

Friends of Nunhead Cemetery

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES 1 JUNE 2025 – 31 MAY 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

This Annual Report follows a different, hopefully more digestible, format from previous years. It highlights the principal aspects of the issues dealt with by the Board, whilst more detailed information can be found in a series of Annexes to the Report. Members will also find reports on all of our activities in the quarterly editions of *FONC News*.

2. THE BASICS

The Board has continued to function effectively in holding its meetings by Zoom, meeting the requirements of the Charity Commission and ensuring continued good governance. Open Day and Pond Project Sub-Committees were established. Membership has increased (*see Annex One*) and we seem to be recruiting new, younger, volunteers to help with our work. Our social media presence has been increasingly effective. Our finances are sound and we have improved their management (*see Treasurer's Report*). Our insurance cover has been enhanced. The FONC Strategy Plan has been updated (*see FONC website*). The four quarterly editions of *FONC News* continue to be both informative and entertaining. We are taking measures to replace our website (*see Annex Four*).

With the provision of the new FONC Cabin, handed over to FONC in August 2025 with a Tenancy At Will agreement, we have been negotiating with Southwark Council for a 25-year lease for the cabin and also a 25-year Service Level Agreement for our on-site activities.

3. ON-SITE ACTIVITIES

Our tour programme is extensive and remains popular and the demand for specialist group tours has increased. We have also increased the number of popular bat walks and bird walks. The Peckham and Nunhead Free Film Festival event was sold out and our Christmas Carol event has proved hugely popular, as has the 'Winter Woolies' trail. Our annual All Souls Service and Act of Remembrance were well supported. The Publications and Enquiries Desk supported all of our on-site activities and we have managed to increase the pool of volunteers that run it (*see Annex Five*).

Our monthly Practical Work sessions have been increasingly supplemented by corporate volunteers and London Wildlife Trust volunteers, organised by Southwark's Woodland Recovery Officer, enabling us to increase our impact on site (*see Annex Two*). Good progress has been made towards delivering the revitalisation of the pond area of the cemetery with funds from Southwark Council's Biodiversity Grant Awards. Work will be completed by November 2026. The monument inscription recording work goes from strength to strength (*see Annex Three*).

We continue to develop the range of arts activities in the cemetery, primarily based in the Anglican chapel. A series of arts events were held in the Anglican Chapel with eight different artists hosting or curating exhibitions between June and the end of September. The installations included sculpture, static art displays, live music – including a live harp performance, poetry reading, participative workshops – including charm making and clay modelling and live promenade performances. Feedback from exhibitors all identified that the opportunity to find a 'free' exhibition space provided a wonderful opportunity for them to develop their art and to connect to the local

community. The art events definitely attract new visitors to the cemetery – especially young and diverse audiences who have never visited the cemetery before.

We again participated in the London Open City and Heritage Open Days in September and our annual Open Day in May remarkably reached the heady heights of last year with over 5,500 visitors attending.

A further tranche of monuments repairs, again agreed with, and partly funded by, FONC, began in April 2025, and were completed. The most noticeable impact is a group of 15 memorials adjacent to the East Lodge area. A feasibility study, commissioned by Southwark Council, on the possibility of re-roofing the Anglican chapel has confirmed the stability of the building and we now await a second report setting out the respective costs of four possible ways of achieving this. The cracking in the path area adjacent to the Scottish Martyrs memorial has been repaired.

4. OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES

By far the greatest part of our energies have been expended on our participation in *the East Lodge: From Ruin to Revival* project, part funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Details of what has been achieved this year can be found in *Annex Four*.

We continue to participate in the wider community, including membership of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, the National Federation of Cemetery Friends, Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe, The Conservation Volunteers, Community Southwark and the Southwark Biodiversity Partnership. We held a Christmas social and a members' visit to Tower Hamlets Cemetery.

Our wide range of publications sell well. The Graves Symbols booklet and a range of postcards have been reprinted and the Scottish Martyrs booklet has been substantively revised and published. Ten podcasts about aspects of the cemetery have been produced and can be accessed through our website.

We have been unable to make progress in persuading Southwark Council to establish a management group to oversee its implementation of the Nunhead Cemetery Conservation Management Plan, although a group to discuss delivery of the NLHF Woodland Management Plan has met. The issue of no controls on dogs in the cemetery remains unresolved, partly due to the impact of impending local Council elections. This will become a priority for the next reporting year.

ANNEX ONE

MEMBERSHIP REPORT - 1 MAY 2025 TO 30 APRIL 2026

FONC membership stood at 874 on 1st May 2026, of whom 608* were new members this year or had renewed their membership. 266 renewals were outstanding. Members who have still not renewed and do not have a standing order set up will be removed during August.

241 members joined in 2025/26 and 205 failed to renew their membership or left for other reasons, so the overall change in membership is an increase of 36.

Members generously give us donations when they renew our membership (and sometimes when they join too). This year we have received £1,442* in membership fees and £4078.10 in donations. This is very welcome and means we yet again do not have to raise our membership fee, which currently stands at £2 for British members and £10 for overseas members who elect to have hard copy newsletters.

400 members have signed Gift Aid declarations, a big increase from 125 last year. We received £809 in tax reclaimed through Gift Aid and it is likely to be more next year. If anybody is a UK taxpayer and thinks they have not signed up to let us claim gift aid but wishes to, please let me know.

*These two numbers do not precisely match up because a few payments slip from one year to the next, and because a couple of members renewed but have since stopped being members.

Carol Stevenson
Friends of Nunhead Cemetery
Trustee / Vice Chairman / Membership Secretary
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ANNEX TWO

PRACTICAL WORK REPORT

Hours worked

This section of the report covers all the work done by the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery (FONC) Practical Work Group in the Cemetery recorded in the Volunteering book. It excludes work done by the Monument Inscriptions Recording volunteers and the Publications and Enquiries Desk volunteers, which will be reported separately. For Corporate volunteering, it records only the work done by FONC volunteers (supervising, training etc).

This report covers a full 12 months.

Total hours worked (practical work):	788 hours	(Last year: 808 hours)
Total number of volunteers (practical work):	34 volunteers	(Last year: 35)
Total hours worked (Corporate volunteering):	62 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours	
Total number of FONC volunteer attendees:	15 volunteers	

Practical workday report

We got a huge amount done this year despite the challenges of having to cope without the cabin as our base for several months (and, in January, finding the new cabin had no water or toilets because the temporary above ground water supply had frozen). Decanting to a shipping container showed us just how much stuff we have accumulated, very little of which could be thrown away. We are very pleased with the new cabin now the major snags have been ironed out.

We spent a lot of time clearing monuments that had become overgrown or smothered by falling branches, both to allow access for professional masons to repair them, for the Monument Inscriptions Group to record them, and to improve the appearance of the cemetery.

Plenty of strong winds during the year kept us well supplied with fallen limbs and indeed fallen trees to clear away. As more ash trees show early signs of ash dieback this is going to be an ongoing task.

We have also planted some Dutch Elm Disease resistant elm trees to provide continuity of habitat for the rare White Hairstreak Butterfly, which needs elm flowers. They currently thrive on our Huntingdon Elms which are all of a similar age so hopefully the new trees will be big enough to step in when the Huntingdon Elms eventually start to die.

Quite a lot of work has been done on paths throughout the Cemetery, both in maintaining access (brambles can swallow a path very quickly) and in trying to reduce flooding.

We have had funding to improve the pond on East Hill, deepening it and removing all the bramble and flag iris that grew back after the previous year's clearance. The clay that was dug out was deposited just downhill to make a fairly level area that could be used as a classroom area, once we have surfaced it. We have just appointed contractors to put in a dipping platform and boardwalk, together with fencing to reduce the number of dogs which get in the pond and are very deleterious to the wildlife. The project is aimed to complete in November 2026. If anybody is concerned – this area was so wet that it was originally used for growing turf and so does not have any burials in it.

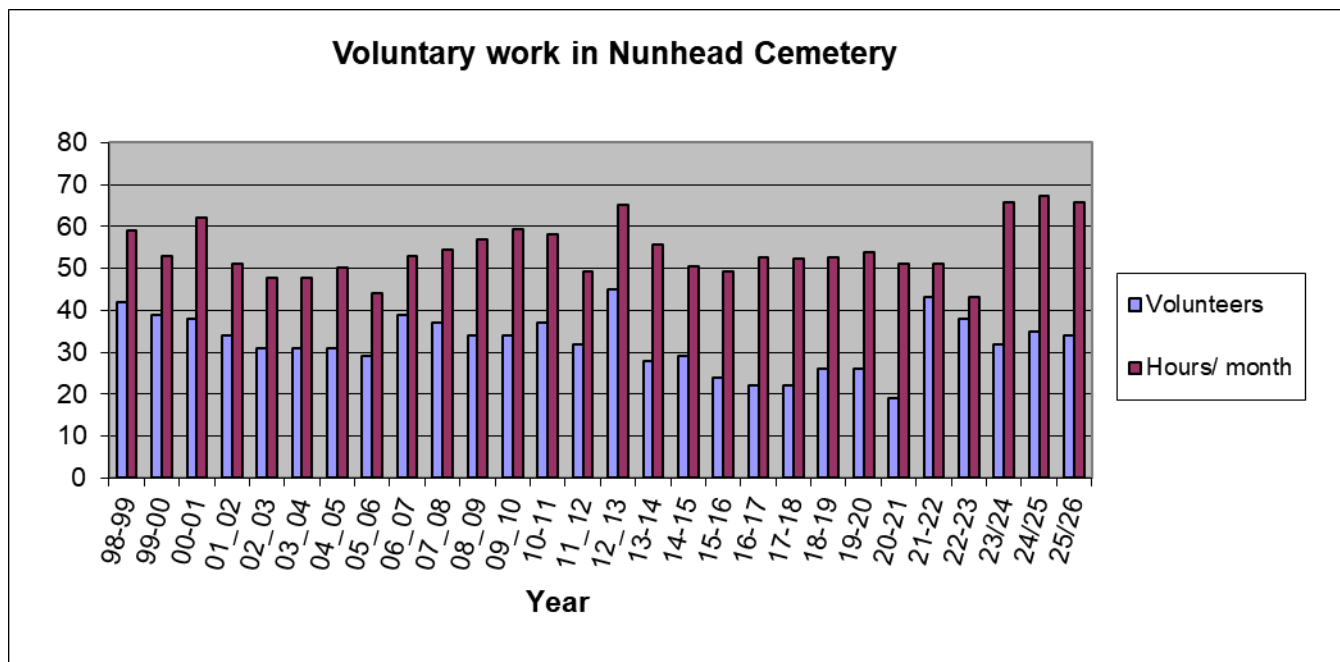
We had four groups of 'corporate volunteers' – two groups from London Wildlife Trust, one from Colfe School and one from Goldsmiths. They opened up bays on the green path up West Hill to

improve butterfly habitat, cleared growth from monuments (great work on a particularly hot day), and helped control brambles in the 'Thirties Glade' in the south of the cemetery.

And in September we took the afternoon off and had a Volunteers' Picnic to celebrate the new cabin, where we were joined by Publications Desk and Monument Inscription volunteers and other members, as well as some representatives from Southwark Council. There was no shortage of food as everybody showed off their cooking skills!

New volunteers are always welcome, you only have to do as much as suits you. We provide tools, on-the-task training, hot drinks and we have gloves if you do not have your own. Meet us at our work cabin on the first Sunday of every month, from 10am onwards. (Ring Tim and Carol Stevenson on 020 7732 8396 for more details, or e-mail Nunhead.stevensons@gmail.com).

Statistics



Carol Stevenson April 2026

ANNEX THREE

MONUMENT INSCRIPTIONS RECORDING REPORT

The last year has seen record numbers of volunteers on monument inscription recording work. 34 volunteers participated in our workdays, carrying out a huge 667 hours 15 minutes of work. The table below compares this with previous years.

Year	Total hours worked	%age increase in activity from 2022/23
2022/23	264	
2023/24	374.6	142
2024/25	476.3	180
2025/26	667.25	253

We continue to schedule two workdays every month, and to focus on the large area at the top right-hand side of the main avenue, and very significant progress has been achieved in squares 125 (95% complete) and 126 (70% complete).

Use of the inscription recording template is now an established routine, and volunteers (including one keen home worker) have completed around 3000 records, 600 of which were completed in the 2025/6 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 continued apace, with 77 enquiries being received in the year. This work continues to bring in significant 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 Coordinator is now believed to number around 5000 records, dating back to at least 1979, before FONC even existed. One intrepid volunteer has taken it upon himself to start digitising these inscriptions, starting with typed records. A much bigger challenge will be to work through the majority handwritten records in the bundle.

Garry Wiles

ANNEX FOUR

EAST LODGE PROJECT REVIEW – 1 JUNE 2025 TO 31 MAY 2026

The structural work on the East Lodge (known as the Shell and Core contract) which had been due to start of Spring 2025, and which had been delayed due to contractor issues, finally commenced in late June with an anticipated completion date of April 2026. Initially, the site was cleared, with the scaffolding being removed 'exposing' the east Lodge, but it was soon re-scaffolded whilst extensive underpinning of the building took place. This involved the removal of lots of London clay and the use of a great deal of concrete to stabilise the building. During the extremely wet winter weather the site ended up like a quagmire which hampered progress in the reconstruction work. However, eventually the bay on the south side of the building was reconstructed, and the repair of one chimney and complete reconstruction of the second chimney was completed. Work started on the reconstruction of the portico which had been removed several years ago before it collapsed. Fortunately many of the portico features had been stored on removal so that they could be reused in the reconstruction. By the end of May the roof had been weatherproofed enabling the removal of the scaffolding so visitors could now get a good idea of what the restored building would look like. Unfortunately, the weather delays meant that the structural work would not be completed until late June 2026. As part of their Social Value input to the East Lodge Project, Paye held a successful stone masonry session with year 10 boys from Harris Academy.

The landscaping work, which will involve the putting in ramped access to both levels of the East Lodge, is due to commence at the end of June 2026. During the past year, the tender for this was sent out and a contractor (Warwick Landscaping) selected enabling them to commence work once Paye, the Shell and Core contractor vacates the site.

The very dilapidated FONC cabins, which had served as a base for FONC for the past 40 years, were finally demolished in June and in July the replacement cabin was in place. After sorting out a few snagging issues FONC moved into our new facilities in August and we held an 'opening' event in September inviting Southwark Council's Cabinet member for Leisure, Parks & Young People to do the honour of cutting the ribbon to officially open the cabin. With separate storage and mess facilities, as well as accessible and unisex toilets for use by the public when FONC volunteers are on site, the new cabin provides the facilities FONC needs to continue to offer on-site volunteers with a comfortable base from which to carry out their activities.

The Outreach and Development Manager, Catrin Podgorski, who started work in late February 2025, having reviewed the activity plan developed during the development stage of the East Lodge Project, quickly started working with partner organisations to put in place some of the wide range of different activities proposed. After successfully piloting two wellbeing walks, regular walks take place throughout the year. To engage a younger audience, wild woodland adventure sessions were held and would continue on a regular basis. Catrin also worked with Project architects Roger Mears Associates so that students on the Architecture and Product Design course at Southbank University would propose and develop suggestions to enhance the restoration work. The Nunhead Cemetery Late event which took place on 15 May this year involved extensive planning. Held in conjunction with Goldsmiths, University of London, the open call for music and performance suggestions attracted over 30 proposals from Goldsmith students and staff, of which 10 were selected for the event itself. The Late event proved very popular attracting over 1100 visitors who enjoyed an evening of art, music and performance.

The Woodland Management element of the East Lodge Project saw FONC working with Southwark's ecology officers to look at ways to improve and diversify the habit in the cemetery. One project was to source and plant eleven disease resistant elm trees to help conserve the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly, an increasingly rare butterfly, which requires elm flower for its caterpillars.

As part of the digitisation element of the Project, FONC is managing the development of a new FONC website. A contractor has been appointed and the new website should go live in the autumn of 2026.

ANNEX FIVE

PUBLICATIONS AND ENQUIRIES DESK REPORT

Although FONC put on nearly 40 different tours during the past year, the volunteers helping on the FONC Publications and Enquiries Desk (PED) continued to provide invaluable support at all of the tours - be it the general tour at the end of each of each month or the themed tours, held on other Sunday afternoons. Visitors are always amazed at the range of different publications FONC has on sale - biographies of Notables buried in the cemetery, a history of the cemetery company, information on grave symbols, butterflies, trees and shrubs to be found in the cemetery as well as the ever-popular Short Guide which provides a good general introduction to the cemetery. The canvas FONC bags are also popular, as are the cemetery postcards.

PED volunteers provide a friendly welcome and endeavour to answer visitors' questions - which are currently often about the progress being made on the restoration of the East Lodge. With the new cabin now in place, volunteers are grateful to be able to retreat into the warmth on cold winter afternoons to heat themselves up. The publications desk display was updated with peg boards now holding down/displaying information and new book and postcard stands making the display more visually attractive. Storage of publications in the cabin has been rationalised so it is now far easier for helpers to find the publications being asked for!

A recent plea for new volunteers has encouraged some additional help with 3 new volunteers joining and supporting the PED team this year. Between April 2025 and the end of March 2026, 20 separate volunteers helped on the PED providing a total of 307.5 volunteering hours.

Jane Hart, PED Coordinator