

St Denis' church and churchyard / nature reserve

Update for the 21 October 2025 meeting of
Hatley Parish Council

St Denis' church

East window

Stephanie Norris, the Friend of Friendless Churches (FoFC)'s architect for this project, has reported that the Trustees have accepted the quote from Lodge & Sons to carry out the first phase of the works, which will be the repair of the masonry of the window surround.

Phase 1 Stonework repairs and window templating

- Temporary security boarding is removed.
- Internal and external scaffold installed and stonework repairs by Lodge & Sons.
- Aidan McRae Thomson (the stained-glass artist responsible for the new window's design) to template for the new window while access is in place.
- Scaffold is removed and lighter weight temporary protections put in place across the window openings.

Phase 2 New window installation

- Scaffold re-erected by Lodge & Sons and window installed by Aidan (approximately 12 months after window templating by Aidan).

Lodge & Sons is proposing a 12-week programme for Phase 1. To help fix a date, Stephanie contacted Rachel Bates of Castle Hill Ecology for advice. (Rachel, as a member of Cambridgeshire Bat Group, has been voluntarily monitoring the bats emerging from St Denis' for several years). Her response was:

'The roost inside the church is a maternity roost, and the bats are present from May through to October-ish. However, the roost is at the opposite end of the church, in the roof beams at the west end, and fly around inside before leaving at the north-east church entrance. So, repairing the east window itself should be fine as there are no roosting bats nearby (that we know of) and you won't be obstructing any roost access points.

'It'd be best to avoid the core maternity months (May-August) when females give birth and raise their young to avoid any possible disturbance to individuals. Now is a good time to do the works.

'Please do proceed with caution, and if you can make Lodge and Sons aware of the presence of bats that'd be great. If a bat is found at any point, works to the window should cease immediately and you should contact me (or another ecologist) for advice on how to proceed.'

Donations to the Friends of Friendless Churches

Since May 2023 when Peter first put a collection bowl on the little table in St Denis' (a year after he started opening the church on a daily basis), the donations placed in it, mostly coins plus the occasional fiver, have amounted to £100.

Peter passed this to the FoFC on 27th August. Donations have ranged from 9p to £5 – the average is £2.41.

Visitors

Visitors to the church have included the Breed family with ancestors in the churchyard and the Kratvilles from Montana, USA searching for their ancestors' graves.

Chest

A large, heavy chest which looks as though it is made from an old pew was donated to St Denis' on 23rd July. It usefully doubles as a seat in the church. It is covered with a plastic sheet each evening to protect it from bat droppings and urine.

Cave spiders

Livi Welch, a master's student at St Hugh's college, Oxford, studying the invasive cave spider *Meta bourneti*, asked the FoFC if he could look at the spiders in the furnace chamber under St Denis'.

He did this on 26th September and reported finding 20 cave spiders. In the last 'official' check, Jason Steel counted 16 spiders on 9th September 2022.

Bats

Al Smith and Nicola have counted the bats emerging from beneath the guttering on the vestry on twelve evenings during this year, the final occasion being 9th October. Basic results of counts are in the table on the following page.

A community evening for residents to observe the bats was led by Rachel Bates of Cambridgeshire Bat Group on Tuesday 19th August. Six children were among the total of 13 who joined in.

Rachel talked about the bats, their behaviour and monitoring them with an infrared camera and echolocator. Species recorded on the detectors were: common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared and the usual one barbastelle.

Two other families with children came along on other evenings when Al talked about the bats and monitoring them.

**Brown long-eared emerging from St Denis' church
between 13 April and 9 October 2025**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of bats observed</i>	<i>Time first bat emerged</i>	<i>Additional observers; comments</i>
13 April	6*	20.04	
2 June	22*	21.34	
9 June	21*	21.27	
16 June	23*	21.39	
26 June	17*		Rachel Bates plus three Cambs Bat Group members; Serotine bat may have emerged from church roof
14 July	18*	21.42	
13 August	29	20.34	
19 August	No count	20.47	Community evening, 12 from Hatley plus Rachel Bates
25 August	25*	20.29	2 East Hatley residents; 1 bat still flying round the church at the end of the count
21 September	6	19.35	Family from East Hatley; 1 or 2 bats still flying round church at the end of the count; cold evening
1 October	18	19.04	Family from Gamlingay
9 October	21	18.34	Friend from Gamlingay

* IR camera also used.

Thanks

As always, thanks to Peter Mann for opening the church each morning and closing it at dusk, and for liaising with the FoFC and visitors.

St Denis' Churchyard / Local Nature Reserve

Scything and mowing

On the evening of 22nd July a total of 13 people, with varying levels of expertise in scything, scythed the southern side and about a third of the north side of the churchyard. It was an enjoyable evening with good weather. A second session arranged for 12 August on the [Cambridgeshire Scything Workgroup's calendar](#) wasn't needed as the remaining area was intended to be left as long grass for the benefit of wildlife.

Thanks to all those who helped goes to: Joshua and Helen Johnson, Nicola Jenkins and Mark Wilsher from East Hatley, Peter Condon, Connor Leaf-Grimshaw, Hilary Young and first-time scyther Harriet Gould from Gamlingay, and five other members of the Scything Workgroup from some distance away.

The cuttings were left a few days for any seeds to drop then piled in the north west corner on 26th and 28th July by Helen and Josh, Peter Condon and Nicola. Unfortunately, the intention for the remainder of the northern side of the churchyard to remain uncut wasn't honoured in error but was cut soon afterwards.

In September, Helen Johnson, Connor Leaf-Grimshaw, Janice and Trevor Bellars and Peter Hayward scarified the grass in the southern part of the churchyard.

Thanks to Peter Mann for keeping the footpaths and an area in front of the south side of the church mown during the summer.

Wildlife

A nest of ground wasps, in a snuffle hole excavated by a badger, was on the footpath on the southern border from July to August. Peter put up a warning notice.

The badgers are digging in the churchyard but have already made use of a significant part of the pile of cuttings.

A hornet or wasp nest (we're not sure) has been built on the top of the drainpipe to the left of the church porch.

Flora and fauna

Sloes are in abundance, haws and rose hips are plentiful and pink fruits are ripening on the spindle. Blackberries have been absent from the western border as we were perhaps rather too enthusiastic with cutting back the brambles on the western border last winter but a large high bramble bush on the north east border has fruits.

The large clump of autumn crocus, *Colchicum* is over but a few single flowers of saffron crocus, *Crochus sativus* are out near the porch. Yellow bristly oxtongue *Picris echinoides* or *Helminthotheca echinoides* and a few pink clover are flowering.

Big butterfly count

A 15-minute count was made of butterflies in the churchyard on 19th July for Butterfly Conservation's [Big Butterfly Count](#). The numbers, higher than last year's were: 3 gatekeepers; 4 meadow browns; 2 large whites and 2 common blues.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann / 20th October 2025