

**Church of St. Stephen
Winsham
Nr. Chard
Somerset**

Bat & Bird Survey

June 2008

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Report of Findings

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1. Introduction

To ensure appropriate mitigation for Protected Wildlife Species (bats and birds) can be included in plans to recover the nave roof slope and repair the roof structure and internal ceiling at the Church of St. Stephen, Winsham, Nr. Chard, Somerset, a survey was commissioned.

The survey included a visual check of all accessible areas of the church, an external check from ground level and at dusk a bat emergence survey.

The village of Winsham is situated to the south of the main A30 road between the small towns of Crewkerne and Chard. Immediately to the south is the county boundary with Dorset. The undulating countryside surrounding Winsham is primarily engaged in pastoral farming, but there is a wildlife park situated between it and the A30. Within one kilometre of the site there are small areas of woodland and many mature trees in the gardens and hedgerows nearer to the site. The churchyard itself contains many mature Yew trees.

The earliest parts of the church date from the 13th century and include the chancel and tower. The nave, south porch and the vestry are of more recent origin, especially the vestry which has only been added since the mid 19th century. The church, which measures 28.5m in length, is of an unusual design as the tower is sited between the nave and the chancel. Its walls are a mixture of flint and local rubblestone with Ham Hill stone dressings. The pitched roofs are covered in slates with a lower row of stone tiles, and the nave also contains a roof void above the barrel vaulted ceiling. The roof void is accessed via an opening in the wall of the tower's ringing room. The vestry is joined to the south porch by a covered archway.

2. Legislative Considerations

All species of bat found in England are fully protected in law, as are their roost sites. The primary legislation is embodied in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, also by European Directive implemented by the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994. Further consideration resulted with the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Under the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994 it is an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat. This is an absolute offence - in other words, intent or recklessness does not have to be proved. Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection. This is taken to mean all bat roosts whether bats are present or not.

Most resident nesting birds are protected by provisions in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which protects the birds, nests, eggs and nestlings. There are certain exceptions which attract less protection and other rarer species which are afforded special protection.

3. Extent and Method of Survey

The church was surveyed by a licensed bat worker and an experienced assistant on the evening of Friday, 6th June 2008. The accessible interior and exterior of the church was systematically searched for bats and signs of bat usage i.e. droppings, urine stains, rub marks and discarded food remains, using powerful torches. Some bats typically eat butterflies and moths, and then discard the wings. A search for potential bat roost locations was also undertaken.

The survey also included a search for indications of nesting birds which could be affected by the proposed re-roofing works.

At dusk the surveyors used heterodyne and frequency division bat detectors, linked to digital recording equipment, to support visual observation to check for emerging, commuting and foraging bats. One surveyor was stationed in the ringing room and the other outside of the nave. At intervals during the survey the main body of the church was checked for emerging bats inside.

The surveyors remained in place until bats were active and known to be foraging in the vicinity of the church. The dusk survey commenced at 21:20 and concluded at 22:30.

The weather conditions were dry with a light to moderate breeze and no cloud. The air temperature was 11.3 degrees C during the survey.

4. Survey Findings

4.1. Bats

Visual Survey

No signs of bat usage were found on the ground floor of the church. Discarded butterfly wings and a small collection of Lesser horseshoe (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) bat droppings (c.30) were found in the ringing room. A large number of droppings were found beneath the ridge beam in the roof void. In the centre and at the west end were more substantial accumulations. The majority of the droppings were from Lesser horseshoe bats but a small number were considered to be from Long-eared (*Plecotus sp.*) bats. A single Lesser horseshoe bat was found roosting in the roof void. Lesser horseshoe bats are able to access the roof void through the permanent opening in the wall of the tower's ringing room. (*Horseshoe bats require an opening large enough to fly through i.e. 300 mm wide by 150 mm high*). They are able to enter the tower and ringing room via two main routes.

1. The unglazed opening in the door at the top of the tower steps.
2. Through the four windows in the bell chamber.

Crevice dwelling bats could also use these routes but could also use the gaps beneath the

stone tiles.

A number of potential roost sites suitable for crevice dwelling bats were identified during the survey. These included the following:-

- ❖ Gaps at the eaves.
- ❖ Spaces under raised slates.
- ❖ Gaps beneath ridge tiles.
- ❖ Wall cavities in the tower.
- ❖ Gaps above roof timbers.
- ❖ Gaps in roof timbers.
- ❖ Tops of walls.

Dusk Survey

At dusk the following bat activity was noted at the church. A total of four bat species were identified during the survey: Lesser horseshoe, Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*), and Long-eared (*Plecotus sp.*).

The following table gives the results of the bat activity survey.

Table 1: Bat activity noted at southwest corner of church

TIME	BAT SPECIES	QTY	BAT ACTIVITY
21:45	Lesser horseshoe	1	1 pass detected but not seen in ringing room
21:48	Common Pipistrelle	1	1 pass towards west end of church, detected not seen
21:54	Serotine	1	2 passes flying along south elevation of church
21:59	Long-eared	1	1 pass flying at southwest corner of church
21:59	Common Pipistrelle	1	1 pass flying at southwest corner of church
22:04	Common Pipistrelle	1	1 pass flying at southwest corner of church
22:07	Serotine	2	2 passes flying from northwest and back again
22:07	Lesser horseshoe	1	Detected not seen in ringing room, stayed for ten minutes
22:09	Common Pipistrelle	1	Foraging around Yew tree
22:14	Serotine	1	1 pass flying from northwest
22:16	Serotine	1	2 passes flying from northwest and back again
22:21	Serotine	1	Detected not seen to west of church
22:27	Serotine	1	2 passes southwest corner of church

4.2. Birds

Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) are nesting in the covered archway between the south porch and the vestry.

5. Conclusions

5.1. The roof void and tower are used as a daytime roosting site by a small number of Lesser horseshoe bats. The roof void was possibly used as a breeding roost in the past as is indicated by the large accumulation of old droppings.

5.2. The ringing room is used as a night-time feeding roost by long-eared bats. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that these bats may also roost in the tower or roof void (*Edward Wells, member of Somerset Bat Group pers. comm.*).

5.3. Bats are found in the area surrounding the church and may occasionally roost there unseen in the locations identified in section 4.1.

5.4. Providing the proposed repairs are completed whilst bats are unlikely to be using the church (mid-October to end of March following), and the repairs maintain the bat roost locations and entry points, a licence issued by Natural England to allow the repairs will not be required.

5.5. Barn Swallows are nesting in the covered archway between the south porch and vestry.

6. Recommendations

6.1. If the work cannot be completed between mid-October and the end of March following it will be necessary to apply for a licence from Natural England to allow the works as it is likely to disturb bats (Natural England Guidelines). The licence must be secured before work commences and is likely to restrict the timing of the works.

6.2. The bat roosting locations and access points must be retained after works are complete. Access to the tower and roof void must be maintained for Lesser horseshoe bats. An entrance measuring 300mm in width and 150mm in height must be available for this species to enter the locations listed in the survey findings above.

6.3. If the repair work proceeds within the period when a licence is not required the bat consultants must be informed immediately if the work is likely to extend beyond March 31st

6.4. Caution must be taken when **all** roof materials are removed as bats could be roosting unseen beneath. The roof slates/tiles must be removed by hand and checked for roosting bats before stacking. It is recommended that the removal of slates from the nave roof begins at the west end. Should a bat be disturbed it therefore likely to fly into the tower.

6.5. Any timber treatment to the church must be from the list approved by Natural England. Timber treatment to areas where bats can access should be completed

during the period when bats are less likely to be present i.e. between mid-October and the end of March.

6.6. All operatives on site must be appropriately briefed on the potential bat presence and instructed to stop work and seek expert advice should a bat(s) be discovered. The bat(s) should only be moved by a competent person if it is in danger. Work which could further disturb the bat(s) should be suspended until expert help is on site.

6.7. Construction operatives must be advised that nesting birds are protected and must not be disturbed whilst nesting. Should nesting birds be found then work should be suspended and expert advice sought.

6.8. If the period of time between this survey and commencement of the repair work extends more than one year, then a further survey must be commissioned to ascertain any changes in bat usage before work commences.

