

BATS IN CHURCHES



Trials and Tribulations



All Saints, Toftrees, Norfolk

All Saint's Toftrees is a small, isolated church in the countryside near Fakenham in Norfolk.

The church no longer has a village around it, purely a scattering of houses. The church is mainly looked after by just one or two churchwardens

There is no electricity, heating or running water at the church which limits the amount of events and activities it can hold and makes cleaning incredibly difficult.

The church is notable for an incredibly rare geometrically carved Norman font, one of just four similar fonts in Norfolk and possibly the best Norman font in England.

Toftrees has historically been home to a major maternity roost of 100+ Natterer's bats, although numbers have decreased in recent years. There is also a Common Pipistrelle maternity colony, with occasional day roost use by two other species, Brown Long-eared bat and Soprano Pipistrelle)

The bats roosted throughout the church with access along the eaves at most point in the church.

In such a small church the bat mess and damage was significant.

The bat damage also become conflated with a number of other problems such as damp, insect damage and broken windows, all leading to the church looking very dirty and uncared for, despite the efforts of the PCC, and being closed to visitors.

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Trials and Tribulations

Toftrees has been the site of a number of bat mitigation trials, primarily as part of the 2011-2013 Defra research including radio tracking and trial of acoustic deterrents.

The acoustic deterrent trial was briefly successful at excluding bats from the church however bats failed to find alternative roosts and the deterrents were removed allowing the bats to return.

The church had high expectations of the trials and the fact that they had no long term effect meant the church was disillusioned and far more resentful of the impact of bats than they had been before.

The Bats In Churches Project funded works to exclude the bats from the church and contain them in four rafter boxes and into

the tower space. Unfortunately failures by contractors meant that this work was incomplete, and of poor quality.

Understandably the church attitude to their bats continued to get worse, perhaps more so than if they had not been offered a solution.

Finding A Solution

In 2022 the church started working with a new ecologist who had a far more realistic and supportive attitude, providing regular updates and communication.

Alongside some successful exclusions this has improved both conditions in the church and the feelings of the church towards the bats. This highlights the importance of giving a church realistic expectations about the success of mitigation and being consistent in approach throughout.

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