

Friends of Nunhead Cemetery

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES 1 JUNE 2022 – 31 MAY 2023

1. MEMBERSHIP

FONC membership fell from 764 to 730 this year, although a number may have renewed at the May Open Day. We recruited 120 new members but lost 154. We have 5 overseas members. 48% of members pay their subscription by bank standing order and Gift Aid declarations have been signed by 48% of members resulting in repayments from H M Revenue & Customs of £930 over the year. We are fortunate that Simon Mercer, Membership Secretary, continues to keep our membership records and distribution lists up-to-date and has helped facilitate the move this year to electronic distribution of newsletters to many of our members.

2. FONC MEETINGS AND MEMBERS' VISITS

All Trustees 'meetings' this year have continued to be held on the Zoom 'virtual' platform. Trustees held ten regular meetings, and the Practical Work Sub-Committee met four times. The 2022 AGM saw a return to a 'face-to-face format' and refreshments provided by FONC Trustees were hugely enjoyed! A presentation was made by a Southwark Borough officer on the draft Conservation Management Plan which was due for 'imminent' consultation which began one year later! We also held a members Christmas social on one of the coldest nights of the year in December. We tried a new venue, El Vermut on Nunhead Green, and those who ventured out particularly enjoyed their hospitality and hot mulled wine.

3. FONC GOVERNANCE

The Trustees continue to work on their skills audit to help identify where we can improve on any deficiencies and improve our diversity. Several NCVO and other training sessions have been attended. We have successfully identified and appointed two new Trustees during the year who we are confident bring new skills and perspectives to the Board. We have carried out the first six-monthly review of our dynamic five-year FONC Strategy Plan to enable us to set targets and review performance in the delivery of all of our stated objectives. This document is available to all members on our website. All FONC policy statements have been reviewed and updated and new Vulnerable Adult and Child Protection policies adopted.

4. FONC'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Communication with our members, and users of the cemetery, has fundamentally changed since FONC's inception in the 1980s. Social media is now ubiquitous, with Pew Center research (2021) showing that 85% of Gen Z use it as their primary means of communication - while only 15% check their emails each day. Within this context, we've recently undertaken a review of FONC's communications strategy, to ensure it meets the needs of our members and users today. With greater reliance on social media, we're aiming to unify our accounts across Instagram and Facebook in summer 2023 – allowing us greater control over content and those that it reaches. We'll also seek to post more exciting and relevant content, more regularly, in order to better engage our current audiences while at the same time broadening them. With the help of new volunteers, we've also been able to better engage local organisations in the Nunhead area through social media, contributing to better awareness and participation in our Open Day. Over the long run, we aim to ensure that *all* digital platforms – from social media, to our website – will continue to provide a satisfactory experience to all users, while also supporting FONC's strategy – such as the

successful delivery of the East Lodge project. In this spirit, we'd welcome your views and feedback on any of our proposals above!

We are also now able to distribute FONC News electronically by MailChimp and are developing our database to enable direct communication with assenting members electronically.

5. AFFILIATIONS

We continue to be affiliated to the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE) (€25 p.a.) and the National Federation of Cemetery Friends (£20 p.a.). We participate in Community Southwark opportunities and are affiliated to the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (free). We are also members of the Trust for Conservation Volunteers (free). We maintain contacts with several other local and national groups and have strengthened our relationship with St Silas and St Antony's church. We attend relevant Southwark Council Ward Assemblies. We have also established contacts with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission through their 'Eyes on, Hands On' initiative. We regularly receive information from the Charity Commission and we have contributed to Charity Commission surveys.

6. NATIONAL FEDERATION OF CEMETERY FRIENDS (NFCF)

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends held its annual general meeting at Leicester's Welford Road cemetery, its first face-to-face event since 2019. It was attended by 18 of the member groups. Reports on the work with the Ministry of Justice on burial law, liaison with ecclesiastical bodies and bereavement groups were given. FONC's Gwyneth Stokes announced her retirement as the Secretary of NFCF with effect from June 2023. The date of the NFCF's National Cemeteries Week has been changed again and will now be in June 2023.

7. FONC PUBLICATIONS & ENQUIRY DESK

During the past year FONC's Publications and Enquiries Desk (PED) has been available at every FONC tour – covering both the always popular general tours on the last Sunday of the month and the mid-month themed tours. It has also supported the two larger events run in the cemetery – the Annual FONC Open Day in May 2022 and the Heritage and Open House weekend in September. The PED continues to be popular with visitors, providing information on the East Lodge plans, signing up new members and selling the extensive range of FONC publications as well as the popular FONC cotton bags. The desk was available for the Month of the Dead tours in October and has also been in place to support the occasional pre-arranged group tours led by FONC guides. The desk however continues to need new volunteers. It really does offer a great way to meet and chat with the cemetery's many and varied visitors. The only commitment is to help on the occasional Sunday afternoon for a couple of hours. Our thanks go to the dedicated team of volunteers who cover the PED, outside, under a gazebo, in what can be inclement conditions particularly in the cold winter months. In total 17 volunteers provided 213.5 hours of PED cover during the year.

8. FONC WEB SITE, PUBLICITY AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Webmaster Simon Quill continues to improve the content of our website (www.fonc.org.uk) but we continue to struggle to give much greater immediacy and relevance of material. This will form part of our review of the communications strategy (see above). Trustees took the decision to remove the 'members only' section of the website, which had proved difficult to access, and to make documents previously restricted to members freely available to improve transparency and accountability.

We have featured in several publications during the years from 'Bird Watching' to management of cemeteries for wildlife podcasts. Several film/arts events have taken place facilitated by FOINC

including an anthropology student film and Goldsmiths, University of London movement performance Masters' assessment.

9. MEMBERS' JOURNAL

Our members-only journal, edited by Ron Woollacott, is published quarterly and is delivered at the beginning of March (spring issue), June (summer issue), September (autumn issue), and December (winter issue). The number of pages in each issue varies according to the amount of material received, and usually comprises no fewer than 20 pages per issue. Last year there were three issues published containing 28 pages each and one of 24 pages. One of the main features in *FONC News* is 'Cemetery News', a regular column by our Coordinator Jeff Hart, which keeps members up-to-date with matters directly involving Nunhead Cemetery. Gwyneth Stokes does an excellent job as proof-reader and our thanks to everyone who sends in articles - we can never have too many. Also, thanks to all our hand-deliverers coordinated by Nicola Dunn, and postal coordinator Linda Martin who takes care of the mailings and Jeff and Jane Hart who deliver the items to the Post-Office. Thanks also to all at Catford Print for an excellent service and quality product at a reasonable cost. Finally, if you have not yet written an article for *FONC News* why not have a go! Your articles and letters are always appreciated.

10. RELIGIOUS AND REMEMBRANCE SERVICES

The All-Souls Service, again graced by the Nunhead Lighthouse Cathedral choir, and a service led by Fr. Dele Ogunyemi of St. Antony with St. Silas, was held in heavy rain. However, this did not dampen the spirits of those attending this important event in the *FONC* calendar. The opportunity was taken for practical work-day volunteers and service attendees to mingle over welcome hot tea and cakes. Our annual Remembrance Service was again well attended and it was a great pleasure to be able to end the event inside the Anglican chapel this year. We again made a donation of £270 to the Royal British Legion for the wreaths and multi-faith crosses that we placed at the various memorials in the cemetery.

11. PUBLICATIONS, ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH WORK

A new Nunhead cemetery publication, 'Death in Tragic Circumstances and Crimes of Passion', by Michele Louise Burford and Ron Woollacott has been produced this year. We continue to receive from members and others their family histories and memorabilia which helps to add to the wealth of stories about our increasing number of 'Notables' and other aspects of the cemetery. We are hoping to add to our natural history database with new volunteers, led by Sam Radonich, recording on site. We have also responded positively to several student project requests.

12. CEMETERY PRESENTATIONS, TOURS AND OTHER EVENTS IN THE CEMETERY

A full programme of cemetery tours returned for 2022/23. Attendance in some instances has not been as good as we would have liked but our social media presence is leading to an improvement. Special interest tours were held for, among others, the Victorian Society and a local walking group whose generous donations help raise funds for *FONC*. We ran a stall at the Friends of Brockley and Ladywell's Open Day on 10 July and, jointly with the London Wildlife Trust, held a bat prowl on 8 September. The planned Nunhead and Peckham Free Film Festival event at Nunhead on 17 September was postponed as a mark of respect on the death of Queen Elizabeth.

13. MONUMENT INSCRIPTION RECORDING AND GRAVESEARCH ENQUIRIES

Volunteer records for Monument Inscription recording have been consolidated this year as several volunteers have failed to keep in touch. Eleven volunteers participated in our workdays, carrying out 264 hours of work (384 last year). The number is down for various reasons, mostly for several

workdays being cancelled due to adverse weather conditions (extreme heat, some prolonged very cold spells and much rain!), as well as the coordinator's illness on a couple of occasions. We continue to schedule two days each month, except for December. Inscription recording work in square 55 was completed in the previously inaccessible area after the Practical Work Team did some excellent clearing work there. We have now moved all our resources to the large area at the top right-hand side of the main avenue, and work on recording the inscriptions in square 109 is complete. Square 110 is almost fully recorded and we have moved into square 111. It is becoming increasingly difficult to capture the inscriptions as we move further into this area. Work will then begin to record the monuments in squares 125-127 below this area. Again, the Practical Work team have been very helpful in making this large area more accessible for us. The inscription recording template is now being used to record the inscriptions and photographs, and many hundreds have been completed this year. We also have two home-based volunteers doing this work for some of the older recordings going back to 2005. The aim is to get these uploaded to the website so that members of the public can access them more readily, but this will require the services of the newly appointed Digitisation Consultant engaged as part of the funding for preparatory work for the restoration of the East Lodge.

The stream of enquiries from people looking to find the grave of their ancestors buried at Nunhead has continued strongly, and there is now a 6-week backlog of requests. More volunteers will be needed for this interesting work as demand remains high, so please consider signing up. Many people receiving replies give a donation, including one generous gift of £100 from a couple from Canada who visited recently to see a family grave that had been tracked down for them. This revenue stream continues to benefit the work all volunteers carry out at Nunhead Cemetery.

14. PRACTICAL WORKDAYS

Practical work is conducted in the Cemetery on the first Sunday of each month. Please see the Practical Work Group Annual Report for information on the number of volunteers, hours, and work completed. We also hosted DEFRA on our first solo corporate workday with Southwark's permission. It was very successful and we now have a corporate workday section on our website to encourage future bookings.

15. ANNUAL CEMETERY OPEN DAY AND OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND

We participated in the London Open City weekend on 4 September 2022, but this was very poorly advertised by the organisers. Fortunately, we linked this day with the new Heritage Open Days which hosted a much better website detailing what was on offer at Nunhead which improved what would otherwise have been a low attendance. Over the weekend, nearly £400 was raised.

The 2023 Open Day was perhaps our most successful yet with a record attendance of over 5000 people and raising nearly £6,000 for FONC funds. The Trustees were concerned that we would be stretched to the limit in running the event this year but we were delighted by the number of additional helpers for setting up and taking down on the day, and the quantity and quality of donated baking and plants. More importantly, we received plaudits from East Lodge project consultants who attended and ran various activities for the range of events, numbers of visitors and the obvious enthusiasm and enjoyment of the day.

16. MANAGEMENT OF THE CEMETERY BY SOUTHWARK BOROUGH COUNCIL

We have finally received a response to the detailed comments we submitted on the draft Conservation Management Plan for the cemetery. The draft Plan went out to public consultation at our Open Day and Trustees are currently considering how to respond. Enforcement of the Public Space Protection Order to encourage responsible dog walking continues to be problematic. Agreed signage improvement measures have not been put in place. Recent council officer/police presence has sought to improve observance but it is now likely that the PSPO review in Spring 2024 will be

needed to address the issue further. A spate of unauthorised vehicles on site has been resolved by inserting a bollard at the Limesford Road gates.

17. CEMETERY IMPROVEMENTS

We successfully joined with others to oppose the reduction of the number 78 bus route which serves the area near the cemetery and are currently considering the Council's proposals to introduce a Controlled Parking Zone covering the whole of the Nunhead and Queens Road ward. Southwark Diocesan Advisory Court approval to facilitate repair to the Limesford Road boundary walls was finally received and is hoped that work will begin this summer with completion by the end of 2023. Repair works to the Anglican chapel have finally been completed, although some vegetation clearance is outstanding. This has enabled a return to holding events inside the chapel. The electrical wiring in the crypt has also been replaced. Outstanding repairs to the Briggs and Foreman vaults and at the top of the west side of the Main Avenue have been completed to a very high standard by new Council contractors, Faulker Construction. In addition repairs have been carried out to two vaults on the East Path following an incident involving a dog falling into the vault. FONC also commissioned seven monument repairs by Priest Stone Restoration along the West Crescent, greatly improving the visual impact on a path along which many fallen monuments can be found. Unfortunately, there has been further cracking in the Scottish Martyrs memorial path surfacing for which a resolution is still awaited. Tree clearance by Southwark's arboricultural team has improved the St. Paul's view from the top of West Hill but unfortunately a lime tree on the Main Avenue was lost during heavy winds and the stump subsequently removed.

18. EAST LODGE RESTORATION: 'FROM RUIN TO REVIVAL'

Following the submission of the joint Southwark Council and FONC application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) in May last year, we were really pleased when we were informed in mid-September that our application had been successful. The grant of over £100,000 for the initial development phase enables us to fully work up our delivery phase proposals, setting out the full costs needed, resources required and timeline for the restoration work. As so often with large organisations, bureaucracy resulted in the official 'Permission to Start' notification only being received in December when we hit the 'go' button to send out invitations to tender for the necessary consultants to develop in-depth plans in support of the project. These include consultants for activity, interpretation, business, and fundraising plans as well as a digitisation strategy and a plan of how we would evaluate the success of the project. These consultants will develop proposals designed to engage the local and wider community in the cemetery such as school visits, exhibitions, interpretative displays and arts events.

By mid-February we had contracted all necessary consultants who are now busy working up their proposals for us. A number of consultants took the opportunity of attending the Open Day to seek views from visitors of their hopes and expectations for the restored East Lodge and cemetery as a whole.

In the meantime, the interim structural work, aimed at stabilising the East Lodge, was completed at the end of 2022 and no further work will be undertaken on site until the restoration work commences. Due to the deteriorating state of the East Lodge and the pressing need to start its restoration, Southwark Council and FONC have set ourselves an ambitious timetable to submit the delivery phase funding application in November 2023. This would enable construction work to start in the first half of 2024.

As a pilot activity in support of the East Lodge project to engage a wider range of people in the cemetery, FONC took part in the Big Help Out on 8 May which provided a great opportunity to publicise volunteering in Nunhead cemetery. FONC arranged the taster event – an introduction to volunteering in Nunhead Cemetery – which attracted 11 new volunteers to try their hand at practical work and monument inscription recording in the cemetery.
