

HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST

Newsletter

Spring 2024



A message from the Chair

In my contribution to the last Newsletter (Summer 2023) I outlined how following the withdrawal of funding for our core operating costs, we had been successful in receiving funds from the National Heritage Memorial Fund's (NHMF) Cultural Assets Fund and Historic England, for which we are most grateful, to complete a range of structural repairs to some of the buildings in our care. This will help us in the process of finding new owners who can offer a more sustainable future for our remarkable collection of chapels.

We move forward with mixed feelings. Whilst it is with a heavy heart that we have to look for new owners, it is very reassuring to know that some of the major repair works that are urgently needed at our buildings will now be funded. A start will be made on a good number of projects this summer. However, across our remarkable collection of 20 chapels there are still some important capital works which need to take place for which will require additional fundraising.

Volunteers at Umberslade were able to organise the opening of the church over the New Year to view the atmospheric illumination of the interior. Photo courtesy Friends of Umberslade.

Our Conservation Project Manager, Kathryn Moore, joined our team last Summer and has made a rapid start on recruiting architects and surveyors to review all of chapels and identify the most urgent repair needs. Please refer to her report for what is proposed this year and next year.

HCT has appointed Tricolor Associates to take forward the process of seeking new owners for our chapels and overseeing all that is involved in conducting negotiations and effecting transfers. Tricolor worked with us on our funding bids to the NHMF and Historic England and we have established a good working relationship. Emma Collins is their Senior Project Manager, with overall responsibility for this aspect of the project. There are some promising developments, as mentioned in her report.

Another part of the funding we have been able to obtain is helping ensure we are able to undertake various essential maintenance tasks and compliance issues. Kathryn Moore

has been very ably assisted by Christopher Paterson whose first task was to ensure winter gutter clearance took place at the chapels.

I am indebted to the various chapel supporters groups, who have stood alongside HCT in this period of transition. As can be seen in Steve Pilcher's report, many events and activities have been organised last year (and will be taking place this year). I am very grateful to Steve for coming out of retirement to act as a contact point with local committees and providing answers to some quite complex questions that arise in this time of transition.

In our last Newsletter, we launched our Fund the Future of our Chapels campaign. This was very successful, as detailed in Vikki Thompson's report. It is humbling to know that we have your support in our quest to secure the future of these wonderful buildings.

Chris Smith OBE, HCT Chair

Structural Repairs

Thanks to funding from the NHMF and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) under the Cultural Assets Fund, we are working in partnership with the Churches Conservation Trust to tackle the most urgent repair needs across HCT's chapels this year. We are planning to get on site at eight chapels; Bethesda Chapel, the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, St Benet's Chapel, Petre Chapel, Todmorden Unitarian Church, Umberslade Baptist Church, Wainsgate Chapel, and Westgate Chapel. The focus of the funding is on repairs that are needed to make the chapels structurally sound, weathertight, and halt any deterioration of important historic fabric.

As well as the repair programme, the funding is covering routine maintenance at all of HCT's chapels, to keep them in good condition while their long-term futures are secured.

Kathryn Moore



There are significant cracks requiring repair at Umberslade. Photo courtesy Kathryn Moore

Dispersals Programme

The Dispersals Programme, to find new owners who are better placed to care for HCT's chapels in the future, started in early 2023 with site visits to all 20 of the chapels – starting at Penrose in Cornwall and working our way north until we reached Biddlestone in Northumberland. These site visits also allowed us to meet the local committees, friends groups and other stakeholders who care so deeply about each chapel's future.

Following the site visits, we drafted a Mission Statement and Principles for Dispersal, which were also signed off by the HCT Trustees and the Steering Group which oversees the Conservation and Dispersals Programmes. Our Mission Statement for the Dispersals Programme is:

'To give history a future. To safeguard Historic Chapels Trust's magnificent collection of 20 chapels by developing, evaluating and implementing strategies for new stable ownership in consultation with stakeholders at both the local and national levels and in conjunction with the Conservation Programme, in order to secure a long-term and sustainable future for each chapel befitting its historical, cultural and social significance and ensure that the new owners can pursue relevant opportunities for use, community involvement and further funding to preserve and progress the chapels' histories.'



Walpole's atmospheric interior creates a lasting impression on all visitors. Photo courtesy Tricolor collection.

Through the rest of last year, we stayed very busy undertaking research and preparing outreach strategies for all of the chapels. This has allowed us to identify a number of potential new owners for the chapels, which we will continue to develop this year, including:

- Dissenters' Chapel – after discussions, the lease of this chapel in Kensal Green Cemetery has been returned to the General Cemetery Company.
- Walpole Old Chapel – Historic Suffolk, formerly known as the Suffolk Building Preservation Trust, plans to take ownership of Walpole Old Chapel and raise funds to complete work to replace the render of the building, with support from the Tricolor team.
- Todmorden Unitarian Church – the local group is organising as a charity with plans to take ownership, with project development and fundraising support from Tricolor.
- Wainsgate Chapel – the local group is already organised as a charity and plans to take ownership, with project development and fundraising support from Tricolor.
- Discussions are ongoing with Friends of Friendless Churches on specific chapels that fit their areas of focus.
- A number of discussions with other potential owners are also ongoing.

If you have any ideas about ownership and new usage for specific chapels, please feel free to email our team at office@historicchapelstrust.org.uk

Emma Collins

Chapel News

Local community involvement and finding new uses for its exceptional collection of chapels has always been at the core of HCT's purpose.

At many chapels, local committees have been established which engage with their community to deliver a programme of activities and events to attract visitors. This relies on the skills, creativity and enthusiasm of the committee members. I continue to help the committee at St George's German Lutheran Church, at Aldgate in East London and it has been a pleasure to be back in contact with the other local groups and support them in their endeavours. There has been plenty of activity at several of the chapels, the highlights of which are detailed below.

Bethesda Methodist Chapel, Albion Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent

The local friends group continue to host activities throughout the warmer months of the year – but they make an exception for Remembrance weekend in November and it is heartening to record that they had a good turnout, with 87 people in attendance.

Please visit their website <https://www.bethesda-stoke.info/> for details of events that are proposed in 2024.

Petre Chapel, Thorndon Park, Brentwood, Essex

Completed in 1859 as a mausoleum for the Petre family, who at that point in time were living in the nearby Thorndon Hall, the richly decorated interior of the chapel is one of Essex's hidden gems and is the work of William Wardell who subsequently emigrated to Australia, due to ill health. Wardell is perhaps best known for being the architect for the cathedrals in Sydney and Melbourne.

HCT took on responsibility for the chapel in 2010 and subsequently undertook several phases of repairs to secure the structural stability of the building, which were funded by English Heritage/Historic England and the Country Houses Association.

The delightful Warley Place gardens is nearby. They were created by the 19th century horticulturist, Ellen Wilmot. Her mother's grave is alongside Petre Chapel – and several members of the Friends of Warley Place Gardens kindly assisted with clearing the area around the grave in Summer 2023. We hope they will continue to help with future maintenance of the grounds at Petre Chapel.



Biddulph Male Voice choir at Bethesda on 11th November 2023.
Photo courtesy Elaine Titley

Salem Chapel, Vicarage Lane, East Budleigh, Devon

In 2023 an agreement was reached between HCT and the East Budleigh History Society (EBHS) which enables the EBHS to re-open the chapel and run a range of events and open days between July and December. These included a number of exhibitions in August 2023 celebrating the food heritage and natural heritage of the area, along with openings for Heritage Open Days in September, Remembrance weekend in November and a display of Christmas trees in December.

HCT is indebted to local activist Maria Malinowska for taking the initiative to contact HCT and EBHS. Maria and her active group have also been of great assistance with regard to providing access for a range of maintenance contractors, whose work is essential to maintaining this delightful, but fragile building.

Further details about EBHC can be found on their website: <https://salemchapel.github.io/ebhs/>

St George's German Lutheran Church, Alie Street, London E1

The St George's local committee arranged a talk or concert every month (except August) during 2023. As ever, one of the highlights was the annual carol concert of West Gallery Quire songs, given by the London Gallery Quire in December.

Sunhild Walker-Keir had been a very effective chair of the local committee for over 5 years and sadly she passed away in September 2023, after a short period of ill health. Her stoic support for St George's and ability to gently ensure good order and progress will be much missed. A concert, in her memory, was held on Tuesday 20th February 2024 at St George's.

Umberslade Baptist Church, Hockley Heath, West Midlands

The local committee hold regular Open Days – please view their Facebook page for details of events. They ended 2023 by illuminating the interior of the church, with battery powered LED lights, giving a very dramatic effect, as shown in the photograph on the front cover. The church was open on 31st December 2023 and 1st January 2024 and there were a few dozen visitors.

Steve Pilcher

Obituaries for Chris Wakeling and David John

It is with great sadness that we need to report the death of two men who had strong connections with the Historic Chapels Trust and its buildings.

Professor Christopher Wakeling

Professor Christopher Wakeling died on 2nd October 2023, aged 74. He had been a Trustee of HCT since 2013. He was a specialist in non-conformist built history and he wrote what is the definitive book on the subject *Chapels of England: Buildings of Protestant Non-conformity* in 2017.

Chris was a long-standing, committed supporter of HCT and, particularly, of the chapel committees. He cared about the people themselves as much as for the chapels which the community and forebears had built and sustained. Being based at Keele University, he felt a particularly strong affection for Bethesda Methodist Chapel, in Hanley and the active group of volunteers who have made such a success of the Open Days at the chapel.

He was a good conscience to HCT and we could always count on his fair judgement, courteously expressed - and firmly pressed where necessary. Chris will be very much missed by his family, friends, colleagues and many other communities. His work on the revised Pevsner for Staffordshire will be published this year and it is hoped that the book will be 'launched' at Bethesda in a fitting tribute to his life and work. A tribute can be found on-line at:- <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/nov/27/christopher-wakeling-obituary>.

David John

Devotees of twentieth century architecture will be familiar with the work of the architect F.X. Verlade. HCT assumed responsibility for the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in 2002, arguably one of Verlade's finest works, set in a peaceful lawned setting near Stanley Park, in Blackpool's north western suburbs.

Its striking sculpture was the work of the sculptor, David John, who passed away on 26th August 2023, aged 95. Various tributes to him can be found on-line, including mention in the Catholic Network and the Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/oct/03/david-john-obituary>.

David learnt the craft of stone sculpture at the Wimbledon College of Art, but had also trained in carpentry and such was his skill in a variety of mediums he became sought after for his work. At the Shrine, his striking bas relief sculpture of the Holy Trinity leaves a memorable impression on all visitors and people passing by on Whinney Heys Road. David kindly travelled to Blackpool and addressed the audience when a public meeting was held in the Shrine to launch HCT's proposals for the building back in 2004. He was able to relate some fascinating details of he and his team's work on the building and was reunited with several members of the contractor's workforce who built the Shrine.

HCT chapels - past, present and future

Wainsgate Baptist Chapel, Old Town, nr Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

Wainsgate Baptist Chapel, stands in a windswept location on the edge of the rural settlement of Old Town, set down a track some 600 feet up the steep hill from the former mill town of Hebden Bridge.

The building and attached school house date from 1860, standing on the site of two previous chapels. The somewhat austere exterior hides a richly decorated interior, which includes a marble and alabaster pulpit, a fine large organ from the Leeds firm of organ builders, Wordsworth, installed in 1891 and two war memorials.

The chapel had played a key role in the community until after World War II, but declining attendance and the failure of the heating system led to the closure of the chapel and transfer to HCT in 2005.

Such is the nature of the vibrant community in the Calder Valley, HCT soon received approaches from local people to help reopen the chapel and create new uses. Thanks to the help of local musician Dave Nelson and others, a dynamic and dedicated local committee was established. Many concerts and other events have been held in the chapel and spaces on both floors of the former school building have been let out as artists studios.

Wainsgate now has an ever-growing, innovative, inclusive and high-quality events programme which brings thousands of people from near and far into the building each year. There is a thriving concert series which this year will include a piano festival with world-class musicians, some major spoken-word artists, with a wide variety of musical styles represented. Wainsgate Dances is an internationally recognised programme of dance, funded by Arts Council England and Sadlers Wells Theatre in London, which includes daily dance practice sessions for all ages, an artists residency programme, performances and workshops bringing people from all over the world to Wainsgate. The programme was recently the subject of an article in the Guardian about the “cultural explosion” happening at the chapel. There are bi-annual Artists Open Studio events filling the whole building with visual art, installations and other exhibitions. There are markets, heritage events and a host of other events engaging the surrounding communities. A dedicated and experienced gardening team meet weekly to take care of the burial grounds and gardens.

The large burial ground contains the graves of three World War I combatants and a number of impressive memorials. It also includes the grave of Dr John Fawcett (1739 – 1817), theologian and hymn writer, who was minister at Wainsgate from 1863 to 1877 and wrote the well known Baptist hymn, ‘Blessed be the Tie that Binds’. One of the local residents, Chris Barnett has developed the fascinating Wainsgate Graveyard Project website which charts the history of Wainsgate through the people buried there - www.wainsgategraveyardproject.co.uk

Future Plans

There has been a very active group of local supporters from the very early days of HCT’s ownership, previously known as ‘The Friends of Wainsgate Chapel’. They are an enthusiastic and committed group who undertake the day-to-day running of Wainsgate with responsibility for the building, the grounds and the extensive events programme which attracts large audiences. Through their activities, they raise funds to



Wainsgate's impressive interior.
Photo courtesy Tricolor Associates

support the chapel and grounds. Recently they have raised money to enable new disabled toilet facilities, a disabled access ramp, heating in the Sunday School and other rooms, and a new kitchen to be installed. Wainsgate Chapel has now obtained charitable status with four trustees, have developed a business plan and have expressed interest in taking on ownership of the chapel from HCT.

Their vision is to continue with the current arrangement of renting out the former school rooms as artist's studios and to continue to expand the hugely successful events programme to ensure that the building continues to be a sustainable and thriving part of the community. The chapel and grounds are well used by local people and strong connections are maintained with the local primary school and other local residents. HCT is proposing to help fund further structural repairs to the chapel and school room, but further fundraising will be required to be raised to enable a heating system in the chapel to be installed.

The package of urgent works planned at Wainsgate will focus on encouraging the chapel to dry out, a challenge as both the chapel and school room are partially built into the hill behind. This will include: high level works such as re-pointing and gutter repair to prevent any further water ingress, structural repairs to timber inside the chapel which has been damaged by historic water ingress, drainage works, and works to the ground level to the east of the chapel. We are also hoping to introduce some additional ventilation into the chapel space. These works should help prevent further deterioration to the chapel while a larger project to improve facilities at the chapel is developed.

Fundraising - Vikki Thompson

Thank you

We are immeasurably grateful to everyone who made a contribution to our Fund the Future of our Chapels Campaign, which we launched in the summer 2023 edition of the newsletter. While we set a target of £10,000, we were deeply humbled to receive £19,000 from 65 donors. This is a magnificent achievement and our sincere thanks go to everyone who contributed in this way. The funds raised will go towards our essential core costs at this pivotal time in HCT's history, which are not covered by the grants from the NHMF or Historic England. Alongside the generous donations to our campaign we are also very grateful to our annual supporters who contribute to our work and would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their continued support.

Help our Chapels stay Warm and Dry 2024 Campaign

While we are very grateful to the NMHF and Historic England for their generous support, there are certain types of repair and capital works that these grants do not cover. This includes works to address heating, a pressing need in several of our chapels which are cold and damp. These conditions not only make the chapels unwelcome for visitors but can put the fabric of these historic buildings at risk, accelerating the deterioration of their condition, which would then require more extensive and more expensive works to remedy. For example: Bethesda Methodist Chapel, Longworth Catholic Chapel, Todmorden Unitarian Church, Umberslade Baptist Chapel, Wainsgate Chapel, Wallasey Unitarian Church and Westgate Primitive Methodist church urgently require new heating systems. If we cannot secure the funding to undertake capital works, our chapels remain at risk. Indeed, the magnificent Grade I listed Todmorden Unitarian Church is desperately in need of a new boiler and heating system before another winter arrives. The new boiler will need to be fitted in a new position, so that it is no longer in a damp cellar. While this will make the heating more efficient and effective it will also increase the cost which is estimated at £35,000. While the chapel Committee will fundraise throughout the year additional support through this campaign will be required. Donations will not be restricted to Todmorden but will be shared among the chapels which require support to make them warm and dry.

We would like to raise £15,000 through 2024 to support this essential area of activity. We are very aware that our donors have already been so generous during 2023 but if you could consider supporting our latest strand of essential repair works we would be most grateful. To make a donation, you can either complete and return the enclosed application form or visit - easydonate.org/HCTE6.

HCT's Website

For reasons beyond our control, HCT's website has not been accessible for almost two years. This is very unfortunate, especially at a time when HCT is undergoing a period of significant change. It is, therefore, very heartening to report that HCT's consultants, Tricolor, have been able to find the previous version of the website and with the help of some IT experts, the website is being recreated and will hopefully be available again soon.

Other local committees have their own website – where details of future events and other points of interest can be found. Details are as follows:-

Bethesda:- <https://Bethesda-stoke.info>
Salem:- <https://salemchapel.github.io/ebhs/>
St George's:- <https://www.stgeorgesgermanchurch.org.uk/>
Todmorden:- <https://todmordenunitarianchurch.wordpress.com>
Umberslade:- <https://www.facebook.com/p/Friends-of-Umberslade-Baptist-Chapel-100064439511445>
Wainsgate:- <https://wainsgate.co.uk>
Walpole:- <https://walpoleoldchapel.org>

If supporters have any general or specific queries please send an e-mail to historicchapelstrust@tricolorassociates.co.uk or write to Historic Chapels Trust, St George's German Lutheran Church, 55 Alie Street, London E1 8EB

Thank you

HCT would like to thank the following people and organisations who have generously supported their work in 2023.

Walpole Unwrapped

The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel have a major fundraising campaign underway for the 'Unwrapped Project' to carry out essential conservation and refurbishment to the external fabric of the Chapel. Please find more information online at <https://walpoleoldchapel.org/support-us/donate/>.



Historic England



NATIONAL HERITAGE
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Professor Clyde Binfield - Mr Norman Chang - Mrs Debbie Dance - Mrs M Ede - Friends of Bethesda
Friends of Coanwood - Friends of Cote - Friends of Farfield - Friends of Longworth
Friends of St George's - Friends of Todmorden - Friends of Umberslade - Friends of Wainsgate
Friends of Walpole - The Gatliff Trust - Mr Jonathan Harris - The Henfrey Charitable Trust
Mr Dennis Keeling - R Macleod - Sir Alastair Norris - Mr Julian Selby-Rickards - Mr Anthony Wood



**Historic Chapels Trust, St George's German Lutheran Church,
55 Alie St, London E1 8EB United Kingdom
office@historicchapelstrust.org.uk | www.hct.org.uk
Company No. 2778395 (England) | Registered Charity No. 1017321**