

Friends of Nunhead Cemetery

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES 1 JUNE 2021 – 31 MAY 2022

1. MEMBERSHIP

Pleasingly FONC membership increased from 706 to 764 this year despite residual Covid restrictions. We recruited 153 new members but lost 95. We have 7 overseas members. Members paying by bank standing order fell slightly to 47% of the membership. Gift Aid declarations have increased to 36% of members resulting in repayments from H M Revenue & Customs of £636 over the year. Our gratitude is due to Simon Mercer, Membership Secretary, who has continued to keep our membership records and distribution lists up-to-date.

2. THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

The lifting of Covid-19 restrictions on 19 July removed the burden of having to manage tour bookings and allowed our on-site activities to return to virtual 'normality'. Whilst continuing to be cautious, we have found that many new visitors have discovered the cemetery during lock-down periods, perhaps accounting for our increase in membership. We have amply demonstrated a responsible attitude to dealing with the impact of the pandemic which has stood us in good stead with Southwark Council and other statutory bodies.

3. FONC MEETINGS AND MEMBERS' VISITS

All 'meetings' this year were held on the Zoom 'virtual' platform, even after the lifting of restrictions. Trustees held eleven regular meetings, a special meeting to discuss the East Lodge project and one special strategy meeting. The Practical Work Sub-Committee met four times. The 2021 AGM was held 'virtually' in June with a brief PowerPoint presentation on the trees of Nunhead cemetery by Tim Stevenson. Unfortunately this was only just quorate despite advertising the Zoom link widely to members. One members' visit in September, to Brompton cemetery, was organised by Cathy Mercer.

4. FONC GOVERNANCE

In the context of the joint LBS/FONC National Heritage Lottery Fund bid and as part of the continuing effort to improve FONC's overall performance, Trustees have made a number of improvements this year. A Trustees Code of Conduct has been adopted and signed up to by all Trustees, a skills audit has begun to help identify areas where we can improve on deficiencies and improve our diversity. Formal Declarations of Interest have been reviewed and recorded. Perhaps most importantly, we have adopted a 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 request.

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 maintain contacts with many other local and national groups. We also participate in the Southwark Green Forum and attend (virtually at present) the Southwark Council Ward Assemblies. As a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, FONC is required to submit information to

the Charity Commission on an annual basis which is available on line for public review and we have contributed to several Charity Commission surveys.

6. NATIONAL FEDERATION OF CEMETERY FRIENDS (NFCF) AND ASSOCIATION OF SIGNIFICANT CEMETERIES IN EUROPE (ASCE)

For the second year during the pandemic the National Federation of Cemetery Friends did not hold an annual general meeting but distributed the various reports by email. The NFCF's National Cemeteries Week, however, was resumed in May 2022 and FONC took part by introducing a new special cemetery tour associated with World War II graves. The Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE) did hold an actual AGM in Budapest in 2021 but the linked two-day conference on "Cemetourism" was hosted on Zoom by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery, and FONC trustee Gwyneth Stokes attended. Similarly, by providing the virtual option for their conference, Caring for God's Acre could widen the audience for their helpful talks on most aspects of their Beautiful Burial Ground project and FONC was represented by vice-chairman Carol Stevenson.

7. FONC VOLUNTEERING AND PUBLICATIONS & ENQUIRY DESK

Following the lockdowns in 2020 and early 2021, leading to restrictions on running tours and the publications and enquiries desk (PED), since April 2021 we have managed to have publication desk cover for every tour. We have also held two Open days - the 2021 event moved to September to coincide with the London Open City weekend and with much relief the 2022 Open Day was held at its usual time in May. The PED at both events proved popular, signing up many new members and selling the extensive range of FONC publications as well as the popular FONC cotton bags. In late Autumn Southwark Council applied for planning permission to restore the East Lodge so over a couple of months the PED provided a great opportunity to set out the proposals and enabled PED volunteers to discuss the plans with visitors and hear their views. After the planning application was granted, and as part of the work for the submission of a National Lottery Heritage Fund bid being prepared jointly by Southwark Council and FONC, an online survey was made available on the facilities and activities visitors would like to see being provided in the proposed restoration of the East Lodge. Again, the PED provided visitors an opportunity to express their views. The PED continues to be an important initial point of contact for visitors to learn about FONC, volunteer to help with our activities, buy FONC publications, and sign up as members. The desk still needs new volunteers and 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.

8. ANNUAL CEMETERY OPEN DAY AND OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND

With the lifting of Covid restrictions, the Trustees decided to enhance the usual London Open City weekend to a lower-key Open Day on 4 September 2021. This was welcomed by the local community many of whom expressed their gratitude to FONC for starting up our events again at the earliest opportunity. With sensors on the gates to record the number of visitors (for NHLF purposes) we can now state confidently that 3,200 people attended and helped raise around £3,000 for FONC funds. It was thus quite an undertaking to organize a return to our normal May date for the 2022 Open Day but we were rewarded with a record attendance of nearly 4,500 and raising over £4,700. More importantly, we received numerous plaudits from stall holders, performers and, most importantly, visitors on the organisation and low-cost enjoyment of this firm community favourite event. After some 20 years of leading the organisation of the Open Day, Tim Stevenson is now standing down from this role on a real high and the Trustees wish to thank him for his tremendous efforts and look forward to him continuing to participate with his pole lathe and woodland bodging.

9. FONC WEB SITE, PUBLICITY AND MEDIA COVERAGE

With webmaster Simon Quill's support we have finally moved the FONC website to an up-to-date platform which will enable us to improve both the visuals and content of our website (www.fonc.org.uk) over the coming year. With several trustees now trained on up-dating techniques, this should lead to much greater immediacy and relevance of material. We are also becoming more active on social media outlets in addition to our Instagram and Facebook presence. We have featured in reporting by Peckham Peculiar and several other on-line reports in regard to the East Lodge restoration project. The BBC Wildlife Unit also spent two days (and nights) filming at Nunhead for a series on urban sites taken over by Nature for BBC Earth. The series is called "After We've Gone" and the episode is "Discovering Wildlife in an Abandoned Cemetery" and is still available on the BBC Earth channel on YouTube. They were particularly excited by the cave spiders resident in the chapel crypt!

10. MEMBERS' JOURNAL

FONC News is perhaps the easiest way to keep all members, throughout the UK and abroad, informed about FONC's activities and up-to-date news concerning the cemetery. It also provides a platform and the opportunity for members to comment, criticise, agree or disagree, with the decisions made by the trustees and or by Southwark Council. So please, always send us your views, complimentary or otherwise. *FONC News* is your publication and we appreciate receiving your articles and letters. Why not tell us about your local cemetery or what's your interest concerning Nunhead Cemetery? We would also love to know if you have ancestors interred in the cemetery and their stories – everyone has a story to tell - so please put pen to paper or else contact the editor by e-mail editorfonc@hotmail.com *FONC News* is published quarterly in November, March, June, and September. We look forward hearing from you.

11. PUBLICATIONS, ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH WORK

No new FONC publications have been produced this year but we contributed to the ACSE publication 'Crossroads of Diversity', and the long awaited free Magnificent Seven Cemeteries leaflet, to which we had previously contributed, was finally distributed. 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 also continue to research and add to our natural history database.

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

After the much-truncated tour programme caused by Covid restrictions, we have now been able to return to a full programme of cemetery tours. Attendance in some instances has been slow to return to pre-pandemic levels but we are confident that this will improve as our social media presence is enhanced. Special interest tours were held for, among others, the London Appreciation Society and the Society of Genealogists whose generous donations help raise funds for FONC. We were also able to run a stall at the Friends of Brockley and Ladywell's Open Day on 11 July. We welcomed back London Wildlife Trust for a very successful joint bat prowl on 9 September and the Nunhead and Peckham Free Film Festival on 11 September with a well-attended showing of 'Beauty and the Beast'. One of the most enjoyable events of the year was a visit by Year 3 children from Hollydale School who came to learn about the trees of the cemetery.

13. MONUMENT INSCRIPTION RECORDING AND GRAVESEARCH ENQUIRIES

This year we continued to see an increased interest in volunteering to work on the task of recording and photographing the inscriptions on all the circa 4,4000 monuments in Nunhead Cemetery, and we now have 21 volunteers signed up. Some are very active, while others make occasional appearances at the workdays. 15 volunteers pitched up at various times, completing 384 hours of work this year. We have regular workdays scheduled for one mid-month Wednesday and the last Sunday of each month (except for December). Inscription recording work has been largely completed in squares 55 (apart from a small, currently inaccessible patch), 82, 83 and 161. We have latterly revived the inscription recording template that some members may have seen on display at Open Days, and three new volunteers who cannot get to the cemetery are busy working on these from home, transcribing the inscriptions completed in previous years. The aim is to get these uploaded to the website so that members of the public can access them more readily.

There has always been a steady stream of enquiries from people looking to find the grave of their ancestors buried at Nunhead, and we carry out this work on request. In the first few months of 2022, demand for this service has risen rapidly, and there is currently a backlog of requests. More volunteers will be required for this interesting work if demand remains high, so please consider signing up. Most of those receiving replies give a donation via the online donations page on the FONC website, which can only benefit the work all volunteers carry out at Nunhead.

14. RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Our All-Souls Service was again graced by the Nunhead Lighthouse Cathedral choir and a service led by Fr. Dele Ogunyemi of St. Antony with St. Silas. This is an important event in the FONC calendar and gives the opportunity for practical work-day volunteers and service attendees to mingle over tea and cakes. It was wonderful to be able to hold our annual Remembrance Service again this year which was very well attended. We again made an enhanced donation of £300 to the Royal British Legion for the wreaths and crosses that we placed at the various memorials in the cemetery.

15. MANAGEMENT OF THE CEMETERY BY SOUTHWARK BOROUGH COUNCIL

Site meetings with Southwark Bereavement Services were finally resumed in March to discuss various on-site issues on which we can then agree a way forward. We finally received a draft of the proposed Conservation Management Plan for the cemetery on which we made a number of detailed comments. We expect to receive the Council's response shortly and the Plan will go out to public consultation this coming summer. Enforcement of the Public Space Protection Order to encourage responsible dog ownership became difficult as signage was misunderstood by some and even vandalised by others. We have agreed improvement measures but these have yet to be put in place. FONC's comments to the Planning Inspector's review of the LBS Southwark Plan have led to improved recognition of the preservation of the view from West Hill to St. Paul's. We also campaigned successfully for the retention of Southwark's in-house tree management teams. Agreed criteria for closing the cemetery in high winds was shared with us just in time for Storm Eunice. Unfortunately we have recently learned that Sam Rees, the Head of Bereavement Services, has undergone serious heart surgery and we wish him a full and speedy recovery.

16. CEMETERY IMPROVEMENTS

The response to the application to the Southwark Diocesan Advisory Court to facilitate repair to the Limesford Road boundary walls was inordinately delayed. However, the planning application for the work has been submitted and should be decided shortly. Southwark have confirmed its commitment to funding and carrying out this week. Proposed repair works to the Anglican chapel have, in FONC's view, been badly mis-managed by the Borough Engineers and not being able to access the chapel has made planning FONC events very difficult. The promised planting of

replacement trees at the Limesford Road entrance and elsewhere took place in November. A third tranche of Southwark funded monument repairs, agreed with FONC, which began in November 2020 has still not been finally completed as two large vaults by the Figgins memorial await reinstatement. The electricity supply to the FONC portacabin failed in January 2021 and took until October to be restored, making it difficult for FONC volunteers using the base and for the holding of FONC events. Five major monument repairs commissioned and paid for by FONC have been completed by Priest Stone Restoration. Two of these were necessitated by the impact of Storm Eunice in February. The storm also caused extensive damage to the Brockley Footpath boundary walls and some 29 mature trees were lost creating a great deal of work for FONC volunteers (see separate report).

17. EAST LODGE RESTORATION

It may appear that progress on the East Lodge restoration has stalled but in fact a great deal has been happening albeit without much evidence on site. Universal Stone were appointed as contractors for the next phase of enabling works but complications with the drainage design requiring a re-think meant that work did not start until January 2022 with completion expected by October 2022. The clearance of vegetation around the site caused some concern to visitors but is absolutely necessary.

The submitted Planning and Listed Building Applications for the Lodge restoration was supported by FONC and many others but some objections were made by the owner of the West Lodge. However, FONC representatives, borough officers and Roger Mears Associates were able to assuage those objections at the Planning Sub-Committee held on 6 December such that the application was unanimously supported. With a proposal much more in line with FONC's original aspirations, a Partnership Agreement between Southwark and FONC to deliver the project has now been signed by both parties.

As estimated costs have spiraled, it became essential for the submitted joint LBS/FONC Expression of Interest (EOI) bid for National Heritage Lottery Funding (NHLF) to be successful. FONC made a major contribution to this and not only was the EOI accepted but the NHLF appointed a no-cost consultant to help us develop the full application for funding. This is not just filling in an application form but involves considerable research leading to developing numerous supporting documents and substantiating how the project will be sustainable and bring real benefits to the wider community. It quickly became apparent that the aim of submitting a good application in November was unrealistic. Part of the necessary process was to undertake a survey, again largely developed by FONC, to determine who uses the cemetery and what they wished to see delivered by the project beyond the simple restoration. It proved to be one of the most widely responded to surveys which clearly demonstrated almost universal support for our proposals.

Borough officers and FONC representatives have worked extremely hard and constructively together to develop a bid, submitted on 24 May, that we think is as good as it can be. The application sets out what will be done during the Development Phase of the project to be followed by the Delivery Phase which will produce not only a restored building but also various on-going activities and initiatives through a new Community Outreach and Development Officer post that FONC will be able to contribute significantly towards managing. We now await the NHLF decision on our bid to be delivered by the end of September. Unfortunately, the timescales for development and delivery mean that the full building restoration is unlikely to start until April 2024 but FONC Trustees are convinced that a much better and comprehensive project will be delivered as a result.
