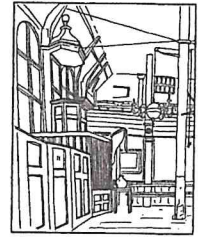




Walpole Old Chapel, Halesworth Road,
Walpole, Suffolk IP19 9AZ
secretary@walpoleoldchapel.co.uk



To: Dame Fiona Reynolds, Master
Emmanuel College
St Andrews Street
Cambridge CB2 3AP

25th June 2020

cc: The Revd. Jeremy Caddick, Chaplain

Dear Dame Fiona,

Re: Walpole Old Chapel - 'Unwrapped'

I am writing to you as Chairman of The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel, to ask whether you and/or the college might be interested in becoming involved in a project here.

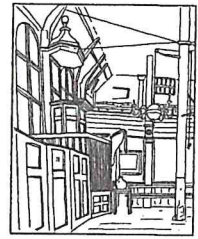
The Old Chapel in Walpole (Suffolk) is a unique C17th Independent chapel, which was converted from a late C16th farmhouse and is still, today, virtually as it was when first used. The first Minister of the Walpole congregation, in 1649, was Samuel Habergham, a follower of William Bridge. William was an influential non-conformist preacher and member of the Westminster Assembly of the Divines – 1643 to 1653.

You will know that Emmanuel is one of the Cambridge colleges most closely associated with religious non-conformism at that time. Samuel Habergham, and John and Samuel Manning – the three earliest Ministers at Walpole, were all educated at Emmanuel. We in the Friends group feel there is a strong historical, and formative link between the chapel and the college.

In brief, the project will involve removing the existing (inappropriate) render from the building, making any repairs necessary to the structural timbers, and re-rendering in traditional materials (oak laths and lime plaster). Alongside the physical conservation work, we also hope to 'unwrap' the social, political and religious history of the building and its people, bringing them to contemporary audiences. I attach a copy of the first edition of our project newsletter, which provides further information.



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The chapel is owned by a national charity - The Historic Chapels Trust. The HCT supports this project, but they currently have neither the staff nor the funds to carry it out. In fact, their conservation work is currently being provided, through a service agreement, by the Churches Conservation Trust. This is why we, the local group, have taken on the task of driving this project forward.

We would be absolutely delighted if you and/or Emmanuel College could become involved in the project in some way - to re-establish and update the historical links as it were!

I know you will be very busy at this time, but we would like to invite you to Walpole, to see the chapel for yourself, and to discuss the possible involvement of the college. We would be very happy for you to bring any colleague(s) you feel could contribute to the conversation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries about the chapel or this project. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Wm. W. Mahood.

The Revd. Bill Mahood
Chaiman, The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel
T. 01986 872759
E. billmahood@btinternet.com

Walpole Old Chapel – June 2020



A very warm welcome to Walpole Old Chapel, and to an exciting new project that will be taking place here over the next year to eighteen months - “unwrapped”.

What you are looking at above has been described as “..one of the most intriguing buildings in East Anglia”. It was built as a farmhouse in the late C16th century and converted, by local people, into an independent chapel, in the C17th. It was at the centre of non-conformist life in the village, and further afield, till it closed for regular worship in 1970. This is recorded, poignantly, in the minute book, from 11th March -

“This meeting feels that the Old Chapel building at Walpole should be preserved as an object of historical interest, but the cause there has ceased to exist, as there appears little interest by local inhabitants.”

Fortunately, in 1995, the chapel passed into the ownership and care of The Historic Chapels Trust (HCT). Now we (the local community), have a unique opportunity to work with HCT, supported also by the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), on a major new project at what is listed as a Grade 2* site of great significance, both locally and nationally. We hope to be able to invite you, soon, to an event to officially launch this project. But, for now, please, read on to find out more!

Wm. W. Mahood.

The Rev. Bill Mahood, Chairman of the Friends of Walpole Old Chapel

www.walpoleoldchapel.co.uk

www.hct.org.uk

www.visitchurches.org.uk

Walpole Old Chapel – June 2020

Covid 19 Update

But first, an update on the position here in relation to the coronavirus pandemic – As you'd expect, the chapel building is currently closed, and will remain so until further notice. All is not lost, however. The chapel 'yard' is safe and open. A seat is provided for those who want to rest, listen to the birds, watch the flowers and grasses sway in the breeze and generally imbibe the peace with those who have been laid to rest here over the centuries. The car park opposite is open and the familiar outside view is as ever. How many times have you, like me, motored past between Halesworth and Laxfield or Peasenhall and caught sight of this splendid view of the chapel beyond its iron railings? Next time just pause on your journey and enter the grounds, or why not make a special trip? Bring a camera to photograph the wildlife, or some binoculars. Walk round and inspect the current state of the plaster before it is 'unwrapped'. Imagine it renewed..... Join our dream and perhaps think about getting more involved. It could be a way to a more satisfied life, beyond Covid 19.

The Old Chapel 'Unwrapped'

Over the years we've had all sorts of problems with the render on the outside of the chapel – including cracking of the render and 'spalling' of the surface coating, as this current photo shows.



Walpole Old Chapel – June 2020

In 2017 we had a thorough survey and detailed analysis carried out to establish what are the causes of these problems, and what is the best way forward. Following those recommendations, we have decided that all the old render should be taken off – the building will literally be “unwrapped”. That will reveal the structural timber frame, and allow any necessary repairs to be carried out before the building is re-rendered in appropriate, traditional materials, by people with the specialist skills required. This will provide an unusual and fascinating educational opportunity for interested groups to visit, and observe real craftsmen and craftswomen at work.

Alongside the work to the physical fabric of the building, we hope to “unwrap” the social history of the chapel and its people over the centuries. We believe this will lead to a broader and deeper understanding of the chapel's important role in the communities it served in the past, as well as bringing to life the role it fulfills now.

This will involve digging into the archives. Hopefully, though, we will also be able to talk to members of families which have been associated with the chapel in different ways over the decades or centuries. We will also be interviewing people who have used the chapel in recent years – whether to get married, or to say goodbye to loved ones; to perform, or to listen to music and poetry; or just to sit in quiet contemplation. What does this building, and its unique internal space mean to them? And how can we harness that understanding in order to help chart a way forward that meets people's needs today and into the future?

It would be great, for example, to talk with members of the 'Group A' choir from Lowestoft, who performed at the chapel in 2017. What do they remember about it now? How could their memories help us better reach out to non-traditional performers or audiences at a rural chapel in the future?



Walpole Old Chapel – June 2020

And where might this comment take us, from the visitor's book in August 2005? What does pilgrimage mean to people today? Why do we get so many people visiting who are on church 'tours'? What drives them, what are they looking for? Can we learn things that would allow us to better meet their needs?

Walking where pilgrims
have walked for 300 years.

In the chapel 'yard' we have a tiny patch of 'herb-rich grassland' – a very rare remnant of pasture which was once widespread on the Suffolk Sandlings.



What can we find out about this type of pasture, the way it was managed and the people who farmed it? And what might that tell us about the life experiences that informed the religious and political views of the chapel congregations of old?

Walpole Old Chapel – June 2020

We hope you have found this first edition of the WOC “unwrapped” newsletter interesting and thought-provoking. We plan to let people know what's happening on the project through further editions of the newsletter, and through blogs and podcasts on our website, which is being upgraded for the purpose.

We hope you will want to follow the “unwrapping” of Walpole Old Chapel, but if you would prefer not to receive any further publicity about WOC, please let us know.

How you can Help

Alternatively, if you would like to find out more or to get involved, please do get in touch. We'd be really pleased to hear from you! This is a big, and quite complex project, with the bulk of the work being carried out by local volunteers. We would welcome more help, including in the following areas -

- publicity in various formats – print, website, social media
- researching and writing grant applications
- planning and putting on local fundraising events
- reasearching and writing up or recording local stories

Contact Information

Anne Thomas or Simon Weeks T. 01986 784348

secretary@walpoleoldchapel.co.uk