



Walpole Old Chapel - December 2023



WALPOLE OLD CHAPEL

*In the care of the Historic Chapels Trust
Registered Charity No: 1017321
and
The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel
Registered Charity No: 1198030*

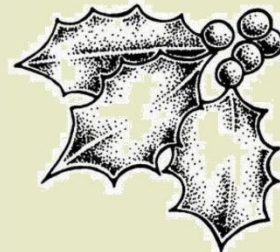
Carols and Readings by Candlelight

SATURDAY 16th December
at 3pm

Wrap up warm, bring a torch and please join us afterwards for mulled apple juice and mince pies.

Walpole Old Chapel is on the B1117 two miles southwest of Halesworth.
Free parking opposite the chapel.

www.walpoleoldchapel.org





Walpole Old Chapel - December 2023



Repair and Conservation - Simon Weeks

As regular readers will know, our architect - Kirstie Robbins of Ptolemy Dean Architects, worked hard over the last year to prepare our application for Listed Buildings Consent for the re-rendering work. This included overseeing the 'investigatory works' required (and funded) by Historic England. It also included detailed pre-application discussions with East Suffolk Council, Historic England and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). The application was submitted, on 11th October. You can see the application and comments made on the East Suffolk Council planning pages, searching using the following reference - DC/23/3897/LBC. We were delighted to learn today (28th November) that the application was successful, and that the permission has now been granted.

Apart from the Listed Buildings Consent, the other major element that needs to be in place before we can start looking for contractors is the funding, of course. Right now, we are in a bit of a limbo - waiting to hear how much of Historic Chapels Trust's (£3.6m) Community Asset Fund award might be allocated to The Chapel. If Walpole Old Chapel receives sufficient to cover the cost of the re-rendering work, then we hope to be able to carry out the work over the summer of 2024. If not, then much of next year will likely be taken up with looking for funding elsewhere, and the work will probably not be able to take place till 2025. The implications of this for our events programme are discussed later in this newsletter.

Discovery Project Online - Miriam Stead

2023 has been a fruitful year for the Discovery Project Team. Not only have the volunteers undertaken a fascinating and important body of research about the Chapel and its congregation, but also, we have been able to start making it available to readers everywhere using our website. For this we thank our volunteer web manager Mark Wenham. This digital material will become even more important if we have to close the Chapel when the conservation repairs are underway. These essays, images and popup exhibitions will, for a short while, be the only access to the story of Walpole Old Chapel. The web address to find the material is <https://walpoleoldchapel.org/about/history/>

So, what can you find there? Firstly, there is a short essay about the history of the Chapel by David Holmes and then a brief piece explaining what the Discovery Project is all about. Next is a historic gem of a film clip from the 1979 BBC TV series Discovering English Churches, hosted by the distinguished actor Donald Sinden. Apart from seeing these historic views of the building, it is wonderful to hear his mellifluous voice telling us about these early Independents, clothed in an immaculate tweed suit. It's very different to today's more relaxed style of presenting. It also appears that Donald Sinden was no mere presenter. He had a lifelong interest in church buildings, inherited from his architect grandfather and he wrote a book on the subject using his grandfather's illustrations. We thank the BBC for allowing us to use this archive clip.



Walpole Old Chapel - December 2023



We put the David Holmes essay online earlier in the year. This was soon followed by Vic Gray and Alison Peet's thorough survey of the graveyard. This in turn was followed by the mammoth work of the U3A Genealogy Group from Halesworth, transcribing the Baptism Records, which run from 1706 to 1837, over 1200 names. They also produced an excellent report, which begins to analyse and mine the database for family histories of people associated with the Chapel over the centuries. The last piece in this first tranche of material is Christina van Melzen's heartrending story of James Baldry Saunders and his appalling experiences as a conscientious objector.



Discovery Project volunteers meeting at Halesworth and District Museum

In the past few weeks, several other pieces of work have been completed by the team and added to the website. Philip Gorrod has chosen to transcribe the series of deeds and mortgages that we have relating to property and land held by the Trustees of the Chapel. The main interest in these documents lies in both the descriptions of properties and the names of trustees and tenants. Philip, aided by his partner Catherine Draper have completed the first of these, the initial lease dated 1689. In this year, King William III and Parliament passed the Act of Toleration that gave Non-Conformists freedom of worship.



Walpole Old Chapel - December 2023



Later that same year the six trustees of the Walpole congregation received a lease on the building that became the Chapel, with an acre of land, from the Corporation of Southwold. The annual rent was ten shillings. These trustees were local men of some substance: Richard Whincop, gentleman, and Joshua Nunn, yeoman, of Spexhall; Thomas Reeve, yeoman, and Samuel Folkard, grocer, of Walpole; John Fella, cordwainer, and John Hugman, glover, of Halesworth. It is not known how the town of Southwold came to own land in Walpole, but the site was probably part of the surrounding farm leased at that time to Joseph Skoulding, named as occupier of this building. It is possible that the land once belonged to the dissolved Sibton Abbey, which had sizeable holdings in Walpole.

In June, a visit from the Aldeburgh & District Local History Society brought us an interesting document in the form of a will belonging to an ancestor of one of the members named Edward Hodierne, who lived in Walpole, dated to 1637. A transcript was kindly provided by Jonathan Hodrien in November 2023. It was compiled by Jonathan Hodrien, Helen Shirley and Diana Hughes. It reveals a fascinating picture of the connections between well-to-do families in Walpole and surrounding parishes in the early 17th century. It also contains hints of a local Puritan presence in Walpole some 12 years before the first written reference to a Non-Conformist congregation here – in particular that his daughters should only receive their inheritances if they do not marry ‘papists’.

One of our great successes over the past couple of years has been the relationship we have developed with the University of East Anglia History Department, hosting student placements. Our first student, George Howard, has gifted us an essay on another sad life linked to the Chapel – that of Methuselah Spalding, who lived in Wissett, travelled regularly to the Chapel to worship, and played a role in its community. This, however, is perhaps the most tragic of all the cases of the congregation of the Walpole Chapel. Methuselah Spalding met his end on a hangman’s noose in London, many miles from both Walpole and the world in which he had lived for what can only be assumed was much of his life.

I am pleased to note that our link to UEA continues into this academic year. We hosted a visit from nine of the new intake to the Master’s in Early Modern History and already have found a student interested in working on the Oral History Project. More on that to come next year.

Our final addition to the website this year is the in-depth essay on the Life of Alma Gould Dale 1854 – 1930 by Judith Condon. Alma is buried in the Chapel graveyard, having spent her last years in Walpole, but she was by birth Canadian and a pre-eminent missionary for the Quakers across her native land, to New Zealand and finally Britain. She settled permanently in this country in 1908 and made her home at Walpole Hatch Farm, owned by the Gillett family, in the form of Margaret Gillett. Judith has researched Alma’s early life in Canada, but most interestingly has used as the main source for her later years, oral history interviews with Tony Gillett, current owner of the farm and great nephew of Margaret.



Walpole Old Chapel - December 2023



As you can see, there is a lot of fascinating material waiting for you to read, just the thing for long nights in the New Year! Happy Christmas to you all.

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

Research and Consultation - Simon Weeks

Thank you to the 231 people who completed the online survey about The Chapel, conducted by Tricolor Associates on behalf of the Historic Chapels Trust. Thank you also to those who spoke with the researchers in person. The aim of this research was to identify ways in which both the number and diversity of visitors to The Chapel might be increased in the future. Being able to demonstrate this potential for growth is seen as an important requirement by some funders, including the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The trustees have now received the draft report, which we have discussed and commented upon. We hope the final report will be published soon.

A Different Sort of Season

As discussed above, it is not currently clear whether The Chapel will be available next year for us to put on our normal programme of events over the summer. In any event, The Chapel is likely to be 'dark' for the summer, either next year or in 2025. But we don't plan on being absent or silent. Trustees are working up ideas for keeping The Chapel 'alive' during the work, whenever that takes place. We would love to put on a few performances in a venue other than The Chapel. So, if you know a place that might welcome us, please do get in touch and let us know, on info@walpoleoldchapel.org We are also planning a travelling exhibition, probably to share some of the results from our Discovery Project (see above). So, again, if you know of somewhere that might like to host a temporary exhibition, please do let us know.



Walpole Old Chapel - December 2023



The Friends - Paul Simmons

Our numbers are gradually increasing, including from one of the UEA MA students who visited earlier and another who has volunteered to take some atmospheric photos of some details of the Chapel.

And if you haven't got all your Christmas cards yet, we have some from the Historic Chapels Trust featuring the Chapel in snow, A5 size 8x6ins with the greeting inside 'With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year'. Price £7.50 for 10- local delivery or add donation for p+p. Please contact Friends' Secretary: Paul Simmons on friends@walpoleoldchapel.org.uk or 01986 948277 to order.

The Gladwell's Oil Lamps - Simon Weeks



These handsome oil lamps were hanging in The Chapel for several decades until removed by their owners in 1995. We now understand, from the Historic Chapels Trust's archives, that the Gladwells acquired the lamps from Walpole Parish Church around the time of World War II.

It would be great to complete their story. Do any readers know how and when they were first hung in the Parish Church? Does anybody know where they went after 1995?

Please do get in touch if you can help us find out.

Contact information

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

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

To donate online: <http://easydonate.org/HCTE2>

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

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