

HERITAGE

You've got a friend – charity 'adopts' disused church

PRAYERS ANSWERED: The future of St Denis Church in East Hatley is secure thanks to a conservation charity

CAVE spiders and bats living at a disused Cambridgeshire church are set to have company after it has been befriended.

The Friends of Friendless Churches (FOFC) has stepped in to save St Denis Church in East Hatley. The iconic church, a Grade II listed building, dates back to at least 1217 and was restored in the 19th century by Victorian architect William Butterfield, who was known for his Gothic revival style

The building has been owned by South Cambridgeshire District Council since 1985, after it was deconsecrated by the Church of England.

The church and its churchyard are currently a 200 square metre local nature reserve and home to cave spiders and bats.

Ownership has now been transferred to the FOFC conservation charity and its chairman, Roger Evans, received the keys from South

RAYMOND BROWN
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Cambridgeshire District Council's deputy leader Cllr Nick Wright.

A £130,000 restoration project, funded by South Cambridgeshire District Council, English Heritage and Hatley Parish Council has already seen the walls and roof repaired, leaving the church wind-proof and watertight.

FOFC will now get a £60,000 endowment grant from the council to fund the remaining work – including replacing the floor and windows – needed to bring the church back into community use.

FOFC has cared for another disused church in South Cambridgeshire since 1979 – St John the Baptist in Papworth St Agnes.

Supported by an active local friends group, the St John the Baptist

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building is now regularly used as a community space.

Cllr Wright, who has overseen the council's management of St Denis' in recent years, said: "St Denis' is an iconic building, loved by the local community and its restoration is certainly something to be celebrated.

"I'm proud of the part we've played in helping to preserve the church for future generations and am grateful to the Friends of Friendless Churches for taking the building into their expert care to

bring it back into community use."

Roger Evans, FOFC chairman, said: "The council deserves praise for its initiative in saving this historic church and the Friends are most grateful for the endowment grant, without which we couldn't take the church into our care.

"Much still needs to be done after the present phase of work, but we look forward to working with the local community to bring St Denis' back into good order for occasional use."

Cllr Sebastian Kindersley, dis-

trict and county councillor for East Hatley, added: "Villagers are absolutely delighted that the future of the building is now secure. Huge thanks to all those involved in making this happen. It's a very exciting day and we look forward to playing our part as the church comes back into use as an important part of our community."

The surrounding churchyard is still open for burials and remains in the care of the local rector and parochial council, with support from a volunteer management group.



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