BATS IN CHURCHES

SAILING TO SUCCESS

ST MARY MAGDALENE, BRAMPTON, CAMRIDGESHIRE

Surveys by Bernwood Ecology in 2021 showed that St Mary was home to a small but very mobile maternity roost of Soprano Pipistrelles using a number of locations in the church

While the church could manage the general cleaning throughout the church they were most concerned by droppings from the roost above the chancel arch. This has caused serious problems in previous years when damp from urine had caused the carpet to become damp and decayed.

The project had used both removable trays and solid shelves to catch bat droppings below a roost in other churches and something similar was suggested here.

Designing The Sails

The proposal for something to catch droppings from the roost was discussed with the ecologist, PCC and the church architects, Archangel.

The main conclusion was that anything used should be easy to remove, able to be replaced if it was stained or damaged and most importantly that, once installed, it should be able to be moved from ground level so the church did not have to pay for hire of scaffolding or a cherry picker to clean it every year.

The protection must also sit as close as possible to the wall without gapping at the edges in order to catch all the droppings.

After a number of designs were proposed,

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Images courtesy of Chris Damant/Bernwood Ecology, Diana Spencer/Bats In Churches

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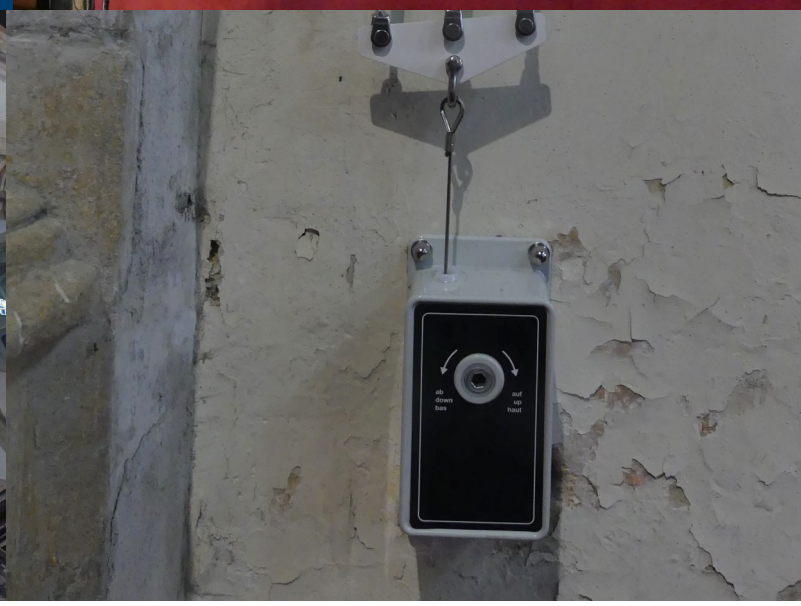

ArchAngel used their experience with sailing boats to suggest a design for two triangular sails that could be winched up and down from ground level.

One advantage of covid and the increased number of outdoor canopies etc means that it was comparatively easy to find a number of companies that were happy to quote and provide durable, waterproof sails for the church.

The project chose to work with Tensile Fabrics Ltd based in Bristol as the most suitable quote.

The final design for the sails consisted of an aluminium frame with sail stretched around it. This helped the sails sit flush to the wall and created a lip around the sail to prevent droppings falling out.

They also provided a winching system which is lockable with a removable handle to prevent anyone from moving or lowering the sails.

The sails were installed by two workmen over the course of two days. The most difficult part of the process was adjusting the rope system to make sure the sails came down level without dipping on either side and tipping out the bat mess.

Minor capital works such as this do usually need advice from architect and ecologist but are unlikely to need a licence or the major cost of extensive bat surveys and monitoring.

The church shows how protecting one area of a church, rather than trying to exclude bats from the entire building can be a simple and effective solution.

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