

Walpole Old Chapel Annual Newsletter 2017

The chapel is in the care of the Historic Chapels Trust (Charity Commission No. 1017321).

Welcome to the 2017 newsletter – the first from the new secretaries Phil and Linda Stevens who have the impossible task of following in the footsteps of Christina Van Melzen. Secretary for the past twenty years, you will be pleased to know that Christina will continue to be involved in the affairs of the Chapel, although largely confining herself to supporting events and baking delicious cakes.

2016 Last season was a busy one for the Chapel. Highlights included performances by harpsichordist, Yat-Soon Yeo, the Lovekyn Consort, and singing group, Scunslata. We celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of William Shakespeare with readings from the Suffolk Poetry Society, while the Waveney Brass Band Ensemble accompanied the singing of hymns chosen by the local group for our Songs of Praise. In September the Chapel opened its doors for the 11th year of the Heritage Open Days, providing welcome refreshment for the participants of the SHCT bike ride.

Once again, the Rev Bill Mahood led the Annual Ecumenical Service for which we were joined by members of the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust. They brought with them the excellent Marenzo Singers and the organ was played by Tony Percival, who has accompanied our annual service since its inception. The address was given by Lord Beith of the Historic Chapels Trust. Our year ended with the popular candle-lit Carols and Readings for Christmas service which was as usual very well-attended. The grounds of the chapel have been significantly improved thanks to Anne's continuing good work with the Community Payback team. A summer wedding was one of the year's best moments.

In August a memorial service was held following the sad death of a great friend of the Chapel, Gerald Herbert –please see Christina's tribute below.

2017 promises to be an interesting year for the Chapel. In October last year Historic England produced the Walpole Old Chapel Conservation Statement, a full and detailed report of the WOC as a heritage asset produced by Griffiths Heritage. The report confirms why the chapel is important and lays out what we need to do to look after it in the future. The report describes its significance of in the following way:

The earliest surviving Non-Conformist chapel conversion from a domestic dwelling in the country, with tangible links to early Suffolk Independence, and one of the most evocative and finest meeting house interiors in England.

The Chapel is clearly a highly important historic building. In general the building is in good shape, but the exterior walls have deteriorated in recent years and need urgent attention. Local architect, Brian Morton and Anglia Lime have agreed to produce a fabric survey of the exterior walls which we will use as the basis for a fundraising appeal.

In late February I was surprised to receive a telephone call from the Director of HTC, Roland Jeffrey. Roland explained that they have underspent on projects this financial year and the exterior fabric survey could be funded from the underspend. We agreed to go ahead with the survey on the 70/30% funding split we approved at our last meeting. We also agreed that the HTC survey, carried out by Skillingtons, should complement the pro-bono work generously undertaken by Brian Morton. Within the next couple of months we will have two professional reports on the exterior of the building which can inform our decisions going forward.

We plan to introduce one or two new ideas this year. **Melissa James** is an emerging singer with a national profile who Linda and I first saw performing at Orford Church. Melissa is also the founder of the mental health charity, SING4SANE. The concert is a collaboration with the Snape Festival and performing with Melissa will be a group of young singers from Lowestoft, Group A. It promises to be an entertaining evening.

Dr Knighton is the keeper of the Samuel Pepys book collection at Cambridge University and has strong local connections, as did Pepys, of course. A feature of Dr Knighton's talk will be the strong local accent kindly provided by James Holloway.

The retrospective exhibition of the work of **Linda Holmes** is long-awaited and the Chapel will provide the appropriate setting for some of her best work. Given fine weather the Waveney Brass Band tea in August should prove popular with locals and holidaymakers alike.

News from HCT

Our relationship with HCT is set to change and I am sure this will prove a topic for ongoing discussion. The Trust's funding from English Heritage/Historic England is to be reduced to zero over the next couple of years.

A joint group has been set up chaired by Carol Suter of Oxford University and former Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, to explore ways to safeguard the future of historic chapels. The group consists of representatives from HTC and English Heritage/Historic England. Local consultation will form part of the group's work.

Display of the Public Liability Certificate is not required by law as the chapel is not a place of employment.

HCT give their full support for us to source local funds and procure work as we see fit, keeping them informed, of course.

HCT annual visit is on Friday 9 June at 12.00pm

Gerald Herbert 1955 - 2016

Gerald was a highly regarded restorer, with a passion for antiques and he was tremendously generous to the old chapel with the skills he had worked so hard to acquire. He was enormously valued for his practicality, hard work, forthright advice and humour.

Gerald also has a talent for friendship, and many of his friends were inveigled into helping in and around the chapel. Gerald always had a friend who could help out with just about everything from architectural advice to wielding a chainsaw. He had very strong views on most subjects and could be pretty sharp, but he was never unkind, he just said what needed to be said clearly and decisively then withdrew and let the dust settle.

With his death Walpole Old Chapel has lost a great friend and defender whose presence will remain in the chapel in the many tasks he undertook or arranged and in the memories of those of us who knew and who held him in high regard.

Bill Mahood led what was a true celebration of Gerald's all too short life in a packed chapel on a beautiful August afternoon. There were tears and laughter. It was a fitting testimony to a man many of us are deeply grateful to have known and who gave so generously to Walpole Old Chapel.