

BATS IN CHURCHES



PROTECTING THE IRREPLACEABLE THE KEYSTON CADAVER

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, KEYSTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

St John the Baptist in Keyston was referred to the project after a member of the PCC wrote to their local MP about the lack of support for churches with bats.

The church had been struggling to get permission to carry out much needed window repairs. A VBRV visit had not been able to help, there was no information on how bats accessed the church, and there was concern that repairing the windows would block access or trap bats inside the church.

The church were also concerned about the unique C15th wooden cadaver that at the time was stored at the back of the church, and covered in cotton sheeting.

In 2021 Bats In Churches paid for a full bat management survey by Barry Collins.

The survey identified a major maternity roost of 100+ Natterer's bats in the north transept.

The survey also showed that the main access point was through the tower and chancel, and not the broken windows.

Having information about the bat access points would have allowed the windows to be repaired straight away, and getting this information allowed the window repairs to take place almost as soon as the funding for it was available.

This highlights the importance of having occasional bat surveys, even for a church that isn't planning major works or repairs.

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Historic England



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A Unique Piece of Heritage

The main item of concern in the church was the early 15th century wooden cadaver.

This has been identified by Dr Christina Welch as from the tomb of William Stuckley who died in 1408.

The carving is probably the most complete wooden eviscerated cadaver in the country, and of huge national and potentially international importance.

In 2021 the carving was kept at the rear of the church on a bier and covered in cotton and plastic sheeting to protect it from bat droppings and urine.

While the church hoped to carry out bat mitigation to reduce the droppings it was clear that protecting the cadaver was an

immediate priority and couldn't wait for potentially years of major works.

Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust provided a grant for careful cleaning and minor conservation works to the cadaver.

The project then funded a bespoke, ventilated glass and oak case to keep the cadaver clean.

The cadaver was brought to its original location in the chancel and celebrated with a rededication service in 2022.

In churches like Keyston, focussing on protecting the most important individual items can have an immediate benefit, directly protecting our heritage.

The church continues to fundraise for repairs and mitigation to reduce bat droppings in the rest of the church.

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