



# Cleaning your Church with Resident Bats: A Post-lockdown Guide

This guide is aimed at volunteers, wardens, cleaners or clergy who are thinking about re-opening and cleaning churches with resident bat colonies. It covers:

- What to think about before going on site
- A checklist to use when arriving on site
- A template to design a cleaning plan
- Things to be aware of when it comes to health and safety around accumulations of droppings
- A kit list
- Step-by-step instructions of how to clean large accumulations of droppings

## More Information

Other resources are available on cleaning to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and on re-opening church buildings. The Church of England offers comprehensive guidance for re-opening the site, ICON offers guidance surrounding caring for collections and Historic England offers guidance around cleaning historic artefacts, in more detail than we do here. These resources are referenced throughout the document, with details of where to find them at the end.

This guidance document was written by the Heritage Advisor for the Bats in Churches project. For more information get in touch using our email: [churches@bats.org.uk](mailto:churches@bats.org.uk)



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## Bats and COVID-19

*The bats and bat droppings in your church do not pose an infection risk for the COVID-19 virus. None of the bats in this country have been linked to the spread of the disease.*

*For more information, please visit the Bat Conservation Trust website at: <https://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/covid-19-and-bats>*

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## Introduction

Your church has now been closed for a number of months and we understand that you may be feeling quite daunted about cleaning and re-opening it. This will be made worse by the fact you have resident bats and usually spend a lot of time cleaning-up after them. With this guidance, the Bats in Churches project hopes to make the task of cleaning and re-opening more manageable, by providing tips and helping you plan for the task ahead.

Don't forget, we are here to help if you need us. Get in touch with the Bats in Churches project through your usual contact or via our contact pages on our website [batsinchurches.org](https://batsinchurches.org)

### Prioritise your own and others' health and safety!

*Only tackle the cleaning inside the church once the building has been checked and is safe. The following non-exhaustive checklist should help with this, as well as the checklist provided by the Church of England – a link to this is in the resources pages at the back.*

## Before Going On Site

### Plan Ahead

When a building has been left unopened for a while it may contain some unexpected hazards. Make sure you think about what these might be and plan accordingly. The following is a short list of some of the hazards you might find, what you can do about them, and some further guidance.

Hazard	How to identify	What to do	Further reading (links at the back)
Loose masonry, tiles or glass and other damage like vandalism	Carry out a visual inspection of the building before entering it. Use binoculars and a torch. Take photographs any issues you find	Make a note of any damage and report it to the person in charge of maintenance. Take a photograph if possible. If there is a risk that more debris might fall, put up a cordon or warning sign	SPAB Resources on the Maintenance Cooperative Project and Faith in Maintenance project are very useful and available on their website
Standing water or unused pipes – legionella etc.	This is something to be aware of if you have a water system, toilet or any running water. Also look out for leaks and standing water	Flush out the water system by running it for a while	Church of England guidance on Access to church buildings during lockdown: advice for incumbents (latest version)
Electrical problems	The electrics may have been turned off before lockdown, or other problems may have arisen. Tell-tale signs may be a smell of burning, discoloured or loose wires	If you know how, check that the electrics are working in the building firstly by accessing the control box. Do a basic visual check and inspect other electrical items especially emergency lighting, fire and security alarms	Church of England guidance on Access to church buildings during lockdown: advice for incumbents (latest version)

Vermin or pests (not bats)	Look out for frass from insects. This looks like fine sawdust. Look for changes in appearance and for new holes in altar textiles and other fabrics. Also look out for droppings that may have come from rats or mice (although this may be difficult amongst lots of bat droppings)	Make a note, take photos, and tell the person in charge of the fabric of the building	ICON Collections Care Group Guidance on 'Waking-Up Collections'
Dust	Visual build-up of dust on flat surfaces, dust motes in the air on disturbance, and a musty smell	Be careful not to breathe in the dust while cleaning. There is more information on this below in the step-by-step guide to cleaning	Church of England guidance on Keeping church buildings clean (latest version)
Mould	Mould may have developed anywhere in the church but especially in large accumulations of dust and droppings	Try not to breathe in the mould spores and wear a mask while cleaning. There is more information on this below in the step-by-step guide to cleaning	ICON Collections Care Group Guidance on 'Waking-Up Collections'
Bird droppings	If a bird has got inside the church it may have left droppings on fabric, which will cause staining	If the surfaces are not historic, valuable or vulnerable collections, clean the droppings off carefully with a mild, conservation grade detergent. For historic collections consult a conservator	ICON Collections Care Group Guidance on 'Waking-Up Collections' Historic England cleaning advice for Coronavirus
Dead birds or bats	Bats or birds that have been trapped in the church may have died	If you feel comfortable and have the means to do so, dispose of the bird safely and without touching it. If you find a dead bat get in touch with the Bat Conservation Trust via the helpline or website	Bat Conservation Trust provide advice on their website or call the National Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228
New deterioration on other objects	New deterioration on metalwork or stone may have occurred due to increased dampness and a lack of ventilation in the church	Take photographs, as detailed as possible, of the object and its surface. Keep a visual record of it after the building has returned to 'normal' use, to make sure no further deterioration is occurring. Call in an expert	ICON Care of Collections Group Guidance on 'Waking-Up Collections'





This powdery dust is 'frass' caused by insects eating through wood. Make a note, take photos, and tell the person in charge of the fabric of the building



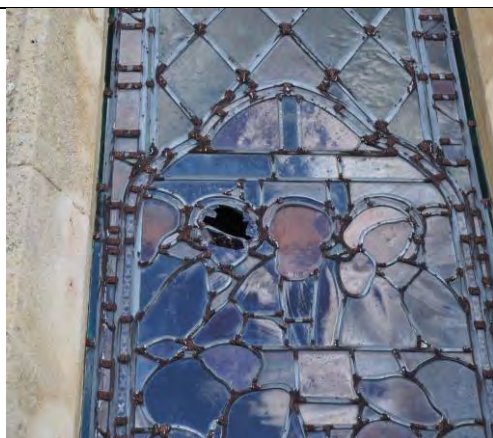
Moisture trapped behind plastic covers encourages mould growth. Roll up the plastic and take outside. Allow these areas to breathe more often



A poster with holes indicating insect damage. Check your other paper objects!



A very blocked gutter may lead to damp problems. Check the corresponding area inside the church to make sure this has not occurred



Accidental damage or vandalism may have occurred in windows. Look inside and outside to find the glass shards and careful collect them



Patches of damp can be a sign that drainage around a building is not working correctly. Check corresponding drains, guttering and downpipes

## Creating a Cleaning Plan

Think ahead and plan your cleaning tasks beforehand. By breaking the task of cleaning into manageable chunks, it can be achieved more easily. This may also help you to delegate tasks to other team members – provided that you work safely within government advice.

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*Break the large, daunting task of cleaning into small, manageable chunks, and delegate where necessary.*

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Here is an example of how you could break down the tasks (descriptions of the methods behind these tasks are found later in the guidance).

What	When	Who	How long will it take	What will I need
Dusting the walls and cobwebs	12 June 2020 AM	Rachel	2 hours	Dust mask Gloves Telescopic brush
Brushing window sills and other flat surfaces	12 June 2020 PM	Diana	2 hours	Dust mask Gloves Brush and shovel Vacuum Dustbin bags
Sweepings and vacuuming the floor	14 June 2020	Rachel (chancel and south aisle) and Diana (nave and north aisle)	2 hours	Dust mask Gloves (?) Vacuum cleaner Sweeping brush Brush and shovel Dustbin bags
Secondary clean up after the dust from the first clean-up has settled	16 June 2020 AM	Honor	2 hours	Dust mask Gloves (?) Vacuum cleaner Sweeping brush Brush and shovel Dustbin bags
Brushing monuments, pulpit and decorative woodwork	16 June 2020 PM	Honor	2 hours	Mask Gloves Small brushes Vacuum cleaner Soft cloth
Other in-depth cleaning tasks like wet cleaning and waxing of wood (see below)	-	-	-	





## Important Health and Safety Point

Although bat droppings themselves are not harmful to your health, large accumulations left undisturbed in an unventilated church are a breeding ground for bacteria and mould. When combined with dust and damp, mould spores can grow and these are harmful when breathed in.

To prevent this, it is important to wear appropriate PPE in the form of an FFP3 dust mask and nitrile gloves. Fabric masks and lower grade masks will not protect you against mould spores.

As you are aware, there has been a national shortage of masks and gloves over recent months because of high demand and prioritisation within the NHS and Care Homes.

It is not clear when masks will be available to the general public, so regularly check local and hardware stores or department stores, as well as online retailers.

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*We do not recommend cleaning large build-ups of droppings and dust without an FFP3 mask. It has been proven that this grade of mask is effective against mould spores.*

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## Bats and the Law

It is illegal to harm a bat or damage or disturb its roost. If you find a live bat hiding in a crevice, under a pew, or even snuggled in some fabric like a dust-sheet, do not touch or disturb it. It may move or return to its roost within a few hours or by the next day. The Bat Conservation Trust has more advice

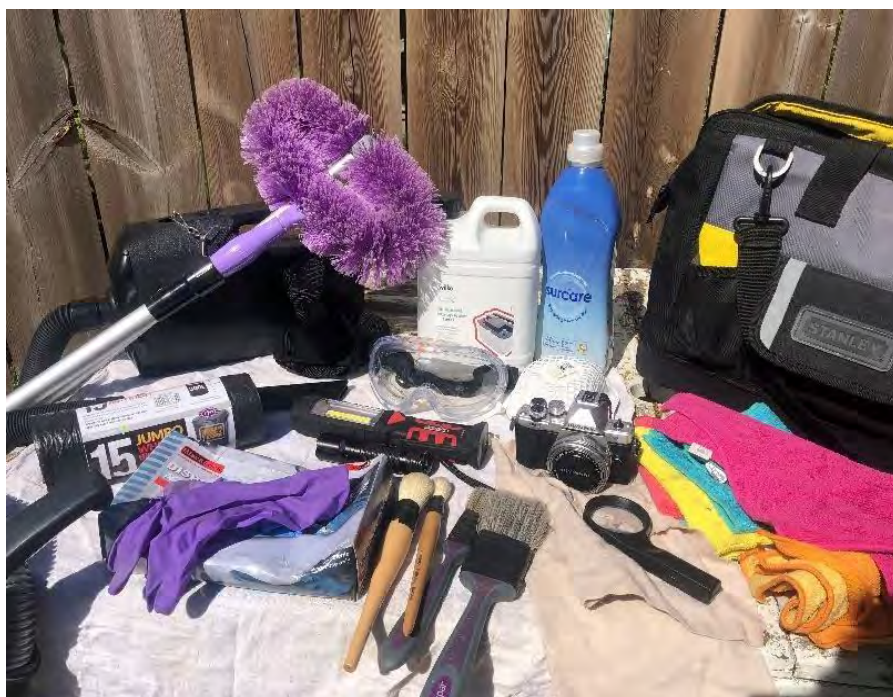
here: <https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/help-ive-found-a-bat>

## Kit List

Make sure you have everything you think you will need before going on site.

For the basic clean ('deep' cleaning, polishing or waxing is not covered in this guide) you will need:

- A poster to display outside the church to alert people to the fact someone is working (safely) inside
- Torch
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Vacuum cleaner (preferably with a hepa filter)
- Bin bags
- Brushes
  - Dust pan and brush
  - Broom
  - Soft bristle brush for furniture
  - Long-reaching brush
- Rags, dusters or microfibre cloths
- Chamois leather cloth
- De-ionised water
- Conservation grade detergent (non-essential and only use if necessary)
- Gloves – preferably nitrile but latex will do
- Dust mask – FFP3 grade (where you are expecting heavy accumulations of bat droppings)
- Safety goggles or glasses
- Pen and checklist
- Risk assessment
- Refreshments: have a bottle of water with a top that seals so you don't have to touch the bit you drink out of. The flip-top ones are good as they minimise you touching the neck of the bottle and helps keep it dirt free.



Left: Example of a basic kit – you will already have most things but others should be available from a local store.



# Step-by-Step Guide to Cleaning

*Always make sure somebody knows that you are working on site and that they, or somebody else, is available to call and respond in an emergency.*

## Getting ready to clean

- 1) Secure the site  
There is a risk while you are on site or cleaning with doors open that a member of the public will try to enter before you are ready. Put up a notice at the entrance (like the one provided in the resources at the back) and try to block the entrance with chairs or something similar.
- 2) Ventilation  
If the church is particularly damp and smells musty or unpleasant, ventilate it first. Leave the doors and windows open for a few hours before tackling the cleaning.
- 3) Visual check  
While the church is ventilating, use your binoculars to carry out a visual check of the building and the interior. Look out for cracks, fallen building debris, mould, pest activity and other damage.
- 4) Dust sheets  
If you have put dustsheets down, carefully fold these in on themselves, containing any dust or droppings, and take them outside to turn upside-down.

## Cleaning

- 1) The first task is to get rid of the droppings and dust from flat surfaces. Work from the highest areas to the lowest. Starting with windowsills and other high surfaces, then pews and other low surfaces and finally the floor.
- 2) While brushing the higher areas try not to brush higher than your head. This may not be easy or always possible but do try to avoid brushing the dust and potential mould spores straight into your face! Consider using safety goggles or glasses.
- 3) Despite taking care not to disperse too much dust into the air, it will have happened anyway. After the first dust and vac, leave it for a day or so and come back to do a second one before attempting any more in-depth or specific clean.
- 4) While dusting you may have noticed sticky residue from bat urine on some of the surfaces. This can be removed from non-historic, non-valuable and non-vulnerable surfaces using a

### Key Cleaning Tips

**- Always work from top to bottom and clean the floor last.**

This avoids repeating any of the cleaning you have done already

**- Brush gently and directly into a bag or vacuum cleaner** to minimise the distribution of dust and any potential mould particles into the air

**- Dry clean first.** If you instantly go in with a wet cloth you run the risk of mixing dust and dirt with water and staining porous materials especially stone and wood

very damp cloth with deionised water. If you feel that you need something stronger, you can dilute some (conservation-approved) detergent with water to use. The best store-bought detergents for this purpose are Ecover and Boots Sensitive (fragrance and paraben free).

**Historic England** gives good guidance on how to approach historic or vulnerable surfaces (see link at the back)

- 5) After the worst of the dirt and urine has been removed, you can look at your regular deep cleaning tasks in individual areas, like waxing pews, polishing metal and washing the floor. Keep a diary of when you do these things. Polishing only really needs to be done once a year and waxing can be left for up to five years! By keeping a diary, you can help protect the artefacts in your church from over-cleaning and also save yourself a lot of work.
- 6) If you have severe staining or damage on particular items like metal or wood, get in touch with the Bats in Churches project for extra help and advice. Sadly, some items may be permanently damaged and more cleaning will just abrade layers of historic fabric.
- 7) Dispose of the debris in heavy duty bags. If you think it is contaminated with mould, make sure to seal it and empty the vacuum cleaner into it immediately after cleaning. Dispose of it quickly to avoid spreading any potential mould spores to other places.

## Final notes

- The guidance we have given is based on best practice for the future preservation of your church, its historic fabric and for the bats. Please avoid strong chemicals and overall approaches like misting or fogging. These uncontrolled approaches can be very damaging to your historic fabric and to the bats.
- If you find that there is still an unpleasant smell, or the church is still very damp, and you have already removed the dust and droppings, ventilate more. Consider using fans while leaving the windows and doors open. Also use naturally nice smelling things like lavender or citron (these have the added benefit of repelling cluster flies).
- If the bat droppings are uncontaminated with mould spores, and not too dusty, put them on your garden! They are excellent fertilisers.



## Further Reading and Links

### Bat Conservation Trust

Finding a dead bat <https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/found-a-dead-bat>

Finding a live bat <https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/help-ive-found-a-bat>

### Church of England

The Church of England has lots of useful documents available to download from their website. The documents are regularly updated so please access their '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance for Churches](#)' page where you will find the following guidance:

Access to Church Buildings During Lockdown: Advice for Incumbents

Access to Church Buildings During Lockdown: General Advice for Incumbents, Churchwardens and PCC members

Guidance for Churches and Cathedrals on Access to their Buildings for Construction Work During Lockdown

Guidance for Accessing Church Buildings for Building Maintenance During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Keeping Church Buildings Clean

Towards Re-opening Church Buildings: Coronavirus Risk Assessment Checklist for Parish Churches

Scroll down to the bottom of the page to see links to download all of these resources:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Historic England guidance on COVID-19: Cleaning historic surfaces

<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>

Government guidance on COVID-19: Cleaning in non-healthcare settings

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcaresettings>

### The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Maintenance planning resources: <https://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/maintenance-cooperatives-project/mcp-fim-resources>

Maintenance calendar: <https://www.spab.org.uk/sites/default/files/SPAB-FiM-maintenancecalendar.pdf>

Maintenance plan:

[https://www.spab.org.uk/sites/default/files/HB22\\_Maintenance\\_Plan\\_Template.pdf](https://www.spab.org.uk/sites/default/files/HB22_Maintenance_Plan_Template.pdf)



## Resource Pages and Templates

### Checklist

This is a short checklist to help you look for hazards on site. The Church of England has also provided a checklist and risk assessment with the aim of keeping people safe on site. You may prefer to use that one. It is available here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/202005/Parish%20Risk%20Assessment%20Template%20v.1.pdf>

Hazard	Visual check done?	Photographs taken?	Notes
Loose masonry, tiles or glass and other damage like vandalism			
Down pipes and drainage			
Standing water or unused pipes – legionella etc.			
Electrical problems			
Vermin or pests (not bats)			
Dust			
Mould			
Bird droppings			
Bat droppings (notes of where large piles appear if this is different to normal)			
Dead birds or bats			
New deterioration on other objects			

## Cleaning plan

What	When	Who	How long will it take	What will I need
e.g. Dusting the walls and cobwebs				Dust mask Gloves Telescopic brush

### Notice to display while on site cleaning

We do not recommend locking yourself inside the church if you are working alone, in case you have an accident. You may also have the door propped open to ventilate the building.

This means that there is a risk that the general public will enter the site when you are not ready.

Please display a notice like this one on the door so that people near or approaching the church know that somebody is working safely on site, and not to enter.

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## This Church is Preparing to Open in the Future!

Thank you for your patience while we have been closed over the past few months, and for your part in helping stop the spread of COVID-19

Please do not try to enter the church!

We are currently cleaning inside the church ready to re-open. The door is open for ventilation only.

Although we are working safely within government guidance, following advice from the Church of England and have carried out a robust risk assessment, it is essential that there is no other public access to the building, until we are ready.

Thank you again for your patience.

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