

St Denis' church and churchyard / nature reserve

Update for 15th March 2022 meeting of Hatley Parish Council

St Denis' church

Work on the third phase of renovations is continuing to schedule. It is expected to be completed by the end of March, to comply with conditions of the grant awarded from the Government's Culture Recovery Fund.

Once the scaffolding was erected (internally), Peter Mann finished the painstaking task of photographing the top third of the walls, as a historical record for the Friends of Friendless Churches, before the walls were plastered anew.

Some scaffolding is still to be erected on the outside to facilitate minor roof repairs.

A specialist contractor cleaned and checked the roof timbers for signs of beetle infestation, dry rot and wet rot and treated them as necessary. The plasterers have not seen any evidence of leaks from the roof, suggesting the evident damp around the north side of the chancel arch is seeping up from the ground.

It proved necessary for Lodge & Sons, the contractors, to remove all the plaster from the walls as what remained was very fragile and crumbly. It is being replaced with a traditional lime putty mortar over nearly all the interior walls of the nave. The bricked north door and its surrounds will remain unplastered as will a small area of the original fieldstones above the south door. Three putlog (or putlock) holes, used to support the scaffolding when the church was built and enlarged over the centuries, were surprisingly revealed along the walls after the old plaster was stripped off. Three of these holes, surrounded by bright white Bath stone, will be left visible as a fascinating historical feature.

Most of the top layer plastering on the upper part of the walls has now been completed. The first layer of new plaster dries in a couple of days in the upper section of the walls; the bottom section takes much longer because of damp in the lower part of the walls.

New stones have arrived for repairing the reredos, along with new tiles for repairing the sanctuary step.

A stonemason is due to cut and fit new replacement stones for the right hand side to the chancel arch and repair the east window surround.

Thanks to Peter Mann and Joyce Denby for liaising with the FoFC and the contractors and to Sebastian Kindersley for his help and providing access across his property.

Gazette article

An illustrated article by Peter Mann entitled 'St Denis' under the skin. Catching up on the East Hatley church restoration project' was published in the *March issue of the Gamlingay Gazette* (pp 18 -19).

Thanks also to Peter Mann for writing the *Gazette* article, for photographing the walls before they were stripped, and to Joyce Denby and Peter for showing occasional visitors round the church.

St Denis' churchyard / local nature reserve

Storm Eunice on 14th February caused a large dead tree at the end of Footpath 12 into the churchyard to blow down completely alongside the fence. It fell half way over last year and was supported by one of the trees in the neighbouring meadow. Peter Mann has kindly offered to remove it.

The pretty show of snowdrops is just about over. Primroses, daffodils, violets, celandines and a few grape hyacinths are now in flower.

Nicola Jenkins / 14th March 2022