

Extreme Clean of a church belfry in Witney, Oxfordshire

At A Glance

Location: Witney

Problem: Pigeon Guano

Structure: Church Belfry

Solution: Extreme Clean

Overview

Pigeons and Jackdaws are adept at finding the most unusual places to nest and roost, especially when it is warm, safe and away from people. Bell towers and church belfries are a common place to inhabit, but are notoriously difficult to proof.

Rapid Environmental Services were called upon to provide a bird capture, install and service exclusion measures followed by an extreme clean of the bells, the mechanisms and the access areas in St Mary's Church, Witney.

The Problem

The building has had some bird prevention installed quite a few years ago, but over time holes have appeared and allowed birds to enter the belfry. Once inside, nesting materials and tons of droppings and carcasses have been deposited on the bells and their workings below making the environment particularly hazardous for repairs and servicing to be carried out on the clocks.

The Challenge

The challenges faced were:

- Very limited access to the tower – all the passages are so small and low, getting equipment up and waste down was difficult – especially the spiral stairway
- Piles of rubbish that needed to be cleared to expose the bells and chamber
- Foul waste and excrement covering everything
- Working on the bells and mechanism was difficult and hazardous
- Checking the existing proofing and replacing this at height

Rapid Environmental Services are very used to working in hazardous conditions and safety of our staff is paramount, so fall protection and rope access was required for added safety. We could only use the bell housing frameworks to walk on and not the floor area, as it could not be deemed safe to stand on.

We checked the existing proofing and made sure no birds were trapped inside by using a small camera drone inside the tower, checking all the areas we could not get to easily – this proved very effective and safe.

The Solution

Rapid ESL's Extreme Cleaning teams are highly trained and experienced in dealing with this type of environment, so working under these conditions is second nature.

All the birds were trapped and removed from the area and the holes sealed up to prevent further ingress before the cleaning could start.

The bird fouling was then pre-treated with a powerful pathogen killing fluid designed especially for removal and decontaminating of bird guano. This also helps breakdown the faeces and allows cleaning to take place more effectively. Once the chemicals had started to work, the bells could be cleaned and made safe.

Once the cleaning was underway, the waste could be transported down the 60 or so steps to the ground level for removal.

Conclusion

The project took 3 days to complete which was expected due to the amount of guano and debris to clean up as well as completely cleaning 8 huge bells and all the intricate mechanisms, but the end result was superb.

The proofing was checked over a period of a week to ensure no further access points allowed any birds inside the tower, then we closed the project successfully.

The client was very happy with the project results and our methods of working – all the bell ringers were taken up into the belfry to take a look at the bells, something they could never do before due to the hazardous environment.



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