



Friends of Darfield Churchyard

Newsletter - Summer 2007

Hello and welcome to the very first newsletter from the Friends of Darfield Churchyard. Our group has now been running for just over a year and we have had a very busy twelve months getting things started. We would like to tell you a little of what we have been doing and what we plan to do. But first of all let me introduce you to Darfield Churchyard.....

HISTORY: All Saints Church, Darfield, is a very old church. Its foundations are Saxon. It would therefore be safe to assume that some, at least, of the churchyard dates from the same era. The earliest dated gravestone still standing in the churchyard dates from much later (but still over 300 years ago) at 1705. However there are other undated stones, with various inscriptions, which could be even older.

GRAVESTONES: The gravestones in the churchyard cover mainly the 1700's to the late 1900's and there are a number of very interesting stones amongst them. I cannot do justice to them all in this newsletter. We do hope to produce a guide to some of the more outstanding ones. However just to mention a few -



- ❖ Ebenezer Elliott - the 'Corn Law Rhymer', died 1849.
- ❖ Lundhill Colliery Disaster Memorial - 189 men and boys lost their lives that fateful day in 1857.
- ❖ Great Houghton Colliery Memorial - 10

men were killed in an accident with the pit cage on New Year's Eve 1886.

- ❖ Robert Milthorpe - who, aged 19, 'lost his life by inadvertently throwing this stone upon himself'. His employer erected the stone, presumably to cover himself against possible future compensation claims!



There are hundreds more. The gravestones, of course, are a mine of information for family and local historians but they are also interesting for anyone to read. Incidentally, if you do have an ancestor in our churchyard and do not live locally please get in touch and we will provide what details we can of the grave.

WILDLIFE: There are many different birds to be seen and heard in the churchyard. We are currently awaiting a 'bird list' of the species seen. There are also frequent sightings of squirrels, pheasants, rabbits and even the odd snake!



TREES, PLANTS and FLOWERS: There was a time, until recently, when the overriding impression of the flora of the churchyard was the forbidding jungle of brambles and nettles. Thanks mainly to our few hardy volunteer workers, John Kendall, Trevor Baxter, Mike and Glenys Smith and Donald Wiley, great headway has now been made into

clearing enough of the undergrowth to provide access to the majority of the graves. This has also allowed the snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells to be seen in all their glory - this year has provided a splendid display along with the cheerful yellow carpet of Celandine over the top part of the churchyard. Even the more delicate plant life now stands a chance to thrive. The volunteers usually work in the churchyard every Monday, so if you see them there give them a word of encouragement and thanks.

The churchyard is of great importance in terms of the environment it provides for a huge range of birds, insects, butterflies, etc. In September last year we had a preliminary visit from two members of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. They specialise in the 'living churchyard' approach, encouraging habitat conservation and sympathetic management of churchyards. In May they returned and spent several hours creating a plan of significant trees and a list of the plant species evident at that time of year. Their interesting and comprehensive report has now been received. The report highlights that *'the glory of Darfield Churchyard are its trees'* - a fact which would have been appreciated by a former 17th century rector whose passion for gardening led him to plant one of every native species of tree in the churchyard. We cannot boast of such a range but over 13 different species are now mapped, as are more than 36 different species of plants.



WHAT WE HAVE DONE SO FAR

Setting up our group proved much more difficult and involved than any of us had envisaged. There were many basics to be considered such as a constitution, insurance, health and safety policy etc, etc. These sound very boring and mundane but were vitally necessary if we were to apply for any funding. Our Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer have borne the brunt of most of these tasks and we thank them for their work. They were - Trevor Smith (changed to John Kendall in May 2007), Sheila McMillan and Pat Myers respectively.

Our first priority was to improve the paths of the churchyard in order to provide access to the bottom part where most of the more recent burials have taken place. The path near to the bottom of the churchyard was only a grass track. It needed to be covered in tarmac to make it safe and secure. Over the years that path has disappeared at regular intervals into the undergrowth and had to be dug out again. We obtained quotes and the eventual cost was estimated to be just under £9000. As

none of us had this kind of money in our back pocket we needed to apply for funding. Sounds simple? Well believe me, it is not. The information that has to be provided and the forms that have to be completed, in order to apply for funding, are quite staggering. In fact it has become apparent that there is a whole art to applying for funding. **I am pleased to report that we have been successful in obtaining funding for the bottom path to be covered in tarmac. This will provide much needed access and open up the churchyard much more. Hopefully the path will be completed soon and you will be able to see the improvements for yourself.**

We have also been provided with some funds to purchase the tools and equipment that we need to maintain the churchyard, and our volunteer workers are being given training on its use in order to comply with health and safety standards. Barnsley MBC has also provided the churchyard with a new rubbish bin, for which we are extremely grateful.

WHAT OUR PLANS ARE

Our next immediate project is to restore the small retaining wall by the side of this bottom path. If we do not do this there is the imminent danger of several graves descending onto the path, contents and all!

Looking further to the future, we hope to make the churchyard a place of quiet contemplation; a place where people can come and wander, or sit, in safety; where they can trace their family history or learn more about local history; where they can marvel at God's creation from the smallest Snowdrop to mightiest Horse Chestnut tree; where they can watch the butterflies, squirrels and varied bird life; or where they can just pause in the midst of such busy lives and reflect.

We hope to make some sort of tour of the churchyard and prepare guides to give more ideas and details of what there is to see of interest to any age group.

We cannot do all this on our own. We need your help and support. This may be ..

- Financially - all donations are gratefully received, no matter how small.
- Physically - if you would like to help in any way please ask and we can tell you what sort of work is needed and ensure that you receive any necessary training.
- Vocally - come to our meetings and put your point of view forward. We need to know what people would like from their churchyard. We would love to hear your support.
- Spiritually - please pray for our work.

Our next meetings are Wednesday 3 October 2007 and Wednesday 5 December 2007 in the Tower Room at Darfield All Saints Parish Church. Please join us.

This is your churchyard. Let us, together, make it one that we can use and appreciate and be proud of.

