

FONC Chairman's Review

Welcome to this the 2025 FONC AGM. For the second time we welcome you to the Anglican chapel in the cemetery for the event. Thank you for attending what I hope will be an enjoyable afternoon.

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to all those that have participated with taking forward the objectives of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery during the past year. Both to Trustees and volunteers, who assist in the Cemetery, whatever the weather. And not forgetting those undertaking the essential roles such as FONC administration, managing the membership, the website and the FONC Journal. Trustees have met regularly with the London Borough of Southwark to ensure that the views and objectives of FONC are considered by the Council as owner of the cemetery. And thanks also to the IDVerde and Southwark staff that work in Nunhead Cemetery. To those that assist in person or in kind, thank you for your contribution to the aims of FONC.

Volunteering in the Cemetery

Our volunteers' enthusiasm has continued progress on clearing the vegetation, monument inscription and other work in the cemetery. In November, in conjunction with 15 Froglife charity volunteers, we welcomed about a dozen volunteers for a day restoring the pond. The work included removing the flag Iris that was overwhelming it and generally expanding and deepening the pond.

Whilst on the subject of the pond, the Friends have received a Biodiversity Grant of £43,000 to be used to develop a boardwalk around a further expanded pond area. This is a project we hope to progress over the next 18 months.

We will always need more volunteers – particularly for special events and if we continue to see the welcome growth of our annual open day. So please spread the word. The next will be need for volunteers for Open House weekend in September.

Events during the year

In April, another group of year six pupils from Ivydale School attended the cemetery as part of their study of the Victorian period. Trustees acted as guides for the children's cemetery tour. We were also joined by Catrin, the new Outreach and Development Manager employed by Southwark Council and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Many of the pupils were very engaged and asked numerous questions. We would welcome those that are able to volunteer at relatively short notice for these weekday events if we are going to expand them to other schools as part of the restoration of the East Lodge as part of Trustees' objective to increase community participation.

The 2025 Open Day took place, as is usual, on the third Saturday in May. Again, blessed with good weather, we saw even more visitors than last year; probably the fourth successive record year. The popularity of the event was further demonstrated by the positive feedback received. To meet that challenge next May, we will need more volunteers to assist on the day. None of us is getting younger so I will make the plea again – for assistance with setting up and clearing away on the day or for contributions of home baking or plants to grace these perennially popular stalls.

Back in December, FONC hosted our second annual Carol Concert. What started as an experiment has now grown – at least in part via word of mouth – so that the singing had to take place in front of chapel rather than inside.

Recent Developments in the Cemetery

Those of you that have used the Limesford Road entrance to the cemetery in recent months will have noticed the substantial works that was being undertaken to completely rebuild the boundary wall. The reconstruction, funded by Southwark, have restored the full length of the Limesford Road boundary wall. It has included the installation of smart maroon heritage railings to match those on Linden Grove. The work was completed in late May and I am sure that you will agree the new wall has been completed to an extremely high standard.

Over the year, numerous monuments have been re-erected and restored in several locations in the cemetery including near the East Lodge, the east path and around the Jenny Hill headstone. The work has been funded by the London Borough of Southwark with FONC suggesting monuments and providing a financial contribution. I am sure that you will agree how effective the groups of restored monuments look.

Although slightly delayed for frustrating reasons outside the control of Southwark or FONC, by the time you read this, it is expected that the 40-year-old, life expired Friends' cabin will have been demolished and work started on site to replace it. We are looking forward to the new cabin being finished. Once complete, it will offer a much improved base for FONC and the volunteers working in the cemetery and better toilets for visitors.

East Lodge Restoration

I would like to express my appreciation to Jane and Jeff Hart for the considerable amount of work they have done over another year – in conjunction with LBS – to progress the work on the East Lodge that is being funded by Southwark, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant giving organisations.

The Trustees hope that the full restoration phase of the East Lodge as part of the “From Ruin to Revival” project will be starting on site during the summer. In a couple of years, the restoration of the Grade II listed building is expected to offer a fantastic welcome for cemetery visitors providing both a café and rooms for the use of the local community.

I am sure that you will join me in thanking those that have made such effort in and for Nunhead Cemetery over the last year.

Jeremy Partington

June 2025.