

St Denis' church and churchyard / nature reserve annual report 2022 / 2023

St Denis' church

Completion of Phase 3 of the renovation work

The latest phase of renovation work to St Denis' church, which began in January 2022, was completed on 17 May 2022. The nave walls were repaired and replastered with a traditional lime putty mortar, sealed with a light coloured lime wash coating to match William Butterfield's 1874 restoration. This has transformed the building into an attractive bright space. Historical features uncovered which remain unplastered include four putlogs used for wooden scaffolding, the bricked north door and its surrounds and an area of original fieldstones and rubble above the south door.

Trustees of the Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC) who visited the church on 4 July, together with Rachel Morley, FoFC's director, were very impressed with the result. The improvements have enabled the church to be open every day from 8.30 am until dusk.

Heritage Open Days

St Denis' joined in the Heritage Open Days (HOD) festival on 9, 10 and 11 September with guided tours conducted by Joyce Denby and Peter Mann. Peter produced a display of photos and sketches of the interior of the church from early times to the present day and a hand-out of *39 things about St Denis' as you look round*. He also wrote an article in September's *Gazette* based on his Hatley website piece at www.hatley.info/hatleys-churches/st-denis-east-hatley/st-denis-re-skinned.

Joyce Denby put on display her long and constantly-updated volume on *A history of East Hatley: its families and church* plus a short version of this. She made four beautiful flower arrangements. Nicola Jenkins organised a team of people to welcome and record visitors.

Replacement of the east window is the main remaining renovation to be carried out when funds are available. A questionnaire on visitor preferences for this revealed the most popular to be a brightly coloured Victorian style window and the preferred design one with some pictorial reference to Saint Denis.

A total of 51 visited the HODs and £108.00 was raised in donations for the FoFC. Visitor numbers were lower than normal. We might not open for the HOD event again until a new stained glass east window is installed.

Thanks are due to those who helped: Mike Casey, Jo and Peter Haywood, Nicola Jenkins, Charlie Norman and Al Smith. A sincere vote of thanks to Joyce and Peter for all their preparatory work and for conducting guided tours.

Greater Cambridge Design and Construction Award 2023 for St Denis'

Stephanie Norris, the architect employed by the FoFC, entered St Denis' for a competition run by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service and the Cambridge Forum for the Construction Industry. She won a [Greater Cambridge Design and Construction Award 2023](#) for the church. Winners were announced at an awards ceremony on 13 March at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge.

Church in general

A segment of the stage no longer needed in the village hall is proving a useful table for the *39 things about St Denis' as you look round* leaflet and other literature, and the visitors' book.

The display boards with photos and sketches of the interior of St Denis' from early times to the present day prepared for the HOD remain on show as a useful information source for visitors.

Current thinking is that the church could be used for summer daytime displays of art or other exhibits, organised and run by those involved. We are open to ideas.

Talk by Peter Mann to Wrestlingworth History Society

Peter Mann presented an illustrated talk to Wrestlingworth History Society entitled *Rescuing a ruin: St Denis', East Hatley and its prominent people* in Wrestlingworth Memorial Hall on 16 March. It was well received by an audience of around 30 people. The Society donated £35 to the FoFC.

We owe a sincere vote of thanks to Peter Mann for liaising with the FoFC, for updating and improving website pages on St Denis' church, and for opening the church every morning and closing it at dusk. As always, thanks to Joyce Denby and Peter for showing round occasional visitors.

St Denis' Churchyard / Local Nature Reserve

Peter Mann mowed the footpath and churchyard/nature reserve and tidied the graves during the year.

A party of volunteers worked hard on 30 October weeding graves and cutting back overhanging branches and trimming brambles on the western edge of the churchyard. Our thanks go to Ruth Chan, Joyce Denby, Peter Hayward, Nicola Jenkins, Peter Mann and Charlie Norman.

The elm trees in the southern 'hedgerow' between the churchyard and Sebastian Kindersley's property have been lowered to a manageable height to allow more light into that side of the nature reserve, important as species-rich grassland. Half a dozen healthy trees have been left at full height and the dead elm reduced to about ten feet.

This job was accomplished over three sessions in November and January. Mark Wilsher chain-sawed trees adjacent to both sides of the metal fence and cut larger trunks into logs, aided by helpers who dragged the thinner branches to Mark's chipper, fed them into the machine and cleared the brash.

Peter Mann subsequently spread the wood chippings over tree roots protruding on the footpath leading into the churchyard, to prevent people tripping. Nicola made woodpiles in three corners of the nature reserve, for the wildlife.

Sincere thanks to all those who helped on this arduous task: Mike Casey, Joyce Denby, Steve Greenhalgh, Peter Hanlon, Nicola Jenkins, Peter Mann, Charlie Norman, Alastair Smith and Mark Wilsher.

Lucy Wilson, the local Wildlife Trust's Conservation Officer, is arranging for a full plant survey to be carried out this spring/early summer and will revise the 2010 management plan.

Bee orchids and Star of Bethlehem were among the flowers in late spring/early summer 2022. Snowdrops made a good show during the winter months. Cowslips and oxlips (or maybe hybrids) have been abundant this spring.

As always, we are extremely grateful to Peter Mann for mowing the churchyard and the footpaths. We were sorry to say goodbye last year to Sarah Brennan and John O'Sullivan who have helped in the churchyard and advised on all aspects of flora and fauna over many years.

For more detail on both the church and churchyard/nature reserve please refer to the reports for the July and October 2022 and January and March 2023 Parish Council meetings on <https://www.hatley.info/parish-council/reports/>.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann / 15 May 2023