

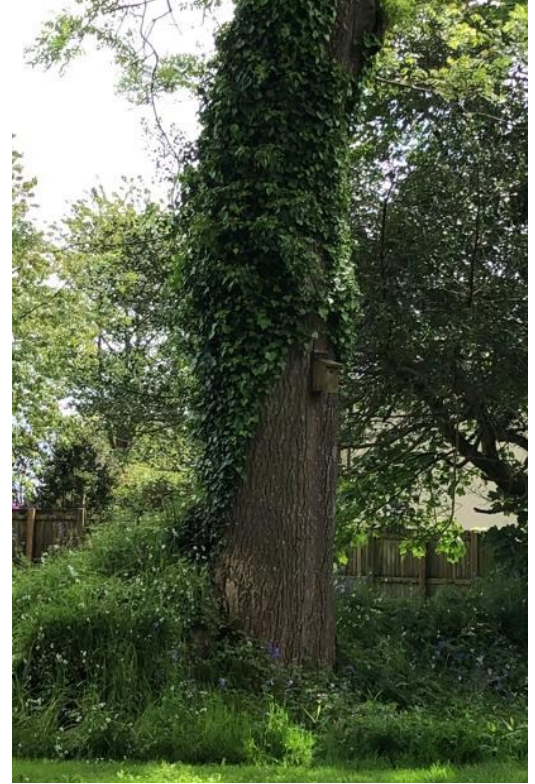
St Erme Churchyard Nest Box Report 2026 - Samantha Haley



Adult Blue Tit (Left)



Adult Great Tit (Right)



Box 3, St Erme Churchyard

Nest Box recording is carried out by approximately 670 registered volunteers across the UK. Working under the direction of the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology), they collect data that contributes to our understanding of breeding birds and follow a strict Code of Conduct to minimise disturbance.

Nest boxes not only provide cavity-nesting birds with a safe place to rear their young, but can also provide overnight roosting sites. Churchyards can be one of the most tranquil settings for these boxes to be placed, while also giving people visiting loved ones' graves the opportunity to enjoy the birds using them.

Seven homemade nest boxes were placed around St Erme churchyard on 17th March 2024. These boxes were designed to attract both Blue Tit and Great Tit. We put up 3 boxes with a 25 mm entrance hole, which is suitable for Blue Tit, and 4 boxes with a 28 mm hole, which are suitable for Great Tit, but can also be used by Blue Tit.

Typically, Blue Tit will lay between 8-10 eggs during April and May. Eggs are laid daily, and once the clutch has been completed, the eggs are incubated for around 14 days. The young will then leave the nest between 16 and 22 days after hatching.

Blue Tits must synchronise the timing of hatching with the availability of food. An important food source for the chicks is Winter Moth caterpillars, which the adults collect from oak trees.

Great Tit generally lay slightly smaller clutches, with 6-9 eggs being most common. Again, these are normally laid during April/May. Like the Blue Tit, they also take around 14 days to hatch, with the young fledging at approximately 19 days old.

The BTO receives around 3,500 - 4000 nest records of each of these species from volunteers on an annual basis. Birds that readily take to nesting in boxes can be easily monitored. The scale of monitoring varies greatly, from a single box in someone's back garden to extensive nest box schemes covering large areas of woodland and forest.

Since the scheme in the churchyard began in 2024, 5 of the 7 boxes have been used.

In 2026, boxes 1, 2, 3 and 7 were used for nesting, and Box 6 was used as a roosting site for an adult bird at night. In 2025, boxes 6 and 7 were used, and in 2024, boxes 1 and 3 were used.

Overall, twice as many boxes were used in 2026 as in either of the previous two years. This increase is encouraging and may reflect the benefit of providing more suitable places for birds to nest.

The BTO's bird ringing scheme, amongst other things, helps us understand how long birds live and how they move between different areas. In 2026, I completed the necessary training and obtained my licence to place small, uniquely numbered metal rings on chicks in nests. At the appropriate stage, the chicks are briefly and carefully removed from the nest so that the ring can be fitted safely before they are returned. If these birds are then re-trapped as part of the scheme, or found dead, their age and movement can be used to contribute toward valuable scientific data.

This year, boxes 1 and 7 were both used by Blue Tits which successfully fledged young. Female Blue Tits are responsible for building the nest, and Box 1 had a complete nest by 3rd April. The female laid her first egg on 10th April and had a total of 10 eggs, which are laid daily. The female is also solely responsible for incubation in this species, but both parents take part in feeding the chicks once they hatch. Whilst the female is incubating, the male calls her off the nest at regular intervals and accompanies her to feed for 5-10 minutes at a time. The chicks in Box 1 hatched around May 3rd and the nest was empty by May 22nd.

Nesting began later in Box 7, with the first egg laid on 23 April. I ringed five chicks in this box on 25 May, and the young had fledged successfully by 4 June.

In August, I did a check on the boxes in the churchyard to see if any would need to be replaced this winter. Whilst carrying out these checks, I found that two of the other boxes had also been used. These appeared to be either late clutches that I had missed or nesting attempts that had been started but not completed. Box 2 contained 1 egg, and Box 3 contained 2 eggs. It is difficult to be 100% sure, but these nests were still looking reasonably neat and tidy, and I think they probably did not succeed. This could well be due to the wet, cold and windy weather we had in May.

Once all my information has been collected, it is submitted to a national online database, where it can be used to examine breeding trends, clutch sizes and rates of successful fledging.

I'd like to express my thanks to Michael Edwards again for helping to make this scheme in the local churchyard possible. I hope the information is of interest and helps to secure the future of the nest boxes in this area.



Box 1 - 16/4/26



Box 1 - 9/5/26



Box 7 - Ringed chick