

THE CURTAIN FALLS ON REX BATTEN'S LIFE



Rex Batten, long-time supporter of FONC, ex-Committee member, popular tour guide and author of several of FONC's best-selling books passed peacefully away on the evening of Tuesday, 7th November. In later life, Rex suffered from cancer and following a period of remission the cancer returned. Loved by all who knew him, neighbours rallied around to care for him at his home in Landells Road, East Dulwich.



Rex joined FONC as member number 500 in August 1986 and soon after was elected as a Committee member. He was quickly working on collecting stories about the cemetery, published as 'Nunhead Remembered', which led to him discovering and researching the tragic story of the Scouts buried there, published as 'The Leysdown Tragedy' with a later shorter version, 'The Walworth Scouts'. Rex also wrote 'Nunhead and the Music Hall' which forms the basis of a popular cemetery tour.



Rex was born in rural Dorset in 1928. He moved to London to take up a scholarship at RADA as a contemporary of Joe Orton and Alan Bates. After bit parts in films and free-lance writing for radio, Rex decided the acting life was not for him and he spent most of his working life in teaching. He was also the author of 'Rid England of This Plague' a semi-autobiographical account of the persecution of homosexuals in the 1940s and 1950s.

FONC was represented at Rex's secular funeral held on 4th December at Honor Oak crematorium where many tributes were paid by mourners who filled the chapel to capacity. On Sunday 18th February some 40 friends, family and FONC members gathered at Nunhead cemetery close to what would have been Rex's 90th birthday to pay our final tribute to him. Welcomed by FONC volunteers with hot homemade cakes at the FONC portacabin, the group walked up West Hill to the site of the willow tree planted in 1995 in memory of Rex's long-time partner John Clough. Rex's name had been added to its memorial plaque, engraved courtesy of Dave West of R. Gray & Son. Following tributes by various speakers, including Jeff Hart for FONC, the group then processed to the Anglican chapel to unveil FONC's memorial plaque adjacent to those associated with the boys drowned in the Leysdown Tragedy that Rex had done so much to keep in the public memory. The plaque, kindly donated by Brian Whybrow of Priest Stonework and Restoration Ltd, was unveiled by FONC acting Chairman, Jeremy Partington. After the unveiling a short walk around the cemetery was led by Jeff Hart, visiting many of Rex's favourite locations where he himself had entertained so many of those attending the tours that he led. At the end of this moving occasion, guests chatted and reminisced about

various aspects of Rex's life over more hot drinks before departing.

As recently retired FONC Chairman Ron Woollacott said 'Rex loved Nunhead Cemetery and we shall all miss him. Rest in Peace Rex'.