

Walpole Old Chapel – March 2021

The old chapel 'unwrapped'

As much of the country struggles to keep going during the third lockdown, we are very fortunate to have been able to keep making progress on the 'unwrapped' project. Kirstie Robbins – our architect – visited the chapel on 12th January, to carry out a condition survey. Ed Morton, from The Morton Partnership, came on the same day, to examine some of the roof timbers which had previously been flagged as possibly being of concern. The reports from these two surveys will allow us to draw up a complete specification for the construction works required to put the fabric of the chapel in good shape for the future.

We are also very pleased that, after a lot of hard work by two of our volunteers and local company *Mustard Creative*, the new website is now up and running. This is going to be central to how we provide information in the future, and we will be adding a lot to it over the coming months. Thanks are due to Suffolk County Council for funding the new site through their localities fund. Please do have a look, and tell us what you think of it!

In the background, we have also been working on things we will need in order to support our applications for grant funding. In our September 2020 edition we introduced a key document - the 'Conservation Management Plan'. The draft is now almost complete, and will soon be ready to go out for consultation. We will be putting it on the website, and we would welcome any comments you might have at that time.

December saw the start of a new musical project in the chapel through an Arts Council funded residency to revive and re-imagine a 2013 composition of great local historical interest – *Witchfinder*. A group of hardy performers took up residence in the chapel for four days of research and development on the piece. We are looking forward to the performances later in the year.



You can find out more about these developments, and others, in the following pages. As always, we would be pleased to hear from you, at our new email address:

info@walpoleoldchapel.org

www.walpoleoldchapel.org

www.hct.org.uk

www.visitchurches.org.uk

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Renovations

The latest condition survey, carried out by Ptolemy Dean Architects Ltd and The Morton Partnership, has confirmed the need to remove and replace the external render. It has also identified a number of other issues requiring 'urgent' attention. These include repairs to doors, windows and barge boards – all of which could sensibly be carried out when the building is surrounded by scaffolding.



We were pleased to receive an acknowledgement of the work of the local volunteers in the report: *“The chapel benefits from an active local Friends group. Despite the disruption to the Chapel’s usual programme of events and the associated cleaning which goes with opening, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-21, the Chapel interior remains in good order and it is apparent to any visitors that this is a place that is loved and cared for.”*

But, alas, 'love and care' are not sufficient to deal with the issues the chapel now faces. These latest reports have confirmed that the cost of the 'urgent' works is likely to be in the region of £230,000. We have begun preliminary discussion with the Heritage Lottery Fund about applying to them for a major grant.

In the meantime our local fundraising is going well, despite covid restrictions limiting the types of activities we can carry out. Oh for the days when you could put on charity balls, race nights and grand plant sales! We will provide an update on how much we have raised locally in our June edition.

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Viola odorata



Dorothy Casey muses on violets, which will soon be appearing around the chapel -

“I know a bank..... where the nodding violet grows” - A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Shakespeare.

Flowering sometimes as early as mid March, violets are among the best loved of our spring flowers. Easily recognised by its heart shaped leaves, the sweet violet can be found in open habitats such as churchyards and on grassy banks as well as in woodland glades and hedges. The flowers are large and may be a rich dark purple in colour but sometimes white or even cream flowers can occur.

The fragrance of sweet violets can be strong and they have been used in the making of perfume as far back as Classical Greece. In medieval times, violets were valued as one of the strewing herbs used to sweeten the floors of dwellings. They also had a role in herbal medicine, especially for insomnia and headache. And they led John Gerarde to write:

“There is made of Violets and sugar certaine plates called Sugar violet which is most pleasant and wholesome , especially it comforteth the heart and other inward parts” - From The Herbal or General Historie of Plants, 1597

Later in the Spring, the rather pale flowered dog violets can be found frequently growing in woods and hedge banks. Unscented and less conspicuous than sweet violets, the dog violet almost certainly inspired John Clare to write in his poem ‘Holywell’:

*“And just to say that Spring was come,
The violet has left its woodland home,
And, hermit like, from storms and wind, Sought the best shelter it could find,
'Neath long grass banks, with feeble flowers
Peeping faintly purple flowers.”*

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Witchfinder!

Witchfinder is a musical theatre piece that takes inspiration from the East Anglian historical figure, Matthew Hopkins (1620-1647), who systematically accused and condemned suspected 'witches' across East Anglia in the 1600's. Hopkins' career in the art of witch hunting is thought to have launched when he moved to Mistley, Essex in 1644. An impoverished lawyer whose father was a Puritan minister, Hopkins began by successfully outing several 'witches' in his village.

He went on to conduct a tour of terror across East Anglia, claiming to be officially commissioned by Parliament as 'The Witchfinder General'; with a mission to uncover and prosecute witches. In 1647 he published a book detailing his witch-hunting methods: *'The Discovery of Witches'*. Between the years 1644 and 1647, Hopkins and his associates are believed to have been responsible for the deaths of over 200 people.



A creative team of performers and musicians spent 4 days at the chapel in December 2020, when they looked at how *Witchfinder* could be adapted for performance there in 2021. The artists workshopped new musical and theatrical material and experimented with how the building's acoustics could be used to create an immersive sound world for the piece. They also looked at how members of the local community could be involved in performances of the piece going forward.

You can read the *Witchfinder* blog, meet the creative team and find a link to a short film of the residency here - <https://witchfinder.blog/>

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Anthony Rossi – chapel architect

If you have a long association with the chapel, you may remember the name Anthony Rossi. He was the architect who oversaw the renovations carried out between 1993 and 1995 and he came to love the building. We still have the heavily annotated drawings he made as he was working on the building, which were very helpful for our current architect – Kirstie Robbins. He also drew the original plans of the historical evolution of the building, a version of which have been included in our chapel 'guide' ever since. And I learnt only last year that he specially chose the vestry lamp shades and light switches from his personal collection.

Anthony died last year, aged 88. You may be interested to read his obituary in the RIBA journal – www.ribaj.com/culture/anthony-paul-rossi-1932-2020-walsingham-shrine-wirksworth-hopkinsons-house

Can you help?

One of the most striking features of the chapel interior is the massive central support post. This was put in to take the weight of the new roof structure when the chapel was extended, and the now familiar double pitched roof was created. It has always been said that this was a ship's mast – a suggestion which is borne out by the fact that it's base is 'squared off' in two axes, at right angles to each other, so as to fit into a square socket. We don't have an exact date for this work, but it is assumed to have been carried out shortly after the trustees took out the original lease on the building in 1689.



But where did it come from? And how did it get to Walpole? We wondered if it might have been salvaged from a navy ship, damaged in the Battle of Sole Bay, which took place off Southwold. But that was in 1672, so it would have been lying around, or in storage, for the best part of twenty years, before being re-purposed. If not salvaged, was there a shipyard in Southwold that was making such large ships at that time? Or was it brought from further afield – from Lowestoft or Yarmouth, for example. Wherever it came from, how was it transported to Walpole. Could it have come the whole way by barge, up the river Blyth? Or could it have been transported by road?

Please do get in touch if you have any leads or theories we can follow up. It would be wonderful to uncover the whole story of this important piece of timber.

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Infection control in the C17th

Thanks to Christopher Leggett for forwarding this extract from *'The Countrey Justice'* 1661.

“If any person infected, or dwelling in an house infected with the plague, shall be by any Justice of the Peace (or other Officer) commanded to keep his house, and notwithstanding, shall wilfully go abroad, and converse in company, having any infections sore upon him, it is a felony: and if such person shall not have such sore upon him, yet for his said offence he shall be punished as a vagabond (by the appointment of any justice of the peace as it seemeth) and further shall be bound to his good behaviour, for one whole year.

It shall be lawful for the justices or any one Justice of the Peace (and other head officers in Corporate Townes), within their several limits, to appoint Searchers, Watchmen, Examiners, Keepers, and Buriers, for the persons and places infected: and to minister unto them oaths, for the performance of their said several offices, and to give them other directions as to them shall seem good.

If any person infected, or dwelling, or being in an house infected, shall contrary to the commandment or appointment of the Justice of the Peace (or other Officer) wilfully attempt to go abroad or to resist such their Keepers or Watchman then may such Watchmen with violence enforce them to keep their houses, and not be impeached for hunting them.”

And how was this to be paid for?

“Any two Justices of the peace or any two head Officers of any City, Borough Town and corporate, and place privileged, may tax all and every inhabitant, and all houses of habitation, lands, tenements and hereditaments within that said city or borough etc or the liberties thereof (at such reasonable taxes as they shall think fit) for the reasonable relief, of such persons as are infected, or inhabiting in houses that are infected in the same city etc and may levy the said taxes (by distress and sale of goods of every person refusing or neglecting to pay the said taxes), by warrant under the hands and seals of two such Justices or head officers to be directed to any person or persons for the execution thereof, and in default of such distress and that refusal be made of payment, then upon return thereof, the said Justice or Officers by the like warrant may commit such person to the Goal there to remain without bail, until he shall satisfy the same taxation and the arerages*.

However, there were exceptions to the above practice.

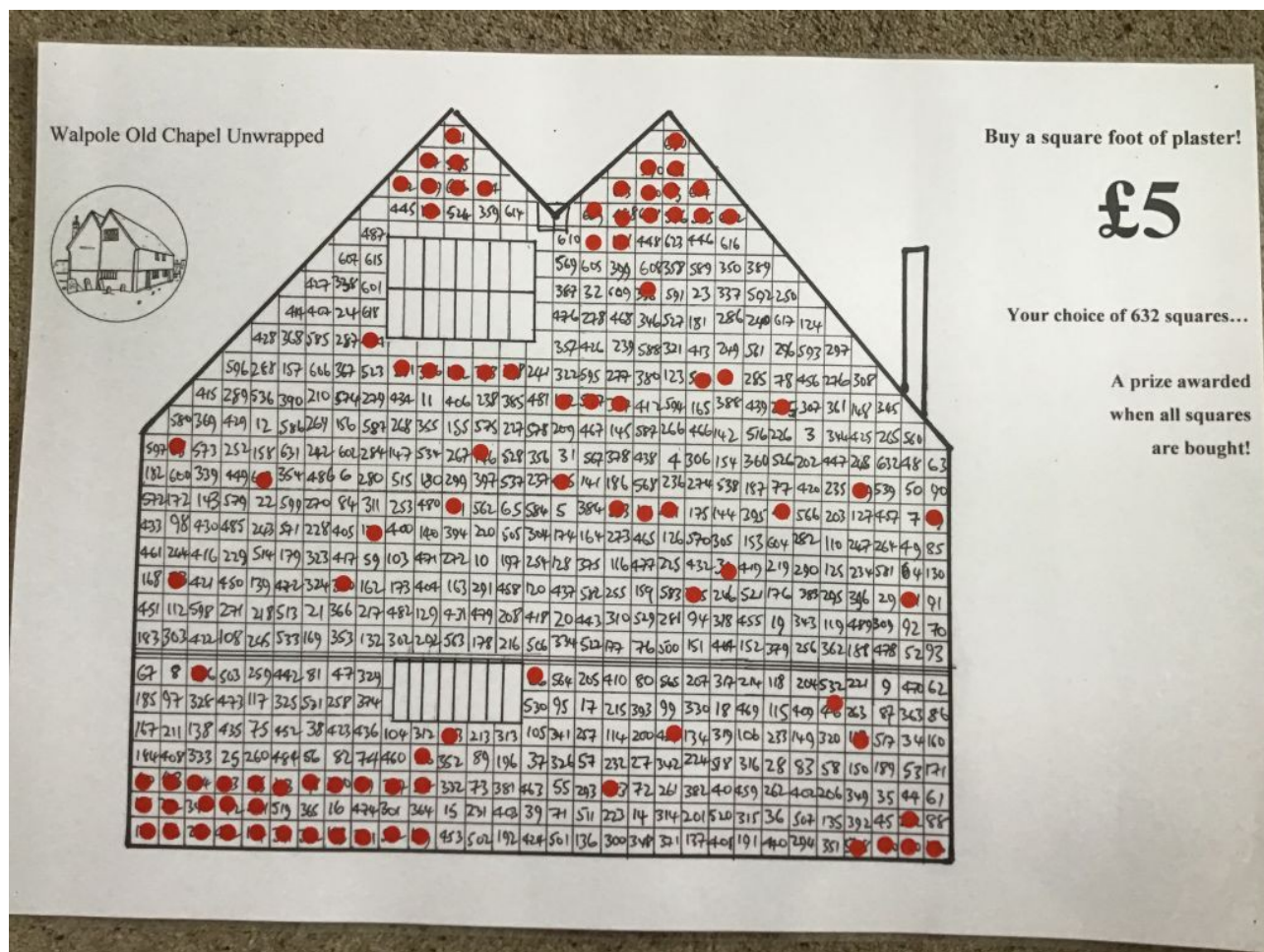
“But no justice of peace shall do or execute any thing before mentioned within either of the Universities of Cambridge or Oxford, or, within any Cathedral Church, or the Liberties thereof, or within the colleges of Eaton or Winchester; but the Vice Chancellor of the University, Bishop and Dean of such Church, and the Provost or Warden of the said colleges shall do and execute all things above-mentioned within their several precincts.”

*Middle English **arrerage**, arerage "unpaid debt, balance due, state of being behind in payment," borrowed from Anglo-French **arrerage**.

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Buy a square of render - update

Our 'buy a square of render' competition has proved to be a popular way for chapel supporters to donate to the 'unwrapped' project fund. We are pleased to report that 92 squares have now been sold – bringing in £521 (including gift aid). A big 'thank you' to everybody who has bought a square(s).



If you, or someone you know, would like to enter: Please contact our Treasurer – Lyn Banks - at lynbanks55@gmail.com to choose a number or numbers that are still available. You can then make your payment directly to our bank account, by cheque or online at <http://easydonate.org/HCTE2>

Thank you for your generous donation!

- Emmanuel College, Cambridge
- Suffolk Historic Churches Trust
- Flagship Homes

Contact information

Anne Thomas or Simon Weeks – Secretaries. 01986 784348 or info@walpoleoldchapel.org

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Volunteering at Walpole Old Chapel

A conversation between Rob Gildon, volunteer at Walpole Old Chapel and Bill Mahood, the Minister.

Rob Since I came to live in Walpole I have felt that The Old Chapel is a very special place.

Bill I have known it for about 30 years and been very involved with it since I retired in 2007. I always feel there is more to discover about its life and history. People driving through Walpole must be surprised to see a large, old house surrounded by graves.

Rob That was certainly the case with me and I have become very involved with it. I love the place and have learned that it was a 16th century farmhouse. About 1690 it was gutted, extended and made into a Non-Conformist Chapel with very few later alterations.

Bill That is true. For most of its life it has been used as a place of worship serving a congregation in all the different aspects of its life. It still has some Services (especially a very popular Carol Service at Christmas) but its life has widened to include a whole range of activities, concerts, exhibitions, plays, poetry readings and many others. We see its activities as being there to serve the community and to reflect the concerns and interests of the area.

Rob Presumably very little is happening at present due to the Pandemic and Lockdown.

Bill In one sense that is true, but there is a lot going on in the background as we prepare for the future. We believe we do have a future. With a building of its age there is always work that needs to be done. Our concern for some time has been the state of the outside of the building, the deterioration of the rendering. So, we are planning to have all of the rendering removed and redone. Being a Historic Listed Building there needs to be a lot of planning and special permissions. It will take a couple of years for all the planning, the fund raising, seeking grants and the actual work. It will cost at least £200,000. We are calling it The Unwrapped Project, releasing the building from its present covering and making it fit for many more years of use and service.

Rob So are you looking for people to fund and invest in the project?

Bill Well, of course it would be great if people were to say they want to help with the finance. But what we really want are people, a whole range of people, to help with the project. People who understand finance and writing grant applications. People who can help us to link with local organisations like schools and museums and involve them. People with an interest in history as we prepare materials telling the story of the Chapel in ways that excite. People who will welcome visitors to the chapels and share its wonder. People with time, energy and enthusiasm, who want to share what they have discovered. People who want to work with others on a significant project.

Rob That sounds like it could be quite a commitment..

Bill We are looking for people to invest as much or as little time as they are able. Let me share the experience of a recent new volunteer. Paul Simmons - "I have always had a soft spot for the Chapel but commitments elsewhere deterred me from helping. With lockdown and suddenly a completely empty diary I was free. I am enjoying working with the current team and am in the process of setting up a Friends of Walpole Old Chapel".

Rob For those who are interested in helping, what is their next step?

Bill Look at our new website – www.walpoleoldchapel.org to learn more about us and contact me, billmahood@btinternet.com or by phone 01986 872759