

St Denis' church and churchyard / nature reserve

Update for 18th October 2022 meeting of Hatley Parish Council

St Denis' church

Future uses of the church

Our current thoughts are that it will not really be practical to hold events such as concerts or plays in the church mainly because of financial liability – exacerbated by the church having no electricity or water supply, poor accessibility and inadequate parking for numerous visitors. However, daytime displays of art or other things, which would need to be organised and run by those involved, could well take place; we are open to more ideas. We will need to obtain permission of the Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC) for any events.

At the 19 July meeting of Hatley Parish Council, we asked (Minute 7 of the draft minutes) that a request for volunteers for a new group, called perhaps 'Friends of St Denis', be advertised on the website. However, after further thought and discussion, and principally because we think large public events are not feasible, we now feel that a new group is unnecessary.

Peter Mann is happy to open the church every day and check all is OK with the building. Nicola Jenkins deputises for Peter and is happy to sweep the church. Peter Mann and Joyce Denby are in regular contact with the FoFC and can give advice to potential event organisers. They are willing to show visitors round the church on request. The St Denis' Local Nature Reserve Management Group is established and continues to look after the churchyard, which is owned by the Parochial Church Council.

Now that Cllr Carole Cooper has initiated setting up of a group of Hatley volunteers who might help with any jobs that need doing within the parish as a whole, we could seek helpers from this group if tasks at the church should come along, as long as Carole is in agreement. We can air these thoughts at the 18 October parish council meeting, time permitting.

Heritage Open Days

St Denis' was open for guided tours from 11 am to 4.00 pm on 9, 10, and 11 September during England's 2022 Heritage Open Days (HOD) festival. The weather was good on Friday and Sunday but we had heavy showers on Saturday.

In preparation for the event, Peter Mann provided details for the HOD's website. His article published on page 17 of the [September issue of the Gazette](#) announced it and pictured the new plasterwork and repaired reredos which allow the church to be open daily. Peter printed A3 photos and sketches of the interior of the church from early times to the present day for the display boards (still on show) and produced a four-sided A5 hand out of '39 things about St Denis' as you look round' (copies are in the church).

Joyce Denby put on display her long and constantly-updated volume on 'A history of East Hatley: its families and church' and the latest version of her 25-page document: 'A short history of East Hatley: its families and church'. She made four beautiful flower arrangements. Joyce and Peter made other display cards explaining the various features of the church. Nicola Jenkins arranged a rota of helpers and provided refreshments of soft drinks; unopened cartons were given to the food bank in Gamlingay.

Joyce Denby and Peter Mann showed people around the church and told them about its history. A sincere vote of thanks to them for all their preparatory work and for conducting guided tours throughout the three days.

Visitors completed an anonymous 'tick-box' questionnaire to ascertain what they thought might be appropriate for a new east window. Most popular is a coloured window, Victorian style, brightly coloured; next is a clear window incorporating a leaded feature. The design with the most votes is for a window with some pictorial reference to Saint Denis. Full results of the survey are in the appendix. The replacement of the east window is the main remaining renovation to be carried out when funds are available.

A total of 51 visited (plus five dogs). Six people came on Friday. The 14 who visited on Sunday expressed the most interest in the church building and were most generous with donations. 31 came on Saturday which was also the 'Ride & Stride' for Hatley St George church. We encouraged visitors to go there; one or two had already been.

Visitors came from Bedford, Cambridge, Great Gransden, Harlton, Harston, Haslingfield, Holmfirth (Yorkshire – visiting Revd. Hilary Young in Gamlingay), Huntingdon, London (visiting friends in East Hatley), Oakington (with an American visitor), Potton, Royston, Rushden, St Neots, Stapleford and Waresley. They included Katie Jackson from the Friends of Friendless Churches, the Breeds (a gravestone of a family member is in the churchyard), Dawn Kerridge, a keyholder of St Giles' in Tadlow which the FoFC is acquiring, Colin and Ruby Croot from Waresley, and Jo Mills, who headed the legal team at South Cambridgeshire District Council for many years and had made the first contact with Matthew Saunders, then FoFC's Director.

Thank you very much to the team of people who welcomed and recorded visitors: Mike Casey, Jo and Peter Haywood, Nicola Jenkins, Charlie Norman and Al Smith.

£108.00 was raised in donations for the Friends of Friendless Churches. Several people were keen the money should go towards the new east window.

We are not totally convinced that the time and effort that needs to be put into the HOD event justifies running it next year, or indeed until a new stained glass east window is installed. Visitor numbers were the lowest since the first HOD in 2019, with only six from Hatley, despite all parishioners having been leafleted and reminded on the village Facebook and WhatsApp, and signs at the end of the East Hatley road and the footpath to the church. Contributory factors might well have been the television and radio coverage of the death of the Queen (on 8 September) and the fact that local residents had already seen the recent renovations.

Since the HOD, we are aware of a steady stream of visitors to the church as evidenced by the number of the '39 things' leaflet being taken.

Cave spiders

Jason Steel, a keen entomologist, was very interested in the cave spiders in the chamber under the church and photographed them on 11 September. He is sending some photos and a report on the spiders that we can put on the Hatley website.

We owe sincere thanks to Peter Mann for liaising with the FoFC, for documenting work on St Denis' on the website, and for opening and closing the church each day. As always, thanks to Joyce Denby and Peter for showing round occasional visitors.

St Denis' churchyard / local nature reserve

Peter Mann mowed the churchyard and tidied round the graves before the Heritage Open Days in September.

A session is planned for Sunday 30 October (starting at 10.30 am) to tidy up the hedgerow which is encroaching into the western edge of the churchyard, particularly around the graves, and to cut back some overhanging branches along the northern perimeter.

Nicola Jenkins is making an effort to get permission from the Parochial Church Council for the dead elm in the southern perimeter to be reduced in height. She has approached Mark Wilsher and Chris Smith via Sebastian Kindersley to ask if they can help in reducing the height of the live elms on that side.

The St Denis' Local Nature Reserve Management Group welcomes new members especially now Sarah Brennan and John O'Sullivan have moved from East Hatley. A remote but huge 'thank you' to both of them for their great help in all the tidy-up sessions and for their excellent advice over the years on managing the churchyard and on all aspects of wildlife.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann / 17 October 2022

NEW EAST WINDOW DESIGN – Your help needed!

The next project at St Denis' is the installation of glass in the East window. We would like to know what you think might be appropriate. The old window was installed after the chancel was rebuilt in 1874, and had a depiction of the Ascension with flanking angels.

Below are some thoughts on what might replace it. **Please will you tick the boxes alongside those that appeal to you most.**

Glass coloured or clear?

Coloured

Victorian-type bright colours like the old window?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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More muted palette to play down effect/let in more light?

<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Clear

To match style of other windows?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Incorporating leaded design, e.g. fleur de lys (as before), angel?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Design – abstract or pictorial?

Abstract

Colours to tone with rest of building

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Pictorial

Ref to St Denis? **NB** – He carried his head under his arm!

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Ref to Ascension, as before?

<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Ref to 're-birth', symbolic?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Ref to Nature, as sited within reserve?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Ref to angels, as before?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
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Ref to sponsor – offers very gratefully received!

<input type="checkbox"/>	
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