

# Friends of Nunhead Cemetery

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES 1 JUNE 2024 – 31 MAY 2025

### 1. MEMBERSHIP

FONC membership stood at 838 on 1 May 2025, of whom 606 had renewed their membership. 232 renewals were outstanding. Members who have not renewed and do not have a standing order set up will be removed during August. 187 members joined in 2024/25 and 167 failed to renew their membership or left for other reasons, so the overall change in membership is an increase of 20. Members generously give us donations when they renew our membership (and sometimes when they join too). This year we have received £1,392 in membership and £4,360 in associated donations. This is very welcome and means that we do not have to raise our membership fee.

Only 153 members have signed Gift Aid declarations. We believe that many members did not appreciate the need to sign a new gift aid declaration when we changed our organisation status from the original charitable status to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and so many longer-term members are not recorded as Gift Aid donors. Some members will not be UK tax payers, but many others could sign Gift Aid forms allowing us to claim 25% of any money they give us in addition to their £2 membership. We will incorporate a form into a newsletter later this year.

### 2. FONC MEETINGS AND MEMBERS' VISITS

Trustees held twelve virtual regular meetings during the year and the Practical Work Sub-Committee met four times. The 2024 AGM was held for the first time on a Saturday afternoon in the ruined chapel, followed by refreshments and a visit to the crypt. Although the weather was kind, attendance was not greatly improved and we again struggled to meet the quorum for the meeting. We held a crowded members Christmas social in December at El Vermut, who made us very welcome. There was no business element to the event as this was a 'thank-you' to volunteers who do not usually meet each other. Whilst food was provided, drinks were 'buy-your-own'. An enjoyable members' visit to Willesden Old Cemetery in April was organised by Cathy Mercer.

### 3. FONC GOVERNANCE

We continue to monitor our skills audit to identify areas where improvement is needed. We have not made great progress on addressing the issue of succession planning and documenting the processes by which various FONC Trustees and members carry out functions on behalf of FONC. This will need to be a priority for the coming year. We have carried out further six-monthly reviews 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. The Plan is available on our website. We are fortunate that Vice-Chairman Carol Stevenson has stepped up to fill the Membership Secretary post following the death of Simon Mercer in July 2024. We would also like to thank Oli Lomer who is standing down following a very constructive three-year term particularly improving our communications strategy. We are also fortunate to have appointed three new Trustees this year. These are Jamie Warner, Petra Handoca and Phoebe Shannon-Fagan, all of whom have significant skills in areas we have not been strong in. They have also brought down the age distribution of Trustees considerably!

### 4. FONC'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

We have now been able to unify our accounts across Instagram and Facebook. We have successfully recruited a team of social media volunteers, originally led by Oli and now led by Phoebe, who have been able to post more exciting and relevant content, more regularly. We have

also been better able to engage local organisations in the Nunhead area through social media. Our Communications Strategy is being formalised and will help to give us a higher profile in future.

## **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 (now costing £130 for two years, as our income has increased). We are also members of the Trust for Conservation Volunteers (free).

## **6. NATIONAL FEDERATION OF CEMETERY FRIENDS (NFCF)**

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends held its annual general meeting at Bedford cemetery in June 2024 with 21 groups represented. Much of the meeting was taken up with discussion about the need to move from being a voluntary Federation to a Community Interest Company, ostensibly to protect committee members from possible personal liability. FONC had concerns about the way this was presented to members and the possible implications for the future direction of the Federation. Although our concerns were shared by some member groups a subsequent EGM approved the change overwhelmingly. We are continuing our membership and will monitor future governance of the Federation. We welcomed visits from representatives of Tower Hamlets, Paddington and West Norwood cemeteries during the year.

## **7. FONC PUBLICATIONS & ENQUIRY DESK**

The volunteers helping on the FONC Publications and Enquiries desk have continued to provide invaluable support to all FONC tours – whether the general cemetery tours run on the last Sunday of the month or a themed tour, held on other Sundays – throughout the past year. Regardless of the weather these hardy volunteers have helped visitors and members alike, selling the copies of numerous FONC publications, postcards depicting views of the cemetery and the ever-popular FONC cotton bags. The most frequently asked questions centre around progress (or not as it appears to visitors) on the East Lodge project, how to go about locating a grave and who ‘famous’ might be buried in the cemetery. The friendly PED welcome is often the first opportunity visitors have to learn more about the cemetery. The PED presence, when cemetery tours take place, enables visitors to both buy publications and to offer a donation as a thank you for their tour. In addition to the PED volunteers covering the desk during tour afternoons, practical work volunteers provide cover during the workdays on the first Sunday of the month which is greatly appreciated.

All volunteers who help on the publication desk find it a rewarding experience as it provides a fantastic opportunity to have a chat with both regular and new visitors to the cemetery but unfortunately there is a real shortage of helpers. So please think about offering to help – it only requires a couple of hours on a Sunday afternoon two to three times a year – but is such a valuable part of FONC’s support of the cemetery. In the past year 18 volunteers have provided 619 hours of cover.

## **8. FONC WEB SITE, PUBLICITY AND MEDIA COVERAGE**

Webmaster Simon Quill continues to manage our website ([www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk)) in the hope that we will be able to transfer it in the coming year to a more modern website platform. This will enable us to re-energise the website, and forms part of the digitisation strategy of the East Lodge restoration project. The Trustees are committed to applying appropriate funding to enable this to happen. We have also added an ‘In Memoriam’ page to the website recognising the significant contributions made by a number of deceased FONC members over many years, the most recent being Malcolm Collins – Committee member and grave researcher.

We continue to feature in several publications during the year and Southwark Council and other groups have now picked up on advertising our events in their electronic bulletins. Work is nearing completion on a series of 10 podcasts about aspects of the cemetery which members will be able to access through the website.

## **9. MEMBERS' JOURNAL**

FONC News is your quarterly journal, of which four editions, Nos 165 to 168, were published between September 2024 and the beginning of June 2025, comprising a total of 108 pages. In addition to up-dates by Jane Hart about the restoration of the East Lodge in each issue, the latest news concerning the cemetery was provided by Jeff Hart our co-ordinator. Every issue contained articles contributed by members on a variety of interesting subjects including stories of family graves. More articles about the flora and fauna of Nunhead would be appreciated.

The editor would like to thank everyone involved in the production and distribution of FONC News, including Nicola Dunn and her dedicated team of hand deliverers and Linda Martin our postal co-ordinator. Thanks also to Jeff and Jane for collecting the work from the printers and for taking the items to the post-office. Thanks also to Chris and the staff of Catford Print for their excellent service. Last but not least, thanks to all those members who sent in articles. FONC News is your publication so please keep your articles and letters coming.

## **10. RELIGIOUS AND REMEMBRANCE SERVICES**

Our All-Souls Service again featured the singing of the Nunhead Lighthouse Cathedral choir during the service led by Fr. Dele Ogunyemi of St. Antony with St. Silas church. A lighting of candles ceremony took place and several visitors to the cemetery came into the chapel attracted by the wonderful acoustics of the singing. Our annual Remembrance Service was well attended with several members and non-members laying wreaths at each of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission sites, the civilian memorial and at the Anglican chapel. We donate to the Royal British Legion for the wreaths and multi-faith crosses that we place in the cemetery. We recognise the importance of these events to our members and the comfort they bring.

## **11. PUBLICATIONS, ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH WORK**

This year we have published both 'Nunhead Notables Five' and 'Nunhead Notables Six' reflecting the huge amount of research carried out by Michele Louise Burford and Ron Woollacott. We continue to receive, and welcome, donations from members and others of 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 also working towards improving the database of flora and fauna in the cemetery. 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 took place and new guides, Robert Dunn and Jane Hart, have given a fresh feel to our general cemetery tours and attendance at the Women's Day tour continues to increase. We now offer two bat prowls each year and have plans to introduce a second Bird Walk each year in response to demand. Special interest tours were held for, among others, The London Appreciation Society, Knowle Green U3A and Gates Green WI. Another successful school's visits from Ivydale Primary School took place in March. The Nunhead and Peckham Free Film Festival event in September showed 'The Wicker Man' and was again over-subscribed. Our second, now annual Carol Singing event in the cemetery proved overwhelmingly popular with some 600 people attending! A more sedate knitted Winter Trail produced by Ann Coley was enjoyed by young and old alike.

### **13. MONUMENT INSCRIPTION RECORDING AND GRAVESEARCH ENQUIRIES**

The last year has been very positive for Monument Inscription Recording work. We now have a record number of active volunteers. 22 volunteers participated in our workdays, carrying out a record 476 hours 20 minutes of work (374 last year and 264 the previous year). This represents an increase of around 27% over 2023/4 and 80% over 2022/3. We continue to schedule two days every month.

Inscription recording work this year has again been focussed on the large area at the top right-hand side of the main avenue, and very significant progress has been achieved in squares 125 and 126. Use of the inscription recording template is now a routine part of the work our volunteers do, and in full swing, and volunteers (including one keen home worker) have completed around 2400 records, 700 of which were completed in the 2024/5 period. As previously stated, the aim is to get these uploaded to the website so that members of the public can access them more readily, once we have established a new website that can cope with this, and with the assistance of the Digitisation Consultant engaged as part of the funding 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 not slowed down this year, with more than 60 enquiries being received. Many grateful enquirers have made donations to support the work all volunteers carry out at Nunhead Cemetery.

The estimated three thousand paper records of inscriptions received from the previous Monument Inscriptions co-ordinator will need to be digitised where possible, again with the assistance of the Digitisation Consultant.

### **14. ARTS EVENTS**

FONC helped facilitate a programme of arts events in the chapel between August and October 2024. FONC was pleased to work with the Feminist Lecture Program who hosted a series of art exhibitions. Five emerging artists were picked to take part in a curatorial program with each artist using their unique practices to explore themes of feminism, community, ecology and environmentalism in their individual solo exhibitions. Each utilised the wonderful outdoor space in very different ways, with all responding to the exposed nature of the chapel. The series of exhibitions was completed with the FLP founder Luisa-Maria MacCormack's own exhibition of a standing stone circle.

Supporting the Nunhead Arts trail, Art space Octagon curated 'Sitting in Silence', an exhibition which included public reading sessions and printing workshop where children had the opportunity of block printing bags and T-shirts.

A second Arts Space Octagon exhibition in mid-October brought together a group of artists undertaking live performances, sound and art. The exhibitions in the unique and beautiful setting of the Anglican chapel, attracted a lot of new visitors to the cemetery, people who might not have otherwise discovered this wonderful, tranquil location.

### **15. PRACTICAL WORKDAYS**

Practical work by FONC volunteers is conducted in the Cemetery on the first Sunday of each month and occasional ad-hoc days. Please see the Practical Work Group Annual Report for information on the number of volunteers, hours, and work completed. We also offer corporate workday opportunities. We have also welcomed Scout and school groups either on regular workdays or specifically organized work sessions.

### **16. ANNUAL CEMETERY OPEN DAY AND OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND**

We participated in the well attended London Open City and Heritage Open Days on 14/15 September which raised nearly £600 for FONC funds but more importantly introduced new visitors to the cemetery. The May 2025 Open Day broke all records again. Blessed with fantastic weather,

the Day was attended by five and a half thousand visitors and raised more than £6,000 for FONC funds! This event could not happen without our increasing number of volunteers preparing for and setting up (and packing up afterwards) the event, running and contributing to our plant stall, refreshments, badge-making, MI enquiries, membership, publications, ceramics, woodland bodging and all the other tasks necessary to make the event enjoyable and safe. It was rewarding to see the obvious enthusiasm and enjoyment of attendees on the day. We are also grateful for Southwark Council's support.

## **17. MANAGEMENT OF THE CEMETERY BY SOUTHWARK BOROUGH COUNCIL**

To our increasing frustration a management group to oversee its implementation of the Nunhead Cemetery Conservation Management Plan has yet to be formed, although a group to discuss delivery of the NLHF Woodland Management Plan has met. The long fought for Public Space Protection Order provisions for Nunhead, and the Borough as a whole, was allowed to lapse. This means that there are now no controls on dogs in the cemetery. FONC has made representations to Council officers and Councillors to address this issue and discussions are on-going. However, there is an increasing awareness on the part of the Council, particularly as a result of the East Lodge NLHF project of the importance of managing the cemetery sympathetically.

## **18. CEMETERY IMPROVEMENTS**

The long-awaited repair of the Limesford Road boundary walls began last June and has now been completed. The end result is a stunning improvement both to the appearance and security of the cemetery. The splendid new railings, painted in the original maroon colour, have transformed this previously mundane aspect. A tranche of 30 monument repairs, chosen in consultation with FONC, were completed just before Christmas with FONC contributing £14,400 towards the costs. A further tranche of monuments repairs, again agreed with FONC, began in April 2025. We still await the commissioning of a feasibility study on the possibility of re-roofing the Anglican chapel and cracking in the path in the area of the Scottish Martyrs memorial still awaits a resolution. We are, however, keeping on top of the number of trees coming down in all parts of the cemetery. A very successful cooperative effort with fellow charity, Froglife, produced an on-site reptile identification training session and in November, we worked together on revitalising the cemetery pond. This encouraged us to apply, successfully, for a £43k Southwark Biodiversity grant to further improve the Wetland area by November 2026. Discussions continue on the Edward Costello and Bobby 'the Guv'nor' Abel burial plots

## **19. EAST LODGE RESTORATION: 'FROM RUIN TO REVIVAL'**

After the excitement of the success of the National Lottery Heritage Fund application last year, the past year has proved a frustrating time where it has appeared to many, little progress has "Neal Browne" <nealbrowne@googlemail.com>been made in taking the project forward. However, although not obvious on site a lot of progress has been made. The contract for the replacement FONC cabin was awarded with the building being fabricated offsite. The original plan for the new building to be in place by the first quarter of the year suffered a set-back and, due to the complications around running the Open Day in May, it was decided to delay its installation until summer this year. Unforeseen issues arising in the award of the contract for the shell and core work on the East Lodge has meant that work will not now start until summer this year. However, we were pleased that the Outreach and Development Manager appointment was progressed with Catrin Podgorski starting in that role in February. We anticipate working closely with Catrin supporting her work in delivering the ambitious activity plan put forward as part of the Heritage Fund bid.

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