

# **St Denis' church and churchyard / nature reserve**

Annual report for the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2026 meeting of  
Hatley Parish Council

## **St Denis' church**

### **East Window**

The masonry of the east window surround has been successfully repaired by Lodge & Sons with Michael Hayhow as contract manager. The work was overseen by Stephanie Norris, the architect employed by Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC). The new stained glass is scheduled to be installed by the end of April 2027.

The repair work is described in the application for listed building consent [25/01044/LBC](#) which was submitted to South Cambs District Council on 17th March 2025 and granted, with conditions, on 23rd May 2025. It was undertaken outside the months of May to August, avoiding the core maternity season of the bats roosting in the church, as advised by Rachel Bates of the Cambridgeshire Bat Group.

Stephanie Norris and Michael Hayhow visited East Hatley on 9th January 2026 to discuss erecting scaffolding and carrying out the renovation work to the masonry of the window surround.

Scaffolding was erected inside the east window and scaffolding and hording outside the east window on 26th January. Stuart Thompson, Lodge & Sons' stonemason and Ryan Johnson, his apprentice, spent a week in early February measuring the tracery prior to repositioning, repining and installing new sections of missing tracery with Stoke Ground Base Bed Bath Stone.

The stonemasons discovered that the tracery did not line up, there being a 25 mm vertical spread across the window, and it would be impossible to move sections back into place with all quatrefoils aligned.

Stephanie Norris and Rachel Morley, FoFC's Director met with the stonemasons on 4th February to discuss the best way forward. It was agreed it was important to retain as much of the historic fabric as possible. They accepted the window tracery could not be perfectly symmetrical from the middle line and the geometry of the quatrefoils could not be equally set out, but specified the curved lines should not have 'steps' in them.

Other points agreed were to replace the internal stone indent at the apex of the arch with a hard lime mortar and to remove the two metal horizontal bars internally spanning across the window at tracery level.

Abbeygate, the company supplying the stone, visited on 11th February to pattern and advise on best cut lines and support for new stone sections. The new stonework was produced off-site. The stonemasons returned on 9th March to install it, finishing the repairs to the tracery and some work on the inside arch on 18th March. On 24th March they replaced the black

plywood security boards, which had covered the window since 2006, with clear Perspex.

Aidan McRae Thomson, the stained-glass artist creating the new window, templated the tracery on 16th April 2026. From this he will produce full scale drawings of each section of window as the next stage in his production process. He is aiming to have the new glass ready for installation by spring 2027.

Stephanie Norris also visited the church on 16th April. She issued a Practical Completion Certificate of the works which includes a 12-month rectification period, concluding on 24th April 2027.

The scaffolding and hording were taken down on 24th April. It was only then that the full appreciation of the repaired tracery was revealed. Lodge tidied up after their repair work and, on 30th April, washed the dusty church floor.

Peter Mann has kept the Hatley website updated with illustrated news on this project. See [https://hatley.info/news\\_events/news/st-denis-new-east-window-more-action](https://hatley.info/news_events/news/st-denis-new-east-window-more-action).

### **Rising damp**

Unfortunately rising damp continues to affect the interior of the church, causing some plaster to darken and flake off the walls. The FoFC is well aware of this.

### **Chest**

A large, heavy chest, thought to have been made from an old pew, was donated to St Denis' on 23rd July 2025. It doubles as a seat.

### **Maintenance checks**

Paul How of Cliveden Conservation Workshop of Houghton, Norfolk visited the church on 20th January 2026 to assess what might need to be done.

A fire risk assessment of the church was carried out on 24th February 2026 by Karissa Thomas of Aries Fire Safety.

Spotlight Construction tested the lightning conductor on 27th March 2026 and carried out some remedial work on 24th April.

### **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. A man walking from Cambridge to Worcester Cathedral via many churches called in to look at St Denis'.

### **Donations to the Friends of Friendless Churches**

Peter gave £100 collected in the bowl on the table in the church since May 2023 to the FoFC on 27th August 2025.

## **Bats**

Al Smith and Nicola Jenkins counted the bats emerging from the vestry on twelve evenings between April and October 2025. The maximum count was 29 on 13th August. Details of the counts are on <https://hatley.info/parish-council/reports>. Rachel Bates visited in June with other members of the Cambridgeshire Bat Group to make a count for the [National Bat Monitoring Programme](#) which helps inform bat conservation.

Rachel led an enjoyable community evening on 19th August, talking about the bats and how they're monitored. Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared and one barbastelle bat were recorded on infrared cameras and echo meters. On other evenings Al talked to families about the bats and explained his monitoring equipment.

This year, 2026, 10 bats were recorded on Al's infrared camera on 17th April, an amazing 33 were counted on the warm evening of 1st May and 15 recorded on 12th May.

## **Cave spiders**

Livi Welch, a Master's student from St Hugh's College, Oxford and studying the cave spider *Meta bourneti*, counted 20 cave spiders in the furnace chamber when he visited on 26th September 2025.

## **Thanks**

We owe a sincere vote of thanks to Peter Mann for all he does for the church – opening it every morning and closing it at dusk, liaising with the FoFC, Lodge and Sons and others working on the church, and updating the Hatley website pages. Thanks also to Peter and Joyce Denby for showing round occasional visitors, and thanks to Joyce for the Christmas displays of greenery in the church.

## **St Denis' Churchyard / Local Nature Reserve**

### **Wildlife Trust's Conservation Churchyard Award**

St Denis' churchyard scored sufficient points to gain the [Wildlife Trust's Conservation Churchyard Award](#) at Bronze level in April 2025.

### **Scything and mowing**

On the evening of 22nd July, thirteen people joined in to scythe the south side and some of the north side of the churchyard. The following took part: from East Hatley – Nicola Jenkins, Helen and Joshua Johnson, Mark Wilsher; from Gamlingay – Peter Condon, Harriet Gould, Connor Leaf-Grimshaw, Revd Hilary Young; from some distance away, five other members of the [Cambridgeshire Scything Workgroup](#), all good scythers.

After leaving the scythed grass a few days for seeds to drop, it was piled in the north west corner by Helen and Josh, Peter Condon and Nicola. Unfortunately, the intention of leaving about a third of the churchyard uncut for the benefit of the wildlife wasn't honoured. It was mowed soon afterwards.

The south side of the churchyard was scarified by Helen, Connor, Janice and Trevor Bellars and Peter Hayward in September.

Sincere thanks to all who helped.

Thanks to Peter Mann for mowing the footpaths and round the perimeter of the church last year. We are very grateful to Mark Wilsher and his gardener who now mow the footpaths and to Peter who mows round the church perimeter.

### **Winter working groups**

On 13th December 2025 a large part of the dry moat floor was cleared of fallen trees and young trees and the border alongside was cleared of suckers, bushes and brambles, with the aim of improving the moat's aquatic ecosystem. The task should be finished later in 2026. The brash was used to construct a dead hedge in the north west corner.

A blackthorn tree was cut down and suckers and brambles encroaching onto the south east area of the grassland were dug out on the same day. On 14th February 2026 the brash was moved to the dead hedge on the western edge of the churchyard or to a pile in the NW corner. The south eastern border was further tidied on 22nd February by removing another blackthorn, a young tree and suckers, and pruning the spindle. Brash was removed to the edges of the churchyard.

Sincere thanks to all the volunteers for their hard work on one or more of the winter sessions: Mike Casey, Peter Condon (Gamlingay), Joyce Denby, Peter Hayward, Jeremy Hooper, Nicola Jenkins, Helen Johnson, Connor Leaf-Grimshaw (Gamlingay), Peter Mann, Al Smith, Angela and Kevin Steel, and Mark Wilsher.

### **Flora and fauna**

Sloes, haws and rose hips and spindle fruits were in abundance in what was a bumper year, known as a mast year. Wildflowers included primrose, cowslip, bluebell, star of Bethlehem, orchids, yellow rattle, agrimony, lady's bedstraw, oxeye daisy and snowdrops.

Snuffle holes dug by badgers cause unevenness of the grassland. A notice on the board alerts the public. Ground wasps nested in the footpath on the southern border of the churchyard. Butterflies recorded for the [Big Butterfly Count](#) were more numerous than in 2024.

### **St Denis' Churchyard Task Group**

Members of the Task Group looking after the churchyard are Revd Hilary Young, Nicola Jenkins, Sebastian Kindersley, Peter Mann, Alastair Smith and Mark Wilsher. Meetings, chaired by Hilary and kindly hosted by Sebastian, were held on 5th April and 15th November 2025. Nicola arranges the working parties.

Nicola Jenkins and Peter Mann / 18th May 2026