



# Walpole Old Chapel - June 2022



## Repair and Conservation - Simon Weeks

Regular readers will be familiar with our 'unwrapped' project to remove the existing, problematic render, carry out any repairs needed to the structural timbers and infill, and re-render the building in appropriate lime plaster.

30<sup>th</sup> April saw an important step forward in the project – a day of public consultation on the proposed works. Evidence of consulting the public and, where appropriate, taking on board comments made, will be an important part of our submission to East Suffolk Council for Listed Building Consent. We were grateful to Kirstie Robbins – our architect, for preparing the display material, and for being at the Chapel on the day to present it and answer questions. We are also grateful to the Patrons, Friends, representatives of organisations and members of the public who came along, as well as to Saki Kato and Hugh Millington for providing a musical interlude.



If you were not able to come to the event, you are still welcome to see the display material and give us your views. Please contact the secretary to request a copy of the presentation.

The comments we received on the day were all supportive and help to demonstrate the wide range of organisations and individuals who value the Chapel so highly. This is evidence that is likely to be important in future funding applications. One visitor captured our thoughts very succinctly:

*"It is difficult to imagine a more worthwhile restoration project than this".*

We are now hoping to submit our application for Listed Building Consent in the autumn/winter this year, following further investigatory work in the summer



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### Witchfinder

We were delighted that the Chapel was recently able to host three successful performances of *Witchfinder* – the immersive musical theatre production, based on the life of Matthew Hopkins – the self-styled Witchfinder General. Brought to us by Cohere Arts, supported by The Arts Council and The Heritage Lottery Fund, it has been long in the making. Readers may recall our report of the early development work at the Chapel in the depths of winter 2020/21. Here we have the reflections of some of the performers on working in the Chapel.



*It felt like the chapel had a powerful effect on all the performers, by focusing them inside the history, atmosphere and story of Witchfinder. The children in particular seemed completely engaged. Working in such a beautiful environment, in natural light, is inspiring and energising, and the acoustic supports every sound, from a child's whisper to a full operatic voice. Walpole Chapel is unlike any other space I have worked in and the building played a huge part in the development of our show. A real joy, thanks to all who made this possible! Emma Bernard- director*

*If only every production could be like this: wonderful colleagues, fantastic music, surrounded by beautiful landscape with goats, hens and peacocks, and the most atmospheric set – the Walpole Old Chapel. It's like a working holiday! Lars- performer*



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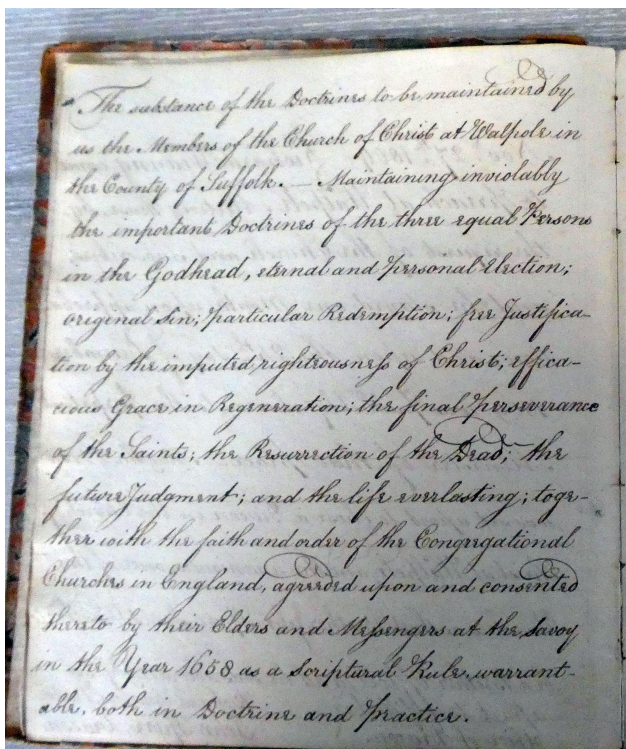
*Being a part of 'Witchfinder' has been an amazing experience and it's been such a joy to perform at the Walpole Old Chapel. There's something magical about the space, that when coupled with the incredible Suffolk landscape, it immediately transports you back in time."* Sandeep- performer

*Walpole Old Chapel is one of those unique places that has a transformative effect on all that visit and perform in it. Over 3 days more than 240 people were beguiled by its mystery and charm. It produced the perfect set and background for our production of Witchfinder- and provided so much inspiration for all our performers both young and old.- Rob - performer*

*What a complete joy to work with friends old and new on QUITE the project. The Jubilee Opera kids were on stage at Snape Maltings with English Touring Opera in La Boheme two weeks ago. Then they got to be right at the heart of WitchFinder. I'm sure both will have inspired them, but my goodness WF would have a better chance of making them more rounded people. This weekend gave them something extraordinary....Tom Appleton - conductor*

### What did they hold to? - Simon Weeks

An important and interesting statement of the beliefs of the congregation at Walpole has come to light as a result of the Discovery Project research. This is in the form of an entry in the 'church book', undated, but c1810.



"The substance of the Doctrines to be maintained by us, the Members of the Church of Christ at Walpole in the county of Suffolk - Maintaining inviolably the important Doctrines of the three equal Persons in the Godhead, eternal and personal election, original sin, particular Redemption; free Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; the final perseverance of the Saints; the Resurrection of the Dead; the future Judgment; and the life everlasting; together with the faith and order of the Congregational Churches in England, agreed upon and consented unto by their Elders and Messengers at the Savoy in the Year 1658 as a scriptural Rule, warrantable, both in Doctrine and Practice."





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The *Declaration of the Faith and Order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England* was drawn up in October 1658 in the Savoy Hospital, by a group of representatives from over a hundred independent churches. It was clearly still an important reference document over 150 years later.

### Walpole Old Chapel Discovery Project update – Miriam Stead

We have been making good progress with the Discovery Project in the last couple of months. In March we had a very enjoyable and helpful visit to the Suffolk Archives at The Hold. We were able to take a close look at some of the Chapel documents deposited there. These included a bundle of deeds that go back to the 17th century and a 19<sup>th</sup> century Chapel Book that, among other things, has lists of congregation members over a period of decades. We also examined the original Tithe Award of 1841 which includes a beautiful hand-drawn map of the parish along with details of who owned and occupied land and property at that time. Our hosts, Bridget Hanley and Mandy Rawlins then gave us a behind the scenes tour of the facility with its over 9 miles of archive shelving!

A week later Mandy came up to Halesworth Museum and led a training session in how to conduct oral history interviews, including best practice and legal requirements. The Museum has good equipment for making recordings and a bespoke database to aid transcribing interviews, left over from a previous oral history project they undertook. These they are very happy to share with the Discovery Project and to help with transcribing. Our oral history volunteers are now making contact with those people who have expressed willingness to have their memories of chapel life before 1970 captured and we hope interviews will begin soon.

Another area of research that is beginning to take off is the investigation of land and property owned or rented by the Trustees of the Chapel. We have photographic copies of an impressive list of deeds, leases, mortgages etc., plus a number of transcripts. Best of all we have an enthusiastic volunteer who is keen learn all he can from these documents, including hopefully the link to Southwold Corporation and before that Sibton Abbey.

The Discovery Project has been joined by the Halesworth U3A Genealogy Group who have offered to undertake research using the Chapel records, primarily the baptism registers from 1704-1800. This will involve transcribing all available information and entering it into a database which will be made available online, with a copy at the Halesworth Museum. It will provide a good starting point for tracing family histories of the people as well as delving into the geographical extent and social history of the congregation.



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Finally, we will soon be hosting the first of two visits by the major historical societies of the County. On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May the Suffolk Institute for Archaeology & History will visit the Chapel and then Halesworth to see the newly acquired coin hoards at the Museum and to visit the Malt Trail at The Cut. They will be followed on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June by the Suffolk Local History Council. Both these organisations have members who belong to other historical groups and we hope that word will soon spread of how great a place Walpole Old Chapel is to visit and learn about this unique building and its community.

If you are interested in helping with the research or perhaps in other ways such as publicity, making videos, vlogging or have some information or memories you would like to share, please do get in touch with me, Miriam Stead at [discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org](mailto:discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org) or 07902 411760

### Out with the old ..... Simon Weeks

The unincorporated voluntary group that has been managing the Chapel on a day to day basis for the last 25 years held its final meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April. The group was able to sign off a healthy set of annual accounts as its final 'business', then agreed unanimously with motions to transfer all its assets to the new charity and to wind itself up.

The trustees of 'The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel' (the new charity) would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to all those volunteers who have given their time to the Chapel, some over many years. Thanks to your efforts, the trustees are taking on responsibility for the day to day running of an organisation that is solvent and a building that is widely valued and has a great future.

### Nature notes – Dorothy Casey

Last winter, clumps of bramble, rose and suckering elm that were encroaching on the open areas of the graveyard were cut and removed to give more light and space to the wild flowers that are such a feature of the graveyard. Now, at the height of summer, look out for meadow buttercup, St John's wort, hairy tare, vetches, smooth hawksbeard, sheep's sorrel, hare's foot clover, sweet vernal grass, red campion, knapweed and lady's bedstraw that grow in profusion amongst the gravestones. Of particular note is the presence of orpine, an uncommon Suffolk plant that is thriving and spreading now that the bramble has been cut back.



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Later in the summer, listen out for grasshoppers and crickets that abound in the dry grass.

*'The poetry of earth is never dead:  
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run from  
hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;  
That is the Grasshopper's - he takes the lead  
In summer luxury.....'*

From 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket' by John Keats



### Stop Press!

We are delighted to report that details of the grant from English Heritage have now been confirmed and made public. We are very grateful to EH for awarding £54,126 to the Chapel for “.. *urgent investigations to discover more about the deteriorating building in order to inform future repair and conservation work.*”

The majority of the grant will be spent on two particular investigations. Firstly, contractors will be cutting away sample sections of the render to get a direct look at the state of the structural timbers underneath. Secondly, surveyors will be reviewing the surface water drainage arrangements to see if they need to be improved for the future of the building. The results of these investigations will inform the final proposals that are submitted for Listed Buildings Consent.

### Contact information

Simon Weeks, Secretary: 01986 784348 or [info@walpoleoldchapel.org](mailto:info@walpoleoldchapel.org)

To become a Friend of the Chapel: [friends@walpoleoldchapel.org](mailto:friends@walpoleoldchapel.org)

To donate on line: <http://easydonate.org/HCTE2>

To contact the Discovery Project team: [discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org](mailto:discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org)

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