



**The Downham Benevolent Society
1785 to 1913**

And its centenary banner 1885

DOWNHAM BENEVOLENT SOCIETY



Downham band at an old sick club event . A pole of the centenary banner can be seen on the left



Old sick club in 1905 at one of their last celebrations on Hare Green Downham

The Downham Banner Group

The Downham Banner Steering Group 2013 - 2019:

Clare Ashworth

Caroline Assheton

Ralph Assheton

Jill Cragg

Micahla Jackson-Smith

Brian Lewis

Hamish McFall

Philippa McFall

Tom McLean

Jenny Palmer

Diane Poole

Chris Topping

The Banner

To celebrate the first 100 years of the Downham Benevolent Society, a banner was commissioned to mark the event. It was unfurled when the society paraded through the village on Whit Monday, 1885.



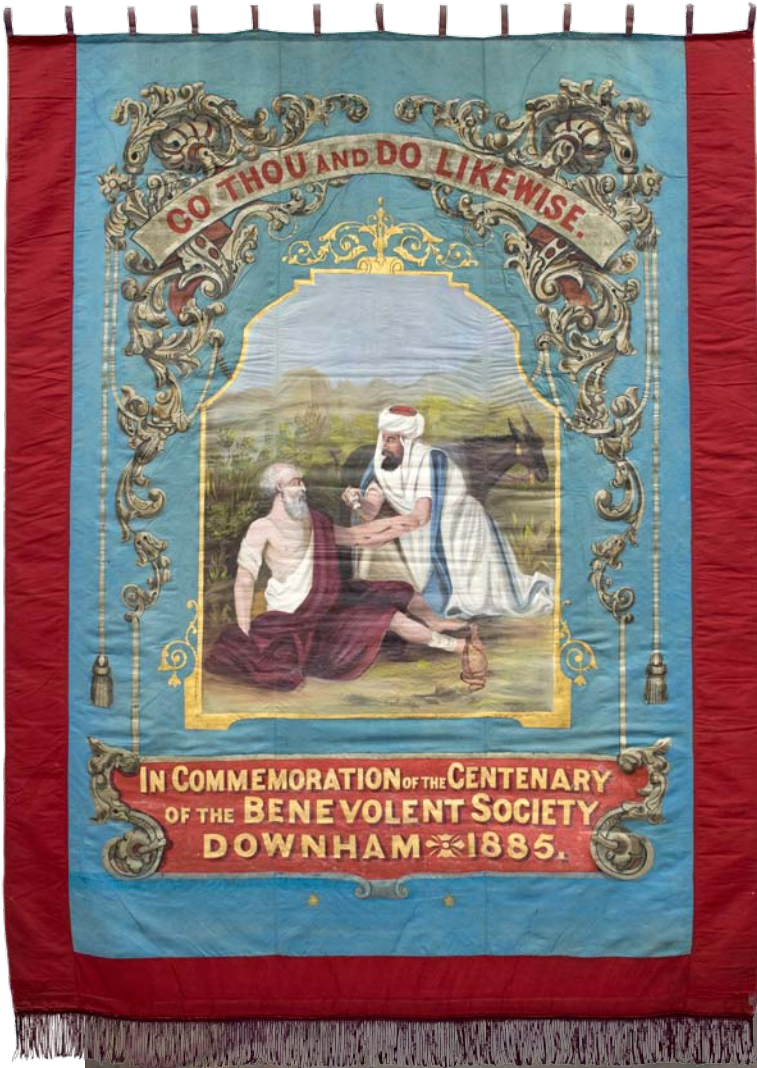
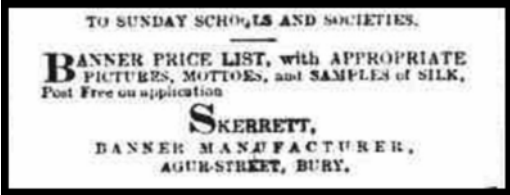
Members of the society celebrating their centenary, complete with new banner, outside the George and Dragon Inn (now the Assheton Arms) in the village of Downham where they held their meetings

The front of the silk banner depicts in painted panels the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the text “Go Thou and Do Likewise”.

Banners were very popular with friendly societies from the eighteenth century onwards, and were used at their annual feast day and procession in towns and villages throughout the county. They were a visual depiction of the values underlying their particular society and for some societies, were carried by members along with colleagues carrying wands, wearing white gloves and sashes. This was to show the communities where they were situated how important and respectable they were.

Many friendly societies had religiously themed pictures and texts on their banners, and even occasionally, on their rule books.

The Downham banner also has the name of the maker at the bottom. It was made by Messrs Skerrett of Bury, a specialist banner maker. This is one of their advertisements

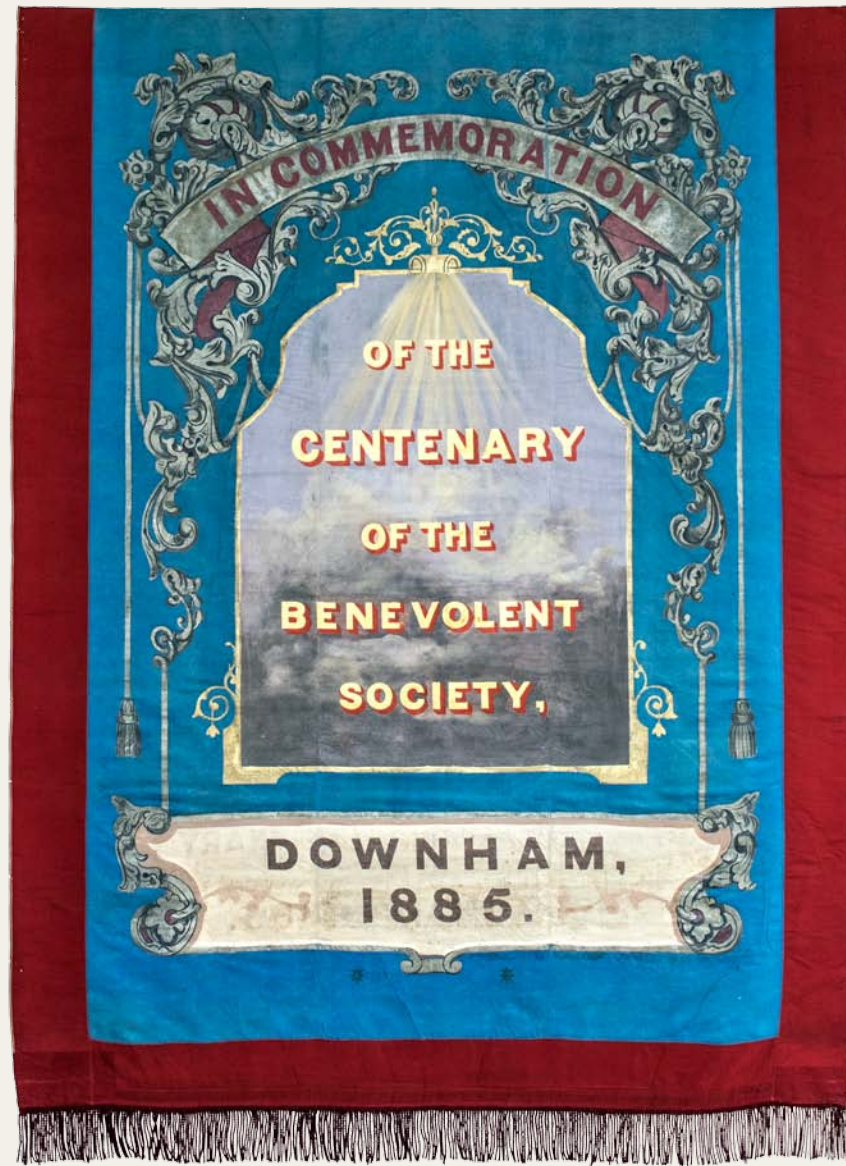


The makers name is visible on the lower right of the banner face.

The reverse of the banner has “In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Benevolent Society” in gold uppercase lettering. Below, on a separate panel, is “Downham 1885”



The conserved banner with the conservator, Jenny van Enckevort, at the People's History Museum, Manchester in December 2017.



The banner was discovered behind the organ in the local parish church of St. Leonard. The Downham Banner Steering Group was formed to organise the conservation of the banner, and were fortunate to obtain funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Subsequently, the banner was sent to the People's History Museum in Manchester. Their painstaking work was carried out over a period of about nine months. Below and on the next pages are pictures taken during the conservation process.



During heat re-activation of the adhesive on the reverse side of the banner



During removal of adhesive staining using the extraction to draw away solvent fumes.



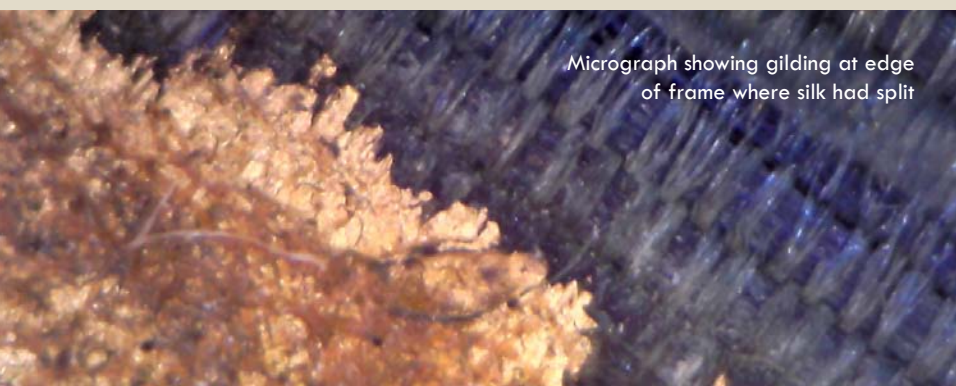
Cleaning the borders with a soft brush and micro vac



Examining with digital microscope



The upper right border face side before and after cleaning



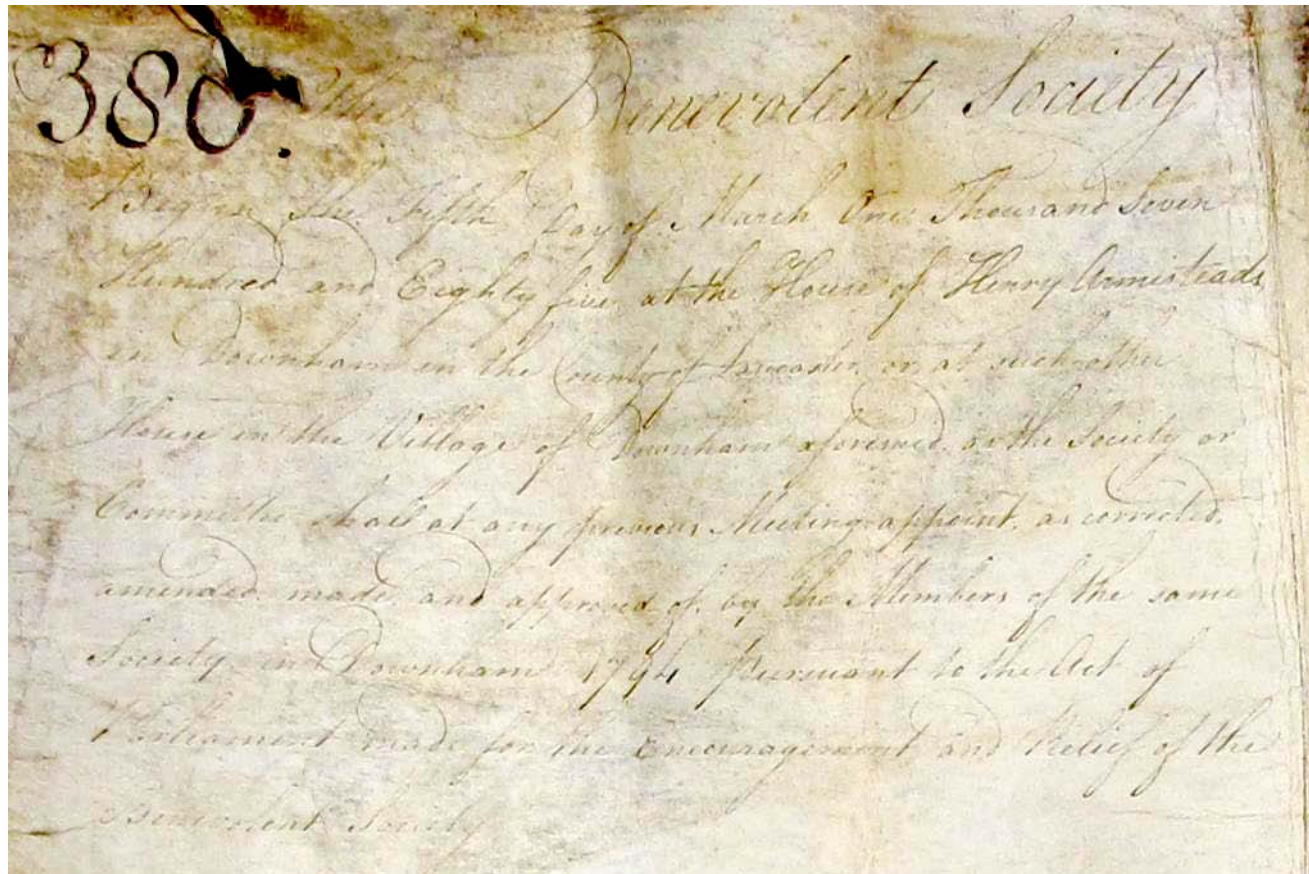
Micrograph showing gilding at edge of frame where silk had split



Cleaning of the main painted panel

The Downham Benevolent Society

The friendly society known as the Downham Benevolent Society was formed by 12 men who met in the George and Dragon Inn, Downham, on 5 March, 1785. The first document we have of the society is a set of rules, approved by the magistrates in Preston on 16 December, 1794. This rule set is handwritten on calf skin and the original is in the National Archives at Kew. Below is part of the first page, which measures approximately 1 metre square.



The 1794 rules formed the basis of all subsequent rules and amendments up to and including the last revision in 1901.

Only men who were in good health, of sober habits and aged between 16 and 28 could join. A few joined who were older, but we do not know why they were allowed to do so. If accepted, they had to pay 2s 6d (12.5p) plus 6d (2.5p) for a set of rules and 3d (just over 1p) to the clerk of the society.

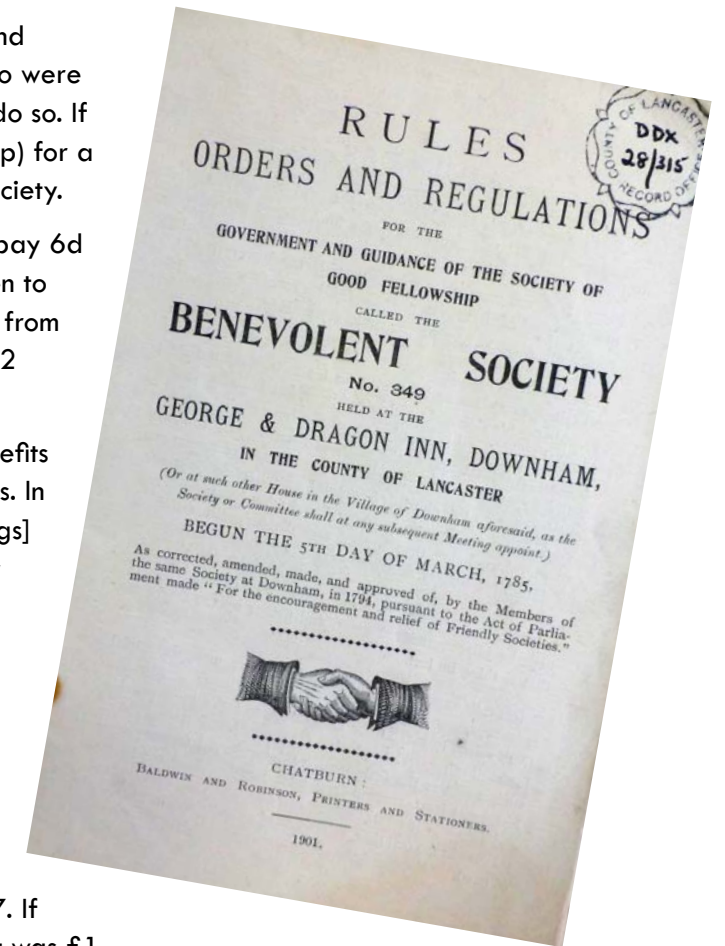
The society met once per month and members had to pay 6d per month for their subscription. By 1877, this had risen to 10d (about 4p). They were not entitled to any benefit from the society until they had paid their subscriptions for 12 months.

Friendly societies usually set their level of sickness benefits at about one-third of the wages paid to their members. In 1794, the benefits for members were, if sick 4s [shillings] (20p) per week or 6s (30p) if confined to their bed or room. So we can estimate that the average weekly wage of the members of the Downham society was about 12 shillings (60p) per week.

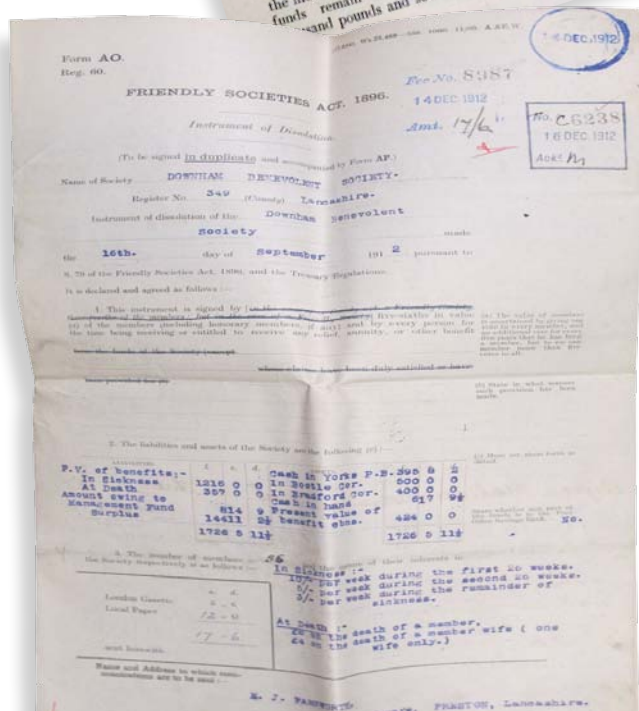
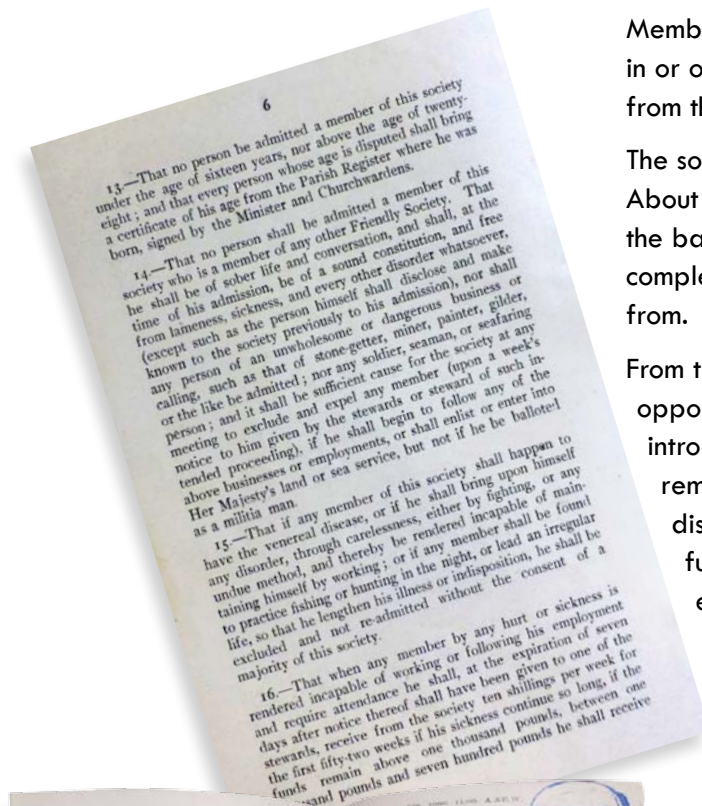
By 1901, the sick benefit had increased to 10s (50p) per week but paid for one year only after which it reduced to 8s (40p) per week. By this time the weekly wage for members was probably about £1 per week

The death benefit rose from £3 in 1794 to £8 in 1877. If the member's first wife died, a benefit was payable. It was £1 in 1794 and rose to £4 by 1877.

The annual feast, when members paraded around the village before going to the George and Dragon for a meal, was originally on what became known as Boxing Day, but was changed to Whit Monday in 1822.



The title page of the 1901 rules



Members could be fined for a variety of offences occurring in or out of meetings. On the following page is the list of fines from the 1901 rules.

The society prospered and grew in numbers over the years. About 390 men joined the society in its 127 year history: at the back of the 1901 rule book, there is a list of members, complete with names, ages, occupations and where they came from.

From the mid-nineteenth century, local employment opportunities dwindled, and National Insurance was introduced in 1911. This combination resulted in the remaining members deciding that the society should be dissolved, and by January 1913 it had ceased to exist. The funds (after £424 had been paid to members who had existing claims on the society) of just over £1,302, were distributed amongst the remaining members according to the length of time they had been in the society.

Without doubt, the Downham Benevolent Society had been a success throughout its life, and the management of the society professional enough to ensure it survived much longer than many other societies. Over its 127 years, it would have seen many members through times of great distress caused by illness or death, by at least providing a financial lifeline that, but for its existence, would not have been available.

13	
the original fine demanded amounted to. And the committee for the time being may, upon a regular complaint to them, and hearing thereof, in the presence of the parties, or in their absence, if neglecting to attend, having due notice, impose such fines as they may think fit for any other breach of the rules, not expressly provided against by any fine hereafter specified.	
TABLE OF FINES.	
THERE SHALL BE PAID FOR	
	S. D.
1.—Each member neglecting to attend the annual meeting according to the rules, or some other person in his stead, shall forfeit to the box	1 0
And to the person that provideth the dinner	1 0
2.—Habitual drunkenness or other disorderly life, tending to anticipate and bring on surfeits and other disorders and infirmity—first offence	2 6
3.—Fighting or gaming in the meeting	2 6
4.—Promoting fighting, gaming, or quarrelling at a meeting	1 0
5.—Clerk neglecting his duty—each offence, not otherwise provided against	1 6
6.—Being steward, neglecting to demand a supposed fine, when required by any member present making a charge of one being due	0 4
7.—Any member fighting with another member, though not at a meeting	5 0
8.—Receiving the benefits of the society under pretended sickness or indisposition, besides being obliged to return the money so received	2 6
9.—Refusing to pay a fine when demanded, and neglecting to appeal to the committee—Double the original fine	
10.—Refusing to pay a fine incurred, and demanded at a former meeting, when re-demanded by the present stewards.—The like sum as the former fine	

List of fines

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THE REGISTER				
Of the Members of the BENEVOLENT SOCIETY of Downham, shewing when they entered, their names, trade or occupation, place of abode, and age.				
When entered.	Members' Names.	Trades.	Place of Abode.	Age
1785	John Armistead	Weaver	Downham	19
Mar. 5	John Hargreaves	do	do	18
"	Thomas Smith	do	do	21
"	Henry Wilkinson	do	do	23
"	Edmund Slinger	do	do	21
"	Henry Walker	do	do	26
"	Richard Wilson	Wool comber	do	19
"	William Wilkinson	Weaver	do	21
"	George Smith	do	Chatburn	20
"	Thomas Armistead	do	Downham	26
"	Robert Bulcock	do	do	25
"	William Marcer	Carpenter	do	19
July 2	James Wilkinson	Weaver	do	17
1786				
Jan. 7	John Marcer	do	do	19
"	Edmund Marcer	do	do	17
Feb. 4	Richard Green	Cotton carder	do	28
Mar. 4	Robert Robinson	Weaver	do	23
Sept. 2	Henry Hudson	Husbandman	Worston	21
Oct. 7	Robert Isherwood	do	Downham	18
1787				
Jan. 6	William Burton	Blacksmith	do	26
"	Thomas Driver	Husbandman	do	20
"	Richard Pollard	Weaver	do	21
Feb. 3	Thomas Hargreaves	do	do	22
"	John Broxup	Farmer	do	22
"	Thomas Boothman	Weaver	do	19
Mar. 3	John Robinson	do	do	27
"	William Robinson	do	do	27
1788				
Jan. 5	John Worswick	do	do	16
"	William Harrison	Cotton spinner	do	18
"	Marmaduke Burton	Weaver	Sabden	28
"	Thomas Hudson	do	Downham	17
"	Jonathan Boothman	do	Angram Green	28
1789				
Dec. 5	Richard Smith	do	Downham	18
1790				
Jan. 2	Thomas Dean	do	do	21
"	William Dean	do	do	17

List of members at the back of the 1901 rule book

The Legacy

There will be a sermon preached in the parish church of St Leonard, Downham, on the parable of the Good Samaritan in August each year, with reference to the society and banner.

Chatburn School have made trips to the People's History Museum, Manchester, to view the conservation work being carried out on the banner. They have also made replica banners to be displayed in the school and is committed to an annual project on self-help, and the banner story.

The banner will be on display at Clitheroe Castle Museum from Spring 2019.

Pupils from the local C of E Primary School at Chatburn visiting the People's History Museum Conservation Department, Manchester



References

- National Archives: FS2/4 Register of enrolled friendly societies 1793-1855
FS3/117/349 – Papers of the Downham Benevolent Society 1794 – 1913
- Lancashire Record Office: DDX 28/315 Rules of the Downham Benevolent Society 1901
DDX 28/340 Subscription Book Downham Benevolent Society 1824-1847
DDX 28/341 Centenary Picture, 1885

Further reading

- P. Clark British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800 The Origins of an Associational World (Oxford, 2000)
- S. Cordery British Friendly Societies, 1750-1914 (Basingstoke, 2003)
- M. Fuller West Country Friendly Societies An account of Village Benefit Clubs and their brass pole heads (Reading 1964)
- P.H.J.H. Gosden Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875 (Manchester, 1961)
- C.J. Topping Welfare, Class and Gender: non-affiliated friendly societies in Lancashire 1750-1835 (Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2006)

Our thanks to

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Chatburn School C of E Primary

Parish Church of St Leonard, Downham

LCC Library Service

LCC Museum Service

People's History Museum Manchester

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