

# BATS IN CHURCHES



## MAJOR CHANGES, MAJOR RESULTS

### St Margaret, Saxlingham, Norfolk

St Margaret, Saxlingham is a mostly medieval church with a largely Victorian interior.

The church has a maternity roost of Natterer's bats, which roosted throughout the church. This was one of the most severely impacted churches in the project, described by the ecologist as 'sticky'.

The church was prevented from carrying out any events or activities in the summer months and had a huge task cleaning every year.

### Working With The Church Layout

The initial suggestion was to contain the bats around their main access point in the south transept. However this transept was

home to the organ, which the church did not want to relocate.

Trying to work without moving the organ would limit the amount of void space that could be created above it and make any work or complex and difficult to access.

The next suggestion was to use the north transept. The transept was already partly screened off to form the vestry, and there was plenty of space above to allow access.

Iain Walker from Spire Architects and ecologist Phil Parker designed a self contained bat loft made of a false ceiling about the vestry and a matching extension to the existing carved screen.

A number of new heated bat boxes were installed in the transept roof, the ceiling was created over the vestry itself and the

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screen extended to completely contain the bats in the upper half of the transept.

A door in the screen allows access for cleaning and monitoring of the boxes.

Alongside these works, the ecologist also carried out several improvements to the silence chamber to make it more appealing for bats, and to prevent any bats using the silence chamber from accessing the main body of the church.

The new bat loft has been a large change to those who know the church well, but most visitors will only see a new screen that looks completely in keeping with the rest of the church.

The first year of exclusion was very successful and the church was clean and bat free for the first time in years.

In 2023 they started holding events and hosted the 'On A Wing & A Prayer' artwork.

In 2023 juvenile bats began to find some new access points in to the church so this will need further blocking and monitoring to keep the church bat free.

The bat loft has also needed some minor maintenance works, firstly to repair the door which warped in the extreme heat and to install ventilation to reduce the smell in the loft.

Saxlingham has shown that major capital works can be both very successful and remarkably discreet, if they're designed by ecologist, church and architect all working closely together and working sympathetically with the existing layout, fixtures and fittings within the church.

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