



Friends of Darfield Churchyard

Newsletter - Winter 2020



The grass grew long during lockdown.

Well - what a year 2020 has been (and still is)!

Throughout it all, our lovely churchyard has continued to provide a beautiful, peaceful place for walking, thinking, researching and just enjoying nature. During the first lockdown, in March/April, no work was able to be done, but the bulbs continued to dazzle with their displays. Little by little, as restrictions eased and our workers returned, the churchyard was tidied up once again.

The churchyard has been used and appreciated by more people than ever this year. There are many mentions of

it on social media, and even lovely photographs. I wonder how many of these people realise how few workers actually tend the huge churchyard. We must express here, once again, our heartfelt thanks to these workers and ask, once again, for more volunteers to help with this necessary and rewarding work



Before the first lockdown, we managed to hold our annual Snowdrop Event in February, but that seems like a lifetime ago now. Also in February, we lost a hawthorn tree to storm damage.

Past and Current Grants

You may recall from our last newsletter that Darfield All Saints Church was fortunate in obtaining a grant in 2018 for the repair of the churchyard wall and for setting up an interactive digital plan of the churchyard. The grant was obtained from Park

Spring Wind Farm Community Benefits Fund. The plan of the churchyard, when finished, will be a useful aid to finding graves for family historians. Volunteer transcribers came forward to get the Burial Register records online and we are currently still working on this. We will then need to match up the Burial register entries with the headstones that we have in the churchyard. Then, after that, we need to get photographs of the graves uploaded too. It is hoped that we can involve the local schools in helping with this.

In 2020, Park Spring Wind Farm Community Benefits Fund was again very generous - this time to our Friends of Darfield Churchyard team with a grant for a 'sit-on' mower and other equipment to help to maintain the churchyard. That was the good news. The bad news was that, almost as soon as we took delivery of the mower, it was stolen. Then more good news - it was recovered. Then more bad news - it was so badly damaged as to be unusable and is currently away awaiting repair. This paragraph sums up the highs and lows of being part of this group. Some people and organisations really inspire us with their generosity and their appreciation of all that we do. These people make up the vast majority of our contacts. Then we have the other odd one or two people who spoil things with just one callous act, leaving us feeling downhearted but not defeated.

A close-up photograph of two purple crocus flowers in full bloom. The petals are a vibrant purple, and the stamens are a bright yellow. The flowers are set against a background of green grass and foliage.

I have spent a lot of time researching autumn crocuses and I have collected a lot of stories but also come across a number of different names and variations for autumn flowering

One story tells that these flowers are originally native to England but they are poisonous so they were removed from farmer's fields where they could kill livestock but they were allowed to continue to grow in Churchyards.

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Spotlight on Harry Bisset Hill (by Julie O'Neil)

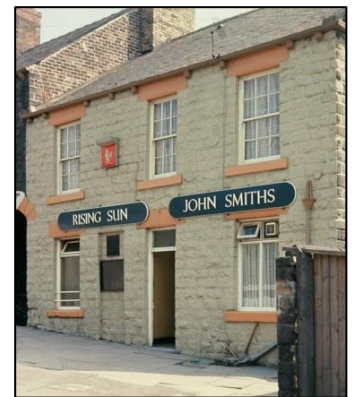


Found in a shady part of the churchyard, just off the path, is the grave of Harry Bisset Hill. Listed last of five on the headstone, Harry is easy to miss or pass by, but this Darfield-born man had an interesting life story; born and raised in a village pub, married and widowed twice, and with an unwavering commitment to the local church and its choirs.

Born in July 1871 in Darfield, Harry grew up in the family home, the Rising Sun Inn on New Street, at the top of Snape Hill. He lived there with his grandparents Joseph and Emma, along with four of his aunts and uncles. It must have been an exciting place to live for a young lad; the pub was popular in the village, and was regularly used for meetings of various local groups. The miners of Houghton Main Colliery and the Order of Oddfellows met there regularly, and local officials used the pub to hold inquests, too. Throughout his life, Harry attended church regularly. He joined the Low Valley Mission Choir in 1880 when he was 9 years old, before moving to join the Darfield Parish Church Choir, then in later years, on to Wombwell. In an article about the choir in the South Yorkshire Times in 1935, Harry reminisces about his early days, when he recalls that congregations were so large that they were difficult to accommodate within the confines of the church building. He remembers this time as 'the happiest part of his life' - trips to the pantomime at Sheffield with the other choirboys at the invitation of Miss Taylor of Middlewood Hall, who was a 'great friend to the choirboys'. These outings would have surely been a fantastic treat for all the boys, and Harry certainly remembered them with huge fondness.

Although a church-going lad, Harry did have a minor indiscretion that made the 'Friday Police' column in the Barnsley Chronicle in March of 1881. Harry, aged 9, took some money from his grandfather's trouser pocket and gave it to an older boy at school. The whole debacle appeared to be sorted out ultimately by Harry's grandmother, who retrieved the money; the case was dismissed 'on payment of costs, and on parents promising to flog the boys soundly'.

Sometime before 1891 the family moved from the Rising Sun to a terraced house on Snape Hill, where Harry lived for a short while and worked as a miner at Houghton Main. Harry married Alice Jane Fernley Allen Martin (a Londoner by birth) in December 1895 at Darfield Parish Church. By 1901, the couple had moved to School Street, Darfield, and had a daughter, Annie Elizabeth. Over time, the family grew, with James Edward born in 1904 and Harry in 1906. Sadly though, ill health took its toll on Alice soon after and doctors suggested she return to London for 'a change of air', where she was then hospitalised. Alice died just nine days after admission in 1908. She is buried in Ilford, Essex.



Now a widower with three young children to care for, Harry moved to Wombwell sometime before 1911. During the Great War, Harry served with the Home Defence Corps and spent some time fulfilling his duties in Whitby before returning home to Darfield. We can only assume that Harry's large extended family and friends stepped in to help look after his children while he was away during this time. Harry married for a second time in 1917, to Elizabeth Neville, and they lived together in Wombwell for many years. Elizabeth was a committed church worker and member of the Wombwell Mothers' Union. Elizabeth's death in 1930 must have been a significant blow to Harry; he placed a memoriam in the SYT on their wedding anniversary in 1931 which read "In affectionate

remembrance of my dear wife Lizzie". After Lizzie's death, Harry carried on living in Wombwell, and by now had several grandchildren. In his retirement, it was reported that he enjoyed gardening and was an avid follower of Darfield Cricket Club.

Despite failing health, Harry still regularly attended the church choir. He was such a constant part of church life that concerns were raised after he was unusually absent from the choir for two weeks. It was then discovered that Harry was seriously ill, and the Rector Canon J St Leger Blakeney joined with the congregation of Wombwell Parish Church to say prayers for him. Harry died at his daughter's home in Wombwell in March 1937. His death ended almost 58 years in the service of Darfield and Wombwell Parish Church Choirs. He was buried alongside his second wife, Lizzie, her mother (Esther) and Lizzie's half brother and sister, both of whom died when young children. At the service before his burial, held at Wombwell Parish Church, tributes were paid to 'his simple faith and deeply rooted loyalties. In quiet devotion and consistent service, Mr Hill had set a high example, and they would all miss him'.

Postscript to this story from Kay Valentine.....Whilst taking the photograph of the gravestone for the Hill family (above) I noticed that it was close by the grave of Annie and Ethel Stables, children of Oswald and Annie Maria Stables who ran the Rising Sun from 1891 to 1924. My grandmother, Charlotte Jobling, was their niece and helped with the housework and looking after their 14 children. She told how she could only check that the children were all in the house by counting their shoes stored under the table.



The Buzzard

This year has been a year to see buzzards flying over our churchyard. The most I have seen at any one time has been four. You seem to hear them first and then see them. Their call is a distinctive mewing pee-ay call.

They are amazing to watch, soaring effortlessly, their broad wings catching the thermals. Often you can see them being mobbed by other birds mostly crows. When you watch something like this, the buzzard just seems to take it in its stride, ignoring the action of the crows. Only once have I heard of a

buzzard taking action. A crow was unusually persistent in its attack, the buzzard flipped over on its back and extended its talons, the crow flew off!

On another occasion we were out walking, following a track to some ancient standing stones. We heard the mewing looked up and saw a buzzard. At the same time we saw a large yellow butterfly quite high up. For some reason, which I do not understand, the buzzard attacked the butterfly, which slowly spun to the ground.

Next time you are walking through our churchyard, listen for the mewing, look up and hopefully you will see a buzzard, some times more than one and maybe doing strange things.

A. B. Irdwatcher (Picture courtesy of RSPB)

Next Issue – Information on symbols on gravestones (which we did not have room for this time!)

Wishing all our readers a Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Peaceful New Year

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 by, A Lay, J McMillan, Julie O'Neill and K Valentine. Photos by Andrew Lay and Kay Valentine.