

FODC News Bulletin



Eccles Shorrock in memoriam

Darwen emerged slowly from a scattering of smallholdings and farms to become a village and then a thriving town. A lot of good men – and women – have given their time and their money over the years towards keeping it firmly on the map as an industrious and thriving community.

One man more than most – Eccles Shorrock, who built the magnificent India Mill and its world-famous chimney.

Shorrock, who lived for most of his life at Low Hill, Bury Fold, was a great benefactor to the town. He was to the fore when Darwen was crippled by the cotton famine 150 years ago, but his efforts eventually led to a breakdown and he spent his last few years in an asylum in Edinburgh.

He died in 1889 and his loss was described in the "Darwen News" as "a merciful release."

Eccles Shorrock was buried in the family vault in Darwen's old cemetery, close to the mound on which the Non-conformist chapel once stood. But such was the stigma that mental illness once had, the grave of one of the great Darwenerers was not marked with even a modest headstone.

Thankfully, these days that stigma is being swept away and caring communities and the NHS do their best to help people with mental problems.

Monday, October 10th, marks World Mental Health Day and on the previous afternoon the Friends of Darwen Cemetery will unveil a headstone to mark the contribution that Eccles Shorrock made to the town and especially his legacy of India Mill whose elegant chimney can be seen through the cemetery trees away to the north.

India Mill have indicated that they will make a donation to the headstone and the FODC are hoping that Blackburn with Darwen Council's mental health department will also make a donation from the funds they have set aside for World Mental Health Day. Stonemason Brent Stephenson has designed the headstone and is also making a donation.

It was the idea of local historian and journalist Harold Heys. "It's about time Eccles Shorrock was accorded a headstone and this seems an appropriate date," he said.



Memorable visit by Lord Darwen

The Cemetery Friends certainly made it a memorable visit for Lord Darwen and members of his family after he had accepted an invitation from chairman John East to attend the 150th anniversary of the opening of the cemetery in June, 1861.

Lord Darwen, the former Paul Davies, is a member of the long established family of mill owners who ran Greenfield and Waterfield mills and who built Garden Village just before the First World War.

He succeeded to the title only a few days before his visit on the death of his father Roger but was determined to fulfil his obligation to his town. He designs and manufactures sustainable housing and lives in Oxford with his wife and family.



John East met Paul, sister Sarah and uncle Stephen at the Whitehall and then Tony Foster and Harold Heys showed them round the town including a visit to Woodside Bank, the family's first home in Darwen, and Moorthorpe and then they visited Garden Village and the family vault at the cemetery.

In the late afternoon Lord Darwen and the Mayor of Blackburn with Darwen, Councillor Karimeh Foster, unveiled a headstone to mark the previously unmarked grave of a 15-month-old baby, Richard Eccles, who was the first person to be buried in the cemetery.

About 60 Friends and visitors attended the ceremony and there were prayers led by members of the local Roman Catholic, Church of England and United Reformed churches.

In the evening about 50 attended a dinner at the Whitehall at which Tony and Harold looked back to the early days of the Davies family in Darwen and the visit in 1931 of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian religious leader, at the invitation of Percy Davies, Lord Darwen's great grandfather.

On the following morning the Davies family were taken by Mr East and the Rev. Geoff Tolley to be shown round Duckworth Street United Reformed Church and then they visited the Mayor in the Town Hall at Blackburn. Lord Darwen's great-great-great grandfather, the Rev Thomas Davies came to Duckworth Street Chapel from Preston in 1860 – at about the time baby Richard Eccles was born.

After their visit Lord Darwen wrote to the Friends expressing his thanks for a well organised and thoroughly interesting visit to Darwen.

Said Mr East: "Everything went off without a hitch and it was very memorable for everyone involved."

