

St Denis' church, East Hatley

2020 / 2021 annual report

Phase Two of the renovation work – to the chancel walls and windows

A **grant of £58,200** for further renovation work to St Denis' church was awarded from the **Government's Culture Recovery Fund** to The Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC) on 9 October 2020. The terms of the grant specified that the money should to be spent by 31 March 2021 but an extension was later granted.

The FoFC submitted detailed **planning applications** ([20/04598/FUL](#) and [20/04599/LBC](#)) to South Cambridgeshire District Council for 'the reinstatement of three leaded light windows to the chancel north and south elevations, and localised masonry repairs to window surrounds in St Denis' church' on 9 November. These were validated on the same day and approved with conditions on 8 January 2021.

Preparing for and carrying out the renovation work

Sabina van de Bruck and Lucy Kaszewski of Hirst Conservation spent two days in November surveying the chancel wall finish to prepare a report with recommendations. In late November, Geoff Eveling of Lodge & Sons, the contractors carrying out the renovations, visited St Denis'.

In early February a footbridge was erected across from Sebastian Kindersley's land into the churchyard to enable equipment and materials to be moved into the church, and a portable toilet erected. Thanks to Sebastian for clearing space near the footbridge. The grids over the chancel windows (including the east window) were removed and taken away by Lodge. The blue display boards were taken by Peter Mann to Hatley Village Hall for storage in the area behind the bar. David Sear, FoFC's glazier measured up the new windows for the north and south walls of the chancel in mid-February.

Work on phase two of the refurbishment of St Denis' began in earnest in late February with the installation of scaffolding inside the chancel and then the conservationists from Hirst Conservation began the painstaking process of consolidating the blistered plasterwork, leaving some areas of William Butterfield's brickwork exposed. The single upright line of polychromic tiling in the middle chancel step been replaced, as has the missing York stone in the step itself.

The windows were then installed by David Sear on 24/25 April. The window in the front of the south side of the chancel incorporates some pieces of stained glass from St Denis' original east window that were handed over to Rachel Morley in 2019 by Simon Damant who had picked them up from the ground when he lived in East Hatley. Joyce Denby had 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 text that ran along the bottom was still largely complete. Not all the lettering could be incorporated in the new window but it is sufficient to acknowledge the original benefactors. The east window appears to have depicted an Ascension in the centre panel, with flanking angels in the outer panels. One of whose heads was in FoFC's possession and is now incorporated in the window. A photograph of the south chancel window is at the end of this report. Rachel Morley, Director of the FoFC, and Stephanie Norris, the architect employed for the renovation, commented that the window looks even better than they had hoped.

The end result is very pleasing and makes the church look far more complete from outside as well as inside and much lighter inside.

The contractors cleared the equipment from the church by 25 April. Spare flints from the chancel are being kept on a wooden pallet enclosed on three sides in the north-west corner of the churchyard until the FoFC decides what to do with them. The spare ex-chimney stonework and shorter pieces of wood are being stored in the vestry. The longer pieces of wood have been moved to the font end, along with the spare roof ridge tiles and pieces of old plain glass – again pending FoFC's long term intentions.

Work still to be done but by no means forgotten is to install a stained glass east window and stabilise the nave and vestry walls. We hope to open the church during this year's Heritage Open Days event.

Thanks to Peter Mann and Joyce Denby for liaising with the contractors and the FoFC throughout the year.

St Denis' featured on ITV's News Anglia, December 2020

Announcement of the £58,200 grant prompted an article by Lottie Limb on the *CambridgeshireLive* website on 30 November (which appeared next day in the *Daily Mail* and *The Mirror*). This was picked up by the local (Cambridge) ITV News team. On 2 December, Claire, a reporter and photographer, spent two hours at St Denis', looking round the church and interviewing Joyce Denby, Peter Mann and Nicola Jenkins. From this, she produced a two-minute news item which was screened on the 6.00 pm and 10.00 pm ITV's News Anglia (West) on 10 December and repeated on ITV Anglia East on 4 January. The filming is described on the [Hatley website](#) and a permanent link to the news item is available.

Heritage Open Days, September 2020

St Denis' church was open for the Heritage Open Days (HODs) on three sunny days Friday 11 September to Sunday 13 September, just before the government's 'Rule of six' was introduced for control of the coronavirus pandemic. The event attracted 85 visitors, more than we dared hope at this time. £105 was raised for the Friends of Friendless Churches, largely from donations for the church plus sales of bookmarks and leaflets Joyce Denby produced.

Joyce Denby put together a display board of drawings and photos tracing the 'Evolution of St Denis' and another of photographs, drawings and a painting connected with the chancel.

A three-part display board of photographs on this year's HOD theme 'Hidden nature' was exhibited, one showing the cave spiders 'hidden below' in the furnace chamber, taken by John O'Sullivan, one of the species of bats 'hidden above' in the rafters, taken by Rachel Bates of the Bat Conservation Trust, and the third central section of flora and fauna found in the churchyard/nature reserve, taken by John O'Sullivan and Nicola Jenkins.

Peter Mann gave informative talks to the visitors about the history of the building, pointing out various features and Joyce talked about some of the notable people who had lived in Hatley.

Visitors came from Arrington, Cambridge, Cockayne Hatley, East Hatley, Hatley St George, Gamlingay, Great Gransden, Great Shelford, Impington, Melbourn, Sandy, Shefford and Northampton.

Special thanks to:

Joyce Denby for preparing the display boards and leaflets, making the flower arrangements for the niches in the nave, and for talking to visitors about Hatley's history. Joyce also prepared a display board on the heraldry in Hatley St George church which was open at the same times as St Denis', thanks mainly to Penny Hewlett;

Peter Mann for conducting the tours, preparing and printing flyers, leaflets, a range of signs including those for Covid-19 precautions and the 'A' boards for directions. Thanks also registering with and preparing material for the HOD website and for advertising and reporting the event on the Hatley website; and to

All those who welcomed visitors, collected names for Covid 19 regulations and generally helped - Sarah Brennan, Carole Cooper, Margot Eagle, Jo and Peter Hayward, Charlie Norman, John O'Sullivan and Gill Wilsher. Thanks also to Sarah and John for talking about the wildlife in the nature reserve.

The Churchyard and St Denis' Local Nature Reserve Management Group

A qualified tree surgeon, Samuel Dudley of Eden Tree Specialists, visited the churchyard/nature reserve on 7 January as a first move to commissioning a report for the Parochial Church Council on managing the dead elm and diseased horse chestnut trees. He spent some time in discussion with Rev Hilary Young, John O'Sullivan, Nicola Jenkins and Harold Nickerson. Unfortunately, despite Hilary's chasing, the pricing of the report has not yet been forthcoming.

Dr Jonathan Shanklin, Cambridgeshire's botanical recorder, recorded 143 species of plants when he surveyed the nature reserve on 4 July 2020. The list is on the [Hatley website](#).

Five members of the Cambridge Flora Group visited the nature reserve to survey the flora on 30 March 2021, joined by Joyce Denby. A report on their findings is awaited. Lucy Wilson, the local Wildlife Trust's Conservation Officer who replaced Siân Williams, was in the group. She gave some advice on managing the churchyard.

A visit to the St Denis' colony of cave spiders living beneath the church on 21 June 2020 revealed some twelve adult female spiders and half-a-dozen egg sacs. John O'Sullivan took some magnificent photographs which are on the [Hatley website](#).

An interesting and informative article by John O'Sullivan about what to look out for in the nature reserve through the seasons was written by John O'Sullivan, illustrated with marvellous photographs. Thanks to John and to Peter for putting the text and photos on the [website](#).

Three sessions were held to mow, rake grass and tidy the graves in the churchyard, two in July and one in September. More than a dozen helped on 11 July, with several taking turns with the scissor mower. [Photographs of this session](#) are on the website. The north east quadrant of the churchyard was not mown until September.

Thanks to all the volunteers: Sarah Brennan, Joyce Denby, Peter Hanlon, Jo and Peter Hayward, Sofie and Jeremy Hooper, Nicola Jenkins, Sebastian Kindersley, Peter Mann, Charlie Norman, Angela and Kevin Steel, John Wright and Revd Hilary Young. Thanks also to Mark Wilsher for buying and installing two new inner tubes for the scissor mower and to Peter for maintaining and storing it in his garage.



South side of chancel of St Denis' church showing window incorporating pieces of stained glass from the original east window.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann
4 May 2021