

Friends of Darfield Churchyard Newsletter - Spring 2008



Hello and welcome to the third newsletter from the Friends of Darfield Churchyard.

Work continues in the churchyard and it looks better than ever this Spring.....

As I write this at the end of February, the snowdrops are in full bloom and the daffodils are just beginning to make an appearance. Now that so much of the dense undergrowth

has been cleared, and with the help of the new path to circumnavigate the churchyard, the flowers can really be appreciated. Please come and have a look. By the time that you read this the snowdrops will probably be gone, but they are followed by a succession of daffodils, celandine, and then bluebells - all in great numbers. There is also plentiful wildlife. The woodpecker has been making a great deal of noise lately. In fact I thought it was someone doing some DIY with a hammer drill until I was put straight. Our secretary, Sheila, says to listen out in early spring for the return of the chiff-chaff from Africa with its distinctive call made up of a variety of notes.

Thoughts in a churchyardGlenice writes:

When I was recently in the Churchyard on a Monday afternoon looking at the graves in one particular area, I noticed quite a lot of gravestones with inscriptions of children's deaths. For example the Hill family from York Cottages, Low Valley, (Joseph and Emma). In 1866 Arthur, their son aged 8 months, died. Alice their daughter died 1867, aged 5 days. Willie, their son aged 10 months, died in 1869. Mrs Hill died aged 42. I am told that York Cottages were on Pitt Street, opposite what was the Mission Church and has now been pulled down and houses are being built there. The next grave is also a family named Hill. The parents were George and Eliza and they lost six children between 1869 and 1882. The longest that any of these children lived was 2 years 3 weeks. Of the rest of the family, two only lived a few days and the

others lived a few months. If the children had been born in the present time perhaps they would have all survived.

Taking the figures from a recent survey of inscribed graves in the Churchyard, we find that there are 157 under five and 36 five-ten year olds mentioned. At the other end of the scale there are quite a lot of people aged in their nineties buried, we have 29 people over the age ninety up to ninety-six, again these are inscribed graves. Quite a lot of these graves have only recently been uncovered, perhaps never seen by family members of a later generation.



The Medieval Cross:

I am ashamed to say that I have been attending Darfield Church for 50 years and had never even noticed the base of the Medieval Cross. I cannot even



blame this on the base being hidden in the undergrowth or at the farthest end of the churchyard. It is straight opposite the South Porch door. I had seen it but never realised what it was, and I am sure that there are hundreds more like me. So now is the time for us all to be educated - after all it is a grade 2 listed monument. The remains include the socle, or socket stone, of a medieval standing cross and the shaft of a later sundial which has replaced the medieval cross shaft and head. Even the sundial itself is missing from the top of the octagonal gritstone column on which it formerly stood. The medieval base is

octagonal sandstone with triangular stops on alternate faces making the bottom half square. (This makes more sense if you look at the picture!) Standing crosses were used for a variety of reasons but the proximity of this one at Darfield to the church would indicate that it played an important role in religious festivals during the Middle Ages. It is quite an important example of a medieval cross and recently attracted a visit from a lady from English Heritage, who also commented on how lovely our churchyard looked.

We shall be having a display at the 1st Darfield Family & Local History Fair. Book the date, 19th April 2008 at the Church Hall.

The museum and church will also be open. There will be twelve family and local history societies attending, and refreshments will be available. Entry to the fair will be free but voluntary donations will be accepted as all proceeds will be for the Reading Room project being organised by the Amenities Society. We also hope to have a display at Darfield Church Garden Party in June 2008. Watch out for us there.

Houghton Main Disaster Monument: Another project we are working on at the moment is having the Houghton Main disaster monument cleaned up. It is looking lovely at the time of writing with the snowdrops in bloom. We are trying to obtain a grant for the cleaning of this monument and surrounding area. It will need in the region of £15,000 to restore it to something like its original

state, so fingers crossed, by the time you read this we may have an update on the grants. The Houghton Main disaster was a pit-cage accident which happened on Thursday 30 December 1886 at the end of the afternoon shift. Ten men lost their lives when the pit-cage plummeted down the shaft, having apparently been overwound into the head-gear and roof of the engine house.



Of these ten men, seven belonged to just three families. The inquest was held at the Cross Keys Inn, close by the churchyard. The engine-winder, Allen Beresford, was charged with manslaughter but later found 'not guilty' at a trial at Leeds Assizes.

Next newsletter -

will hopefully contain details of the fitting of the bird boxes which are currently being made by Darfield Scouts and Darfield Church School and have been sponsored by a number of our supporters.

Next Meetings of Friends of Darfield Churchyard are
Wednesday 2 April 2008 and Wednesday 4 June 2008, in
Darfield Church Tower Room.

This newsletter was written by Kay Valentine and Glenice
Smith. Photographs in this and previous newsletters were
taken by Nancy Mellor, Glenice Smith, Kay Valentine and
Chris Walton.