

Annual report on St Denis' church and churchyard, East Hatley, 15 May 2018

St Denis' church

Hatley Parish Council organised an event to celebrate the handing over of St Denis' church to the Friends of Friendless Churches on the evening of 11 July 2017. Roger Evans, Chairman of the FoFC received the key of the church (in the form of a beautiful large golden ceremonial key on a black velvet cushion) from Cllr Nick Wright, Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council. Despite the heavy rain that persisted throughout that evening, the event was very well attended and enjoyed by all. It was well publicised locally. Thanks to all concerned with the organisation of the event and the publicity, particularly to Kim Wilde, Margot Eagle and her family and Peter Mann for photographing the event.

A planning application (S/1701/17/FL) was registered by Matthew Saunders, Director of the Friends of Friendless Churches with South Cambridgeshire District Council on 12 June 2017 – for 'Replacement windows to nave, replacement door to north porch, internal and external repairs'.

Planning consent was finally granted on 17 November 2017, after some considerable delay for SCDC to satisfy certain issues (including those raised by The Wildlife Trust and Hatley Parish Council). This unfortunately came too late in the season for the FoFC to initiate renovation work in the autumn as had been hoped. The Parish Council regretted this long time interval which caused the FoFC extra work and expense.

Renovation work began early in February 2018. The first phase of the work is practically complete and the church is looking extremely smart. Following an inspection with the architect and contractor on site on Wednesday 16 May, the FoFC will discuss Phase II and opening the church.

Hatley Parish Council and the friends of Friendless Churches would like to express their thanks to Sebastian Kindersley for allowing the contractors renovating the church access across his property. Without this Easement having been granted, the work would have been practically impossible to carry out.

Rachel Morley (who succeeded Matthew Saunders as Director in March 2018) has kindly prepared the following summary of the renovation work carried out to date.

Report by Rachel Morley, Director, FoFC, received 14 May 2018

The first phase of works is coming to end at St Denis'. These repairs sought to make the church weather-proof and to safe for public access.

Our contractor, Lodge & Sons began works in February of this year. Despite several episodes of severe weather, which not only hindered access to the church, but also meant that some temperature sensitive works had to be delayed, the project has over-run only slightly.

First, to make the building water-tight, the many slipped, broken and missing roof-tiles were replaced or re-fixed, and cracks and open joints in masonry (particularly to the porch and buttresses) was repointed in lime mortar.

The mid-20th century tiles in the porch were lifted and revealed a beautiful, warm, worn York stone slab which has been left exposed. This needed only minimal mortar repairs and matches threshold slab, which is also York stone.

During the works, it was noticed that the York stone threshold was cracked across its width. This was a cause for concern and an urgent structural assessment was commissioned. Following this, and in conjunction with the Conservation Officer, the slab has now been supported by some stainless bars to the underside.

However, the most dramatic works are undoubtedly to the floors and windows.

New glazing has been installed in the nave windows and black-powder coating metal guards installed on the outside. The installation of the east window will follow in a later phase of works.

The medieval floor joists to the nave floor have been inspected by archaeologist and new Douglas fir tongue and groove boards have been installed with three inspection hatches, so that the old timbers can be seen. The central walkway to the nave has been and re-tiled – some salvaged, some new tiles.

In the choir stalls area of the chancel, an entire new floor structure has been created and new Douglas fir tongue and groove boards installed. The York stone edging to tiled walkway and the tiled chancel step have both been repaired and restored.

Following an inspection with the architect and contractor on site this Wednesday, 16th May, we will discuss opening the church and what Phase II will involve. We will, of course, keep the Parish Council up-to-date.

Finally, the Friends of Friendless Churches are indebted to Sebastian Kindersley for generously offering his garden as access to the church for the contractors. Without his kindness, this work would have been a lot more difficult!

St Denis' churchyard

Thanks are due to Peter Mann who has mowed the grass round the church on several occasions throughout the year. Thanks are also due to the 14 residents who gave up their Sunday morning to help clear away the grass (and save the quaking grass) on 16 July 2017.

The grass will be mown very soon and a tidy-up session organised if necessary.

Thanks are due to Siân Williams of the Wildlife Trust who carried out a wildlife survey of the churchyard on 21 June 2017. The results are on the [Hatley website](#) and include recommendations regarding mowing and managing the trees near the boundary with Sebastian Kindersley's land. These will be addressed later in the year.