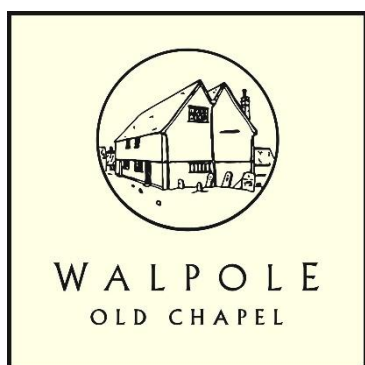




WALPOLE OLD CHAPEL NEWSLETTER September 2026

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter

As the sweltering heat of the last three months gives way to the cooler days of autumn, changes for the Chapel are picking up speed. In this edition, we have stories about the exciting events that took place over the summer season. We're also looking forward. With the support of The Heritage Fund, important conversations will be taking place this autumn with a wide range of stakeholders, supporters and local communities to help finalise proposals to save the Chapel for the future.

Regular readers will know the Chapel was rescued from being sold at auction by the Historic Chapels Trust (HCT) in 1994. A local committee of Friends worked tirelessly to look after the Chapel, becoming a formal Charity in 2022 - *The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel* (FWOC).

Ownership of the Chapel passed from HCT to FWOC in March 2026. To mark this legal change in status, a proposal to change the name of the charity to **Walpole Old Chapel Trust** was passed at the AGM on 11th July 2026. The Charity Commission approved the change last month. Individuals paying an annual subscription to be a member of WOCT will continue to be called the *Friends of the Chapel*.

Unwrapped update for September



Simon Weeks, Secretary of WOCT, is pleased we've had a break from lime plastering this year. The plaster likes to dry out and cure in much cooler temperatures than those of summer 2026. It would have been very difficult for the contractors to achieve that if they had been working on the Chapel this year.

The consultants funded by the Heritage Fund development grant are now in place and starting their information gathering and research.

We hope to receive draft reports from them by the end of the year, covering governance; business planning; activity planning; evaluation; and fundraising. Their final reports, due in March next year, will be important supporting documents for our application for delivery funding that will be submitted in June 2027.

Be involved in our Harvest Festival service



This September we are re-instating the Chapel's annual Harvest Festival service which has lapsed over the last few years. Our Minister, Rev'd Dr Catherine Ball will be leading the service on **Saturday 19th September at 4.00pm.**

We would like to mark the event with a generous contribution to the Halesworth Community Larder, so donations of fresh, tinned or packet food are welcome at the Chapel from 3.00pm.

If you have stems of wheat, barley, foliage or colourful vegetables and fruit for us to dress the Chapel, please leave them inside the dog-proof gate at Oak Cottage – to the right, next-door-but-one to the Chapel.

It is not too late to volunteer to read, so contact linleversha@hotmail.com if you would like to take part in the service. We look forward to welcoming you to this traditional celebration, where you can raise your voice in the hymns of those who originally worshipped in the Chapel but now with the accompaniment of our newly restored harmonium.

A great summer of music at Walpole Old Chapel

The programme opened in June with a fundraiser by *The Dollard Collectief*, with a literary collection of words and music from Northwest Europe. This was followed in July by *Blake Morrison and The Hosepipe Band*, when we enjoyed a stimulating afternoon of poetry from Blake's new anthology "Afterburn" enhanced by original music. Appropriate to our unique Chapel, *the Lovekyn Consort's* songs and instrumental music celebrated the summer in fine style, giving us a delightful experience of seventeenth century music. A packed house revelled in a glorious afternoon of music with Rob Gildon and seven musicians who entertained us with songs and music from Vivaldi to Britten.

There is still time to come to the **final concert of the season** with the **Tin Foil Aliens on 6th September**, when this popular five-piece band of local musicians will be playing original music. We look forward to seeing you.

Walpole Reflection

Grace Adam, our Artist in Residence, writes:



Nearly six months of coming to the Chapel to look, think, absorb and draw is coming to a close. Now there is a quickening as I gather my work and start on my installation which responds to the interior of the Chapel and one particular aspect of its history. I'll give you a clue; I've been gathering Hazel rods for some time.

Walpole Old Chapel is a unique building: plain, pragmatic, practical and beautiful. There are no straight lines. There are rough surfaces, worn edges and it is always just before 8.45 according to the clock. Big nails, kids' graffiti, and a make-do-and-mend aesthetic runs through the interior. It's good to be in there as a maker and to be 'talking to' all those other makers before me.

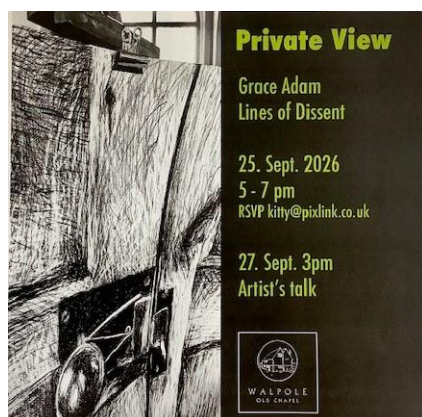


Approaching the Chapel along 'desire lines', the quickest routes worn by generations of feet, leads me into a religious space with almost no religious paraphernalia. Clambering upstairs to look out across the horizon has fed into several drawings.

Large scale charcoal drawings were my starting point. It seemed intuitively the right way to get to grips with the forms and angles around me. Gradually, time spent there

has brought to the surface details, shapes and objects that I've abstracted through work back in my studio. The austere box pews are a riot of rectangles!

As part of the Residency, we ran three very successful workshop sessions: drawing, painting and collage. There was a lovely, friendly atmosphere with some people having lots of experience, and others trying out things for the first time, so thank you everyone for coming. Great work, and an excellent way to enjoy the Chapel.



Finally, my special thanks go to Lin Le Versha, one of the Old Chapel Trustees. Lin has been wonderful in her support, friendship and ideas throughout this process.

An invitation to the Private View of my work with the Chapel – ***Lines of Dissent*** – between **5-7pm on Friday 25th September** is on the last page of this Newsletter. Don't forget the free talk I'll be giving about my work on **Sunday 27th September at 3pm**. See **Stop Press** (below) for the Exhibition dates in October.

The Importance of Pots in the life of Gilbert Burroughes

Before the AGM business meeting, members of FWOc listened to a very interesting talk by Gilbert Burroughes, Life Member of the charity, about his life in archaeology. His mentor had been Basil Brown, famous for his discovery of the Sutton Hoo ship burial, and with whom he kept up a professional friendship until Basil passed away.

Gilbert said his interests in pottery came partly from finding ancient fragments of pots in his arable fields and mainly from falling in love and marrying Heather Watson of the Henry Watson Pottery company in Wattisfield!

Initially, Gilbert worked on the Roman potteries which were based on the unique mica clay found at Wattisfield and then became an expert on Samian Ware. Gilbert is a skilled potter, making reproductions for many museums and appearing regularly on Tony Robinson's *Time Team* television documentaries to demonstrate how the archaeological finds would have been made.

Gilbert has a lasting affection for the Old Chapel and played an active role in the early years of the Friends committee. He talked about first seeing Heather at the 1947 pageant organised to



celebrate the Chapel's 300th anniversary. The programme and the script for the pageant are still held in the Chapel's archives.

A talented musician, Heather was the organist at Halesworth URC and she also played the harmonium for services and special events in the Walpole Chapel for many years. Her name is recorded on the Chapel's Memorial Board in the vestry. We are very grateful that Gilbert has donated his late wife's collection of reed organ scores to be kept in the Chapel for present and future organists to play.

The Boston Reed Organ: recent developments



On 14th July, Simon Pulham and David Tibbetts-Chaplain, from Bishop and Sons organ restorers, came to assess the two American Reed Organs – known as 'harmoniums' in the UK – we have in the Chapel. The *Boston* is a brown-case chapel organ and the *Estey* has a grey painted case. The Boston is at least 125 years old.

David played both instruments for comparison. We agreed the Estey's sound is harsh with a thin quality that isn't pleasant to listen to. In contrast, the Boston sound is round, rich and mellow, especially in the lower registers, and resonates very nicely in the Chapel acoustic.

David told us the Estey had been donated to Walpole in 2005 from a URC Chapel in Essex where it was no longer needed whereas Simon has known and looked after the Boston in the Chapel over many decades. Not only is it a far superior instrument, he knows it has been in the Walpole Chapel from the 1930s or maybe even further back.

The Trustees agreed to dispose of the Estey and commissioned Bishop and Sons to service the Boston. The harmonium, having been silent for the last 20 years, will be providing music for a wedding being held in the Chapel on 5th September, and the Harvest Festival service on the 19th September.

Help Shape the Future of Walpole Old Chapel

As part of the HF *Unwrapped* project, consultant **Becky Jefcoate** is developing an Activity Plan, exploring what could happen at the Chapel in the future and how we can encourage more people to discover this extraordinary place.

Becky writes: I'd really value listening to the ideas and experience of the people who know, support and care about the Chapel. What would you love to see happening here? Which ideas excite you? What would you take part in? How could we attract new people to discover this special place? And what are we missing?¹



I'm holding **two friendly, informal consultation sessions** on **Thursday 24th September at Walpole Old Chapel:**

11am – Supporters, visitors & anyone interested in the Chapel

For anyone who knows, visits or supports Walpole Old Chapel or is simply interested in its future. Come and explore some of the ideas, share your own and help us think about how we can reach new people and give them a reason to come through the Chapel door for the first time.

2pm – Current & former volunteers

A dedicated session for anyone who currently volunteers, or has volunteered, at Walpole Old Chapel. As well as hearing your ideas for future activities, we want to learn from your experience: what works, what could change, what would you enjoy being involved with – and what should we do differently to attract and welcome new people?

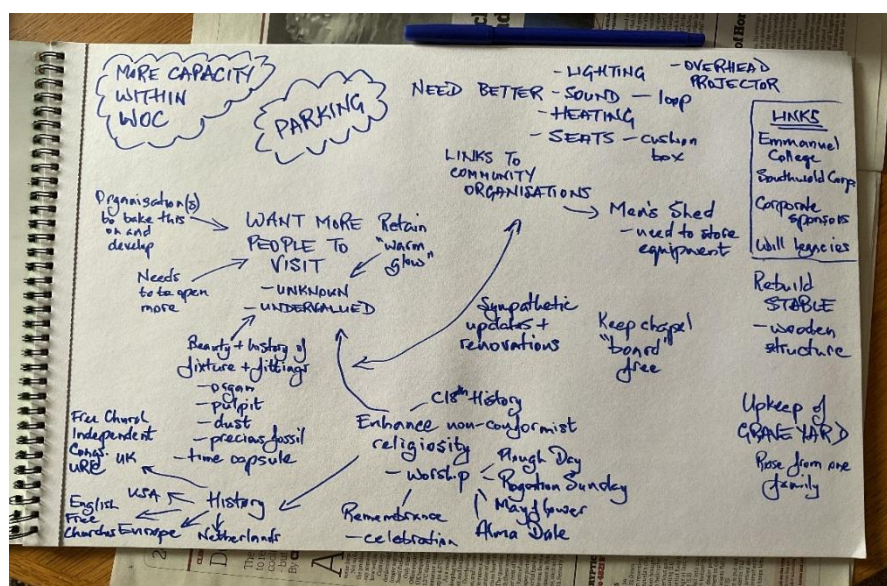
Both sessions will last about an hour and a half and be **relaxed, creative and conversational**. You don't need to prepare anything and there are no right or wrong answers. And importantly, **cake, savoury snacks and drinks will be provided!**

¹ Picture credit; Historic England, Copyright: Credit: Bill Cheyrou / Alamy Stock Photo, Creator: Bill Cheyrou / Alamy Stock Photo

Everyone is very welcome, but space is limited, so **please email me** at Becky.Jefcoate@yahoo.co.uk to **reserve your place**, letting me know which session you would like to attend. Parking is available in the field opposite the Chapel.

We're enormously grateful to everyone willing to give their time and share their ideas. What you tell us will directly help shape the Activity Plan and the future of Walpole Old Chapel. Together, we want to explore how this remarkable building can continue to be a **place of gathering, independent thinking and creativity** – and how a new generation of people can discover it.

Here's one the Trustees made earlier...



All six WOCT Trustees are children of the *Blue Peter* generation, so here's our early attempt to think about some of the questions Becky will be exploring in her consultation with you all.

WOCT Treasurer, Lyn Banks, produced the 'infogram' in the photo. It shows our sketchy and unrefined thoughts as they emerged during a morning meeting at The Angel in Halesworth in July. We tried to put into words what we felt the essence of the Old Chapel is for each of us, alongside its strengths and weaknesses, possible areas for development, 'must dos' and 'what about this' ideas.

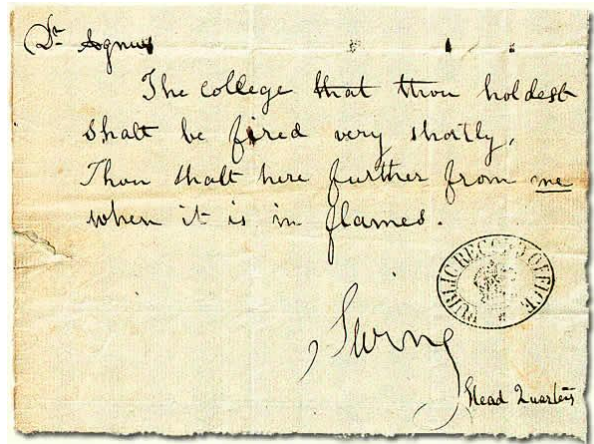
We thought it might be useful to share our first rough-and-ready, rudimentary assessment. The Trustees took part in a much better structured and interesting two-hour discussion with Becky on 18th August. We hope as many readers of the Newsletter as possible will come to one of her meetings on 24th September. If this date is not possible for you, please do email Becky at Becky.Jefcoate@yahoo.co.uk with your responses to her questions and help plan the best future for the Chapel.

Discovery Team and Heritage Open Days Update

The team has been busy over the past year transcribing documents, researching and exploring new material that has come to hand. We also offer Early Modern History M.A. students at the University of East Anglia opportunities to carry out small-scale research projects based on the Chapel and supported by the Discovery Team.

Projects by three of the students are now available online. Two articles on **Captain Swing², the Tithe Wars and rural unrest** in Suffolk, by Harry Thomas and by Ben Guttridge can be found on the Chapel website.

- *From Captain Swing to the Tithe War*, by Harry Thomas, UEA, M.A. research paper, 2025.
- *Captain Swing and Walpole*, by Ben Guttridge, UEA, M.A. research paper, 2025.



This summer Karen Hill completed a fascinating research project about the **Conventiclers in Suffolk and Walpole**. If you have never come across this before, the Conventicle Act of 1664 was another way of persecuting non-conformists. The Act prohibited individuals from gathering in groups of more than five people for worship who were not of the same family.³ The penalty was a heavy fine or imprisonment.



- *Conventiclers in Suffolk & Walpole Old Chapel*, by Karen Hill, UEA, M.A. research project 2026.

See Karen's presentation on Walpole Old Chapel's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4zbPymvSY8>

² Example of letter sent during the Swing Riots. This letter was sent to Corp. Christ. Coll. Cambridge in 1830. It says: "Dr Agnus. The college that thou holdest shalt be fired very shortly. Thou shalt here further from me when it is in flames. Swing Head Quarters." [Source: Wikipedia, accessed 22.08.26]

³ William Strong, *The Conventicle*, Drypoint on paper, 20.10x17.5cm, National Galleries of Scotland [from Karen Hill's presentation].

Coming soon from the Discovery Team will be displays for **Heritage Open Days on Saturday 12th September**. The theme this year is *Everyday Working Lives*. Volunteers have been working on a nineteenth century Church Book for the Chapel and the 1871 Census. These will give us a picture of what members of the Chapel congregation and wider community did to earn a living.

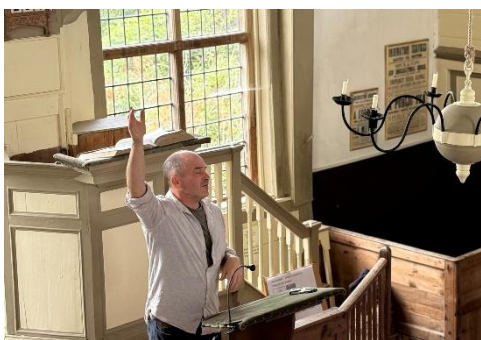
We would dearly love to recruit some more volunteers to join the Discovery Team. We have plenty in our archives that needs looking at and have recently received more Walpole documents from the Historic Chapels Trust when it closed down in the spring.

As we move on with our National Lottery Heritage Fund bid, we want to gather material that will help us tell the incredible and emerging story of our community. The Discovery Team usually meets on a Tuesday afternoon once every two months. Meetings take place in the Halesworth Museum in the Railway Station. For more information contact WOTC trustee Miriam Stead miriam.stead@icloud.com

STOP PRESS

Becky Jefcoate will be holding two further Walpole Old Chapel consultations on **Friday 25th September** in Halesworth Library (11.30am and 2pm) as part of her research for the Activity Plan. These will be designed more for people who may not have heard of WOC or who have never visited the Chapel. Becky will be promoting the library sessions via local Facebook groups and pages and via local groups in the coming days.

The Chapel provides a Puritan Vernacular setting for South Norfolk Community Choir and friends to learn 3 and 4 part American Vernacular songs, led by Brendan Taaffe (left) and John Harrison (right). Go to www.walpoleoldchapel.org/news to see and hear more ...



Finally, come to the Chapel to view the ***Lines of Dissent*** Exhibition and meet Grace Adam who will be present for all these weekend dates. Entry is free.

EXHIBITION OPENING HOURS:

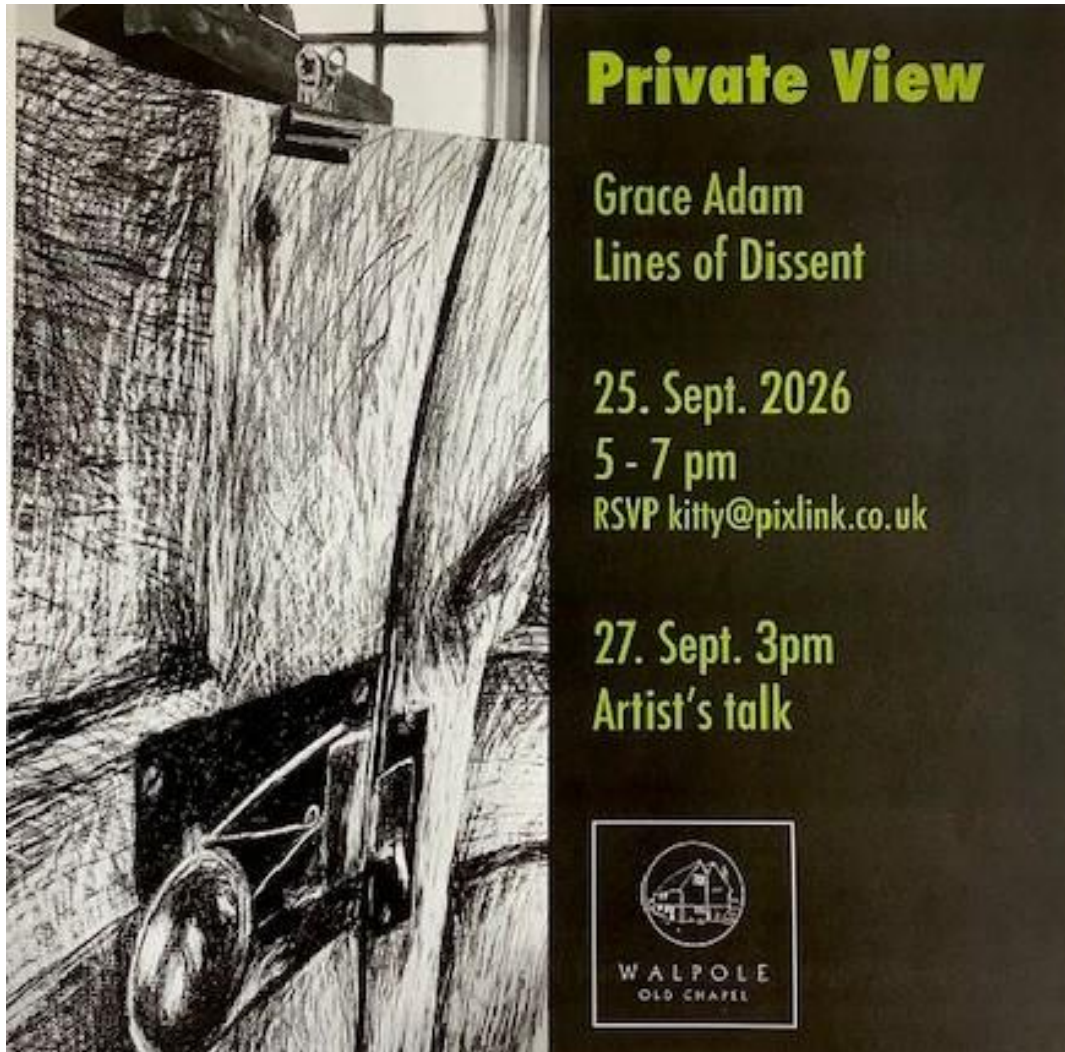
26-27th Sept: 2 - 4.30 on Saturday, 1.30 - 5 on Sunday, Grace will talk at 3p m.

3-4th Oct: 2- 4.30 on Saturday, 11-1 on Sunday.

10-11th Oct: 2 - 4.30 on Saturday, 11-1 on Sunday.

23-24th Oct: 2 - 4.30 on Saturday, 11-1 on Sunday.

30-31st Oct: 1-3pm on Saturday, 2-4.30 on Sunday.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact Simon Weeks, Secretary: info@walpoleoldchapel.org

Contact Miriam Stead, Discovery Project Leader: discovery@walpoleoldchapel.org

Contact Paul Simmons, Membership Secretary: friends@walpoleoldchapel.org

Other Trustees' responsibilities: Lyn Banks, Treasurer; Lin le Versha, Programme organizer; Jacquie Burgess, editor WOCT quarterly Newsletter.

Walpole Old Chapel is owned and managed by Walpole Old Chapel Trust [reg:1198030]

Address: Walpole Old Chapel, Halesworth Road, Walpole, Halesworth, Suffolk IP19 9AZ

www.walpoleoldchapel.org