



Walpole Old Chapel - December 2022



Quite a Year! - The Trustees

As the country has grappled with the challenges of recovering from the worst of the covid pandemic, rocketing energy prices, and other cost of living pressures, many charities and voluntary organisations have been struggling to get back on track. Here at Walpole Old Chapel, we are lucky to have been able to make good progress on our plans across the board. This has only been possible because of the exceptional dedication the Chapel inspires in its many supporters.

For the first time since 2019 there has been a full programme of public and private events at the Chapel this year – including regular opening on Saturday afternoons, weddings and funerals, concerts and other public performances, group visits and the 'Ride & Stride' and 'Heritage Open Days' weekend. We thank the organisers, the performers, our volunteer stewards and our visitors for making this possible. Preparations are already underway for next season's programme, which promises some exciting new developments – see below.

We have also seen good progress on the repair and conservation project – Walpole Old Chapel 'Unwrapped'. A total of £95,000 has now been raised, which will more than cover the project costs to the point where we invite contractors to tender for the main work. We still have to raise funds for the re-rendering work, but we are very pleased to have appointed Vikki Thompson as our consultant in this endeavour. Our architect – Kirstie Robbins, has been working tirelessly to ensure the prior 'investigatory' works required by Historic England are completed in time to make use of their grant funding – more on that below. We thank everyone on the 'Unwrapped' project team for helping to keep the momentum going.

Our 'Discovery' (community history) project team met face-to-face for the first time last month, which made us reflect on how much can be achieved just through emails and online meetings. The oral history recordings are now almost complete. We have jointly hosted two successful group visits to the Chapel and Halesworth & District Museum, as well as given talks and written articles. The Halesworth U3A genealogy group has completed the task of transcribing the Chapel's baptism records into a searchable database, which we hope will be available online soon – more on that below. We thank everybody involved in this excellent project.

Finally, we managed successfully to convert the legal form of The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel from an 'Unincorporated Voluntary Association' to a 'Charitable Incorporated Organisation'. This means we can now raise our own funds and claim our own gift aid, rather than having to route those transactions through the Historic Chapels Trust which, sadly, does not have a long-term future. You can find a recent update on HCT's future below. We thank the 35 people who have already joined 'The Friends', and we look forward to the charity growing in future years.



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The Historic Chapels Trust – Chris Smith

We received a recent update from Chris Smith – Chair of the HCT trustees. As many readers will know, the future of HCT itself, and of the 20 chapels it owns (including Walpole), has been uncertain for several years. It seems that things are now becoming clearer, as indicated by the following passages from Chris' update:

“Previously I referred to negotiations with public bodies without naming them for reasons of confidentiality. I can now reveal that we had applied to the National Heritage Memorial Fund's Cultural Assets Fund (CAF) which is designed to address the problems faced by heritage charities afflicted, like HCT, by events since early 2020. Our application was accepted because our situation had deteriorated, and we had established that there remained no grant-giving body willing to sustain our existing financial model. We undertook the lengthy and demanding application process with the support of consultants. Negotiations were known to Historic England who understood our new and very challenging circumstances and, we believe, promoted our case with CAF.

As was announced yesterday (go to NHMF's home page and click News), we were successful in attracting an offer of c.£3.6million. This is a remarkable outcome for which we feel very grateful. Regrettably, however, it is not available to sustain HCT as we know it, but to ensure that we can find new homes for the Chapels before ceasing to operate.

The money can be spent on the repair of some chapels which meet CAF criteria. That work will be carried out on our behalf by the Churches Conservation Trust, with whom, as you know we have a long-standing strong working relationship, who will also be funded to manage the maintenance of the Chapels for the three-year period of the grant.

We are also on the cusp of completing negotiations with HE who understand that we face costs not covered by CAF and that our reserves are limited. Sadly, they agree with our assessment that all avenues of long-term revenue funding have been explored and found wanting - so their further and exceptional grant aid is only to enable us to achieve the process outlined above and, eventually, to close down.

So, this is a bittersweet moment. We have avoided the danger of immediate closure and all the chaos that would have brought. But we have only achieved funding to disperse the Chapels to safe and appropriate long-term ownership by others.

We will be writing to you all with more details and to explain what this means for the sector, the Chapels generally and the one with which you have a particular affinity. We will also begin to set up the programme of meetings I promised in my previous note”.

We will keep our readers informed about these important developments as we learn more.



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Carols and Readings by Candlelight

After having had to cancel the service in both 2020 and 2021, we are delighted that it will be going ahead this year – **on Saturday 17th December at 3pm.**

Wrap up warm, bring a torch and please join us afterwards for mulled apple juice and mince pies. The juice this year comes from Walpole's very own community orchard and apple juice project!

And on the subject of mince pies Lisa Eveleigh writes:

"When Simon put out a call for mince-pies makers to get baking in time for the annual Carol Service, I was happy to volunteer.

My mother Joan Webster, who died on 21st September aged 90, was renowned for her light hand with pastry, and in particular demand at Christmas. The comforting scent of baking and spiced fruit are inextricably linked to Advent for me. At one point Joan was in danger of being nicknamed Mrs. Kipling. The record one December was over 200 dozen, a figure mentioned in her eulogy.

These were largely sold in aid of charities associated with Rotary, Inner Wheel, our Parish Church, and a local care home, and few of our friends and family troubled to make their own. My cousin Toby – a connoisseur of all things sweet – still maintains they're the best he's ever eaten.

It's a great comfort to us that last Christmas my mother stayed with my sister and enjoyed exercising her silky skills, as the picture shows. It remains to be seen whether I've inherited her talent, but I'll do my best to honour her memory. "





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Repair and Conservation - Simon Weeks

At the time of writing, we are awaiting final confirmation of dates for the 'opening up' work at the Chapel, provisionally scheduled to begin during the week starting 5th December. Regular readers will remember this work was required by Historic England (and funded by them) before we submit our application for Listed Buildings Consent for the re-rendering work. The work will involve cutting away sample areas of the external render to better understand the state of the laths and structural timbers underneath. At the same time an archaeologist will be visiting to monitor the work and to make the required 'Historic Building Record'.

We think this could be a time when we learn a lot more about the building. We also think people might be interested in seeing the process first hand, and hearing what the contractors have to say. So, we have arranged that the contractor will host a morning or afternoon where **interested people can come along to find out more**. The number we can accommodate will be limited, so please contact me as soon as possible to register your interest - Simon Weeks, Secretary: 01986 784348 or info@walpoleoldchapel.org

Looking Forward to Events in 2023 - Lin le Versha

We are thrilled to announce that on Wednesday 14th June The King's Singers will be performing three concerts in the Chapel as part of the Aldeburgh Festival programme. Since 1968 the group, formed by graduates from King's College Cambridge, has become the "gold standard" of acapella singing and we hope that their concert may be the first of many we will host for the Aldeburgh Festival and Snape Maltings.

We are also excited to reveal two of the other events we have booked for our summer season at WOC. On 11th June the Gainsborough Quartet, a Suffolk-based quartet will be entertaining us. They have appeared at Snape Maltings, a plethora of local venues and most recently at the International Festival of Early Music. Their programme will include quartets by Mendelssohn and Prokofiev and they will be joined by our local baritone opera singer Rob Gildon, for Samuel Barber's "Dover Beach". An afternoon of musical delight, not to be missed!

In 2015, Blake Morrison published "Shingle Street", a collection of poetry inspired by the Suffolk coast. The Hosepipe Band has composed original music to accompany Blake's poems, which they have toured to great acclaim around Suffolk and we have booked Blake and the band on 29th July. If you want a taste of what promises to be a great evening, you can hear some sample pieces on the band's website.

These are just a few of the treats we have in store for 2023. Our full programme will be released in March with information on how you can book your tickets for some great events.



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Discovery Project: Walpole Baptisms - Kevin Wooldridge

[We are hugely grateful for the work carried out on Walpole Old Chapel baptisms by Halesworth and District U3A Genealogy group and written up by Kevin Wooldridge. What follows is extracted from his very interesting report - ed]

Amongst the surviving original records of the Walpole Chapel are three baptism registers recording baptisms from 1706 to 1837. In 2021, the Genealogy group took on the task of transcribing the original baptism records and formatting the transcribed information into a spreadsheet. The original records (in 3 volumes) are held in the Suffolk Archives, The Hold, Ipswich, Suffolk.

A report accompanying the spreadsheet provides a summary of some of the data contained within the database and it hoped might prove useful as a starting point for further research. The report discusses a number of points of interest arising from the baptism records, including how baptism was carried out at that time, names and surnames of the baptised, where the baptised were living, some of the personalities recorded in the baptism record and includes a case-study using the baptism data to trace a family tree from 1700 through to the modern day.

When Walpole Chapel began documenting baptisms in 1706, they were under no legal requirement to do so. At that time, there was no national system of civil registration in England and Wales. Baptisms, marriages and burials were recorded in parish registers largely maintained by Church of England clergy. This raises the question as to why the Walpole Chapel records were kept in the first place. A clue might lie in the records of a contemporary non-conformist congregation, that of the Independent Chapel in Beccles. Baptism was seen by some Independent chapels as a *de facto* permit of admission into the Chapel community. The Beccles chapel followed set procedures:

'Baptism was administered to the children of believers, as a sign of the gracious covenant God had made with the parents, and as an occasion for parental dedication and the solemn promise of Christian instruction. But the use of sponsors was discarded, as alike unscriptural and unnatural; the sign of the cross was omitted, as a departure from the simplicity of the gospel, implying a proportionate approach to superstition; and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was rejected, as calculated to produce and nourish a fatal delusion. It is essential to the efficient existence of every society, whether secular or religious, that some regulations should be adopted with regard to the admission of its members. But the distinction cannot be too carefully noticed, between arrangements of this nature assented to by persons voluntarily associated for religious purposes, and terms of church fellowship enforced by authority, under civil penalties, directly or indirectly attaching to nonconformity.'



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The former are consistent with unlimited toleration; the latter involve the very essence of intolerance (The Beccles Minister) Mr. Ottee appears to have exercised a very commendable prudence in the admission of members into his church. Some of the brethren were usually appointed to confer with the candidates, "in order to the church's satisfaction." And repeated instances are recorded in which the society suspended its decision, until they could "give further satisfaction," and should again apply for admission.

Contrary to seeing baptism as a means of entry into the Chapel community, there is evidence in the baptism record suggesting Walpole Chapel held a fairly liberal view as noted in a reference of a mass baptism carried out by minister John Crompton, not in Walpole, but at the Independent chapel in Wrentham on Nov 29th 1726. An explanation of why this may have occurred is provided by John Browne's history of the Wrentham Chapel.

"Mr Samuel Hebden (minister) came among them.... He kept to the old practice of this church in not administering baptism to any but the children of church members and so strong was the feeling of the church upon this point, and so great its aversion to innovation, that Mr. Hebden was bound by the church in this respect at his first coming. He was, however, willing that other ministers should administer the rite in those families in which he was precluded from doing it himself. "Disturbances and debates arose in his time, which caused a few of the congregation to leave his ministry; these were partly on account of confining baptism, and partly from family prejudices and connexions."⁵ The old practice of the church above referred to was this: those children only were admitted to baptism, one or both of whose parents were members of the church. On comparing the (Wrentham Chapel) list of baptisms with the list of admissions into the church, we find that the children were baptized at the same church meeting at which the reception of their parent or parents took place, or at some convenient time shortly afterwards; such cases frequently occur.

Whilst both the Wrentham and Beccles ministries held reservations over the baptism of non-members of the church and their relatives, Walpole chapel (and their minister) appeared to follow a more inclusive approach. This fact alone might account for some of the baptisms of folk who lived some distance outside the immediate 'footfall' of Walpole. It appears to be a policy that carried for the whole of the period of the baptism registers and suggests that Walpole Chapel didn't view baptism in itself as a means of conferring membership to an otherwise closed community.



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The rise in numbers of dissenters from the Church of England and other non-conformists meant that by the beginning of the 19th century, more and more baptisms, marriages and burials were going unrecorded in the Church of England registers. The Parochial Registers Act of 1812 declared that births deaths and marriages registered through the Church of England had to be entered on standard entries in bound volumes. The same Act also stated that the registers of non-conformists congregations were not admissible in court as evidence and only Church of England records could be presented in court as legal documents. Eventually pressure regarding the inequalities contained in the 1812 Act, led to the establishment of a Select Committee and eventually to the 1836 Registration and Marriage Acts bringing in the GRO (General Registry Office) in 1837 and the first non-denominational system of civil registration.

After 1837, birth registrations became a statutory responsibility rather than the choice of individual churches or chapels. The Walpole Chapel baptism record books all contain statements to the effect that following the 1836 Registration and Marriage Acts, the records were passed over to the General Record Office (GRO) and a baptism record was no longer maintained by the Chapel. At that date it appears that Walpole Chapel decided to no longer keep a record of individual baptisms. Although the 1837 Act was clearly only intended as the civil registration of births, it seems Walpole Chapel were relatively happy that the 1837 Act absolved them of any further responsibility in recording baptisms.

[We plan to make both the spreadsheet and Kevin's report available online through the websites of Walpole Old Chapel and the Halesworth & District Museum. We'll let you all know when these resources go live - ed].

Finding Mrs Dale - Simon Weeks

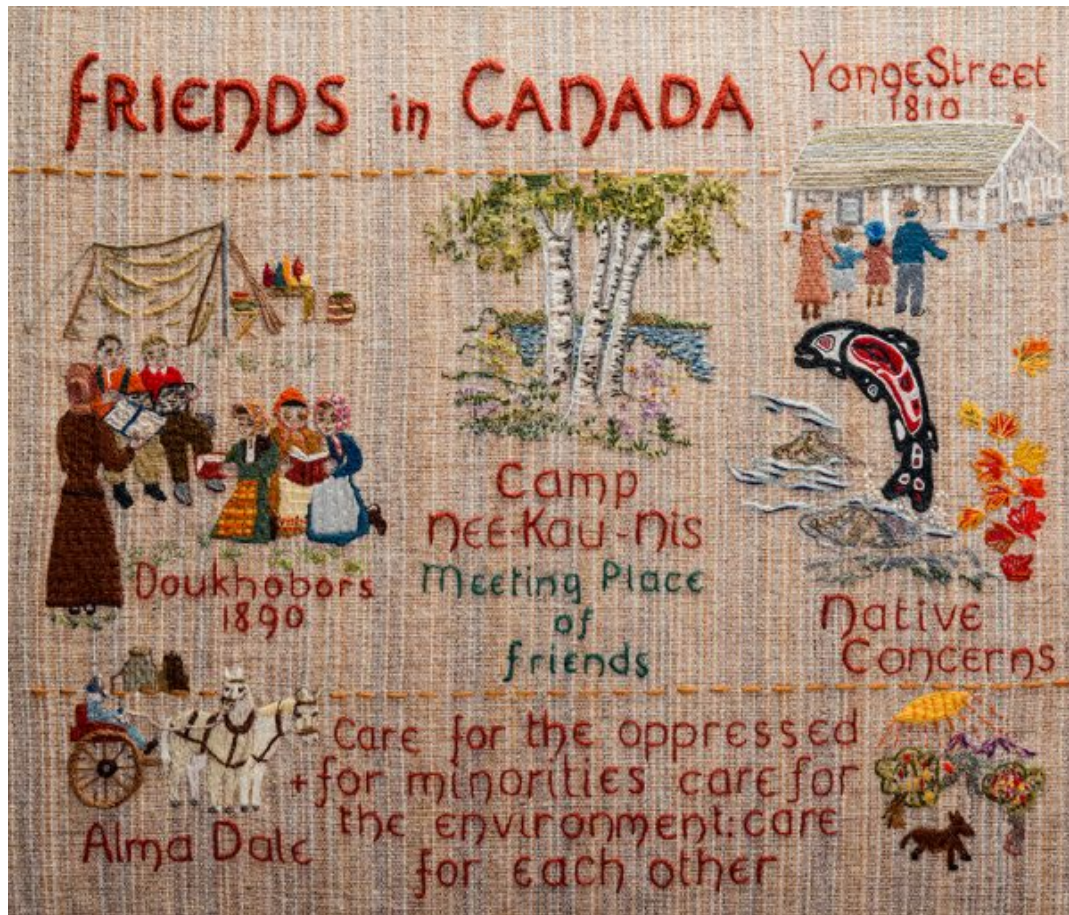
One of the most intriguing stories to be 'unearthed' through our Discovery project so far is that of Alma Dale, memorialised by a gravestone in the Chapel yard.

Alma Dale was born in 1854 in Ontario, Canada. She was part of a Quaker community that was descended from migrants who went to America with William Penn in 1683 and then moved North in 1803. She became known as a lively and persuasive Minister and was instrumental in spreading the Quaker faith Westwards during the late 1890s and 1900s. She became so highly thought of that she was invited to preach and lecture in England and New Zealand, as well as all over Canada. For readers who want to find out more, Alma Dale even has her own Wikipedia page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alma_Gould_Dale

She is also celebrated in a panel of the 'Quaker Tapestry' - a history of 350 years of Quakerism told in embroidered panels: <https://www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk> Alma Dale is shown in her carriage in the lower portion of the panel reproduced below.



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So, why was Alma Dale buried in Walpole? It turns out that she was friends with The Gillett family, also Quakers, who owned Hatch Farm then as now, and she was living there when she died in 1930. Current owner of Hatch Farm – Tony Gillett, remembers Mrs Dale as a close friend of his great aunt Margaret. And, something not reflected in other records, he remembers talk of her as a great agricultural improver and innovator. Alma and Margaret together introduced lucerne, 'white tooth maize' and the making of silage to the farm. If any of you have ever wondered about it, we can now reveal that the round concrete 'tower' outside The Harmony Centre was one of the first silos in the country – courtesy of Mrs Dale.

Contact information

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To become a Friend of the Chapel: friends@walpoleoldchapel.org

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

To contact the Discovery Project team: discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org