



CASE STUDY

Tree Bog at St Philip and St James, Escot



Summary

St Philip and St James, Escot, is located within the Escot estate in East Devon. It is isolated and not supplied with running water. The church wanted to provide toilet facilities so it could host special events, so installed a twin Tree Bog in the summer of 2009.



Description of the project

The project was initiated in Spring 2009 to solve the problem of hosting special events at a church that stands in the middle of a field. The cost of connecting the church to the main water supply and building toilets was estimated to be around 10 times the price of installing a compost system.

The Tree Bog is a recognised ecological method of composting waste, and acceptable to such bodies as National Trust, Friends of the Earth and RSPB. It is effectively an uncontrolled compost heap, broken down by the surrounding trees, which can be a biomass resource. The design is fairly standard, but flexible in details, and there are many examples in Britain.

The design was for a twin Tree Bog, with cubicles for men and women, situated in a copse just outside the perimeter of the churchyard. No site survey required beyond those who are interested in it looking and selecting the correct site. Because the site was outside the churchyard, no Faculties were required. Planning permission was not required. Environmental Health regulations were not discussed as the Tree Bog is not a permanent construction. One disadvantage of the Tree Bog is that it is not accessible to those who are unable to climb steps. However, the disability aspect did not hinder the plans for, nor the construction of, the Tree Bog.

The Tree Bog was installed in May 2009 by a workforce loaned by John-Michael Kennaway from Escot, and blessed in July by the Bishop of Crediton, the Rt Revd Bob Evens.

The funding came from the Tale Valley Trust and Church Funds.

Technical details

Construction:

- A pit about 8' x 4' x 6' deep was dug to form the soakaway.
- The pit was surrounded by a 5' high wall of straw bales wrapped in a double layer of chicken wire, to stop damage from animals.
- Two enclosed toilets were built on a platform atop the bales, approached by a flight of steps, all constructed from timber.
- There is no running water, plumbing or electricity.
- Toilet rolls and hand gels are provided for hygiene.

Maintenance:

- Gravity takes away the liquids and the solids break down naturally. Unlike a conventional compost toilet, a Tree Bog should never need emptying.
- There should be little or no odour, and no health hazards.
- If a Tree Bog has heavy usage, it is advisable, once a week, to add a fine layer of non-chemically treated wood sawdust/wood chips, shredded newspaper or straw. Half a cup of dried soil and/or wood ash helps prevent odour if added every other day. It is also advisable to occasionally level the heap with a pole. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree_bog.

Investment costs and funding

Investment costs:

- Construction - £1,500

Funding sources:

- Tale Valley Trust - £500
- Church - £1,000

Follow-up

As of March 2010, the Tree Bog has been used by congregation, special events and walkers, with no problems.

The blessing by Bishop Bob attracted a great deal of publicity, e.g.

- Press releases on CofE sites
 - <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr7409.html>
 - <http://www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org/press.php?id=50>
- Shrinking the Footprint made a video as part of the Advent 2009 campaign:
 - http://www.whywearewaiting.com/calendar.php?get_day=7&get_month=12
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQlwav-lm5A>
- Ruth Gledhill's blog in the Times
 - <http://timescolumns.typepad.com/gledhill/2009/07/blogging-the-treebog.html>
- The press releases were picked up by many other sources, e.g.
 - <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/bishop.blesses.compost.toilet/23847.htm>
 - <http://www.sloppynoodle.com/wp/british-bishop-blesses-compost-toilet/>
 - <http://forums.myspace.com/t/4652066.aspx?fuseaction=forums.viewthread>

Further actions planned

- Escot church is now considering photovoltaic cells for generating electricity.



Considerations for other projects

Lessons from this project:

- Print off the specifications from a website and get on with it!
- Tree Bogs are for places where it is completely impossible for other sorts of toilets to be constructed, so it is unlikely that disabled people will make their way to events in the first instance. If too much time is spent on trying to accommodate the feelings and wants of all sections of the community, then the costs will spiral out of all reasonable proportion and the project will not happen – unfortunate, but true.

“How to” websites, e.g.

- <http://www.stewardwood.org/resources/DIYtreebog.htm>
- <http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/building-a-tree-bog/>

Contacts for more information

Escot church would be delighted to show the system to anyone who is interested. For further details contact Rev Cate Edmonds on cateedmonds@aol.com or 01404 851401, or Keith Townson, Churchwarden, on evekeith@ifunda.fsnet.co.uk.

Installer

- John-Michael Kennaway is available for consultation on any other ecological projects, on 01404 822188 or info@escot-devon.co.uk.

Funding bodies

- Tale Valley Trust – see <http://talevalley.com/>