



# Friends of Darfield Churchyard

## Newsletter: Spring 2012

### Work on the repair and cleaning of the grave of Ebenezer Elliott

- due to start in Spring 2012



The grave of Ebenezer Elliott was the only grave in Darfield churchyard to retain its railings when all others were removed during the second world war in order to provide more metal to aid the war effort. Up until that time there were a large number of graves with this type of railing around and the churchyard had a very different appearance.

The railings on the grave of Ebenezer Elliott were kept because of his importance as the 'Corn Law Rhymer'. When FODCY first started to work in the churchyard, it was noted that these railings were in bad condition. They were

smartened up with a coat of paint, but this could not stop the rust which had entirely eaten away some of the rails near to the ground. The grave was therefore put onto our list of future projects. However it moved rapidly up that list after the spikes on the tops of the railings were found to be a safety issue (being in the vicinity of trees which it was considered children might be tempted to climb and then fall out of!)

The spikes were immediately removed, but this left the grave looking something of an eyesore - you remember the outcry in the local press at the time. Unfortunately with old and important monuments it is never as simple as just throwing a few pieces of metal together. We first of all had to obtain a 'faculty' for the work. This is a sort of 'planning permission' given by our church diocese. The people granting the faculty need to be assured that the work will be of good standard and in keeping with the history of the monument. To obtain the faculty we needed to get estimates for the work from several sources. All this has now been done and we are ready to start the work.



The cleaning and restoration of the actual stone will be undertaken by Roberts of Barnsley (who did such a good job on the Houghton Main Memorial). The railings will be done by Steve's Steels and the

total cost is about £2,300. Thanks to all your generous donations, we are now almost in a position to be able to pay that. The work has already started and should be completed in the next couple of months so that visitors will be able to see the finished work during the good weather of summer. Contributions can still be made. Any excess will be used in the further maintenance of the churchyard.

Ebenezer Elliott was famous nationally and internationally in his own time. He was born in Masbrough, Rotherham in 1781 and died in Great Houghton in 1849. We featured him in an article in the newsletter in Summer 2008 (available on the church website.)



The railings have been removed ready for work to start

## News Items

As well as being generous with support and donations, people pass on insights into their own connections with, and fond memories of, Darfield. One such faithful supporter is Mr Frederick Upton who included this anecdote in a recent letter,

*"I once found a most astonishing bird's nest in the churchyard and when I told my mother she wrote a little piece for her newspaper, the 'Mexboro' Times.' Because she was paid by lineage, she was an expert at padding out stories (additional lineage you see!) In some way she managed combine the bird's nest story with Ebenezer Elliott's birthday!! Don't ask what the connection was but it was all extra lines. So, I've always had a soft spot for anything about the Corn Law Rhymer."*

(Many of you may remember the lady in question-Mrs Doris Upton, a well-known School Street resident, regular church member and local correspondent.)



**Another avenue of help came from the historian and author, Mr Brian Elliott**, who offered some copies of his book "Darfield and Wombwell - a second selection" for us to sell for our work. This raised £155 in sales and accompanying donations. Martyn Johnson took this in hand and we are very grateful for all he and Brian did.

**Our evening events began again in March** when Mr Frank Morley gave an extremely interesting talk entitled "Wentworth Castle and Wentworth Woodhouse" to a packed audience in the supper room of the Church hall. This raised over £240 and Frank, like all our speakers, gave his time freely and we do appreciate this.

**The next date for your diary is Friday 27th April** when David Peckett and John Driskell are coming to give an illustrated talk about their adventures trekking in the Himalayas - first as young men in the 1960s and then again just a few years ago. Along with Les Simms, they are the authors of a book "Everest, the Old Way", copies of which will be available on the night. The talk is at 7pm in the Church hall, admission is £5 to include light refreshments. We would love to see you there!

Later on in the year we are to hear about the work of a wildlife officer from Paul Jameson, our own Community Police officer, and a frequent visitor to our churchyard. Watch out for further details!

When the **Ebenezer appeal** was launched early last year, it began with a donation from the Darfield Area Amenity Society and now another local group, the, Great Houghton Village Hall Committee have recently given us a generous gift too for which we are thankful. Alongside these are all the individual donations, the money from the Community Support Fund and our own fund raising efforts. Together it has all made for a successful conclusion which will stand for a long time to come.

As we look towards our coming projects we do so with confidence in our supporters old and new and invite everyone to be part of what is happening in this wonderful and unique place - Darfield churchyard.

**Photographs on the church website** - Steve Tindale has put together two sets of wonderful photographs taken in the church yard and these can be seen on [www.darfieldallsaintschurch.org.uk](http://www.darfieldallsaintschurch.org.uk). They are under the 'Photo Albums' heading (not under the churchyard heading) and cover 'Autumn Fungi' and 'Springtime in the Churchyard.'





## Spotlight on .....William Allerton and Robert Gregory

By Michael and Glenice Smith

There are two headstones in the churchyard which mark the graves of two Darfield residents who died in a terrible railway accident at Stairfoot on Monday December 12<sup>th</sup> 1870.

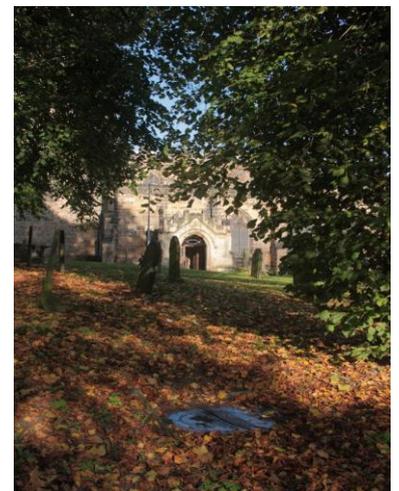
The accident happened at Ardsley station on the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railway. The station was near where McDonalds takeaway stands now, near the Stairfoot roundabout. A passenger train had left Barnsley for Sheffield at around 6.00pm and had just arrived at Ardsley station. As the passengers were about to alight, a train of fully loaded runaway wagons smashed into the rear of the standing train, killing fourteen people and severely injuring many more. The runaway wagons were part of a train which was being made up of wagons taken from Barnsley station goods yard. During this procedure a run of wagons, with a sprag or sprags in the wheel spokes to hold them, broke loose when two gas tanks were shunted up to them. Despite valiant efforts by shunters and crossing guards, one of whom tried to ride a brake handle until he was thrown off, the whole run started to pick up speed down the inclined tracks towards Stairfoot where the impact completely demolished the last carriage and almost completely the second last carriage of the standing train.



Among those who died at the scene was Darfield resident William Allerton, a shoemaker who had been in Barnsley that day on business. Mr Allerton, a bachelor in his late fifties who lived with his sister Martha, had been clerk to Darfield Church for twenty years. His father, also called William, was clerk to the church for 39 years before him. His body was taken to the Cross Keys Inn along with several others. The Cross Keys and the Keel Inn were used as temporary mortuaries. William Allerton's headstone stands by the tower, just over the path on the north side.

Robert Gregory, a twenty one year old miner from Broomhill, was living in Thomas Street Darfield at the time of the accident. He suffered terrible abdominal injuries, having been trapped under the wreckage. On being freed he was taken to The Keel Inn where he was attended to by Barnsley surgeon, Mr Wainwright. His injuries were so severe that he was not moved and he died there on the Saturday morning, making the total number of deaths 15. His girlfriend, Emma Collins, and his mother visited him daily from the accident to his death.

Robert's headstone is laid on the grave with the inscription uppermost and is just to the north of the Houghton Main Cage disaster grave, halfway between the church hall side wall and the path. This stone has only recently been uncovered by the Friends of Darfield Churchyard and was not recorded in the Doncaster Family History Society survey of the 1980's.



At the time of the collision, a celebration tea was being held in the Cross Keys to mark the opening of the workings between the old and new Oaks Collieries. Many of those attending rushed to the scene to give what assistance they could. The previous Saturday the owners and officials of the Oaks Colliery had broken through to the old Oaks workings which had not been accessed since the explosions of 1866 - four years before the rail crash. Four bodies from that explosion were found that day, Andrew Barker and his son Richard, and Thomas Jones and his son. Andrew and Richard Barker were identified by Mr George Barker, another son of Andrew, who was manager at a Sheffield colliery and who had expressed a desire to be present when the bodies were likely to be found - and in fact it was he who discovered the bodies.

## Bits and Bobs

Thank you to all who bought our **Christmas cards**. We had a magnificent response this year and sold 460 cards..... A special thank you to Darfield Library and Darfield Post Office who both sold the cards on our behalf, which was a really big help.



The **two dangerous trees** down the churchyard have now been removed - not without a little drama when the mechanical saw got stuck in the branch of one and left the branch half sawn for a short period - thus making the tree doubly dangerous. The area had to be cordoned off until the situation could be remedied. We have just placed an order for two replacement trees - a weeping ash and a copper beech.

**Don't forget ...** workers are in the churchyard doing clearing and maintenance on Monday and Thursday afternoons every week (John, Mike, Trevor and Glenice) plus the last Saturday morning in the month (Chris, Pat and Kay). We really could do with more helpers, especially as we approach the summer months when the weeds really go mad. The work can range from heavy digging and cutting back to the lightest weeding, pruning and sweeping. Whatever you choose to do, you will be most welcome. Please help us to keep the churchyard in the beautiful condition which we have achieved over the last few years.



**Recording the headstones** - Kay is currently on a mission to record all the headstones in the churchyard, both their position and inscription. We do already hold a list and plan which was compiled by Doncaster Family History Society in the 1980's but, since we have cleared so much more of the churchyard, many more headstones have re-appeared and many have become much easier to read. When she finally gets it finished we will have to decide how to make it widely available. More details will follow on this.

Our newsletters (including back copies) are now also available to view on the FODCY pages on Darfield All Saints Church Web Site - [www.darfieldallsaintschurch.org.uk](http://www.darfieldallsaintschurch.org.uk)

## New Models now on show at The Showhouse

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This newsletter was written by Glenice Smith, Sheila McMillan and Kay Valentine.  
Photographs: K Valentine, G Smith and C Walton

We are grateful to The Showhouse for sponsoring this newsletter.

Marie and Robert Taylor from The Showhouse have been very generous in also sponsoring the printing of some of our Christmas cards over the last two years