



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



Welcome to the Spring Newsletter



Snowdrops flowering in the Chapel yard – spring is here!

Phase One of the Walpole Old Chapel 'Unwrapped' project will begin in April 2025

Regular readers will know that our efforts to secure funding for the repair and conservation work needed at the Chapel have been long and complex, but it now looks as though a way forward has been agreed between the main potential funders. This follows a recent period of intense discussions between the **Historic Chapels Trust (HCT)**, current owners of the Chapel, the **Community Asset Fund (CAF** – part of the **National Heritage Memorial Fund**) which is funding HCT's programme of repairing its chapels prior to re-homing them, **Historic England (HE)** and the **National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)**. As the probable future owner of the Chapel, the **Friends of Walpole Old Chapel (FWOC)** has also been an active participant, and we have been able to speak about our own issues and preferences throughout these high-level discussions.



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



The news that gives us certainty for the immediate future is that CAF will fund the great majority of the first phase of the project. At a cost of just over £400,000, this will involve stripping and re-rendering the West and North elevations of the Chapel. The shortfall remaining after the CAF grant will be met from residual 'Walpole' funds held by HCT, grants from local Suffolk charities and donations by individuals, held by FWOC in a designated fund. We are very grateful for all the local support the Chapel has received. In the end, our local donations have ensured that the first phase of the renovation of the building is fully funded.

Now that they have been formally appointed, we can confirm that the main contractor for the first phase will be Cliveden Conservation, an Essex company with a good reputation and a particular expertise in working with lime. We do not yet have a date for them starting on site but expect it will be in April. They will be working through till late autumn. We are expecting that regular Saturday afternoon opening will carry on as usual, from 2pm to 4.30pm, from Easter through till the end of September.

Included in the Cliveden contract is provision for some **'hard hat' tours** for people interested in the renovation work. If you would like to join a tour, please let the Secretary know, so we can advise you of the dates.

The second phase of the project will include re-rendering the East and South elevations, plus all the activities we have planned to improve the sustainability of the Chapel in the future. However, the agreed funding strategy means the construction work for phase two will not start until April 2027 and run through to late autumn. Our application to the NLHF will be above the financial threshold for their single stage process, so there will be a 'development' stage, followed by a 'delivery' stage. Likewise, HE has indicated that their contribution would be over two financial years.

As a result, we now expect The Chapel to be closed for events this year, open for events in 2026, and closed again in 2027. This may feel slightly odd, but it's the only way forward that fitted with the parameters all our major funders are having to work with. Local volunteers first raised our concerns about the state on the render in 2015. So, ten years on, we are delighted to finally be making a start on putting it right.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter M.P. visits the Chapel on 1st March

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter was elected as the new Member of Parliament for the Suffolk Coastal constituency at the general election in July last year. Although Jenny is Suffolk born and bred, her large constituency is diverse, stretching from Felixstowe to Kessingland, so there is a lot to get to know. We were delighted when she accepted our invitation to come and visit the Chapel as part of her busy schedule of familiarisation with her constituency.



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



During our wide-ranging discussion, it emerged that there are several areas in which Jenny's particular interests overlap with issues of importance and concern to the Chapel. Her first degree was in history, so Jenny was interested to hear about the early non-conformist pioneers who built and sustained the Chapel in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. She was also interested to learn about our Discovery Project, in which local volunteers are researching and publishing the history of the Chapel and its communities. We were very pleased to hear that Jenny had spoken in a recent House of Commons debate in favour of retaining the Listed Places of Worship Scheme, which provides for VAT relief on repairs to listed places of worship like the Chapel.

One of Jenny's main priorities is to raise awareness in government about the impacts of rurality, and rural poverty in particular, on people's lives and opportunities. And this, of course, is an important issue for the Chapel too. The absence of any public transport and the distances people need to travel to reach the Chapel affects our audience numbers for events and our ability to recruit and retain volunteers.

This was a very positive meeting, and we'll keep in touch with Jenny to update her on developments at the Chapel.

Groundwork and maintenance of the Chapel yard

Snowdrops are flowering in several areas and there are some crocuses coming out too. Moles are active with fresh molehills appearing between the old gravestones. Part of the hedge separating the kitchenette/toilet block and the road has been blown over. This is a hedge that we have asked our contractor, Max Galley, to cut down in height, both for safety reasons and to allow vehicles approaching the Chapel from Halesworth to have view of the Chapel before they whizz past, as they can when approaching the other way from Walpole village centre. Mr Galley has also cut back the width of the hedge behind the Chapel to allow access for scaffolding when needed for maintenance and has removed some of the tangle of shrubbery facing the doors of the toilet block. It is important that this sort of work is completed before the bird nesting season starts.

Fire Safety

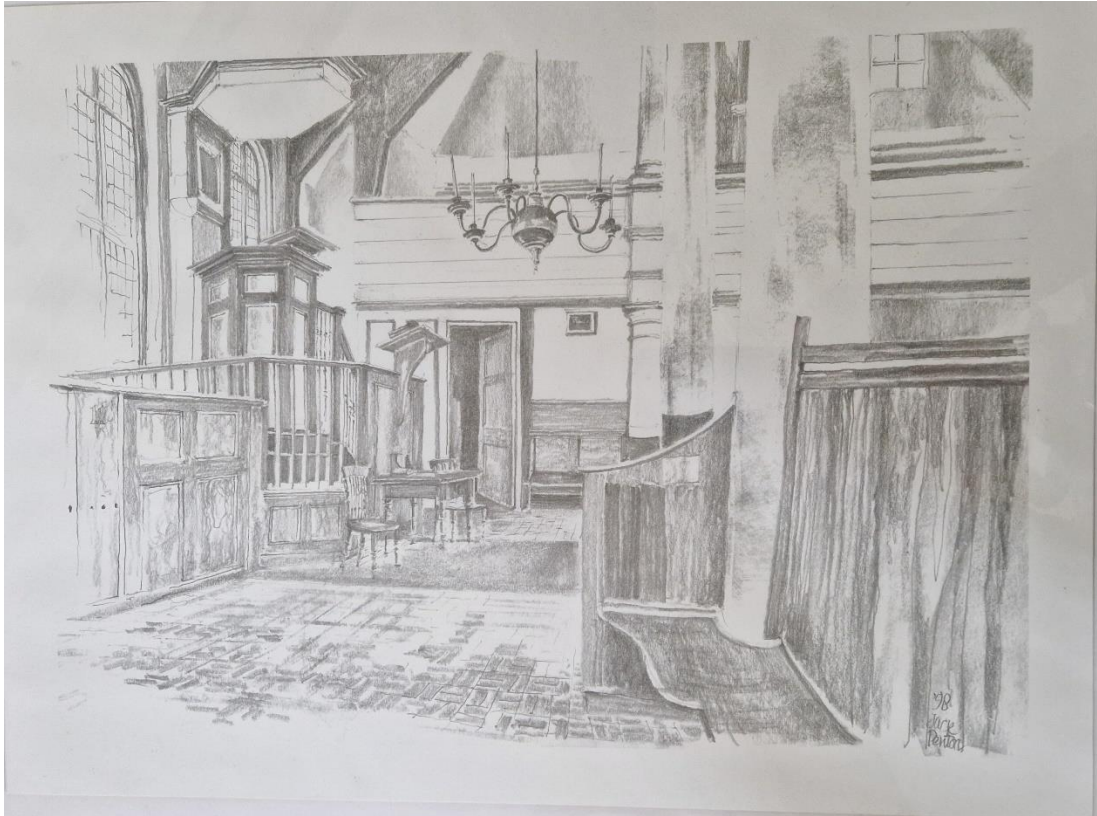
The Chapel's original fire detection and alerting system, put in when the Chapel was rewired by the Historic Churches Trust, has been defunct for several years. It has now been replaced and the alarm points are active once again. A kind quartet of Salters Lane residents have agreed to be keyholders should the alarm be activated or malfunction. We are very grateful to them for their support.



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



Re-homing part of Walpole Old Chapel's archive held by the Historic Chapels Trust



Pencil drawing of the interior of the Chapel, by Jack Penton

The HCT which currently owns Walpole Old Chapel is finding new homes for its archives and paperwork, mostly with the organisations who will be taking on responsibility for these historic buildings once the HCT has wound up. The WOC documents held by the HCT in their headquarters at St George's German Lutheran Church in Alie Street, just off Commercial Road in Whitechapel were collected last month by Paul Simmons. Paul returned to Suffolk with his car boot filled with several carrier bags full of old correspondence, six architects' reports, two framed pictures and some 35mm slides. The framed pictures are pencil drawings by the late Jack Penton whose son Tim performs with The Dollard Collectief who performed in the Chapel on 22 September last year (*North After Summer*) <https://dollardcollectief.org/>.

As FWOC will become the new owners we were keen to take these papers to add to our archive: some of our documents are kept in the Suffolk Archives at the Hold but many of them live locally. The HCT collection has been deposited at our partner organisation, Halesworth & District Museum (HDM). HDM is an accredited museum, which means it looks after its collections to a high standard, which includes storage and cataloguing. They can also be accessed by members of FWOC, volunteers in the Discovery Project and members of the general public who want to research the chapel's history. A list of what is already there can be obtained from discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org.uk. As soon as possible, the items from HCT will be listed and added to the catalogue.



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



The Discovery Project - UEA History M.A. students volunteer for 2025

We were delighted when the University of East Anglia approached us for the third year running about hosting some of their history master's students at the WOC. Simon Weeks, Jacque Burgess and Miriam Stead went to the UEA campus to meet the students and make a presentation about the chapel and previous placement projects. We were even more pleased when three students opted to work with us in 2025.



Simon shares a contemplative moment with the UEA volunteers

Juliana Gisler, Harry Thomas and Ben Guttridge came to visit the WOC at the beginning of February. We also took them to visit our friends at the Halesworth Museum and enjoyed lunch at The Cut. Our three placements have chosen interesting projects. Harry & Ben are working on rural unrest and any potential links to non-conformism. The Captain Swing riots of the mid 1830s were linked to resentment against Tithe payments, which of course non-conformists had to pay even though they rarely attended their local parish church. These riots were prevalent in rural northeast Suffolk, though we are not sure that anything happened in Walpole itself.

Juliana has opted to work on the Great Yarmouth Church Book which lives in the Norfolk Record Office. This fascinating document charts the early story of the Independents. The leader of this tendency in eastern Suffolk and Norfolk at this time was William Bridge. He was an influential puritan, ordained in the established church, who had fled from Norwich to the Netherlands to escape Stuart persecution. After being pastor of the English refugee church at Rotterdam, he returned to take a prominent place in the Westminster Assembly of Divines which had been set up by the Long Parliament to make the English church more thoroughly Protestant.



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



Some thought this could be done from within. But Bridge was one of those who believed it could only be achieved by breaking away and following a separate path. The Walpole Chapel congregation was one of the dozen or so stimulated from his own church at Yarmouth.

The Yarmouth Church Book, preserved in the Norfolk Record Office, records that on 21 June 1649 'ye saints in and about Coukley' asked Bridge's church for 'ye right hand of fellowship in this their great undertaking'. These 'saints' were not only devout locals but also several relatively well-known and ordained men, some of whom had been contemporaries at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, a centre of puritan teaching. They were Samuel Manning, who was to be minister here for nearly 50 years, his brother John, their close friend Thomas Spatchet, and John Tillinghast, nephew of the regicide Robert Tichbourne.

Please join the Suffolk Preservation Society and help protect your county.

The Suffolk View magazine invited Simon to write an article about the Chapel and the Unwrapped project which was published last month. In return, we are pleased to publish this appeal from Thomas Seymour who is a Trustee of the Suffolk Preservation Society. SPS, an independent charity, founded in 1929, is the only charity dedicated to Suffolk & all of Suffolk, that stands up robustly for Suffolk's special qualities - its historic buildings, towns and villages and its distinctive landscapes. It has a proven record and reputation, and indeed the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust and Suffolk Buildings Preservation Trust/Historic Suffolk, were founded under its auspices.

What SPS does:

1. Through our small team of dedicated planners, (a) make representations on the most significant proposals that impact our county; (b) press for good planning outcomes, and for mitigation of development where it has adverse effects; (c) help parish councils and communities to engage with the planning process; (d) provide advice and support, where we can, to individuals and communities in relation to developments/planning applications:
2. Provide regular workshops on specialist aspects of the planning system, which are of value both to councils and house owners: recent workshops have addressed retrofitting old buildings for energy conservation.
3. Celebrate the work of unsung heritage heroes with Annual Awards.
4. Work with our sister charity CPRE which we represent in the county

Membership brings with it access each year to half days out at some of the county's most interesting locations with expert speakers: recent ones have included Wenham Castle, Staverton Thicks, historic houses in Lowestoft High St: this year's events include specially arranged excursions to Bury St Edmunds, Debenham and Bruisyard Hall.

There are also special membership offers as per this

link: <https://www.suffolksociety.org/become-a-member/membership-offers/>.



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025



Our excellent twice-yearly magazine, *Suffolk View*, comes in hard copy with membership. There is also an annual summer party open to members, who are encouraged to bring guests willing to join or be significant donors. The website is the best place to read in for more detail. It is very easy to become a member – see the website “Become a member” – or by contacting sps@suffolksociety.org. Julie Howe, the Secretary, can walk you through the steps. Household membership is £60 p.a., life membership £800, and under 40’s membership is currently £30 p.a. Whilst we have a significant membership, we need to increase it, as, along with so many small charities, it is increasingly difficult to finance what we aim to do, and we need your support’.

Fund-raising concert for Walpole Old Chapel, 12 July 2025, to be held at The Cut.

Words & Music – a concert to raise funds for Walpole Chapel

Saturday 12th July 7.30 – 8.30 pm at The Cut, Halesworth

An evening of songs and readings featuring some of our finest musicians and local writers. Sopranos Charmian Bedford, Madeleine Holmes and baritone, Rob Gildon, will be accompanied by Nathan Williamson in a selection of songs celebrating and spanning the life of Chapel, from its seventeenth century origins to the present. They will be joined by John Myerscough, the cellist with the Doric String Quartet and an accomplished soloist.

Readings by novelist and biographer Lucy Hughes-Hallett with fiction and non-fiction writers Julia Blackburn and Blake Morrison will entertain us in what promises to be an excellent evening.

All funds raised will support the renovation of Walpole Old Chapel – a seventeenth century farmhouse, converted into a non-conformist chapel and now in desperate need of restoration. Help us to save this unique building for future generations.

Tickets at £20 are available from The Cut – <https://thecut.org.uk>



Walpole Old Chapel - March 2025







Change of Editor

Regular readers will know how much time our Secretary Simon Weeks devotes to the Chapel. Without his energy, expertise and enthusiasm it is unlikely that we would be in the strong position we are today. Among his many roles, Simon has edited the quarterly Newsletter which does so much to publicise this wonderful building, its fascinating history and the exciting programme of events held in the Chapel during the summer months. I came to the Chapel as a mature student member of the group of M.A. History students from UEA in November 2023. I volunteered for the Discovery Project while I finished the M.A. The Trustees of FWOC asked if I would like to take on a trustee role last summer and I was delighted to accept. Wanting to know how I could help, Simon suggested taking over responsibility of the Newsletter. Under his watchful eye, this is my first effort, and I hope readers have found our Spring edition interesting.

To encourage feedback and suggestions for future items we might cover in the Newsletter, we've set up a new email address which will come through directly to me. Please do get in touch.

Contributors to the Spring 2025 Newsletter: Simon Weeks, Paul Simmons, Miriam Stead, Lin Le Versha, and Thomas Seymour.

Thanks to the funders of Phase One!

 <p>NATIONAL HERITAGE MEMORIAL FUND</p>	<p>Stuart Heath Charitable Settlement</p>	<p>Supported by Councillors Locality Funding</p>  <p>Suffolk County Council</p>
	<p>All you generous Individuals</p>	 <p>Heveningham Hall Country Fair Trust</p>

Contact information

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

Jacque Burgess, Editor, Newsletter: newsletter@walpoleoldchapel.org

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

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