



WALPOLE OLD CHAPEL Annual Newsletter 2014

The Chapel is in the care of the Historic Chapels Trust (registered charity number 1017321)

CHRISTOPHER FYSON STELL OBE 1929–2014

Christopher (above), who died on 16th January, was possibly the most influential voice in the saving of Walpole Old Chapel. His letter, on hearing of the possible sale of the Chapel in 1982, does not mince words: 'It truly amazes me that any denomination should wish to dispossess itself of one of the finest and oldest and most richly evocative buildings in its care'.

He was at that time a senior investigator with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and his comprehensive four-volume *Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses* covers the whole of England. A photograph of the interior of Walpole graces the title page of the volume on Eastern England.

Christopher Stell was a founder member of both the Chapels Society and the Historic Chapels Trust. I followed him as the second secretary to the Chapels Society and I have to take issue with one point that appears in *The Times* obituary of 30th January. It states that 'No meeting he attended would be complete without his insistence on a correction to the minutes of the previous meeting'. I held the post for eight years and once, just once, he had no comment on the minutes!

Thank goodness he was as fierce in his defence of the non-conformist built heritage as he was of English grammar. An executive decision was made to send a donation of £200 in his memory to the Historic Chapels Trust.

OTHER NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS

2013 was another good year for the Old Chapel though visitor numbers were slightly down on the previous year. The poetry collection *Walpole Words* has sold well, we only have a couple of dozen copies left so hopefully a second collection may be on the cards for 2015/16.

It has been a quiet year for maintenance work on the Chapel and that is beginning to show; we hope that the report from the new architect appointed by the Historic Chapels Trust will come up with an affordable, staggered programme of work to improve its appearance. Meanwhile we keep working to be able to pay our share of the cost,

as we have been able to do for the last 18 years, thanks of course to your support.

The Scots pine which has lain fallen in the graveyard since the storm of 1987, and which had grown again from the trunk, finally gave up the ghost in the winter storms. The committee decided to remove the debris but to leave the major part of the trunk as a dividing line between the graveyard that we maintain and the part that we leave wild. An anonymous friend has made two beautiful inscribed collection bowls for the Chapel from some of the wood.

2013 EVENTS

The season kicked off with a performance by **Riotous Assembly** – all good rousing stuff, a reflection in words and music on the years after the Napoleonic Wars when returning soldiers found a country much changed and almost brought revolution back with them. The **Suffolk Poetry Society** used the building as a venue for a programme of poetry inspired by other art forms entitled *Transpositions*. The Reverend Paul Whittle Moderator of the Eastern Region of the URC, addressed our **Annual Service**, which was led by Revd Bill Mahood with our friend Tony

Percival on the organ. In July a local group read extracts from **Dickens' novels**, **Chris Doddridge** led a **Raga Mediation** and the **Halesworth Café Poets** made their annual tea-time visit in August. Again the **Waveney Valley Brass Ensemble** accompanied our *Songs of Praise*. We were open as usual for the **Suffolk Historic Churches Trust's Annual Bike Ride** but the highlight of the season was an exhibition over the **Heritage Open Days** by textile artist **Barbara Clarke** inspired by the Chapel. Her work reflected the atmosphere and the colours of the Chapel

and it was most exciting to be able to browse through her scrap books and see just how she had crafted her inspiration into the articles on display. The **Carols & Readings for Christmas** was once again a huge success with around 180 people, including many new faces. The youngest was baby Olive, all dressed in red, whose mummy and daddy had been married in the Chapel the year before.

Barbara Clarke's exhibition of textiles was the high point of the year



THE 2014 PROGRAMME

The Chapel will be open on Saturday afternoons from the first Saturday in May (3rd) until the last Saturday in September (27th) between 2 and 4.30pm. There will also be **Quaker Meetings for Worship** on the first Sunday in the month from May to September at 10.30am.

This year seems to be a year of singing in the Old Chapel. The season opens with a workshop on Sunday 11th May led by **Stephanie Anderson**. This will begin at 10am and end at 1pm, the cost will be £10: further details are on the Chapel website or from Stephanie on 01692 583400 or www.stephanie-anderson.co.uk

Stephanie is also bringing her singers *Scunsulata* for a performance in aid of the Chapel on Saturday 14th June at 7.30pm, tickets will be £7 either on the door or as above. Our **Annual Ecumenical Service**, when we celebrate the founding of the congregation in 1649, will be held at 3pm on 22nd June and we are delighted that **Ronald Blythe** has agreed to give the address. He will speak on **John Bunyan** to whom the service will be dedicated. Then our friend **Helen Rolfe** is bringing two groups of singers together, *Way Beyond the Blue* and *Heartbeat*, for a concert,

again in aid of Chapel funds, on 28th June starting at 6pm. The **Halesworth Café Poets** are coming for their annual tea-time reading on 10th August. Over the **Heritage Open Days** we will be holding a retrospective exhibition of some of the work of the late **Jack Penton** who so loved our Chapel, along with Venice and Suffolk's fine churches. The exhibition will be open from Friday 12th September until Sunday 14th from 10.30 to 4.30. We have something quite different on Sunday 21st September as our committee member **Caroline Way** is going to reconstruct the **Harvest Tea** of 1871 which was postponed due to some nonconformist infighting. For the details see **David Holmes's** book *An Inglorious Affair*. The tea will cost £5 and needs to be booked in advance through the Secretary as the number of tickets is limited to 40. Finally the season will end with a flourish when the **Waveney Valley Brass Ensemble** will accompany our *Songs of Praise* on 28th September. Outside the season, of course, we must mention the **Carols and Readings for Christmas** which will be held this year at 3pm on Saturday 20th December.

Christina van Melzen

11 May	10.00am-1.00pm Shape Note workshop led by Stephanie Anderson, £10
14 June	7.30pm Stephanie Anderson with her singers <i>Scunsulata</i> , £7. In aid of Chapel.
22 June	3.00pm Annual Ecumenical Service - address by Ronald Blythe
28 June	6.00pm Helen Rolfe with singers <i>Way Beyond the Blue</i> and <i>Heartbeat</i> . In aid of Chapel.
10 August	5.00pm Halesworth Café Poets' annual visit
12 September	10.30-4.30 Heritage Open Day: exhibition of works by Jack Penton - to 14th.
13 September	9.00am-5.00pm SHCT Bike Ride and Heritage Open Day
14 September	10.00am-5.00pm Heritage Open Day
21 September	3.00pm Reconstructed 1871 Harvest Tea
28 September	3.00pm <i>Songs of Praise</i> Waveney Valley Brass Ensemble
20 December	3.00pm Carols & Readings for Christmas

For further information please contact the Secretary to the Friends of Walpole Old Chapel
Christina van Melzen: 01986 798 308 email chrisvanmelzen@outlook.com

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St George's German Lutheran Church, 55 Alie Street, London E1 8EB 020 7481 0533 www.hct.org.uk.

President Sir Hugh Rossi Chairman Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP