

St Denis' church, East Hatley

2018 / 2019 annual report

This has been a quite year in terms of work on the building – the Friends of Friendless Churches, which owns it, continues to search for around £110,000 to complete its project of restoring the inside, including stabilising the internal walls (at the moment they are rather crumbly), putting new windows in the chancel (including a stained glass east window) and returning the sanctuary to how it would have looked after William Butterfield completed his restoration of the church in 1874.

Because of the poor state of the internal walls, the church remains locked, although it is open for special occasions and on request – a notice has been added to the noticeboard in the churchyard for anyone interested to ring Peter Mann, who is one of the building's key holders.

At the 15 January 2019 Hatley Parish Council meeting, the following key holders were approved (the 'first' and 'second' key holders have the keys – including to the basement – which the 'deputies' have access to):

First key holder – Margot Eagle as Chair of Hatley Parish Council (plus Mark Wilsher)
Deputy first key holder – Gill Wilsher

Second key holder – Peter Mann (plus Joyce Denby)
Deputy second key holder – Nicola Jenkins

On 2nd April, Rachel Morley, FoFC Director, e-mailed Peter Mann to say:

I will get to work on east window soon. I need to have the architect inspect with the glazier and prepare a specification. This will all take some time, as the Stained Glass Repository needs to approve the new configuration, and also, we will need listed building consent, I fear.

On a similar vein, I have a meeting with a TV company which is planning a series on medieval craftsmanship. My plan is to suggest St Denis' as the location... More anon.

I have had an e-mail from a chap in Cambridge who owns the organ presented to St Denis' from Downing College in 1875. (It has a plaque on it saying as much and he bought it for £95 decades ago.) It is in working order, though one key sticks a little. I have no idea of dimensions, etc. and will reply to this gentleman soon, but I wondered – do you think there would be an interest in having the organ back at the church?

Peter Mann replied:

Stained glass window – well understand it can never be a 'five minute project'.

TV – presumably one point will be an example of how one turns a collection of field stones into a rigid building... which I keep telling everyone is no easy task.

Organ – it would be wonderful to have it back... but two practical points: how is it powered and can it withstand being in a building with no heating (although that may be as it was in 1875!)? If it is to return, probably best if it's after you've completed phase two of the refurb so as to minimise dust and small bits of grit off the walls getting into the organ.

Rachel acknowledged these points; there has not been any further news.

Open days and visitors to St Denis'

To celebrate the completion of phase one of FoFC's restoration of St Denis', an 'open evening' with drinks and nibbles, was held on 20th July 2018 for everyone in East Hatley, and further afield, to look round. Rachel Morley gave a background talk with a brief history of the church, how it was built and of William Butterfield's vision, as part of his 1874 restoration, of an inclusive church – the gentry's box pews were replaced by standard 'open' pews so everyone could be part of church services. She detailed the FoFC's own restoration work, in particular the new floor and windows in the nave – the 2018 St Denis' annual report covered this in full.

From 13th to 16th September 2018, the church was also opened each day as part of the 2018 Heritage Open Days – HOD days allow visitors to look round historic buildings not normally open. Some 70 people came to see St Denis' – mostly not from Hatley after the church was featured in the *Daily Mail* and *Metro* newspapers, as well as the local press. Visitors donated £72.00 which was passed to the FoFC. Considerable effort was put in by Nicola Jenkins to prepare for the event, so thanks to her for making it happen as well as Joyce Denby, Margot Eagle, Peter Mann and Angela Steel who gave their time to show visitors around – and also to Allen Miller who donated a display stand (now kept in the church) and Rachel Morley who provided a simple flyer about the church.

On 24th March 2019, 24 members of Comberton Ramblers visited the church – and donated £35.70.

This year's HOD scheme runs from 13th to 22nd September – its theme is 'Powerful people', which fits in well as Sir George Downing, who owned East Hatley back in the mid-1600s, was certainly a powerful man. It's to be decided which days St Denis' will be open.

St Denis' churchyard

The small team of volunteers continues to keep the churchyard looking neat and tidy – the dry summer making it easier than in previous years as Peter Mann was able to cut and collect the long grass with his ride-on mower instead of needing to use the 'St Denis' scissor mower.

Thanks also to Steve Greenhalgh, who mowed paths around the church earlier in the year (and again this year), and to regular volunteers Sarah Brennan, Jo and Peter Hayward, Jeremy and Sofie Hooper (and children), Nicola Jenkins, Mervyn Lack, John O'Sullivan and Angela and Kevin Steel for their hard work on 'tidy-up' Sundays.

We still need to lower some of the trees / hedging on the side adjacent to Sebastian's land as recommended by Siân Williams in her report of 2017.

There has been one burial – on 9th November 2018 of East Hatley resident John Lanchbery. John was always part of the churchyard tidy-up team and particularly knowledgeable on its flora and fauna, often being the first to spot interesting grasses, flowers and passing insects and mice.

The burial in the churchyard of Patricia Brown is due to take place on 8th June 2019.

Peter Mann, 21st May 2019.