



# Walpole Old Chapel - March 2024



## 2024 - A Big Year Ahead

Regular readers will know that the current owners of The Chapel - The Historic Chapels Trust - is in a three-year process of trying to 're-home' all of its buildings, prior to winding up as a charity. During this period, they will be spending some £3.6m carrying out urgent repairs to those buildings deemed most in need. The way ahead for Walpole Old Chapel has become much clearer since our last newsletter in December.

First of all, despite The Chapel being on the 'Heritage at Risk' register, there are other HCT buildings assessed to be in even more urgent need of repairs. Walpole will receive none of the £3.6m grant secured by HCT. We discuss the implications more fully below.

Secondly, we are delighted that Historic Suffolk (formerly Suffolk Building Preservation Trust) has offered to take on ownership of The Chapel. There are several steps to be completed before the legal transfer of The Chapel from HCT to HS can take place. This preparatory work is now already underway. We also discuss the transfer in more detail below.

Thirdly, the lack of immediate funds from HCT to carry out the repair and conservation work means it cannot start before spring 2025 at the earliest. Much of this year will be spent trying to raise the necessary funds from other sources. We discuss our broad approach to this task, and the part you can play, later.

Finally, all this means we will be open for business as usual during 2024, including:

- Public opening on Saturday and Bank Holiday afternoons from 1<sup>st</sup> April till 28<sup>th</sup> September
- Music, theatre and poetry events throughout the summer
- Hosting group visits
- Weddings, funerals and baptisms
- Heritage Open Days on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> September
- And, of course, our candlelit carol service, this year on 14th December

Details will be published on our website in due course.

## The Chapel Misses Out

We were very disappointed to learn, in January, that Walpole Old Chapel is not to receive any of the £3.6m grant from The National Heritage Memorial Fund for urgent repairs to chapels prior to 're-homing' them. The trustees felt we had made a strong case for Walpole to receive a contribution towards the cost of the repair and conservation work needed here. We pointed out



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that The Chapel is a grade II\* Listed building, which is on the Heritage at Risk register. We also referred to the very comprehensive preparatory work that has been carried out under architect Kirstie Robbins of Ptolemy Dean Architects, to understand the structure of the building and identify the best way forward, some of this work funded by Historic England. Finally, we reminded HCT that Planning permission and Listed Buildings Consent had recently been granted, and that the work at Walpole was now 'ready to go ahead'.

But sadly, this case was not seen as strong enough. The Chairman of HCT was kind enough to write us a long letter in which he acknowledged the excellent work that has already taken place at Walpole, and the urgent need to complete the works here. But he confirmed that other chapels are in an even more critical state and had to be prioritised in line with the National Heritage Memorial Fund's requirements as funder. This was a decision made jointly with The Fund, Historic England and the Churches Conservation Trust.

### A New 'Home' in Sight

We are delighted that Historic Suffolk has offered to take on ownership of The Chapel from HCT. It is a long-established charity, which owns Little Hall in Lavenham, Pakenham Water Mill and Thelnetham Windmill. The fact that Historic Suffolk is willing to accept The Chapel with major repair and conservation work required, and without funding secured for the work, is a testimony to their vision and their confidence in the future of The Chapel, for which we are very grateful.

There are various steps that have to be completed before the legal transfer can be completed. First of all, both Historic Chapels Trust and Historic Suffolk need to be happy with any conditions or requirements that are specified in the legal transfer documents. The Chapel boundary also needs to be registered with the Land Registry, as this has never been done before. The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel and Historic Suffolk also need to reach agreement about the roles and responsibilities of the two charities in keeping The Chapel in good condition and open to the public into the future. This agreement is likely to be in the form of a 'memorandum of understanding'. An important part of this agreement will be how the repair and conservation project is to be managed.

All three charities have now started this preparatory work. We understand that Walpole will be the first of HCT's buildings to be transferred to a new charitable owner, so we are the trailblazers in this process. That almost inevitably means we'll come across unexpected issues to be resolved, but there is goodwill and energy from all parties, so we are confident the transfer will go ahead as planned.



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## Fundraising Again!

A huge 'Thank You' to all the individuals and organisations large and small who have donated to the repair and conservation project so far. With your help we have raised over £100,000. This has allowed us to employ some of the best conservation specialists to fully understand the building's history and produce proposals for the best way forward. These proposals have now received Planning and Listed Buildings Consent. So, we are ready to go ..... apart from the funding.

The current estimate for the cost of the work is just short of £400,000 (including VAT, some of which may be recoverable). Clearly, this is a substantial sum, one that could not be raised through individual donations alone. Our fundraising consultants have surveyed the whole of the public and charity sectors to identify those donors whose criteria The Chapel works are most likely to meet. And we believe it should be achievable to raise the great majority of the required funds from a combination of different national donors. We will need to do some preparatory work in order to provide the required supporting material for some of these applications.

But this is likely to leave a shortfall, which we'll have to try and make up by looking to the further generosity of our local community. Please help us if you can. Donations from you really do count. Not only do they raise money directly, but they also demonstrate to larger donors how widely valued The Chapel is. Thank you!

You can contribute by clicking on the Donate button below. Or scan the campaign QR code.



Or you can **donate by text:**

To donate £5, text IZXL01 to 70970

To donate £10, text IZXL01 to 70191

If you would like to get in touch regarding a donation, please contact us today.

Electronic fundraising, payments and donations will be processed and administered by the National Funding Scheme (Charity No: 1149800), operating as DONATE. Texts will be charged at your standard network rate. For Terms & Conditions, see [www.easydonate.org](http://www.easydonate.org)



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## Discovery Project - Miriam Stead

In the last edition, I outlined the impressive range of articles about the Chapel and its community that we have recently put online, thanks to the hard work of all the Discovery Project Volunteers. I hope you have had a chance to read them, if not go to <https://walpoleoldchapel.org/about/history/> and have a browse.

### **New Volunteers**

Over the winter, we have recruited two new volunteers to the project. Prof Jackie Burgess is undertaking a Master's degree in Early Modern History at UEA. She came with the rest of her year group (of whom more below) to visit the Chapel. She liked it so much that she offered to become a volunteer and join the regular Discovery Team. As part of her previous research, Jackie has undertaken many interviews and using her skills, she is working with Judith Condon and Pauline Wilcock of Halesworth & District Museum on transcribing the oral history interviews that Judith has gathered. Once these are done, they will decide how best we can summarise and make the stories they contain available.

Our second new volunteer is Chris Wheeler who has taken upon himself the task of managing an Instagram account for the Chapel. He is also a keen and skilled photographer who has been taking some very interesting and artistic images of and in the Chapel. For the Discovery Project he has agreed to record the large number of graffiti, mostly initials that can be found round the interior. These will then be marked onto a plan of the building that has been created by our architects for listed building and planning consent purposes. The idea is then to try to identify the people to whom these initials belong. For guidance, we have the 1429 names listed in the baptism records transcribed for us by the U3A Genealogy Group. We might not identify them all but whatever we can will be of interest.





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## **Working with the University of East Anglia**

I mentioned briefly above we had a visit from the UEA master's students and invited any who were interested to work with us as part of their research skills placement module. We were stunned and delighted when three of the students opted to join us (not forgetting Jacquie who I have already written about). Maddie Cunningham, Rosannah Emeerith-Burley and Pia Waltenberg are the team, and they are working on two projects that will prove very useful to the Discovery Project. Maddie and Rosannah are working on pop-up exhibitions on pull-up banners. These can be used both at events that we may attend in future or if we want to programme a space with historical information about the Chapel and its community. We can also highlight the building conservation project and encourage fundraising. Pia has chosen to work on the interactive timeline that we want to include as part of our website. The idea is to click on a date or event to find out more information about national history of the Reformation or of the Chapel itself. We have suggested that a static version of the timeline could form part of the pop-up displays, so Pia can work with Maddie and Rosannah on this element.

## **Partnership with the Centre for East Anglian Studies (CEAS) - DATE FOR YOUR DIARIES**

The Centre for East Anglian Studies is part of the History Department at UEA. As part of our ongoing work with the University, we are delighted to have become one of the CEAS's regional partners. As such, we are going to host one of their Spring Seminars at the Chapel. These usually take place on the UEA campus in Norwich, and this is their first event 'on the road'. So, we really want to make it a success!

The talk will be given by Dr Joel Halcomb, a lecturer at UEA and CEAS Board Member, who is an expert on religious practice, culture and politics in Britain and Ireland during the British Civil Wars. Joel has become a great mentor to our endeavours in the Discovery Project and an advocate for us with the History Department that has enabled our relationship with the University to grow. He will be giving his talk on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024 at 6.30 pm, although the the Chapel will be open from 5.30 pm for visits. There will be refreshments and the talk is free, but we would invite donations to support our fundraising for important conservation work.

His subject is:

### **"Walpole and the Puritan Revolution"**

The English Civil Wars of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century have often been labelled 'The Puritan Revolution' because of the leading role many puritans took in promoting both the war and the ideas of civil and religious liberties behind it. This talk looks at the Walpole puritans who, during this revolution, gathered the congregation that eventually established Walpole Chapel. Their first ministers were at the forefront of East Anglian puritan radicalism, and while sources for their early years are sparse, we can reconstruct their politics and likely practices from the network of puritan churches with which they associated.

This talk will, I am sure, give us great insights into the early history of Independency leading up to the creation of the Chapel and its congregation. This is a 'must' for your diary. More information can be found on the Chapel events pages or contact me on [discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org](mailto:discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org)





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## Chapel Yard Cleared at Last

Some of you will know that The Chapel yard is a rare surviving remnant of 'herb-rich grassland' – a type of pasture that once used to cover much of the Suffolk Sandlings. Over recent years we have seen elm scrub encroaching across the yard, threatening the pasture. So, we are very pleased to have had this all cleared at last. Hopefully, this will encourage the stronger growth of the grasses and herbs that were in danger of being shaded out.



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