

St Denis' church, East Hatley 2021 / 2022 annual report

Phase Three of the renovation work for repair and replastering of the nave walls and other repairs

The Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC) submitted a planning application, [21/03880/LBC](#), to South Cambridgeshire District Council on 25 August 2021 for 'repair and replastering of nave walls, repair reredos, sanctuary step and east window surround, minor roof repairs to resolve intermittent leaks and localised treatment of timber decay to roof'.

Hatley Parish Council raised no objections at its 28 September meeting and it was approved on 19 October 2021. [21/03880/CONDA](#) for submission of samples of new stone and nave plaster and limewash finish to SCDC's Conservation Officer and written approval by the SCDC was submitted on 7 January 2022 and the condition discharged in full on 22 February 2022.

The FoFC was awarded a grant of £56,288 (80% eligible costs) on 13 December 2021 from the second round of the Government's Culture Recovery Fund in for this third phase of the renovation work.

Lodge & Sons, the FoFC's building contractor, and Abbott, their scaffolding contractor, began work in mid-January. All the inside scaffolding was erected by mid-February. Scaffolding was later erected on the outside of the building to enable minor roof repairs and to investigate sources of damp around the chancel arch and the stove. No leaks were found, suggesting water is seeping up from the ground.

The Trustees of the FoFC asked for a high resolution photographic record of the interior walls of the nave before the 'naked' field stone construction was replastered. Peter Mann carried out this very time-consuming task.

A specialist contractor cleaned and checked the roof timbers for signs of rot and beetle and treated them as necessary on 14 February.

Because of the fragile state of the plaster on the walls in the nave, virtually all it was removed and replaced with a traditional lime putty mortar. The bricked north door and its surrounds were repointed but remain unplastered (to show 'any old rubble' would do), as does a small area of the original fieldstones above the south door (for historical interest). Several putlog (also called putlock) holes, used to support the scaffolding when the church was built and enlarged over the centuries, were revealed along the walls. Four of these holes, surrounded by bright white Bath stone, are left visible as a fascinating historical feature.

Most of the top layer plastering on the upper part of the walls was completed by the end of March 2022. At this time, new stones were ready for repairing the reredos, along with new tiles for repairing the sanctuary step and a stonemason was preparing to fit replacements stones for the right hand side to the chancel arch and repair the east window surround.

We are very grateful to Peter Mann and Joyce Denby for liaising with the FoFC and the contractors throughout the year and to Sebastian Kindersley for his help and providing access across his property.

While the work was scheduled for completion by 31 March 2022, the time taken for the new plaster to dry sufficiently (particularly at floor level) for application of a top lime wash saw the job overrun to mid-May. The scaffolding was removed on 17 May and a final clean-up effected on 18 May 2022.

At last, though, because the walls are no longer crumbly, Peter is opening the church every day at 8.30 am and closing it at dusk for anyone to look around or for quiet contemplation. Should we set up a 'Friends of St Denis' group'? The FoFC Trustees are visiting on 5 July; preliminary work has started on a simple celebration event (in the early evening). The church will also be open for the Heritage Open Days festival again this year (9, 10 and 11 September).

Still to be addressed when funds allow is the design and installation of a new east window. The problem of water ingress on the north wall has yet to be solved – it would appear to be rising damp issue.

Photographs of the new window are included on the Hatley website in the [photo gallery of St Denis' church](#) and a report of the third stage of the renovation work will be added to the website soon.

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 2022 issue of the [Gamlingay Gazette](#) (pp 18 -19). St Denis' was also featured in the summer 2021 issue of the FoFC newsletter. **NB** Since this report was submitted to the parish council, Peter has placed an article on the Hatley website about the FoFC's restoration work: [St Denis' re-skinned](#).

Further publicity

Max Willcock of the Bournemouth News & Picture Service photographed the new window in the chancel on 28 September. This resulted in an illustrated article by Max Willcock and Matt Jackson being published on the website CambridgeshireLive on 12 October and articles in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* on 3 January 2022 and *This Week* on 7 January. The *Telegraph* article resulted in a concert classical guitarist offering to give a recital in 2023.

Gerald Jones and his wife who run the YouTube channel 'Village and Town History' took a five minute video [\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW_aSyZ1aE8\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW_aSyZ1aE8) of St Denis' church in September. There is also a link to it on the Hatley website.

Survey of bats emerging from the church

Rachel Bates of the [Cambridgeshire Bat Group](#) organised a survey of bats emerging from St Denis' church on 17 July, a beautiful balmy evening with the church lit by a half moon. Sarah Brennan, John O'Sullivan, Ruth Chan, Alastair Smith, Linda Hudson, Sofie, Jeremy, Ali and Thomas Hooper and Nicola Jenkins took part.

They sat around the church and counted bats emerging from the church between 9.00 pm and 10.15 pm using bat detectors and tally counters. Activity outside the church was dominated by common pipistrelle and a few soprano pipistrelles and inside by multiple brown long-eared and a few passes of a barbastelle.

At least 16 brown long-eared bats emerged from between the tiles and the guttering of the vestry and just three bats came out around guttering in the nave on the north side of the church. None were seen to emerge from the south side.

DNA analysis of the bat droppings from the church floor showed they were all from brown long-eared bats (*Plecotus auritus*). A report by Nicola is [on the Hatley website](#).

Heritage Open Days (HODs), September 2021

St Denis' was open for England's Heritage Open Day festival on 10, 11, and 12 September. The weather was kind to us. 84 people visited and £223.00 was raised for the FoFC from donations and sales of bookmarks and leaflets.

In preparation for the event, Peter Mann wrote an article for September's [Gamlingay Gazette](#) (page 14) and provided details for the HOD's website. Joyce Denby composed hand-outs about food and farming in East Hatley through the ages for HOD theme's 'Edible England'.

She also updated a display board about the chancel and the new window incorporating pieces of stained glass salvaged from the old east window. The face in the window with the golden mane of hair is that of an angel, probably an archangel, and could be Michael, Gabriel or Raphael. The FoFC is confident it is by the eminent Victorian glazier Alexander Gibbs.

Other boards displayed information about the new planning application, the evolution of St Denis' church and the survey of bats emerging from the church on 17 July. Joyce made three beautiful flower arrangements in the font and in niches in the nave.

A sincere vote of thanks goes to Joyce Denby and Peter Mann for all their preparation and for giving guided tours throughout the three days.

Thanks also to Margot Eagle, Sarah Brennan, John O'Sullivan, Mike Casey, Jo and Peter Hayward and Sofie Hooper for welcoming visitors and collecting names and to Nicky Adkins for chalking the 'A' boards. Nicola Jenkins arranged the rota and helped throughout the event.

Book of Common Prayer

We have heard that a resident in Gransden has the Common Prayer book for St Denis' church, published in 1792. We're hopeful that this might be returned to the church.

A talk to be given to Wrestlingworth History Society

Wrestlingworth History Society asked, via the Hatley website, whether someone could give a talk on the history of St Denis' church, the village's history and its links to the Castells and Downing families. Peter Mann has agreed to deliver a talk on 16 March 2023.

Victorian Society visitor

Tom Tyler, representing the [Victorian Society](#), visited St Denis' on 5 October.

Thanks to Peter Mann for writing the *Gazette* article, for photographing the nave walls, for adding photos to and updating the Hatley website. Thanks to both Joyce Denby and Peter for showing occasional visitors round the church.

Further details on St Denis' church and churchyard/nature reserve can be found in the reports to the Parish Council meetings of July and October 2021 and January and March 2022 which are in the [Reports section of the Hatley website](#).

The Churchyard/Local Nature Reserve and St Denis' Local Nature Reserve Management Group

Peter mowed the south side of the churchyard at the end of May 2021. In July he mowed three quarters of the churchyard, strimmed round the church and graves and cut off the low boughs of one of the horse chestnuts and a dead branch of one of the yew trees. Before the Heritage Open days in September he mowed all three quarters of the churchyard.

On 16 October he did a rough cut with the 'St Denis' mower'. On 17 October a tidy-up morning took place. A party of six volunteers mowed the long grass in the north east quarter and raked up all the grass. Thanks go to Sarah Brennan, Ruth Chan, Joyce Denby, Peter Mann, Charlie Norman and John O'Sullivan for their hard work. We are very grateful to Peter for single-handedly doing several sessions of mowing.

To satisfy Gamlingay and Hatley Parochial Church Council (PCC)'s insurance conditions, Peter wrote a risk assessment for activities carried out in maintaining the churchyard. Please see the addendum on the next sheet. We should inform Rev Hilary Young in advance of any work being carried out.

Storm Eunice on 14 February caused a large dead tree at the end of Footpath 12 leading into the churchyard to fall down. Peter has kindly offered to remove this. A tree which blew down into the moat needs attention.

We did not carry out the optional mow this March as the grass was not too long and Peter's ride-on mower was out of action. No tidy-up sessions have been held in 2022 as of 31 March.

The snowdrops gave a good show early in the year and in March the churchyard looked attractive with primroses, cowslips and oxlip/cowslip hybrids, daffodils, violets, celandines and a few grape hyacinths.

A spreadsheet of species of plants, bushes and trees in the churchyard recorded between 1992 to 2021 was compiled by Dr Jonathan Shanklin, the county's botanical recorder, following the survey carried out by Cambridgeshire Flora Group on 30 March. This is on the [Hatley website](#). Only 18 records were made this year with ten species being recorded for the first time but locals are invited to submit records to add to the official list.

We still need to obtain permission from the PCC to fell (probably partially) the dead elm. Unfortunately we missed the window for arranging to lower the elm hedgerow on the southern boundary. We will endeavour to get this work done this autumn.

The scissor mower was serviced in the autumn. Peter fitted some wheels to heighten the mower to make it much easier to use. The total spent was £116.03. The St Denys Church LNR/NS&I Investment Account stands at £1,231.62, including 13p interest in 2021.

The ashes of George Dixon, Joyce Dixon's brother who died on 11th March 2021, were interred in the family grave in the churchyard in August.

St Denis' Church Local Nature Reserve Management Group has always included a representative of Hatley Parish Council. However, as of 5 May 2022, Nicola Jenkins is no longer a member of the Parish Council.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann
30 May 2022

Addendum

On **Wed, 14 Jul 2021 at 15:27**, Peter Mann - Buzz Associates
<peter@buzzassociates.co.uk> wrote:

Dear Hilary,

I suppose the risk assessment involved in mowing and 'tidying-up' the churchyard would be:

- Damage to St Denis' church, the building (which might be covered by the Friends of Friendless Churches' insurance as owners of the building).
- Damage to any of the graves and / or gravestones.
- Damage to any of the trees and fences.
- Injury caused to anyone in the churchyard, whether a visitor or a volunteer 'tidying-up'.
- Injury caused by:
 - Using garden tools – rake, loppers, wheelbarrows, strimmer etc.
 - A mower – ride-on, scissor or lawn – and attachments (e.g. trailer behind the ride on).
 - Raking up, moving and / or stacking cut grass.
 - Tripping over a gravestone or falling into a grave.
 - Branch falling off a tree.
 - Nettle stings / scratches from brambles etc and insect bites / stings.
 - Falling over on wet grass / tripped up by (say) a tree root.
 - Falling into the moat or ditches.
 - Dry grass setting on fire.
 - Falling tile or masonry from the church.

Does that cover everything?

Best regards,
Peter Mann

From: Hilary Young
Sent: Wednesday, July 14, 2021 4:43 PM
To: Peter Mann - Buzz Associates
Subject: Re: St Denis' churchyard, East Hatley - insurance for grass cutting, July 2021

Thank you so much Peter. That looks fine- having ID the risks we are supposed to put a high/medium/low on them and list any mitigating actions, I will have a go at that- will come back with any actions- such a stupid waste of time.. until something happens I suppose.

Every blessing
Hilary

From: Peter Mann - Buzz Associates [<mailto:peter@buzzassociates.co.uk>]
Sent: 14 July 2021 17:13
To: Hilary Young
Cc: Nicola Jenkins
Subject: Re: St Denis' churchyard, East Hatley - insurance for grass cutting, July 2021

I'd rate them all as 'low' (there being no history, as far as I'm aware, of any serious accidents) – until, as you say, something happens!

Peter