

About the Walpole Old Chapel Discovery Project

The Discovery Project is operated by an enthusiastic team of volunteers under the auspices of the Friends of Walpole Old Chapel and Halesworth & District Museum, These two organisations have signed a partnership agreement to work collaboratively on projects of mutual interest to protect, conserve and promote local heritage. The project has been assisted by the Suffolk Archives who have provided training and support as part of their lottery funded outreach programme. The Halesworth & District U3A Genealogy Group have undertaken a significant piece of research transcribing and analysing the Chapel Baptism Records 1706-1837.

We have also established a working relationship with the History Department of the University of East Anglia. Our contact is Dr. Joel Halcomb, an expert on religious practice, culture, and politics in Britain and Ireland during the British Civil Wars. He is a founding member of the Dissenting Experience project (www.dissent.hypotheses.org), which promotes scholarship on the history, literature, and culture of early modern religious nonconformity. He is currently working on various aspects of interregnum religion and is preparing a monograph on the Congregational movement during the Civil Wars. Dr Halcomb suggested that we put forward the Chapel and Discovery Project as a possible placement for UEA Master's students, who have to undertake a practical project as part of their degree. We were delighted when one scholar expressed an interest, and has researched the sad life of Methuselah Spalding. His essay will be included among the papers on this website. We hope for further collaboration with the University History Department and its Centre for East Anglian Studies.

Walpole Old Chapel Discovery Project – Overall Aims

1. To research, as far as possible, the history of the chapel and its communities
2. To make that history publicly available in a variety of formats in order to educate and inspire as many people as possible
3. To involve local volunteers in all aspects of the project, to increase their skills, experience and satisfaction, to build local capacity in historical research and interpretation
4. To provide a focus for developing partnership working between Walpole Old Chapel and Halesworth & District Museum. The aim of this is to enhance knowledge and access to the heritage of the area and make it easier to visit and enjoy. This will, we believe, generate a feeling of increased pride in the local area and a stronger sense of community or belonging across communities.
5. To be a key community project that supports the overall programme to raise funds for urgent repair and conservation work at the chapel. This will ensure a sustainable future for this important historical asset and allow greater opportunities for local involvement and tourism.

Areas of Research

History of the early years of the Chapel in the context of local religious belief and forms of worship

Land ownership and property held by the Chapel and its members. The Chapel building itself; its development and significance

Family histories and demographic of Chapel members

Oral history – capturing memories of those who had been part of the congregation in their youth

Examining potential links between religious and social radicalism (e.g. the local ‘Swing’ Riots of the 1830s)

How will we use this research?

- Interpretation and exhibitions
- Extended website – interactive graveyard and timeline
- Publications
- Guided trails and walks
- Creative writing
- Drama reconstructions
- Wider community involvement and developing relationships with external organisations

To find out more, please contact Miriam Stead on discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org