

Notes used and provided by Rachel Morley, Director of the Friends of Friendless Churches for the talk she gave during the St Denis' open evening, 20th July 2018

About the church

The nave dates to about 1300 but it is recorded that there was a church here in 1217. The church had fallen into serious disrepair in the 19th century leading to the heavy restoration by Butterfield. Butterfield rebuilt the chancel, added the vestry and rebuilt the porch.

The church consists of a nave, chancel, south porch with furnace chamber under, and a small north vestry. The nave dates from c.1300, although it is recorded that a church existed here in 1217. The south doorway is mid-14th century, of two continuous wave moulded orders – as are the ogee-arches on either side of chancel.

East Hatley, like the adjoining villages of Hatley St. George (also known as Hungry Hatley due to its poverty), is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086. It was never a large village having 21 peasants and 3 slaves in 1086, 19 taxpayers in 1327 and only 10 in 1524. The population rose from c.100 in the first half of the 19th century to 155 in 1871 only to fall again by 1891.

From 1663 the advowson was held by Sir George Downing, the Lord of the Manor. This passed to Downing College in 1800 along with the other Downing estates. A cartouche of the arms of Downing impaling Howard with an oblong date panel inscribed 'AN^O DOM 1673' was set in the tympanum of the porch.

The manor, church and parsonage were all moated.

The chancel was mostly rebuilt in 1874 by William Butterfield, who added the north vestry and rebuilt the south porch. The walls are of fieldstone with clunch and limestone dressings. The north wall has three windows restored, including two lancets one with a cinque-foiled and the other with a trefoiled head. The third window is of two trefoil lights with a quatrefoil in the head.

Before restoration by Butterfield, the interior of the church contained both box and standard pews and could accommodate about 84 adults. The box pews, which were on the north wall, were too high and obscured the view from the poor who worshiped to the west of them. There was a clunch tomb with a black marble slab set on top in the south-east corner of the nave and a pulpit and desk to the west of it. The nave floor was paved in Ketton stone. The chancel roof had a flat plastered ceiling that showed signs of serious problems with the timbers.

In 1873 there were 150 inhabitants in East Hatley, 145 of whom claimed to be church attendees, however only 17 attended monthly communion in the 1870s when the church was restored and half that number did so in 1885. As the cost of church repairs couldn't be met, St. Denis was abandoned in 1961 in favour of a new church that was partially furnished with fittings from the old building.

1985 – passed to SCDC – stripped – even floor-boards! A £130,000 package of restoration work from 2005 to 2006 saw the walls and roof repaired, including retiling. Funded by South Cambridgeshire District Council, English Heritage and Hatley Parish Council, the work left the church wind and watertight, but not safe to use on a regular basis.

On the building's 800th birthday, it was transferred to FOFC. Transfer included a £60,000 grant from the Council to fund work to bring the church back into a useable state for people, including replacing the floor and glazing.

Much of what we see today is the work of William Butterfield - born in London in 1814. After having been articled to a builder for three years, he joined an architectural company in Worcester where he studied early English church building. He became involved with the High Church Movement of the 1840s, being elected a member of the Camden Society. He was chosen to design the model church of the Ecclesiological Society, All Saint's, Margaret Street, London. In all he was involved in the construction or restoration of over 100 churches, chapels and cathedrals, both here and in Australia and South Africa.

His buildings are highly distinctive and range from the muted schemes of most of his churches (Tadlow and East Hatley), to the screaming polychromic effect of All Saint's, Margaret Street. His objectives on restoration projects were to improve the structural and environmental elements of the building to make it safe and warm as well as re-arranging the interior as necessary to allow a better use of space for liturgical purposes. His philosophy was to maintain as many of the medieval elements of a building as possible, designing fixtures and fittings if necessary, to remove all unnecessary post- reformation material unless it was of a high standard and to carry out sympathetic restoration rather than just repair, re-using as much of the original material as possible.

The documentary evidence indicates that the work at East Hatley was estimated at £1300, £250 of which was given by Downing College, a further £250 by the tenants of East Hatley and £550 from funds raised by Mrs Sykes (the incumbent's wife). The work was to include the thorough repair of the nave including the roof, the complete restoration of the chancel and its roof and extending it to its original length, replacing the existing floor with tiles, providing new oak benches and other furniture, installing heating and adding a vestry.

Butterfield's specification for this building survives and we know that at EH, rebuilding was more extensive than initially envisaged. The nave roof was not

simply repaired, but entirely rebuilt in mainly Baltic pine (crown-post) – style of original maintained; the chancel was rebuilt, as were the windows.

The wall decorations in the chancel lie largely above a stone dado and primarily consist of parallel, horizontal lines with red lozenges above and a border to the vestry door and windows. These are created using red and black tiles, presumably the Minton tiles mentioned.

The altar and reredos are amongst the most significant symbols within the church, and those at Hadstock and East Hatley are remarkably similar in concept and design. In both cases the reredos is stone built with a central crucifix flanked by architectural devices containing coloured tiles, which contrasts well with the generally restrained wall decoration within the chancel.

The chancel reredos consists of a central crucifix within a trefoiled arch flanked by two orders of quatrefoils, all of which is set against a red tile background.

The aim of the Victorian High Movement was to reclaim the architectural nirvana of the 14th century. Many churches suffering decay and failure, neglect or simple wear and tear. Wanted to return to this high point of religious expression in architecture. They also sought to improve the environment – install vestries, heating, removed box pews deemed inappropriate, etc.

The use of colour was one of the most significant elements of the High Movement. In most of Butterfield's churches colour is confined to the sanctuary, the floor and the font and often only the east window contained stained glass.

The more restrained decoration at St. Denis or St. Giles in neighbouring Tadlow is not only more appropriate for a rural parish church, but also demonstrates Butterfield's shift away from introducing highly polychromatic detail in an ancient interior following his severely criticised interventions at St. Cross, Winchester in the mid-1860s

First QQ – “cheap and nasty” – statement of its time. Whilst it is easy to condemn High Victorian ecclesiastical architecture as a pale imitation of its gothic ancestry, to criticise the philosophy behind Butterfield's work and its execution in churches is unjust.

What we've done

The first phase of work, which began in February of this year [2018], sought to make the church weather-proof and safe for public access. This has now been completed.

To make the building water-tight, the many slipped, broken and missing roof-tiles were replaced or re-fixed, and cracks and open joints in masonry (particularly to the porch and buttresses) were repointed in lime mortar.

The most dramatic works are undoubtedly to the floors and windows.

New glazing has been installed in the nave windows and black-powder coated metal guards installed on the outside.

In the nave, tongue and groove floor-boards have been laid with three inspection hatches, so that the medieval timbers beneath can be seen. The central walkway to the nave has been and re-tiled with some salvaged, some new tiles.

In the choir-stalls area of the chancel, an entire new floor structure has been created and new floor-boards installed. The York stone edging to tiled walkway and the tiled chancel step have both been repaired and restored.

Since 2016, the Friends have spent just over £113,000 on the building.

We are indebted to Sebastian Kindersley for generously offering his garden as access to the church for the contractors. Without his kindness, this work would have been a lot more difficult!

Future plans

Going forward, we intend to install glazing to the chancel. We hope to install a stained-glass window by Heaton, Butler and Bayne, salvaged from a church in Nordelph, Norfolk in the east window.*

Internal wall and ceiling finishes throughout must be repaired and renewed.

It is estimated that an additional £100,000 is needed to complete the repairs.

We look forward to working with the local community to bring this building back into use.

* 2019 update – subsequent investigation found this window to be too big to fit into St Denis' east window.