

Case study no. 6

St Andrew and St Patrick of Elveden

DIOCESE OF ST EDMUNDSBURY & IPSWICH



This remarkable church is home to a maternity colony of serotine bats. When the inside walls of the church needed plastering, and some roof tiles had to be replaced, the National Bat Helpline was contacted and free advice was received on how to ensure the bats will not be affected.

Location

Elveden is a small village of around 300 inhabitants in the Forest Heath district of Suffolk. The name of the village is thought to come from the Old English *ælfla dene*, meaning ‘elves’ valley’. Elveden Hall is at the centre of Elveden Estate, a large country estate now the seat of the Earl of Iveagh and the Guinness family. Previously, it was the family home of Maharajah Duleep Singh, last ruler of the Sikh Empire who was sent to exile in Britain in 1854. The young Duleep Singh was a favourite of Queen Victoria and lived very much the part of an English country gentleman, until the 1880s when he made an attempt to return to India and to his Sikh heritage. He did not succeed in this, and died in Paris in 1893. He is buried in the churchyard of St Andrew and St Patrick next to his wife and son. The Elveden estate was sold to the Guinness family who developed it into a shooting estate and from the 1920s transformed it into agricultural production. The farm extends to some 10,000 acres, making it one of the largest single farm units in lowland Britain.



The building and its use

The conjoined churches of St Andrew and St Patrick reflect the intriguing history of their construction in their fascinating architecture and appearance. The original church in the village, dedicated to St Andrew, was built in medieval times. It has a 12th century nave to which a tower was added around 1421 and a south porch was also built in the 15th century. The walls of the church are of flint rubble, typical of the area. The Maharajah carried out some considerable renovations to this church around 1869, to make it more in keeping ‘with the splendour of his estate’.



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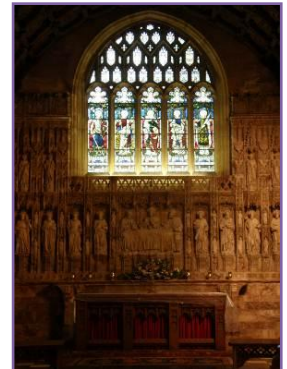
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The first Earl of Iveagh, Edward Guinness, appointed William Caroe to build an entirely new church next to the old one – partly to reflect his visions of grandeur, but also to accommodate the growing congregation. As was common for the time, attendance at church was compulsory for those working on the estate. The new church, dedicated to St Patrick, was constructed between 1904 and 1906 and was described as ‘Art Nouveau Gothic’ by Nikolaus Pevsner, the prominent art historian.

Today, the nave of the St Andrew church forms the south aisle of the conjoined churches of St Andrew and St Patrick and the old chancel has been screened off into a chapel. The two churches are collectively Grade II* listed and some of the features of interest include a Sicilian-Norman font, 14th century piscina and sedilia, and a superb alabaster reredos depicting the supper of Emmaus and purchased for £1,200 (around £250,000 in today’s money) in 1906.

The regular congregation at this remarkable church listen to the sermon delivered from a richly carved pulpit. In addition to regular Sunday services, weddings and funeral services are held at this church. The church also provides a fantastic venue for concerts which are held occasionally. Many Sikhs make a pilgrimage to Elveden and the church and church yard to visit the grave of Duleep Singh.



Bats in the church

Three species of bats are found in this church: brown long-eared bats, soprano pipistrelles, and one of our less common species, the serotine. Small numbers of common pipistrelles are thought to be using the roof of St Patrick’s for roosting, and their droppings can be found throughout the church but not in any quantity. The serotine roost, which is thought to be a maternity colony, is located above the chancel arch of the St Andrew’s church. Their droppings can be found on the floor and on the wall beneath the roost, but it isn’t possible to see the roost from floor level and it is thought that the bats may be using a void within the roof. The serotine bats do not appear to be using the interior of the church. An evening survey carried out by local bat group volunteers found that the bats were using a gap near the ridge tile of the roof, just above the roost and a gap under the eaves, when they left the church to forage after dusk.

The bats are not regarded as a nuisance by those using the church for worship but their dropping and urine have caused some staining of the marble floor and the pews. However, the congregation can usually get on with things without really noticing the bats’ presence. Serotine bat colonies tend to be relatively small, and the one in Elveden church is thought to number around 30 individuals. It is not known whether they are only there during the summer months, to give birth and nurse their young, or whether they also spend the autumn and winter there and use the site for hibernation..



As the number of bats using St Andrew and St Patrick is relatively low, the quantity of droppings they produce is manageable in terms of cleaning effort. Sometimes the bats are seen flying in the church during services and events, but this is tolerated good naturedly by the congregation.

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What has been done?

In 2013, the parish decided it was time to carry out repairs to fix the loose roof tiles, as well as carry out some plastering works and install improved lighting. The plan is also to install kitchen facilities at the base of the tower, and to provide modern toilet facilities, possibly in a separate building in the church yard. The church contacted the National Bat Helpline to find out if bats in the church would be affected by the proposed works. The Helpline arranged for a Natural England volunteer bat roost visitor to carry out a survey of the church to find out how the bats were using it, and what, if any, impact the building works would have on them.



When the volunteer bat roost visitor came for a daytime check, they found no evidence of bats in the tower, and the low level plastering work was not going to affect the areas the bats were roosting in. It was recommended that the high level plastering on the St Andrew's chancel arch, near the serotine roost, is timed carefully to avoid disturbing the bats. In practise, this meant it had to be done in September or October once the maternity colony had dispersed, but before hibernation period in case some bats remained in the church over the winter. An evening activity survey was required to find out what happens when the bats leave their roost at dusk, where they emerge from and whether the proposed works on the roof would affect these areas. As St Andrew and St Patrick is a large and complex building, the volunteer bat worker enlisted the help of the local bat group volunteers and on a June evening around 15 bat workers arrived at the church, bat detectors ready and tuned for some action.

The evening survey resulted in a better understanding of bat activity in the church. The advice given to the church regarding the proposed works was to carry out the roof repairs during September and October to minimise disturbance to bats in the church, and when replacing missing slates the presence of a bat worker inspecting the gaps for signs of bat use would ensure that no access points were inadvertently blocked. No restrictions were imposed on installing the kitchen and toilet facilities, but it was recommended that care be taken to minimise disturbance to the areas the bats are using for roosting.

What can we learn?

At this church, essential roof repairs and plans for a development at the base of the tower meant that bat surveys needed to be carried out to ensure the bats roosting within the building would not be affected by the work. The National Bat Helpline was contacted, and the church was able to receive a Natural England



volunteer bat roost visit free of charge. Due to the complex structure and size of the twin church, many bat workers were needed for the necessary evening survey. The local bat group volunteers were able to step in and carry out the survey, at no cost to the church. Following the assessment carried out by the Natural England volunteer, the church was given advice on planning the building work to minimise disturbance to bats. This advice didn't impose major restrictions on timings of the work. The only bat-related costs would be that of bat tiles to retain access if bats were found using the gaps created by slipped roof tiles during the repair work.

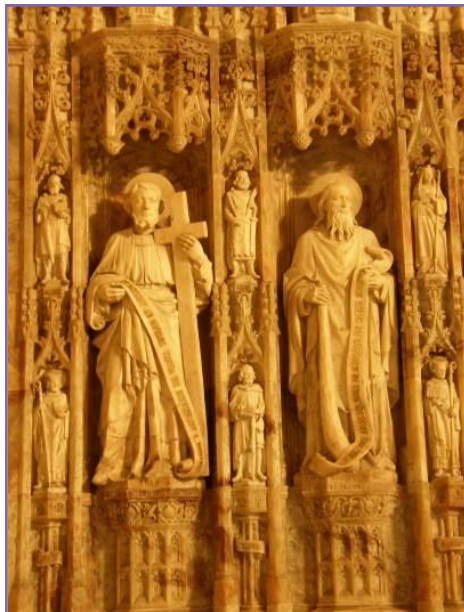
The story of St Andrew and St Patrick church shows us how bat group volunteers can help churches to reduce or eliminate the cost of seeking bat advice and carrying out surveys. The volunteer bat workers that came to survey the church were in for a treat: watching the rare spectacle of serotine bats foraging around them in the churchyard. Everyone was happy, and the bats were safe from disturbance during building work at the church.



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Contacts and more information

Assistant Priest: Rev Paul Tams

Churchwardens: Mrs Janice Flack and Mrs Wendy Francis

Local bat group: Suffolk Bat Group <http://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/species/species-projects-and-groups/suffolk-bat-group> The Suffolk Bat Group and Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Wildline
Tel: 01473 890089

National Bat Helpline: enquiries@bats.org.uk (Tel: 0845 1300 228)

