

# FONC News

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*Journal of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery*



Recently restored monuments in Nunhead Cemetery *Photo: Jeff Hart see page 9*

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## ~ INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS ~

**Membership including your contact preferences:** Membership of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery (FONC) costs £2 UK (£10 overseas), renewable on the 1st April each year. Donations are always welcome. UK taxpayers are encouraged to sign a Gift Aid declaration. Please advise FONC if you wish to cancel your Gift Aid declaration, or if you change your name or home address, or no longer pay sufficient tax on income and/or capital gains. Data is held by FONC to enable us to send members their copy of *FONC News* and also for the purpose of reclaiming tax. You can decide not to receive communications or change how we contact you at any time. *Just send your request to:*

**FONC Membership c/o 31 Normanby Road, LONDON, NW10 1BU**

e-mail: [membership@fonc.org.uk](mailto:membership@fonc.org.uk)

**Further information** about FONC and Nunhead Cemetery can be found on our excellent website managed by Simon Quill at **[www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk)**

**Cemetery Opening Times:** 1st April to 30th September, 8.30am - 7.00pm; 1st October to 31st October, 8.30am - 5.00pm; 1st November to 28th February, 8.30am - 4.00pm; 1st March to 31st March, 8.30am - 5.00pm. *Times are subject to change.* See notice at the cemetery entrances and Southwark Council's website. The cemetery may be closed without notice for safety reasons e.g. during very windy and stormy weather.

**Publications and Enquiry Desk:** The Publications and Enquiry Desk (PED) is open when FONC volunteers are in attendance. A wide range of books and leaflets about Nunhead Cemetery are available for sale at FONC's portable cabin from 2.00pm to 4.00pm on Sundays when cemetery tours or workdays take place. If you would like to help on an occasional Sunday please contact Jane Hart on 020 8694 6079 or by e-mail: [jane.c.hart@btconnect.com](mailto:jane.c.hart@btconnect.com).

**FONC Meetings and Events:** Meetings of the trustees that take place on the third Thursday of each month are currently 'virtual'. Meetings are open to members in a non-voting capacity. If you would like to 'attend' please e-mail [fonc@btconnect.com](mailto:fonc@btconnect.com) for the Zoom website link. Other events are announced in *FONC News* and on the FONC website **[www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk)**

**Nunhead Cemetery Staff:** The cemetery staff can be contacted by phoning **[020 7732 9535](tel:02077329535)**. If unavailable please leave a message or call the main cemetery office at **Camberwell New Cemetery** on **[020 7525 5600](tel:02075255600)**.

**The cemetery's address is:**

**Nunhead Cemetery, Linden Grove, Nunhead, LONDON, SE15 3LP**

**Editor:** Ron Woollacott - email: [editorfonc@hotmail.com](mailto:editorfonc@hotmail.com)

**Contributors:** Ann Coley; Malcolm David Harris; Jeff Hart; Valerie Macleod; Cathy Mercer; Alan Richardson; Roy Vickery; David Wilson. Uncredited text is by the editor. *The editor and FONC trustees do not necessarily agree with the all the views expressed by contributors.*

### **Editorial:**

By the time you receive this issue of *FONC News*, both the coronation of King Charles III and the annual Nunhead Open Day 2023 will be consigned to memory. But there is still much to look forward to, and Nunhead Cemetery is a beautiful place to visit during the late spring and summer months, so why not join one of our many popular tours (see page 23).



*The editor 1975*

Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed a change in typeface. For some unknown reason Times New Roman, which I prefer, was not working correctly on my laptop with Microsoft Publisher 365 (the latest version), so I have now changed to Calisto MT.

There is a varied array of interesting articles in this issue. Jeff Hart updates us on cemetery news and there is a feature on monument repairs, there's news of a new comedy set in a cemetery, an article about lime-leaf aphid, David Wilson rediscovers the grave of a fellow New Zealander, Ann Coley reviews a new book about cemeteries, Cathy Mercer walks the River Lee, Malcom Harris writes about his great-grandfather's watch, and there are more reminiscences by yours truly.

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## **FONC POLICIES**

*by Jeff Hart (FONC Co-ordinator)*

**I**n the last issue of *FONC News* the Trustees highlighted the availability of all adopted policies of the Friends on our website and urged members to be aware of these policies. Since then we have undertaken a further review of all policies and made a number of amendments where updating was thought necessary. These were primarily editorial in nature, such as changing terms such as 'Committee' to 'Trustees' or referring to a

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differently numbered section of the Constitution. The only change of significance is in regard to the Data Protection and Safety Policy where we now state that in addition to using your details solely within FONC to send members their copy of *FONC News* and for the purpose of reclaiming tax, we will also use these details to communicate other FONC related matters of interest to you direct. As before, no commercial use is made of your details. If any member is not happy with this change and does not wish us to contact you in this way, please notify the Membership Secretary.

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## **FONC AGM 15th June 2023**

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery will be held on Thursday 15th June at 7.00 pm.

The venue will be the

**Salvation Army Hall, 217a Gordon Road,  
(opposite Nunhead Library)  
Near Nunhead Green, SE15 3RT**

The meeting will receive the Trustees reports and accounts and will appoint or re-appoint four Trustees. Homemade refreshments will be served after the business meeting and then Jane and Jeff Hart will speak to a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the progress being made on the current NHLF East Lodge project:

### **‘From Ruin to Revival’**

Any member wishing to submit a business motion to the meeting should send this to Vice-chairman Carol Stevenson as soon as possible and no later than 1st June. The Trustees will not be proposing any business motions. We look forward to seeing you there.

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# Nunhead Cemetery News No 50

*by Jeff Hart (FONC Co-ordinator)*

## ***No entry - again!***

Whilst the problem of unauthorised vehicles driving into the cemetery through the Limesford Road gates has been resolved by the installation of a collapsible bollard, the gates were closed to all visitors on the 13th April. This was a result of damage to the closing mechanism which involved welding to complete the repair which was finished the following day. Well done to Southwark Council for a swift response and apologies to anyone who was temporarily inconvenienced.

## ***PSPO controls reinforced***

We reported in *Cemetery News No 49* that enforcement of the Public Space Protection Order which controls dog walking in the cemetery was in abeyance at present. Unfortunately, almost all of the indicator posts on site were vandalised recently. However, following a site meeting with FONC, Southwark Council initiated a three-week long education and enforcement initiative which began on the 10th April. This also involved the presence of local police officers. During the first 'education' week almost all dog-walkers supported the need for controls but felt that the signage could be confusing. There have been a number of incidents involving dogs recently and Nunhead cemetery has the highest rate of uncleared faeces in the Borough's open spaces, with the 'Muslim' burial area behind the Anglican chapel the worst affected. We are yet to find out whether, and how many, fixed penalties may have been issued.

## ***Raise up those walls again***

Following recent further surveying of the Limesford Road Grade II Listed boundary walls in preparation for the planned re-build, Southwark Borough officers have up-dated FONC on the forthcoming work. Having received Church Faculty and Planning Approval some modifications have been made to the scheme. The 'leaning pillars of Limesford' will now consist of reinforced concrete cores which will be faced with bricks to match the existing. The footpath outside the walls will be modified

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and will now include a utilities channel in order that paving will not need to be disturbed to enable future cabling. Importantly, the concerns we expressed during the Planning Application about the lack of detailing on what was to replace the 'temporary' mesh panels installed in the 1970s have been addressed. It is now intended to install metal railings of the same design as around the entrance gates finished in the Burgundy colour used elsewhere in the cemetery. It is expected that work will begin at the beginning of summer and, subject to any unexpected difficulties, will be completed by the end of this year.

### ***National Cemeteries Week highlights our national treasures***

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends (NFCF), of which FONC is a founder member, are promoting a week of events to highlight the importance of cemeteries throughout the UK from the 3rd to 11th June. FONC is participating with our practical workday on the 4th June, the Woodland Walk on the 11th June and the opening of a sculpture exhibition on the 8th June (subsequently visible through the gates until the 30th June), mounted by Urte Janus, in the Anglican Chapel. We will also be attending the NFCF AGM being held this year at London's Brompton Cemetery on the 10th June.

### ***A sight for sore eyes?***

Before this year's nesting season work was carried out to maintain the telescopic view of St Paul's Cathedral from the top of the cemetery's West Hill. This protected view is popular with visitors and FONC volunteers carry out vegetation cut-back to help maintain the view. However, last year some mature tree boughs, too big for FONC to cut, began to encroach on the view. These have now been removed by Southwark Council. At present some large cranes associated with work on the Old Kent Road can be seen from the viewpoint but no construction is permitted to impinge on the view of the cathedral.

### ***Additional conducted tours available***

In addition to our advertised tour programme for 2023, we offer additional walks for 'special interest' groups. In April we welcomed over 30 members of the Victorian Society and a walking group who were walking the whole of the Green Chain Walk, which starts in the north at Nun-

head Cemetery, and were particularly interested in the First World War graves. If members are aware of other groups who would like a 'special' tour, please put them in touch with the Co-ordinator. We do not charge a fee but can recommend a suitable donation to FONC funds!

### ***When is a cabin not a cabin?***

FONC was recently contacted by Portacabin© who felt that we were infringing their copyright when mentioning in print the facility we use by the West Lodge. We are careful now to describe this as the FONC cabin or FONC modular building! We are sure this complaint will not prejudice this company's tender for a replacement for the current facility as part of our NHLF bid.

### ***Goldsmith's students pass the test?***

On the 24th March during a terrible rain storm, followed by a double rainbow and dramatic sunset, several students on the University of London Goldsmiths MA Performance Making TaP Postgraduate course enacted a scenario which was assessed by course directors. FONC Trustees facilitated the event held after the cemetery closed to the public. We do not know the outcome of the assessment yet, but it is hoped that a repeat performance will be held during FONC Open Day.

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## **A new comedy set in a cemetery**

*Report by Valerie Macleod*

Members of a theatrical disposition might be intrigued to know of a new play by Alan Richardson which received its first performance in Edinburgh in February. *Everybody's Dying to Meet You* is a one-act comedy set in a characterful Victorian cemetery. It is described by the playwright as a 'phantasmagorical comedy that mixes gallows humour with every classic horror ingredient you could imagine, including ghosts, vampires, werewolves and zombies'.

In the play, Sue and her three friends meet for occasional picnics at

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unusual locations. But is having an evening picnic surrounded by tombstones in a neglected and reputedly haunted Victorian cemetery such a good idea? You never know who you might disturb... and it's getting dark.

Alan Richardson is my brother-in-law and although he lives in Edinburgh has visited us several times in Nunhead over the years. The play was inspired by a real-life incident in the summer of 2020 when my partner and I got shut accidentally in the cemetery when both gates were locked far earlier than the advertised times. Alongside were another half a dozen people and

two dogs. None of the telephone numbers at the gates were working and for an hour or so it was far from clear how we were going to get out. Although it was a lovely warm evening nobody wanted to spend the night there and nobody felt like climbing the gates. We were finally rescued by a random act of kindness from a stranger as darkness was beginning to fall.

Further information about the play is available from Alan's website [playsbyalanrichardson.co.uk](http://playsbyalanrichardson.co.uk) and you will see that this article is accompanied by a picture of one of the lovely angels from Nunhead. With commendable foresight, this was taken by Alan himself when he was visiting in June 2009.



Angel in Nunhead Cemetery  
*photo: Alan Richardson*



# Monument Repairs Special

## *Reports by Jeff Hart*

### **SOME UNNECESSARY MONUMENT REPAIRS?**

**T**wo recent events in the cemetery have led to the need to repair monuments which would otherwise have continued to stand for some time to come yet. The first involves two adjacent vaults which have a sycamore growing between them. Subsidence had caused a gap to appear on the side of the Partington (no relation to FONC Chairman Jeremy!) vault. Unfortunately, an off-lead dog decided to investigate this gap, fell into the vault and could not get out. The Fire Brigade were called and they pulled the side of the vault off to rescue the distraught canine, but leaving an even bigger gap to the vault. To make this safe, the rather stunted sycamore will be removed and the two adjacent vaults repaired.

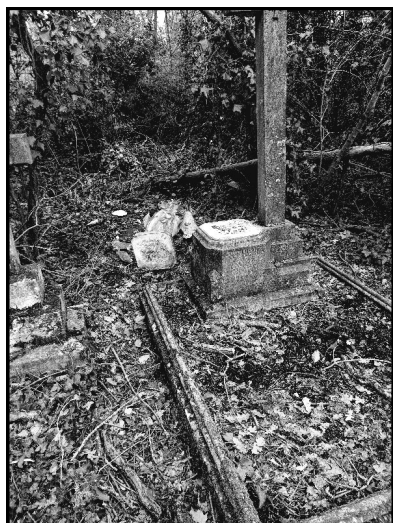


The Partington vault is on the right

*Photo: Jeff Hart*

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The second necessary repair resulted from tree works carried out by the Southwark tree team on the 6th March. A tree branch, hanging for some months, over the path leading from the pond area towards 'The Beeches' area was being removed. Co-ordinator Jeff Hart happened to be on site and chatted to the team who were just starting work and politely pointed out the need for care, as important memorials were in close vicinity. In particular, the Byartt memorial, graced with a lovely cross and mourning angel, stood out. Deborah Byartt features on the International Women's Day tour, held this year on 12th March. She was schoolmistress to the Cameron Highlanders, the 1st Life Guards and the 10th Royal Hussars and matron of Rowton House in Newington, a working man's hotel which George Orwell mentioned in *'Down and Out in Paris in London'*. Jane Hart was horrified, therefore, when a concerned cemetery visitor sent FONC a photograph of the smashed angel and the unsteady cross (which has subsequently been taken down) on the morning before the tour. After considerable effort by FONC, Southwark Council have now agreed to repair and reinstate this fine memorial which, unfortunately, will never be quite the same again. (For a potted biography of Mrs Byartt and a photograph of the monument before being seriously damaged, see *Nunhead Notables* volume 3, page 23).



The sadly broken Byartt angel and cross *photo: Jeff Hart*

## **FONC FUNDS FURTHER MONUMENT REPAIRS**

It is part of FONC's Five Year Strategy (available on our website) to fund a number of repairs and restoration of memorials in the cemetery each year. Whilst FONC volunteers carry out small scale monument repairs, the funding is aimed towards those that are simply too big for us to tackle safely and which improve the visual amenity of parts of the cemetery. At the beginning of March, the firm of Priest Stonework and Restoration carried out repairs to six memorials on the West Crescent Path and reset the front stone slab to a vault at the start of the south bank of Windsor Walk. In addition, they safely took down and placed on the ground an obelisk atop a pedestal monument on the Crescent perilously close to being pushed over by a large tree growing up against it. Originally, Priest quoted a cost of £5,740 for five smaller memorials, so we feel that, as usual, we have had very good value for the work carried out! Hopefully, visitors will have noticed the improvements but that these will very quickly blend in with their surroundings. It is also some good news to balance the monument damage reported above.

## **LONG AWAITED MEMORIAL REPAIRS FINALLY COMPLETED**

After a long hiatus we were delighted when repairs began again in January to two large vaults that FONC had been pressing Southwark Council to complete since they were first disassembled nearly two years ago. The Foreman and Briggs vaults are close to the easily recognised Figgins memorial at the start of the West Hill path. The repairs were delayed initially as a result of concerns about the need to remove a mature oak tree which had caused the damage to the vaults in the first place. This was eventually felled about a year ago but its stump remained in place after disagreements about who was to be responsible for its removal, thus enabling repairs to begin. The contractors Southwark Council used to carry out a number of repairs at Camberwell Old Cemetery, Fulker Contractors UK, were finally brought in to reinstate these fine memorials.

In addition, FONC reported to Southwark Council two very dangerous vaults discovered by our monument inscription recording team located on the west side of the Main Avenue close to the Anglican chapel

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All the above monuments were restored by Southwark Council  
*Photos: Jeff Hart*

but behind the first line of imposing memorials. Such was the damage to these vaults that a small child could easily have climbed in but possibly not been able to get out again unaided. Whilst starting on the Foreman and Briggs vaults, Fulker had the challenging task of reaching these vaults to take out their constituent parts above ground level. The vaults then had to be in-filled to prevent caving in and a base provided on

which to build new supporting walls before reinstating the vault tops. As is often the case, whilst intending to repair two vaults it was found that the adjoining vault also had to be tackled to prevent its imminent collapse.

The completed works now look splendid. Once new grass seeding around the vaults has established, FONC volunteers will complete the tidying up around the work area and another major improvement to the range of fine memorials to be found in the cemetery will have completed.

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## **Lime leaf-nest aphid, *Patchiella reaumuri***

*by Roy Vickery, roy@plant-lore.com*

**T**he British Plant Gall Society's journal, *Cercidology*, vol. 37 (2022), contains a brief article about lime leaf-nest aphid, *Patchiella reaumuri*. This species was first recorded in Britain, in Kent, early in the nineteenth century, but until recently it has rarely been seen. It is 'seemingly a scarce species in Britain', but 'it seems likely that the species is overlooked rather than truly rare'. The article lists the gall as being recorded from nine (possibly 10) counties in England and one in Wales.

Galls caused by *Patchiella* occur on common lime, *Tilia x europaea*, usually on epicormic growth - twiggy shoots which grow from the base of the tree's trunk. Unfortunately such shoots are disliked by tree maintenance people who consider it good practice to remove them. The shoots are usually cut off and destroyed each year, thus the occurrence of *Patchiella* on trees beside roads, in parkland and in cemeteries is severely restricted. In addition to the populations found on lime, populations which consist only of females which reproduce asexually, occur on the roots of Araceae, in Britain, lords-and-ladies, *Arum maculatum*, and possibly other species which have become naturalised. Unsurprisingly, British records of such populations are few.

Although *Patchiella* galls are formed during the summer they can be easily observed in the winter, after the host trees have shed their leaves. The galls consist of irregularly coiled, and often thickened, stems at the tips of epicormic shoots. Often such shoots retain a few dead leaves, so if

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Lime leaf-nest aphid *Patchiella reaumuri* in Linden Grove *Photos: Roy Vickery*

epicormic growth is examined small bunches of faded leaves are a good indicator of the gall's presence.

It is probable that *Patchiella* galls occur in the cemetery, but so far I have not been able to find any convincing examples. However, they can be found just outside, in Linden Grove, notably on a tree at its junction with Forester Road. Wandering around London early in 2023, I've found the gall in most south London Boroughs: Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Southwark, Sutton and Wandsworth. Further afield it's also been found in Barking and Dagenham, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Richmond-upon-Thames, Westminster and Elmbridge.

In many cases, especially where epicormic growth has been slashed, it is difficult to find the galls (perhaps more could be found in summer before such growth is removed), but these observations suggest that *Patchiella* is not uncommon, and would become more frequent if managers of our green spaces were less keen on removing epicormic growth.

## Rediscovering The Happy Wanderer

by David Wilson

Just as the relentless ivy weaves a fabric around both the life and lifeless elements of Nunhead Cemetery, the pandemic also threaded itself inextricably through so many elements of our lives. For me, it wove separation from my home country of New Zealand. It brought me to Nunhead Cemetery to search for peace from the incessant unease. And it brought me to find poetry in a search for a sense of release. Finally, it brought me to Chris McCabe's book that explored the Victorian poets buried in Nunhead Cemetery. One pivotal moment came as I read about the Nunhead buried soldier-journalist-poet, Charles Godfrey Turner (1888 -1922). He, like myself, had relocated from New Zealand to the tendrilled streets of London, and he had also navigated through a pandemic. For him - it was the Spanish Flu. As alluded to in *Nunhead Notables* volume 3, the effects of having suffered from both long-term pulmonary illness, as well as having contracted the Spanish Flu while onboard the ill-fated transport ship HMNZ *Tahiti*, ultimately proved fatal for him during the particularly cold and wet London winter of 1921/22.

His passing left in its wake about 15 years of astute journalistic writings and whimsical poetry across multiple newspaper publications in New Zealand, Australia, and the UK. He also, however, left behind a seven-year-old son. His literary agent, Ethel Mary Richardson-Rice, stepped in at this point with the goal of consolidating and publishing a book containing some of his writings. Her intention for doing this was to use any profits to help support the education of Charles' son. The result of Ethel's selfless work was the 1923 publication of the book *The Happy Wanderer*. Having since obtained a copy of this book myself, I embarked on the task of retyping its text, as well as adding in any additional writings of his that I could find stored in other archive sources. My intention for undertaking this project is to follow in the footsteps of Ethel; to attempt to re-publish his writings, and subsequently donate the proceeds to support a children's education charity.

As part of this project, I decided to locate the grave of Charles Godfrey Turner. My initial efforts were met with one immediate, and signifi-

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cant, challenge - the grave's location: the 'brambles glade'. I had woefully underestimated the determination of binding brambles and ivy to holdfast any arms and ankles that tried to penetrate that area of the cemetery (square 26). A weak sleek sunlight barely broke the undergrowth while I slowly became ensnared and suspended in thorns that clawed at my clothes, and tore at my skin as I tried to venture deeper within. With my sense of the day's chronology lost, but with my count of cuts mounting, I decided to rest, lost, and instead just photograph a beautiful cross I'd seen that was adorned with a relic of Christmas tinsel and a rusted pendant of brass. I leant back through the brambles, against a rock, captured the monument in that moment, then departed disheartened.



Charles Godfrey Turner

The following nights brought new light – in the form of email correspondence with Garry Wiles (FONC Monument Inscription Recording Co-ordinator & Trustee). The next Saturday, we met at the main gates, myself armed with significantly stronger clothing and renewed determination. More significant than that, however: Garry had a map. With his help, the plot details on his map, and the help of my high-vis-clad children (Paloma and Gabriel), I was now able to start to decipher the sequencing and orientation of plot numbers that were shrouded within the densely plaited shade. With Garry's permission, I also carefully pruned some of the brambles as I neared the possible location of Charles' grave. 'A headstone in the shape of a rock', Garry had instructed me as being my target. As the tendrils gave way, Garry's map triangulated me to an adjacent headstone numbered 34830, 'Crippen', a cross, adorned with old tinsel and a rusted brass 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' pendant. The large rock in front of this, the rock I had leant against -disheartened - that cold wet day previously, was in fact the inscriptionless headstone of Charles Godfrey Turner.

101 years after Charles' family and friends had said their final farewells before departing to their own futures, I now had my own chance to bid farewell to the 'Happy Wanderer' who loved both New Zealand and England.



# Walking the River Lee

*Text and photo by Cathy Mercer*

The River Lee is London's second longest river after the Thames and flows 40 miles south from Luton to Bow. There is an excellent footpath all the way, the Lee Valley Path, which I wrote about a few years ago in *FONC News*. Simon and I were back in February - it is always good to revisit good walks in different seasons as London is changing so fast.

We recently walked the pretty section from Springfield Park to the Olympic Park, through the Springfield Marina. We were pleased that my previous article about the Lee Valley Path seemed to have made an impression on readers of *FONC News* - see the graffiti with the dramatic misspelling painted on Horseshoe Bridge, a short walk north from the Olympic Park!

The Lee Valley Path must be one of the best long-distance paths in the UK, taking in attractive countryside in the north and pretty towns such as Hertford and Ware, before reaching London and the Olympic Park.

Perhaps the best thing about the Lee Valley Path is that it's very hard to lose your way, especially from Hertford, where the Lee Navigation starts, as you just follow the towpath! The northern section especially has



some great waterside cafés and pubs and the London section has some real gems, such as the Three Mills Island Tidal Mill, which also comes with a very good café.

The whole Lee Valley Path is very accessible, with an excellent TFL Rail line to Hertford East running the whole way from Tottenham Hale (Victoria Line). It's also very easy to follow, even and flat. As it simply follows the River Lee's towpath. Best of all, it's a piece of countryside in the middle of London, with some great pubs and cafés as pitstops.

*Along the Lee Valley Path*

# **A Moment in Time**

*by Malcolm David Harris*

**H**aving retired over a year ago I now am able to fill my days with even more things to do. Thus I joined various 'Friends of ' groups such as Jubilee Park and Avery Hill Park and now fill my days working in local Bromley and Greenwich on various projects, along with many other things such as Badger rescues. However, I had always been interested in genealogy and had traced my paternal line back to chairmakers in a place called Upton Cum Chalvey in Buckinghamshire (1827). But there were always many gaps and unknowns along the way with completely wrong names and dates within my family tree.

But what was my link to Nunhead Cemetery you might ask? Well after much searching I discovered my great-grandfather, who had lived in Spa Road Bermondsey being a Greengrocer there, living near to the old railway station. However, as his name was not on his son's marriage certificate in 1919 I assumed he had likely died. After much more research I found he had indeed died in 1918 at the age of 64. After some more searching I was next to determine that he was laid to rest on the 25th March 1918 in Nunhead Cemetery. As my father was born 1920 he could never have met his grandfather and I am also certain that my father, who died in the summer of 1998, never knew that his grandfather was buried in Nunhead Cemetery either or had died in 1918, or he would have told me.

My father had little interest in his past family until I started researching it. He then became fascinated by what I uncovered in the 1990s. Dad was born in Dulwich, worked in Peckham Rye and always lived near Nunhead. I was born in Penge and also have lived mostly in or around Bromley most of my life. I was living about four miles from the cemetery in 1956. I now live about five miles from it in 2023.

When my father died I found an old pocket watch with a family connection. Inside was the inscription ' H Harris'. I visited the Nunhead Cemetery in January 2023 for the first time having a rough idea of where Harry might be buried from a Southwark Council email (a council who had previously employed me before my retirement). I was told the grave was in a very old part of the cemetery and quite overgrown. However, I

was ‘drawn’ like a magnet towards a certain part of the cemetery. It was a very cold day but I felt a great peace just being there and exploring the area, which was a most odd feeling. I keep an open mind on what might be, after we leave this earth. I returned some weeks ago in April in the sunshine after being supplied more information as to where Harry actually was buried. It was indeed right where I had previously been drawn too. Harry is in an unmarked grave, as was very common with many public graves in 1918 and he might have had no grave mourners when

buried, due to the First World War. I think his wife likely died before him. However, he now has me after one hundred and five years have passed.



*Photo: M D Harris*

But what of the old pocket watch that I mentioned above? Well it was inscribed with the name ‘H Harris’. It was never mentioned by my dad when he was alive. Maybe he never knew who H Harris even was. The watch is in fact something to do with the military. Incidental fact: Harry shares a connection to centenarian Charles Abbott who died in 1899 and was buried in ‘All Saints Cemetery’ as it was known when opened in 1840. Charles Abbott was a grocer, as was Harry Harris.

I have now joined FONC to learn more about this plot of forever green England, its history and also maybe put a little back and even assist someone else who might be trying to trace a long lost family member who is resting here in Nunhead. I am very grateful to Garry Wiles for his assistance and such a great asset to FONC with his ‘grave search’ for me.

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## **Barry Sutton-Jones of Weston-Super-Mare writes:**

Excellent newsletter and grateful thanks to the Committee and Volunteers who do so much to maintain the Cemetery, where my grandparents and great-grandparents are buried in Grave No 17408 - see *FONC News*, Series 18, Issue No 94.

**Reminder: *Invitation from Cathy Mercer***  
**FONC trip to Paddington Old Cemetery**  
**Saturday 23rd September 2023**

**A**re you a football fan? Do you love Paddington Bear? Do you love Nunhead Cemetery? If so, why not join the FONC trip to Paddington Old Cemetery (POC) in Kilburn - see the graves of Cuthbert Ottaway, first captain of the England football team, way back in 1872, as well the tomb of Michael Bond, who wrote the Paddington novels. Not forgetting POC's chapels - and loos - by the architect Thomas Little, who also designed Nunhead's Anglican Chapel and lots more in this pretty 24 acre cemetery.

The Friends of Paddington Old Cemetery are laying on a tour for us on the morning of Saturday 23rd September - free but donations welcome. We'll meet at the entrance to Kilburn Station (Jubilee Line) from where it is a 15 minute walk to the entrance on Willesden Lane.

All welcome - to join and also to find out the meeting time, please contact Cathy - 'phone 020 8452 5239 or email [cs2000hm@care4free.net](mailto:cs2000hm@care4free.net)

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**Book Review by Ann Coley: *A Tomb With a View:***  
***The Stories & Glories of Graveyards* by Peter Ross**

368 pages—ISBN 978-1472267788—RRP £10.99

**I**t is always a good day when I learn a new word - taphophile - 'A person who is interested in cemeteries, funerals and gravestones'.

This is a book of stories: of why places had to develop new cemeteries (gruesome descriptions included); of cemeteries themselves; of people commemorating their loved ones; of the loved ones buried; and of the people working in and around cemeteries. It makes for an interesting narrative.

I must be honest, when I asked the editor if he would like a review of this book for the next *FONC News* I had anticipated that I would have read it through. In fact, whilst it is an interesting read it hasn't compelled me and whilst I will undoubtedly finish it at some point I keep drifting off to other things. This doesn't mean it isn't worth reading, rather, it means

that it is dense with interesting ideas that I start to mull over. For example, the way that the First World War altered perceptions around the need to have a physical place to focus mourning when for so many their bodies were far away.

Inexplicably there is only one reference to Nunhead Cemetery in the whole book, although there is a chapter on Highgate Cemetery and references to the Magnificent Seven. Other areas covered include Edinburgh, Bristol, Belfast, Dublin, Crossbones (Southwark), and Commonwealth War Graves.

There are chapters of this book that are perhaps too detailed or too long and interest may flag a little, but then the next chapter comes along and brings a turn of phrase, a reference to something or someone or a fact to be retained that makes it worth persisting with. If you are a taphophile and you are looking for something different to read then I recommend this book to you.

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## **Reminiscences of a Local Historian (3)**

*by Ron Woollacott*

I have long been interested in the poet Robert Browning, although I must say I find much of his poetry hard going; my interest is in the man himself. During one of my visits to the cemetery office way back in 1982, the late Lou Hedger, superintendent of Southwark Cemeteries, told me that Sarah Ann Browning, the mother of the poet, was buried in Nunhead Cemetery, and that her headstone had been removed and was now with the Browning Collection in Walworth. Nevertheless, I wanted to see for myself where she was buried, after all perhaps something of the grave might still exist, but on searching, alas, there was nothing to be seen, just the bare earth beneath which she lay. But, almost opposite, much to my delight, I came across the headstone of James Silverthorne, the favourite cousin of Browning, and the only witness at the poet's marriage to Elizabeth Barrett. Nearby, too, was the grave of William Shergold Browning, half-uncle to the poet; the inscription on the headstone still quite legible. Also a footstone, but without a standing headstone, on the grave purchased by the poet's half-brother Reuben Browning, in which two of

*continued on next page*

Reuben's infant children were buried. On another occasion, quite by accident, some distance away, along the cemetery's East Path, I stumbled across the broken down pedestal monument of Robert Shergold Browning and family. Robert was the son of William Shergold Browning and half-cousin to the poet. Additionally, in the Dissenters' section, I found the grave of the Snellgrove family, good friends of the Brownings, who worshipped with them at the Independent Chapel in Walworth.

There is a postscript to this story. Early in 1991, I received a 'phone call from Vivienne Browning, at one time President of the Browning Society. She had been told that I was researching the Browning family, and wanted to know if I might take her to see the grave of Reuben Browning's two infant children. She said she was the great-granddaughter of Reuben Browning, the poet's half-brother. I knew of Vivienne Browning before she contacted me because I have in my possession a copy of her book *My Browning Family Album* published in 1979.

On the 3rd March 1991, Vivienne Browning (Mrs Elaine V Baly) came to Nunhead and I was delighted to take her to see the Browning graves. She remembered seeing the footstone on the grave of Reuben Browning's children when she was a youngster, and thought it was a child's headstone. After traipsing round the cemetery for a couple of hours, I invited Vivienne back to our house where Maureen was preparing a delicious hot meal. After the meal, we, that's our guest, Maureen, and Maureen's sister Linda and I, spent some time chatting about a variety of subjects.

All good things come to an end, however, and it was soon time for Vivienne to depart. Before she left she inscribed my copy of *My Browning Family Album* with the following words: *To Ron Woollacott, who introduced me to my Browning relatives and their friends at Nunhead Cemetery - In gratitude for a wonderful day, Vivienne Browning (Mrs E V Baly) 3rd March 1991.*

On returning home she wrote: *Dear Ron, Maureen and Linda. Thanks to you I arrived home in half the time it took me to get to Nunhead in AM [Linda had driven her to the railway station]. I cannot complete the list of objects, people, animals, plants, haute cuisine, wines, books, ideas, which contributed to a really happy time I spent with you today. With thanks and love to you all, including an extra stroke for Libra and Gem [our cats]. Yours, Elaine.*

*to be continued*

## ~~~~ DIARY DATES ~~~~

**GENERAL GUIDED TOURS OF THE CEMETERY** *take place on the last Sunday in every month starting at 2.00pm.* We meet near the flint circle just inside the main gates in Linden Grove. Tours take between one and a half to two hours. The publications and information desk will be present, weather and volunteers permitting. *ALL TOURS ARE FREE BUT DONATIONS ARE APPRECIATED*

**WOODLAND TRAIL TOUR:** *Sunday 11th June 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**FONC AGM:** *Thursday 15th June 2023 at 7.00pm.* Salvation Army Hall, 217a Gordon Road, Nunhead, London SE15 3RT. *For full details see page 4.*

**WATERLOO ANNIVERSARY EVENT:** *Sunday 18th June 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**CRYPT AND CHAPEL VISITS:** *Sunday 9th July 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide/s outside the Anglican chapel.

**MILITARY CONNECTIONS TOUR:** *Sunday 16th July 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**CEMETERY SYMBOLS TOUR:** *Sunday 23rd July 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**MUSIC HALL ARTISTES TOUR:** *Sunday 13th August 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**NUNHEAD POETS TOUR:** *Sunday 20th August 2023 at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide/s for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**PRACTICAL WORKDAYS** *take place on the first Sunday in the month from 10.00am to 4.30pm.* New volunteers are always welcome. Meet at the FONC cabin near the Linden Grove entrance. Stay an hour or two or stay all day, it's entirely up to you. *Appropriate clothing including sturdy footwear is essential.*

**MONUMENT INSCRIPTION RECORDING:** Transcribing the inscriptions in Nunhead Cemetery is an important and ongoing task. We meet at the FONC cabin near the Linden Grove entrance. For further information and timings and how to volunteer please contact Garry Wiles at [foncinscriptions@gmail.com](mailto:foncinscriptions@gmail.com) or by mobile phone 077 999 71 597. *Appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear is essential.*

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**The editor, FONC News, c/o 185 Gordon Road, LONDON SE15 3RT**

or email: [editorfonc@hotmail.com](mailto:editorfonc@hotmail.com)

*The deadline for letters and articles for the next issue is the 19th July 2023*

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## Friends of Nunhead Cemetery (FONC)



*Friends of Nunhead Cemetery - Established 1981*

**Registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation No 1178763**

A member of the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE).

A founder member of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends (NFCF)

FONC is a recipient of HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's Birthday Award for Environmental Improvements (National Commendation) 1998

**FONC's website address is: [www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk)**

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