



Walpole Old Chapel - June 2023



Investigatory Works

The investigatory works have now been completed, and the sample areas have been 'made good' with different trial mixes of lime render and a limewash finish. Thanks go to our architect and contractors for completing this important work on time and within budget. This will hopefully stand us in good stead when applying for grants in future.



One of the big decisions still to be made is whether to use a render based on lime putty, or one based on 'hot lime'. If, like me, you are not really sure what the difference is, nor what the pros and cons of each might be, I can recommend this article -

<https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/hot-mixed-mortars/hot-mixed-mortars.htm>

Events Programme

We are sorry to report that Syzewell Gap are no longer able to play at The Chapel on the evening of 15th July, due to illness. We hope they will be able to play another time soon. All is not lost, though, as the Moonflower Duo are able to play for us instead. They are local musicians Jane Parker (French harp) and Clare Durrant (violin), who invite us to join them for 'a gentle mix of reflective music for a summer's evening'. Tickets are £12 on the door or £10 in advance from <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on?q=walpole%20old%20chapel>



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The Big Help Out

Thank you to everybody who turned up at The Chapel on May the 8th to 'do their bit' on the post-coronation volunteering day. Our aim was to tackle the brambles and other invasive plants in the Chapel yard, in order to help preserve the rare, herb-rich grassland. There is still a lot to do, but we made a good, and very visible start. We hope to have another bramble pulling day in the autumn, so look out for notifications of the date if you'd like to join us.

SPAB Visit

At the end of March, Walpole Old Chapel hosted a working visit by the Fellows and Scholars of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. We are grateful to have received an article, which tells what the visit was like from their perspective, here reproduced in full:

"Before ever setting eyes on Walpole's Old Chapel we got an idea of the depth of the community's connection with the building. As travelling Scholars and Fellows we operate with few resources and finding a place to lay our heads each night is often a challenge. However, in Walpole our appeal for accommodation was met with a whole host of generous offers of bed and board from kind locals who knew nothing of us, other than that we wanted to help the chapel too. It was clear that this building was something special - something that brings people together.

The eight of us who visited the chapel for a week in March are this years' Scholars and Fellows for the Society of Ancient Buildings (the SPAB, for want of a better abbreviation). For the past 70 years the SPAB have supported early career conservation professionals to spend nine months exploring some of the most fascinating old buildings in the UK, learning directly from the talented craftspeople who work with them.

We arrived in Walpole on a chilly March afternoon, fired up on chips from Southwold pier and keen to see what all the fuss was about. With our preconceptions of ecclesiastical architecture, we would likely have driven straight past the chapel had it not been for our hosts unexpectedly pulling into the field opposite. A scattering of gravestones and a scaffolding tower indicated that we had reached our destination, but the simple exterior of the building gave little indication of what awaited us inside.

Much like the first time meeting a new friend, the first impression of a special building is something that sticks. The Old Chapel's quiet charm revealed itself the moment that we crossed the threshold. And the more that we explored the building the more delights we uncovered. The telegraph pole propping the south-western gable; the beautifully crafted box pews with no discernible rhyme or reason to their numbering; the wave of the timber galleries and the camber of the brick floor, worn by hundreds of feet. Traces of past doors, windows and roofs long removed.



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Personally, I love buildings for the stories that they tell, and Walpole's old chapel is a veritable book of fairytales. We spent hours trying to decipher the history of the chapel through its architecture - when and why this or that timber had been used, what came first, what was a repair and what was part of the building's agricultural provenance. Few public buildings have been shaped by so many hands, yet it is clear that this chapel is the child of the community's care and creativity, formed over generations. It was a privilege to be one more pair of hands making a mark on the building in the coming days.

As part of its conservation, areas of the chapel's fabric have been 'opened up', providing the unique opportunity to look behind its skin and start to uncover more of how it was built. Describing the building as 'timber framed' does little justice to the plethora of materials and techniques employed in the walls alone. Areas of lathe and plaster abut brick infill panels held together with clay mortars; reed panels and areas where lime renders were replaced with cement in the second half of the last century. Key finds included panels of 'mud and stud', a vernacular style of 'wattle and daub' using a clay and straw 'daub' reinforced with vertical hazel staves.

Over the course of the week we sampled a range of techniques under the guidance of local craftsman Thom Taylor. The experiments were intended to help determine the best course of action for the ongoing repair and maintenance of the chapel. Throughout its history the chapel has been constructed and repaired from the available materials, so in this tradition the materials we used were sourced as locally as possible; clay, sand and chalk; reed and horse hair; riven chestnut lathes. We tried different lime mixes on a variety of backgrounds (or 'substrates') including reed panels, mud and stud, and more common lathwork techniques.

During our visit we were also lucky enough to spend some time with a dendrochronologist, who explained the process of trying to date building timbers by analysing their tree rings; and a building archaeologist, who read the building fabric to establish a better idea of its history.

To me, however, the accurate dating and sequencing of the building is of secondary importance to the stories and histories passed on by local people whose ongoing connection to the building far surpasses the knowledge of the experts. Our wonderful host described the tradition of carol concerts held in the chapel by candlelight; and how the raked seating of the galleries provided a perfect setting for her daughter's wedding as, unlike in a typical church, all guests have a clear view of the couple taking their vows. The chapel's most prominent timber column is rumoured to be the mast of a ship - another local person has identified the shipwreck from which it may have come. Whilst we are often keen to prove everything about the provenance of a building, there is a lot of value in the stories and memories that tie people to a place, and the endless possibilities facilitated by not quite knowing everything.

This moment in the history of the chapel provides an opportunity for the current generation of supporters to add something to the building's story. Whilst at Walpole we had lively debates about the works the chapel needs to make it useable for years to come. The conversation naturally focussed on the treatment of the walls, and whilst it is always a challenge to reach a consensus, and what emerged were two key schools of thought.



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When we have a strong connection to a building, significant aesthetic changes can take a long time to gain acceptance, and for this reason many argued that the chapel should be lime plastered and limewashed to retain its current appearance. This option requires regular maintenance, and in the past buildings such as this would have likely have been cared for by local people. Ideally limewashing would be carried out annually to ensure that the walls remain protected and fresh. Perhaps in the past this would have been a community activity, with supporters of the chapel coming together to carry out the relatively simple task, following the sun's journey around the building and applying several coats of limewash over a course of a day. Is this a tradition that could be revived in Walpole?

If there is not the capacity within the chapel's funds and supporters to maintain the exterior of the building in this way, could a lower maintenance finish be considered? Many local buildings are at least partially weatherboarded, and this was proposed as a solution which would perhaps better safeguard the structure at a lower cost over a longer period. But would this be an acceptable change to those who have grown up with the building's rendered exterior?

In our role as conservation professionals, we can only contribute our knowledge and expertise to assist those responsible for the future of the chapel to make an informed decision. As it has been for all of its history, this chapel must continue to be shaped by the local people who use it and who will ultimately be responsible for its upkeep and its future. I have no doubt, from experiencing the care that the people of Walpole have for their chapel, that this much loved building will continue to be nurtured and bring the community together for generations to come”.

The Discovery Project – Miriam Stead

Our small but dedicated group of volunteers continues to beaver away on our research project about the history of the chapel and its community, in partnership with Halesworth & District Museum. We have reported on aspects of the the work in previous editions of the Newsletter but I am pleased to say that we are now able to share these outputs with the wider public through our website <https://walpoleoldchapel.org/about/history/>. Here you can find a brief history of the chapel with a timeline, the graveyard survey, baptism registers and accompanying notes, the story of John Baldry Saunders, a conscientious objector, and a transcript of our original title deed.

We will soon be adding new material as it becomes available. This will include the story of Alma Dale, the celebrated Quaker preacher from Canada who died in Walpole. We are finding out about about her final years through our oral history project, which has also gathered stories from seven people with close connections to the Chapel.



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Our relationship with the history department of the University of East Anglia has proved very fruitful, as we have hosted a student placement who has researched the sad story of Methuselah Spalding. This will soon be available on the website. Our student, George Howard, has indicated that he wants to continue working with us as a volunteer in the Discovery Project, for which we are very grateful, as we have many stories that need to be uncovered. We hope that we can work further with UEA in the next academic year.

Finally, we have been giving a number of talks to history societies around the county, which has already brought some visits to the chapel and Halesworth & District Museum. There are more in the pipeline and it is good to spread the word about our amazing building and the community that created it.

There is plenty to do, so if you are interested in joining the Discovery Team, please get in touch with Miriam Stead at discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org

The Friends - Paul Simmons

Did you know we had a membership scheme which is open to all, near and far, and which allows you along with the five trustees to maintain the Chapel building, its events, outreach and forward vision?

We currently have 54 Friends, some of whom are drawn from those wonderful volunteers who help to steward the Chapel on its open days and events, some from our general mailing list and some as a result of a sustained programme of recruiting more Friends. We have recently had articles in the Community Newsheet serving Halesworth and Southwold, along with that for Saxmundham and Framlingham.

Friends' subscriptions help with general running and maintenance costs- the important 'Unwrapped Project' is funded separately by running special events, seeking donations and approaching grant making trusts. The enormity of the task ahead is only too clear when the 'Unwrapped Project' is delivered as the Chapel will need regular limewashing to keep the plaster render fresh and waterproof- something in the old days that the local congregation and community would do as volunteers but now will need professional input following current health and safety standards. But there is also insurance, utility bills, website maintenance, minor repairs and so on...

So, can you join us? Currently our annual subscription is only £10 but we are happy to receive any top up donation you may also wish to add!

See <https://walpoleoldchapel.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Friends-of-WOC-Application-Form.pdf> or email friends@walpoleoldchapel.org or phone 01986 948 277



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Annual General Meeting – the trustees

The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel held their first General Meeting at The Chapel on 3rd June. Thanks are due to Patrons Paul Heiney and Libby Purves for an interesting talk, before the meeting, about their connections with this part of Suffolk.

The trustees presented their annual report and accounts, which were adopted. Verbal updates were also provided on the repair and conservation project, and on the Discovery Project.

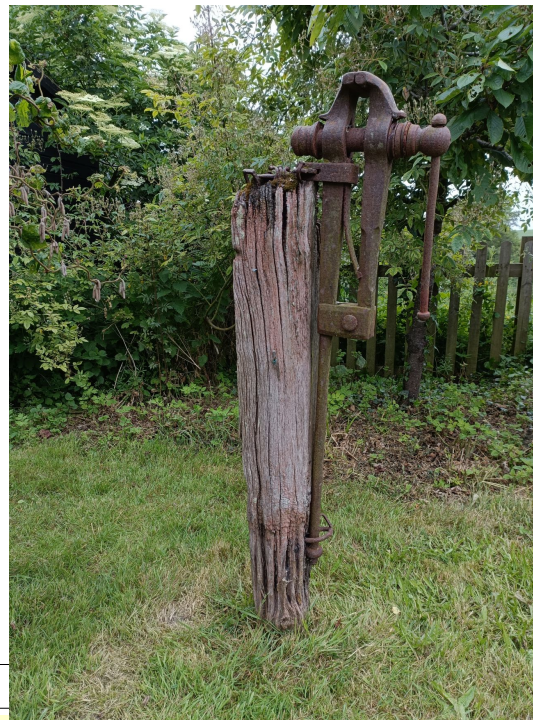
The following Friends were appointed as trustees – Lin le Versha, Lyn Banks, Paul Simmons, Miriam Stead and Simon Weeks.

Copies of the (draft) minutes and any of the reports are available on request to the Secretary.

George Gladwell's Vice – Simon Weeks

George and Sybil Gladwell were members of the final regular congregation at the Chapel. They also helped look after the Chapel and the yard from 1958, when the regular congregation closed. Their photos are still in the vestry today. They provide a visual link to a bygone age.

George was a 'Woodman'. Here is a photo of his wonderful vice today, on its original oak post.



Contact information

Simon Weeks, Secretary: 01986 784348 or info@walpoleoldchapel.org

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