

St Denis' church, East Hatley

2019 / 2020 annual report

Summary

Restoration by the Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC) continues slowly, with emphasis on the Butterfield chancel and its windows. Research into the nature of the Butterfield-era East window was carried out, and a possible replacement investigated, but this proved unsuitable. It is hoped to install a new East window soon once a decision is made on what form this will take.

A problem with damp on the North wall was found to be largely caused by a missing roof tile and faulty drainage. Hopefully the tile can be replaced soon.

The fragile plaster-work needs to be stabilised before unsupervised access can be permitted. Meanwhile several visitors have been allowed access by request. Three open days in September as part of the Heritage Open Days scheme were very successful, with a good mix of local and other visitors, and raised £267.45 towards FoFC funds.

The resident bat population continues to thrive as confirmed in a [bat survey](#) and evidenced by bat droppings and butterfly wings on the church floor.

There has been no movement on the offer of the return of a Victorian organ originally in the church. A decision has been deferred until restoration is more complete.

The church remains closed but visits can be arranged on request. We hope to open it over a weekend during the Heritage Open Days period (11th to 20th September) if coronavirus restrictions are lifted.

Building restoration

Stephanie Norris has been appointed by the Friends of Friendless Churches to undertake Phase 2 of the renovation work on the church under her new Cambridge practice (having left the previous contractors Purcell in April 2018). The scope of work includes the reglazing of the chancel windows, stabilisation of crumbling plaster-work, removal of unwanted rubble etc and general maintenance.

Damp

Significant patches of damp have been observed for some time in the area behind the stove and on the step between the chancel and the nave. Slots were cut in the access panel in front of the main door for extra ventilation. Since then, removable floor panels have been left lifted up and windows are being kept open. The source of water ingress was found to be a missing roof tile on 22 March during an annual maintenance visit arranged by the FoFC to check the exterior of the building.

Chancel windows

The chancel windows remain boarded up. A possible replacement for the East window, salvaged from a church in Nordelph, Norfolk and of the same date as William Butterfield's modifications to St Denis', had been identified by Matthew Saunders, then Director of the FoFC. On 29 August 2019, Rachel Morley, Stephanie Norris, Peter Mann and Joyce Denby went to look at it at the London Stained Glass Repository's storeroom on the Welbeck Estate in Nottinghamshire. They reported it was a wonderful window but unfortunately far too big for the St Denis' East window aperture.

However, a few pieces of St Denis' original East window are in the FoFC's possession. These were handed over to Rachel Morley last year by Simon Damant who had picked them up from the ground when he lived in East Hatley. Joyce Denby investigated the

remains of the old glass still stored in the church to see if a meaningful composite could be created. These are mostly unrelated shards, but the dedication that ran along the bottom is still largely complete.

Enquiries into the design of the original window led to discovery of a dim photograph of the church interior, probably from the 1950s. The East window appears to have depicted an Ascension in the centre panel, with flanking angels in the outer panels, one of whose heads we still have.

A photograph of the interior of the replacement church clearly shows the missing 'dove' from St Denis', set in a panel other glass removed from the old windows. The style of this glass is different from that of the East window and may possibly have come from a Victorian West window that was dedicated to the villagers of East Hatley. The whereabouts of this panel has so far not been traced.

A decision on the design of the new East window, and whether this should include a jigsaw of old glass, is still to be made by the FoFC.

Fixtures and fittings

The photograph of the 'new' church interior shows the Victorian choir stalls and other wooden furniture items removed from St Denis'. Whether these still exist is doubtful but it should be possible to find similar items if it is decided that the chancel should be refurbished.

We now also have a photograph the Communion Plate, and silver items dating partly from the Sir George Downing era of the late 1600s and partly Victorian, which were controversially sold to help pay for the replacement building, and reportedly went to the USA.

The 1874 Portway 'Tortoise' stove, still *in situ*, is severely corroded. Peter Mann approached BFM Europe in Stoke-on-Trent, the current owners of Portway stoves, to ask if they would 'consider refurbishing the cast iron 'Tortoise'-trademarked stove in the church to an external state it was when first installed but not to a working condition'. However, the company does not have or know anyone who would be able to undertake such work and suggested we perhaps find a cast iron specialist. This has not yet been pursued.

Proposal for a Blue Plaque commemorating Sir George Downing

In July 2019, the charity group Cambridge Past, Present and Future extended its Blue Plaques initiative to South Cambridgeshire. Peter Mann suggested a plaque could be affixed to St Denis' church to acknowledge Sir George Downing having once owned the church. As the Plaques cost £1,000, he asked if Downing College would consider making a donation towards this. The Friends of Friendless Churches thought it a good idea but advised that Listed Building Consent would be required. Peter Mann went ahead to initiate a request to Downing College's General Purposes Committee but unfortunately the request was declined.

Bats in the church

Duncan Painter of Applied Ecology Ltd was appointed by Stephanie Norris to carry out a bat survey which is necessary to accompany a planning application for permission to undertake the second phase of the renovation work. An automated bat detector was set up to record bat calls inside the church for a period of two weeks, from 17 September to 7 October 2019.

The survey recorded the calls of four species of bat at times to suggest they had been day, roosting inside the building at different points in time over the 20 night survey. Brown long-eared bats, Natterer's bats, common pipistrelle bats and Barbastelle bats were recorded. The two-page report is on the [Hatley website](#).

Bat droppings and butterfly wings have been photographed by Nicola Jenkins before sweeping the church floor clean of these and rubble on three occasions (November, January, May). Remains of peacock and tortoiseshell butterfly wings have been kept.

Heritage Open Days, September 2019

St Denis' church was open during the Heritage Open Days event on three warm, sunny days of 13th, 14th and 15th September for two hours each morning and afternoon. It attracted over 100 visitors from many villages and towns in the area and raised a grand total of £267.45 for the Friends of Friendless Churches.

Joyce Denby prepared an informative timeline of events for display which helped to shape East Hatley over the last 1000 years (and fitted event's theme 'Power to the people'). Jenny Ollerenshaw made (at very short notice) and donated a perfectly crafted visitors' book which was signed by many. Joyce Denby and Peter Mann gave interesting guided talks, Joyce having accumulated a wealth of knowledge on the history of the church and people involved.

Visitors included several who had worshipped and/or had been baptised in the church and David Bevan who 'introduced' St Denis' to the FoFC to South Cambs District Council.

Special thanks go to Joyce Denby and Peter Mann for giving talks and to Peter for preparing 50p bookmarks which sold well and for preparing the printed pages for the visitors' book.

Thank you to the team of cheerful volunteers who welcomed visitors and served light refreshments: Sarah Brennan, John O'Sullivan and Sofie Hooper. Thanks also to Allen Miller for donating the display boards to the village.

The event was nicely advertised in the Royston Crow and Rachel Morley talked about St Denis' in a programme about HOD events on Radio Cambridgeshire.

An illustrated report is on the [Hatley website](#).

We hope to join in this year's HOD festival, which has the theme 'Hidden nature, on some days between 11th and 20th September, subject to the Government's coronavirus laws on events.

The Churchyard and St Denis' Local Nature Reserve Management Group

We are very grateful to John Wright for repairing the signpost to the church from East Hatley and chiselled the vestry door which was sticking.

The investment account of the Management Group, opened in 1987, was relocated to members of the Management Group, Peter Mann and Nicola Jenkins. It stands at around £1,000.

Thanks to the volunteers at sessions in the churchyard in [August](#), when Steve Greenhalgh used the scythe mower and 16 others cleared the cuttings and tidied the graves, and in [March](#) when Peter Mann cut the grass and 8 of us pruned the two hedgerows: Micky Astor, Sarah Brennan, Joyce Denby, Steve Greenhalgh, Jo and Peter Hayward, Sofie and Jeremy Hooper, with Thomas and Ali, Nicola Jenkins, Peter Mann, John O'Sullivan, Angela and Kevin Steel, Sue and John Wright.

On 23 January, a discussion was held about various matters concerning the churchyard/nature reserve between Sarah Brennan, Joyce Denby, Nicola Jenkins, Sebastian Kindersley, Peter Mann, John O'Sullivan and Revd Hilary Young. We decided to seek permission via the Gamlingay and Hatley Parochial Church Council (which has responsibility for the churchyard) to remove a large dead elm from the southern hedgerow of the churchyard and to lower the remainder of that stretch of trees/hedgerow and to fell two diseased horse chestnut trees (but not to replace them since the churchyard/nature reserve is primarily important and valuable as a grassland). We are

awaiting advice from the Wildlife Trust to follow up a suggested of Joyce's to zone the reserve to conserve/encourage the most 'valuable' species of wild plants and grasses and the areas rich in diversity. We are grateful to the Revd Hilary Young for her interest in the churchyard as a nature reserve.

There has been one burial in the churchyard, that of Patricia Brown, age 96, Nicola Jenkins mother who always enjoyed spending time in rural East Hatley.

At the time of writing, several clumps of beautiful starting white flowers of the Star of Bethlehem can be seen in the grass for the first time for many years.

Nicola Jenkins, Joyce Denby and Peter Mann
18 May 2020