

St Denis' church and churchyard / nature reserve

Update for the 18th March 2025 meeting of Hatley Parish Council

St Denis' church

The Trustees of the Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC) have discussed Aidan McRae Thomson's revised design of the new stained-glass east window. They are happy for Stephanie Norris, the project's architect, to apply for planning consent for repairs to the stonework and installation of the window. The Trustees' comments and further suggestions for further developing the design have been passed on to Aidan.

Unfortunately, rising damp continues to affect the interior of the church which looked so perfect when the renovations were finished in the spring of 2022. The wet winter hasn't helped. The plaster has darkened in many areas and some has bubbled and fallen off. Areas of the stone flooring look black and water droplets are occasionally visible on the tiles. Some green mould has grown at the base of one column. We realise the problem can't be rectified without huge cost.

An organ for St Denis' church

On 15th February, the FoFC emailed Peter Mann with a note from the charity *Pipe Up for Pipe Organs* about an organ seeking a new home – and would it be suitable for St Denis'?

The FoFC thought it might fit into the south west corner of the nave (where the current free-standing display resides).

The organ, from the Methodist Church in Rushton Spencer, Staffordshire, is very similar to the one in Hatley St George church (both have 23 pipes).

Although now powered by electricity, it includes a hand-pumping mechanism with the handle on the front of the organ operated by the organist's assistant – an important feature for churches like St Denis' which lack electricity.

Peter responded...

'It looks a bit too grand for St Denis' church!

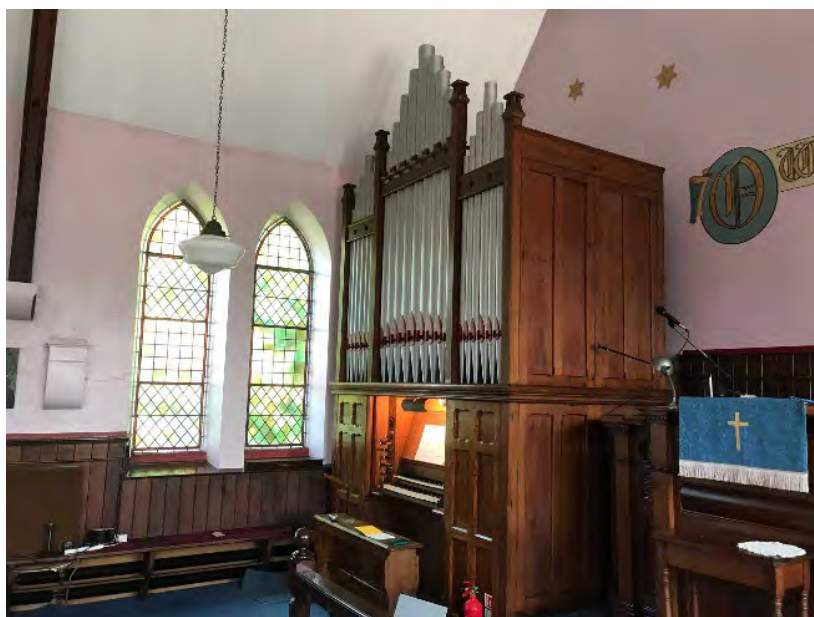
'That aside, my concern would be for the wellbeing of the organ – this time of year it's extremely cold inside the church and with a high water table in the ground around the building, it can be quite damp inside too. The church is also home to several bats – which excrete everywhere.

'Even though the windows and some of the floor hatches are permanently open to aid air circulation (and the main door is also open all day), which helps to an extent, the atmosphere is entirely temperature / humidity dependent.

‘And if the organ were to be installed, but with no electricity and therefore needing two people to operate it, the likelihood is it would only be played occasionally, so its preservation could quickly become an issue.

‘I would also be concerned about the weight [around a tonne] of the instrument and whether the floor, which rests on timber beams, about 500 cm off the earth base, could take it.’

Common sense prevailed and the FoFC is looking to see if one of its other churches is more suitable.



▲ The proposed organ in the Methodist Church, Rushton Spencer, Staffs.



▲ It could fit into the south west corner of St Denis’ – the white spot in front of the display shows how far it would jut out if tight into the corner; its pipes would probably obscure the putlog.



- ▲ An alternative position could be against the south wall, indicated by the white spots and tape measure.

Incidentally, in 2019 the FoFC was offered the organ presented to St Denis' by Downing College in 1875 (but now in private ownership) – quite possibly a foot-pumped harmonium (or a pump organ), ideal for a small country church with no electricity. The offer came to nothing; the same basic issue of the organ's wellbeing applying then too.

Thanks, as always, to Peter Mann for keeping an eye on the church, for opening and closing it daily, and for liaising with the FoFC.

St Denis' Churchyard / Local Nature Reserve

On the morning of 22nd February, Joyce Denby, Nicola Jenkins and Mark Wilsher carried out further work to the western edge of the churchyard, pruning spindle, cutting back suckers, uprooting some brambles and moving the cuttings to the dead hedge. Mark felled a couple more dead elms in that border. Peter Mann filled in snuffle holes made by badgers looking for earthworms and grubs. Thanks to all the volunteers.

Spring flowers now to be seen include primrose, early dog violet, red dead-nettle, celandine and cultivated daffodil. The lovely snowdrop show is over. The first signs of star of Bethlehem are visible.

Scything

A reminder that anyone is welcome to come along to Wellhouse Meadow in Haslingfield on 30th March (10.00 am to 3.00 pm) when scything expert Jim McVittie will teach scything techniques and how to sharpen and peen scythes.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann / 17 March 2025