



Walpole Old Chapel - June 2026



Welcome to Summer in the Chapel



'It's been wonderful starting to really explore the chapel. Making a series of large-scale charcoal drawings is a way for me to investigate different aspects of this special place, and to try and capture its character. Looking through drawing makes me see in a different way; I have to slow down, take notice and see what resonates.' Grace Adam, artist-in-residence, May 2026

As reported in the last Newsletter, Grace is working in the Chapel all summer. She is taking part in the *Suffolk Open Studios* programme. Do come to Walpole Old Chapel **Saturday 13th - Sunday 14th June between 11.00 - 5.00** to see Grace at work and enjoy some of the work she is creating during her residency.

Grace is also holding **3 Workshops** in the Chapel.

- 1. Painting workshop: Saturday 30 May 2 - 4.** This was a non-oil paint workshop and 17 people had a wonderful afternoon painting with Grace. We are exploring the possibility of putting some of their lovely pictures on the Chapel website.
- 2. Drawing workshop: Saturday 13th June 12 - 2 Suffolk Open Studios.** Materials will be provided but feel free to bring your own too.



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3. Collage workshop: Sunday 12th July 10.30 – 12.30. Materials will be provided but feel free to bring your own too.

Everybody is welcome. Each workshop will be a small friendly group, so whether you are a beginner or have lots of experience, come along. You don't need to bring anything – just yourself! A small charge of £10 per workshop to cover materials payable by cash or card on the door.

To reserve a place on a workshop, contact Grace on Instagram @artistgraceadam or on her email: grace@graceadam.com

Book now for our summer concerts!

Having been closed all last year for repair and conservation work on the Chapel, it is wonderful to be offering a great programme of Sunday afternoon concerts during 2026. Each concert will have an interval during which tea, coffee and cake may be purchased.

Sunday 7th June 3.00–5.00 The Dollard Collectief.

Voices through the Trees: the Northwestern Seaboard Down the Ages. A fundraiser for the Chapel. A programme of literary and musical footprints from northwestern Europe – Sweden, the Netherlands and the British Isles.

Sunday 12th July 3.00–5.00 Blake Morrison & The Hosepipe Band.

Scenes From a Life features poems from Blake Morrison's new collection *Afterburn*, accompanied by The Hosepipe Band.

Sunday 9th August 3.00–5.00 The Lovekyn Consort.

Here's the Summer celebrates the natural world in seventeenth-century music by Purcell, Croft, Lanier, Hume and others.

Sunday 23rd August 3.00–5.00 Rob Gildon and a group of musicians.

Music on a Summer's Afternoon. Spend an afternoon with Baritone, Rob Gildon and a group of musicians to enjoy songs and music in this unique building.

Sunday 6th September 3.00–5.00 Tin Foil Aliens.

Join this popular five-piece modern folk/rock band as they play their original music with its unique sound which 'carries the atmosphere of big horizons and salt-air winds' of their home in North-Suffolk.¹

Tickets for events may be pre-booked on Ticket Source Walpole Old Chapel £12; on the door £15.

¹ <https://www.datathistle.com/event/2945262-tin-foil-aliens/>



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Heritage Fund updates



The *Walpole Old Chapel Unwrapped* project is making good progress. The Heritage Fund requires us to recruit a small team of professional consultants, funded by the Development Grant. The consultants are there to provide the essential support small charities like FWOc need to prepare the application for a large HF Delivery Grant to start in January 2028. Kirstie Robbins of Ptolemy Dean Architects, will be leading the next stages of the repair and conservation work. She will also be overseeing the production of a bespoke maintenance plan for the Chapel and a broader Conservation Management Plan which will take FWOc to the mid 2030s. After an extensive search process, we are very pleased to welcome Madylene Beardmore as Project Manager for the various activities that will be taking place alongside the building work (www.mbheritageconsultancy.co.uk). And we feel in very good hands, having appointed the Red Cat Partnership to be our external consultants on Health & Safety and Fire Safety (www.redcatpartnership.co.uk). To complete the team, during June we shall be advertising for consultants to help develop activity and business planning, as well as a consultant to be responsible for an independent evaluation of all aspects of the project for the HF.

April get-together for Chapel Volunteers





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On a sunny Saturday afternoon in April, the Trustees entertained Chapel volunteers to afternoon tea with sandwiches, nibbles and a wonderful selection of home-made cakes (thank-you Amanda and Ruth). The event was to say thank you to everyone who helps run the Chapel, whether welcoming visitors on a Saturday, battling to corral the cars in Tony Gillett's field, or rootling around in the archives for nuggets of relevant historical information.

Simon updated everyone on the conservation repairs from last year and how much progress we are making with the HF grant. Grace Adam showed us some wonderful charcoal sketches of the Chapel's fixtures. Before tea, Simon asked for written comments on what, as volunteers, they think FWOC does well and what they would like to see done better.



The volunteers enjoy being members of a 'dedicated and friendly group' and liked the opportunity to meet over tea. Individuals said they felt supported both in terms of a well-organised stewarding rota and items in the *Newsletters* which keep them up-to-date, as well as providing extra information to talk about with visitors. The Christmas Carol service and the summer programme of cultural events are highlights for the volunteers.

In terms of improvements, suggestions included increasing the pool of volunteers to allow two people to host Saturday afternoon visits, providing better training for new volunteers to increase individuals' confidence when hosting visitors, and improving car parking especially for events.



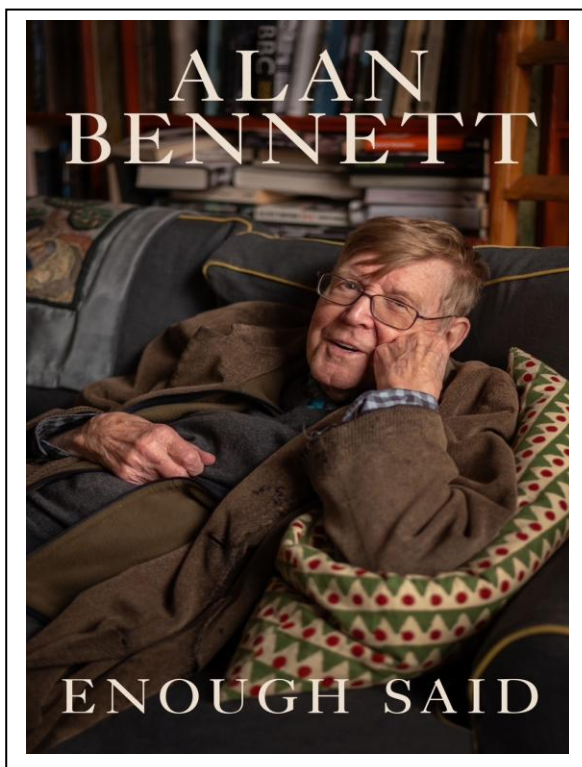
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The Trustees discussed the volunteers' feedback at their monthly Board meeting on 19th May and agreed the following actions and responses:

1. The QR code will be put up by the exits now to make it easier for visitors to donate.
2. To let everyone know that discussions, led by Paul Simmons, are currently underway with the landowner to help ease the Chapel car-parking problem.
3. Simon offered to provide extra training on a one-to-one basis with any volunteer who wants it. Please contact him directly.
4. One volunteer suggested holding services in the Chapel to mark important dates in the agricultural year. Our new Minister the Reverend Dr Catherine Ball has gladly agreed to lead a **Harvest Festival service in the Chapel on 19th September** this year, with all donations going to the Halesworth food bank. The Trustees will discuss the possibility of adding more events with religious and local cultural significance with the Minister.
5. The Heritage Fund grant will support a recruitment drive to increase the number of volunteers. And we shall suggest that the idea of a local 'mini tour', that would connect the non-conformist history of Walpole Old Chapel with that of Bramfield and Huntingfield is also included in HF delivery plans.

The Chapel features in Alan Bennett's Diaries



Over the years, volunteers have occasionally been surprised to find themselves showing the Chapel to someone famous. On 19th June 2018, Penny Wenham unexpectedly found herself hosting Alan Bennett and his partner, Rupert Thomas. Penny writes: 'It was a very understated encounter which I remember well. I was gardening when my phone rang. The caller said they were visiting the Chapel and asked if I could open it for them? I hurried round with the key to find two people waiting outside. I thought one of them looked very familiar but it wasn't until he greeted me in his distinctive Yorkshire accent that I realised it was Alan Bennett.'

It's always a toss-up in these situations whether to say 'How lovely to meet you, I love your work' or not to draw attention to their celebrity. I chose the latter. I'd just read *The Secret Life of Cows* with



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Alan Bennett's Introduction and was keen to discuss it with him. But I kept my composure, tried not to gush and let them into the Chapel to enjoy its calm beauty. They quietly admired the Chapel, thanked me for my time and asked where they could leave a donation.'

In *Enough Said*, Alan Bennett's diary entry describes the special qualities of the Chapel that delighted them both that day.

*'We go on to Walpole to look at what seems like an unassuming yeoman's cottage by the roadside but which turns out to be a Congregational place of worship founded in 1676 and with the whole of the interior rigged out as a chapel. It's delightful, box pews arranged almost haphazardly round the pulpit, the wood pale and worn. Every detail is perfect - the candleholders, the pulley that lowers the wrought-iron chandelier - with the central pillar of the chapel a ship's mast. It's an enchanting place, which we're shown round by a neighbour who is one of the congregation. Afterwards we sit on a bench in the graveyard and wonder that England can still furnish such remote and undiscovered places.'*²

A place where we've discovered an antique American Reed Organ from Boston, Mass.



From the middle of the nineteenth century, Protestant congregations worshipping in Meeting Houses and modest Chapels like Walpole, would most likely be singing psalms and hymns accompanied by someone playing a harmonium. The Chapel has a grey-painted, electric harmonium which is played for the Christmas Carol Services. But tucked away in the vestry and

² Alan Bennett, *Enough Said: the Diaries 2016-2024* London: Faber and Faber, and Profile Books, 2026, page 138, We would like to thank the publishers for permission to quote from the book, copies of which are available from The Halesworth Bookshop.



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obscured by a huge wooden music holder we have uncovered a far superior and more interesting instrument made by the Boston Organ Company, USA sometime between 1880-1903.

Known as 'harmoniums' in Europe or 'reed organs' in North America, these instruments create their distinctive wheezy sound either by blowing or by sucking air through tuned, metal reeds. They were developed as an inexpensive alternative to the pipe organs found in cathedrals, churches and large concert halls.³

Between 1875-1930, North American organ manufacturers dominated the international market by selling technically-sound, mass-produced and inexpensive instruments. One design, known as the 'chapel organ' had a particular appeal for unpretentious chapels such as Walpole. The instrument was small, lightweight and had wooden handles so it could easily be moved around the space.⁴



Jacque and Simon began to investigate the vestry organ more closely in February. The sliding lid revealed a keyboard spanning 5 octaves F-F, 19 stops with each sound identified in gothic letters and the gold painted 'Boston Organ Co. USA' logo underneath the stops. We applied to register the instrument on the database of the Reed Organ Society, based in the USA and, on the

³ Andrew Green 'Harmonium history: tracing the evolution, rise and demise of the pump organ', <https://www.classical-music.com/features/instruments/harmonium-history-pump-organ>

⁴ Robert Gellerman *The American Reed Organ*, New York: Vestal Press, 1973.



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basis of the evidence we supplied, this has been done.⁵

But the real surprise came when we unscrewed the wooden music stand that may have been added by one of the Chapel organists or been put onto the instrument before it came to Walpole. Underneath, between the original music-stand rail and a decorated backboard was a label:



T. D'Almaine & Co. were important London piano makers (1810-1915). The company sent 12 pianos to the 1883 Furniture Exhibition in London valued between fifteen shillings and 105 guineas. They also exhibited 'three reed organs, from 5j. to 9j. retail' which would equate to £40 - £75 today. How wonderful it would be if our instrument were one of these three! But, as yet, we have no record of when the instrument was acquired by the Chapel, nor whether it purchased by the congregation, acquired from another chapel or donated by a well-wisher.

We are also trying to find out when the organ stopped working and was moved into the vestry. A photograph from the flower festival held in 1998 shows it *in situ* under the rack of coat pegs at the back of the Chapel. So, if any reader of the Newsletter can help, please do get in touch.



⁵ Reed Organ Society <https://www.reedsoc.org/> Registration No. 7597.



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Advance notice: the AGM will take place on 11th July 2026

The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel was registered with the Charity Commission as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in 2022. Our fourth AGM as a CIO will take place in the Chapel on **Saturday, 11th July** starting at **4.00 pm**. Simon Weeks will be circulating the papers in advance. Honorary Life Member Gilbert Burroughes will be giving a short talk about his time as an archaeologist and refreshments, including home-made cake, will be provided before the formal business of the meeting is conducted.

Our beautiful new North wall

Hessian protecting the new render on the north wall of the Chapel from the winter weather was removed on Friday 29th May. The results of the repair and conservation work done last year are stunning. The first stage of the *Unwrapped* project was completed for the Historic Chapels Trust who owned the building. Managed by the Churches Conservation Trust on behalf of HCT, the



project was funded by a large grant from the National Memorial Heritage Fund with additional financial support from Suffolk organisations and individual donations to the Old Chapel. [See June, September and December 2025 Newsletters, on our website: www.walpoleoldchapel.org under the 'news' button.]

Ownership of the Chapel passed to the Friends of Walpole Old Chapel in March 2026. The Trustees are assembling an excellent team to work on the Development Phase of the Heritage Fund grant to remove the Chapel from the 'Heritage-At-Risk' Register. The final plan will be submitted to the HF next year. If the application is successful, by 2029 the Chapel will be protected from whatever the weather throws at it in the future. And it will also be a new centre of cultural activities for our local communities and visitors from further afield.

Contact information

The quarterly Walpole Old Chapel Newsletter is edited by Jacquie Burgess, a Trustee of FWOC. Contact Simon Weeks, Secretary: 01986 784348 or info@walpoleoldchapel.org
To become a Friend of the Chapel, contact Paul Simmons: friends@walpoleoldchapel.org
To contact the Discovery Project team: discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org