		Selina Gally Knight	71	16 Jan 1823		3 5
			Henry Gally Knight	59	6 7 1846		3 26
			Henrietta Gally Knight	60	11 8 1849		3 22
			Eliza Miles	82	11 7 1862		3 32
			Frances Harriott Miles	78	16 Oct 1877		3

Burials in the Family Vault Firbeck Church

Frances Harriott Miles (née Jebb) owned Firbeck Hall from 1850 until her death in 1877. Frances moved to Firbeck from Bristol, in 1853, with her unmarried sister in law, Eliza Miles, after her husband William died. William is buried in Bristol Cathedral.

In her Will, Frances stated she wished to be buried in the Vault under the Chancel in Firbeck Parish Church. Her sister in law Eliza Miles had been buried there 15 years earlier. Both burials are recorded in the burial book (above).

To our surprise when looking at the records we found that three members of the Gally Knight family had already been buried in the Family Vault before Eliza and Frances were interred. Selina Gally Knight, wife of Henry Gally Knight Senior who died in 1823, her son also called Henry who died in 1846 and his wife Henrietta. The Gally Knight family lived at Firbeck Hall.

In her Will Frances Miles states:

“I desire to be buried in the Vault under the Chancel in Firbeck Parish Church, by the side of my late Sister in Law Eliza Miles, in the niche made for the purpose and inasmuch as I believe that the said Vault can only be opened with the consent of the Incumbent, for the time being, of the said Parish. I bequeath to him the sum of One hundred pounds in case he shall accede to my desire in this respect, but not otherwise, and in addition to any other legacy to which he may be entitled under this my Will.”

From the Journal of the Rev. Henry Gladwyn Jebb, a nephew of Frances who inherited Firbeck Hall we can read about the funeral.

26th October 1877

(the funeral of Fanny Miles)

“The morning most beautiful. Ellison read prayers in the drawing room – and we all met at breakfast; Strolled about afterwards with now one, now another & held short conferences with Mr Few. At twelve the invited company arrived, & soon after the mourning procession started, & we bore my dear Aunts remains to her grave. Gladwyn & Uncle Charles walked first, John & I second in rank. Bitter tears rose when I thought of the two piteous coffins (his sons who drowned in a skating accident) which I had last followed to that grave-yard. Mr Poole (Rector) met the corpse, Ellison performed the interment service. We went into the vault to see the last. Then we returned for luncheon.”

Frances’ sister in law Eliza, had been placed in the vault when she died in 1862. From the Journals of the Rev. Jebb we can read how she was placed in a lead coffin (the usual procedure for burials not placed in the earth).

6th February 1862

(the funeral arrangements for Eliza Miles)

“They are draining the vault which is a slow process. I wrote a letter or two – one to Philly Kington telling him not to attend the funeral – I was up & down towards the Church continually. Susan & I went with dear Aunt Fanny when she took her last look at the dear familiar face of her best & nearest Friend. At night the lead coffin was brought and soldered up. This lasted till near 12. Aunt F. (as in poor Miss Friesland’s case) placed with her own hands a beautiful cross of flowers upon the breast of the departed one. The scene was

very painful. I was the last who saw the peaceful face just before the lid was closed.”

7th February 1862

“A cold morning. My occupations were much the same as before. The work in the vault gets on slowly – but the water is all out.”

10th February 1862

“The masons worked hard in the vault, & it is all but completed.”

11th February 1862

“I was up as usual & went early to the Church. We were in some anxiety about the arrival of the Miles’s – however they came with Sir W. & his brothers John & Robert. We started soon after eleven, & buried our dear old friend Miss Miles. I read the lesson.”

What have we achieved?

Despite some careful investigations within the church, such as moving one set of choirstalls, fortunately on wheels, where we found the gravestones of the Staniforth family, we have been unable to locate the whereabouts of the vault.

So where is the Vault?

We are in the process of making enquiries with various organisations.

On 17th January 2019, Hilary Gould who is the resident expert on historic church floors for Historic England, stated that she thought the Gally-Knight vault, with the interred Miles family, could be somewhere in the east end of the current 4-bay nave, probably on the north side

“At the time Eliza Miles (1868) and Frances Miles (1877) were buried in the Gally-Knight vault the church had a different plan form. The Yorkshire OS 1855 map (see figure 1) shows St Martins with a rectangular plan form encompassing both chancel and nave, with a rectangular

north aisle (added in 1844). The current 2-bay apsed chancel appears to have been constructed later in 1887 for H.G. Jebb by Hubbard of Rotherham. It appears in the Yorkshire OS 1892 map (see figure 2).



Figure 1: Yorkshire OS 1855 map



Figure 2: Yorkshire OS 1892 map

The vault (although my recce has found no documentary evidence) was presumably built in the chancel shortly after the construction of the church in 1820. Selina Gally-Knight died in 1823, at the age of 72, not long after the church was rebuilt. Henry Gally-Knight died 1837 and Henrietta made her Will in 1849. The vault must have been marked, or identifiable, when Eliza and Frances requested burial in the vault in the 1860s and 70s. The enlargement of the church in 1887, with the construction of the apsed chancel, presumably led to the alteration and re-flooring of the church and obscured any visual evidence of its original position.

If it is possible to clear the east end of the nave of its pews, and sufficient funds can be found, it may be worthwhile undertaking a Ground Penetrating Radar survey of the east end of the nave. It can be used to detect hidden vaults or crypts by indicating voids beneath the church floor.”

The Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese of Sheffield, Dr Hugh Willmott wrote:

“If there is no obvious ledger stone in the floor, the entrance to the vault might be under a simple plain slab, possibly identifiable by the presence of two iron loops set into it. That having been said, any late 19th or 20th-century re-orderings that may have taken place in the chancel could have removed or obscured this.”

The Way Forward

We would like to locate the vault, so that we can commemorate all the people buried there who have done so much for the village and the church.

We are reminded by Dr Willmott: -

“To affix any form of plaque in the building you will need to apply to the Chancellor for a Faculty to gain permission!”

With grateful thanks to Mr Henry Walter Gladwyn Jebb for extracts from the Will of Frances Harriott Miles and extracts from the Journals of the Rev. Henry Gladwyn Jebb.

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