



Friends of Darfield Churchyard

Newsletter: Spring 2009

Spring Flowers in Darfield Churchyard

This year's spring flowers have been better than ever.

Beginning in January we saw the snowdrops push their way through the cold winter soil.



Shortly afterwards they were followed by a radiant display of daffodils of different varieties (which we are hoping to identify) interspersed with early primroses.



There have been more crocus flowers than before, their vivid purple colours standing out in the spring sunlight.



Not to be outdone, the golden celandines put on their display whilst the fragrant bluebells provided a rich carpet of colour beneath the magnificent trees.



There are many other less obvious plants growing in our churchyard. It is a rich environment, worth preserving and protecting.

This month's challenge is for you to go into the churchyard and spot how many different plants and flowers you can find - these will change from month to month. If you see any that are particularly unusual or pretty why not take a photograph and pass it to one of us for inclusion in a future newsletter?

Just to get you started - on the next page is a list of the plants that were found in the church yard in May 2007 when a survey was taken.



Bramble
Broad Leaved Dock
Broad-leaved Willowherb
Bush Vetch
Chickweed
Cleavers/Goosegrass
Common Daisy
Common Sorrel
Cow Parsley
Creeping Buttercup
Creeping Thistle
Dandelion

English Bluebell
Great Willowherb
Greater Plantain
Groundsel
Hairy Bittercress
Hedge Bindweed
Hedge Woundwort
Himalayan Balsam
Hogweed
Lesser Burdock
Lesser Celandine
Ragwort

Ramsons/Wild Garlic
Rose
Rosebay Willowherb
Smooth Hawksbeard
Smooth Sow-thistle
Spanish Bluebell
Spear Thistle
Stinging Nettle
Wavy Bittercress
White Deadnettle
Woody Nightshade/Bittersweet

Report of the Evening with Martyn Johnson in May 2009

Many people enjoyed the evening with Martyn Johnson when he told us of the background to the writing of the best-selling book, 'Black Diamonds' by Catherine Bailey. Martyn has co-hosted talks with the author in many venues so we were really privileged to have him as our guest speaker. He and Christine, his wife, are mentioned in the acknowledgements at the beginning of the book. Martyn was critical in enabling contacts to be made which enabled the research to be done and they became good friends with the author.

Martyn gave the talk to raise funds for FODCY - he certainly succeeded as a grand total of £166.50 was the result of the small entrance charge and the raffle proceeds. We are very thankful to him and to all who supported the event.

Watch out for details of the next special evening - Friday 16 October 2009 - with another Darfield celebrity - Ian McMillan.

Also coming soon.....

- ❖ The next meeting of the Friends of Darfield Church Yard (FODCY) group is on Wednesday 1 July 2009 at 7.30pm in the Tower Room at Darfield All Saints Church.
- ❖ FODCY will be having a display at the annual exhibition arranged by Darfield Amentities Group in the church hall over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Come and meet us there if you cannot get top our meetings.
- ❖ In early 2010 FODCY will be displaying photographs of the various aspects of the church yard in the café at the Maurice Dobson Museum in Darfield. Further details about the exact dates later

Another Grant Awarded

We have been awarded a grant of £463 from Grassroots Grants, via the Barnsley Chronicle. This is for the promotion and publicity of the group. We are very grateful for this help and, as you can see from the news of evening events, we are using it already! It is also enabling our newsletters to continue. We hope that you like the more polished look of the latest two newsletters.

We have been trying to obtain some funding to repair and restore the memorial to the ten miners killed at Houghton Main Colliery in the accident of 30 December 1886. We have managed to obtain a revised estimate for the work of £4,200. Unfortunately, so far, we have been unable to obtain any funding or grant. If you feel that you could help towards this project we would be happy to hear from you or to receive any donation.



Spotlight on George Kemp and George Heptinstall

These are two bellringers who rang the bells of Darfield All Saints in the early 1800s. Up the tower we have a board which records two peals from 1812 and 1815 and these two men rang in both. A peal is a piece of bellringing which lasts for about 3 hours non stop. This peal board shows that, on 1st January 1812, George Heptinstall and George Kemp were ringing bells 1 and 2 of Darfield's 6 bells. Those bells are still there and are rung every week. As I ring them I am amazed to think that I know exactly who was standing in that exact same spot almost 200 years ago.



George Kemp was a beerhouse keeper at Little Houghton (a useful man for a bellringer to know!). He was also a shoemaker. By 1812, at the time of the peal, he was aged 32. He died in 1848 aged 68. George Heptinstall was a tailor in Darfield. He was aged 29 in 1812 and died in 1855 aged 72. Their graves are side by side at the east end of the church. The inscription on George Kemp's grave reads 'Bellringer at this church for 40 years'.

Both these men would still have been ringing in 1825 when Darfield ringers had a big argument with Wath ringers over which band had the best ringers. Wath challenged Darfield to a contest 'at any tower, for any sum, at any time they cared to set.' Darfield took up the challenge and the contest was set to take place at Darfield on 21st November 1825. However, on the day, one of Darfield's ringers was ill and a Darton ringer had to step in to take his place. Wath would not stand for this and cancelled the contest. The argument was then continued through the regional press with first Wath and then Darfield publishing their side of the story in *The Leeds Mercury*. The contest never took place so the issue was never fully resolved. Perhaps the current Darfield ringers should take up the challenge once again with the current Wath ringers!

Thoughts from Glenice.....

When I was helping with the clearing out of the churchyard I came across the grave of my great-grandparents who came up from Wortham in Suffolk around 1885. Their names were Arthur and Mercy Bloomfield and they were married in September 1874. They died in 1936 and 1927. Also in the same grave is their daughter, Blanche Margaret Willetts, who died in 1906 aged 27. She married William Willetts who died at Beaufort West, South Africa in 1911 (and there lies another story I have yet to unravel). The family lived in Darfield and Arthur started work in the mines here - he was a blacksmith when he lived in Suffolk. The occupations of Arthur and Mercy's father were shoemaker and outdoor servant in Wortham. The family lived in Hope Street, Low Valley and later at Snape Hill Road. All their six children were born in Suffolk. If I had not been in the churchyard working, I would never have known about the grave of my relatives. The photograph is of Jacob, Matthew and William, who are the great-great-great-grandchildren of Arthur and Mercy Bloomfield.



If anyone would like any help in finding the graves of their relatives, please feel free to ask us. You never know - you might find, like I did, your great grandparents' grave.

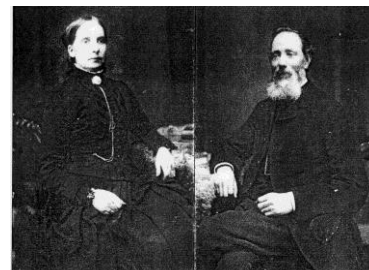
Visitors to our Churchyard from far afield

There have been three separate groups of visitors from the other side of the Atlantic during recent months..... First, two descendants of William Hargate, the Poor Law Officer for Darfield in the mid 1800s, buried by the priest's door on the south side of the church. They were thrilled to locate their family's grave.



Secondly, this is a photograph of our visitors from Lancashire and from California with our own John Kendall, when they came to visit their relatives' graves.

They came in search of the Priestly and Tomlinson family graves and brought interesting information about some of them. I do not have room to copy it all but a



George and Mary Bloom Priestley

Priestly father and son, George and William, were both 'Engine men' at Wombwell Main Colliery.

Then thirdly, and most recently, we had people from British Columbia, whose purpose again was to find their ancestors' final resting place. In this case the grave had been revealed, in readiness, by the hard work of the churchyard workers. When the information had originally been requested, via email, of the whereabouts of the grave in question, we had discovered that it was covered in dense undergrowth. But by the time that the visitors came the workers had done their miracle and revealed all.

The information that all these people had been researching had become tangible and real to them when they came to Darfield Churchyard. They went away with memories that they will keep forever.

When our workers are in the churchyard they will usually have someone arrive, trying to locate a family grave. Someone from the group can usually remember the name and help or, due to the hard work of the archive team, they can look at a detailed account of the graves and find them that way. It gives us all a great sense of pride when we can help in this way, especially when relatives can actually see the graves. We could not do this a couple of years ago as many of the graves were still covered in undergrowth. There are quite a few graves which have been uncovered and where families are now leaving flowers. **However, to carry on this work we need more helpers.** Our workers meet on Mondays and Thursday in the churchyard at around 1.30pm. Even if you could only help out once or twice a month, your help would be greatly appreciated and it would then ensure that the work which has been started in the last few years will continue. Otherwise it will all quickly become overgrown once more and we will be back to square one. So please think about it and we would love you to join us. We can use workers of all kinds - even if it is just to pick up rubbish, which seems to increase ever more as the light evenings lengthen.

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

This newsletter was written, and photographs were taken, by Glenice Smith, Sheila McMillan and Kay Valentine

