

FONC News

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No 161 ~Autumn issue ~ Sept ~ Nov 2023
Journal of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery



The Proom monument on the west side of the main avenue
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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 or email: 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**

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.

FONC Meetings and Events: Meetings of the trustees that take place on the fourth Monday of each month at 7.00pm 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 for the Zoom website link. Other events are announced in *FONC News* and on the FONC website **www.fonc.org.uk**

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

The cemetery's address is:
Nunhead Cemetery, Linden Grove, Nunhead, LONDON, SE15 3LP

Editor: Ron Woollacott - email: editorfonc@hotmail.com

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Editorial:

Flaming June was followed by the wettest July on record and August did not start too well either, so let us hope sunshine will return for the Open House and Heritage weekend in September. This issue contains all the latest news and updates relating to Nunhead Cemetery by Jane and Jeff Hart, and Ann Coley reports on May's Open Day in 'A View from the Tea Tent'. There is the moving story by Stephen West of the soldier who lost his life at Dunkirk and was buried at Nunhead, and there is the story of the unfortunate architect and his association with Nunhead Cemetery. Michèle Louise Burford writes about a lost path that once adjoined the cemetery where Ivydale Road is today, and Cathy Mercer continues the tour of her locality looking at vernacular buildings, and there is a delightful article about Nunhead Cemetery written in 1870. We do hope you enjoy this issue, and please do write to us and send us your letters and stories.



East Lodge Update

by Jane Hart

Work on the East Lodge Restoration project - *From Ruin to Revival* - has been progressed at speed since the award of National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) grant for the development phase of the project. Since the 'Permission to Start' was received in December, it seems that there hasn't been a week go by without meetings to progress the project - be it reviewing consultant tenders, meetings to discuss how the various consultants will progress their parts of the work or reviewing progress. In total eight different consultants have been appointed to work on the project.

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The architects have been actively involved most recently in progressing the design of the replacement FONC cabin and engaging with the Southwark Conservation Officer in order to submit the planning application for the building. They have also been working with the Landscape Architect to develop the most appropriate way to design the ramped access to both levels of the East Lodge whilst retaining trees within the East Lodge grounds.

Several consultants attended the FONC Open Day to enable them to seek views on the type of activities that people would like to see in the restored East Lodge, what sort of interpretation - both on the history and ecology of the cemetery - would be of interest, and how to best communicate digitally - both through an updated website and use of social media. A business planner has been seeking interest from café operators and community groups in the running of the East Lodge building and what would be the most appropriate business model for its operation. At the time of writing a number of pilot activities are planned to take place in the cemetery in August aimed at audiences who currently don't visit the cemetery at present.

FONC's time in contributing to all this work is being logged as an in-kind contribution to the project. We know that up to the end of July we have provided over 400 hours of our voluntary time which is costed by the NLHF at over £8,000. The current aim is to submit the application for the delivery phase of the funding in mid-November and thankfully we are still on track to do this though there is still the small matter of receiving all the consultants reports and actually completing the lengthy application form!

Upcoming Events in September

by Jane Hart

Heritage Open Days / Open House - 9th and 10th of September

Over recent years FONC has participated in the London Open House event, by offering visits to the chapel and the crypt beneath and providing tours of the cemetery on both afternoons of the Open House weekend. Last year we also participated in the National Trust supported Heritage Open Day over the same weekend. So, this year on the weekend of 9th and 10th of September, from 1.00pm to 5.00 pm each day, we will again

taking part in both events with chapel and crypt visits and conducted tours of the cemetery. In addition, we will be offering homemade refreshments to attendees. Heritage Open Days has an easy-to-navigate website www.heritageopendays.org.uk where details of other events nearby can be found.

Nunhead Arts Trail

FONC has participated in the Nunhead Arts Trail in the past, so we are pleased to report that, after an absence for a number of years, FONC is once again supporting an exhibition as part of this local event. The Nunhead Art Trail will run over the weekend of the 23rd and 24th September, 11.00am - 6.00pm. The exhibition in the Anglican Chapel, curated by artists Urte Janus and Yarda Krampol, entitled - *the Stillness of the Departing Light* - will be a group exhibition of local artists including sculpture, performance and sound art, which coincides with the autumn equinox, offering an exploration into the movement of the light within the chapel during this transitional period between day and night. Since the Arts Trail covers the whole of Nunhead, walking through the cemetery and visiting the exhibition in the Anglican Chapel provides an ideal way to link up the exhibitions taking place in the north and south of the Nunhead community.

Nunhead Cemetery News No 51

by Jeff Hart, FONC Co-ordinator

Arts, crafts and films at the chapel

Unfortunately, because of copy dates, it is not always possible to give FONC members advance notice in *FONC News* of last-minute events in the cemetery. For example, artist Urte Janus exhibited a number of sculptures which could be viewed through the gates to the chapel during June and Luisa-Maria Mac Cormack exhibited her paintings inspired by cemetery ivy at the end of August. Hopefully, local FONC members may also have seen the advertising for the Peckham and Nunhead Free Film Festival showing in the cemetery on 2nd September of 'An American Werewolf in London' which was the popular choice of visitors to our annual Open

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Day. Do look at the FONC website or Instagram account for up-to-the minute news of future events in the cemetery.

Boundary walls update

The start on work to restore the Limesford Road Grade II Listed boundary walls (reported on in Cemetery News No 50) which will include replacing the mesh panels installed in the 1970s with metal railings of the same design as the entrance gates, has been delayed. This is a result of the long-term sick leave of the lead Southwark officer, to whom



Boundary wall adjoining the back gardens of houses in Ivydale Road

Photos: Jeff Hart

we wish a speedy recovery. However, we are still hopeful that work will begin before the end of the year. In the meantime, Southwark have begun the one metre depth clearance of vegetation along the Ivydale boundary wall which adjoins the back gardens of the fine Victorian houses, built after the cemetery was first laid out. This is a precursor to considering the need for work both to stabilise the walls and address the state of the fencing on the walls. Whilst most residents act responsibly, some seem to think it acceptable to dump rubbish into the cemetery and even to cut an opening in the fencing to give them access to the cemetery as if it were an extension to their gardens. (See also *Walks in Summer Shadows* page 18).

Park on the wild side?

At the time of writing, heated debate is being had on Southwark Council's proposal to introduce a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) covering the whole of the Nunhead and Queens Road ward in which the cemetery is situated. The ruling Labour Council contend that the application of CPZs across the whole of the Borough are a manifesto commitment to improve air quality and to 'free up the kerbside.' This is disputed by many local residents and businesses who are concerned about the cost of resident parking permits (over £250 per year?) and daytime parking restrictions which would impact on those visiting the area. A recent informal survey sought views on the proposed restrictions road by road but no option to reject the idea of a CPZ was offered. FONC is monitoring how the proposals might affect various visitors to the cemetery. We attended a public meeting with Councillors and will respond to the statutory consultation likely to be held in October of this year, although Southwark can ignore any opposition if it wishes. The 'survey' closed on the 9th June, details can currently be found at www.consultations.southwark.gov.uk/environment-leisure/Nunheadcpz2022/

Conservation Management Plan nearing adoption

The long-awaited draft Nunhead Cemetery Conservation Management Plan (CMP) went out for public consultation at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day and closed on 21 July. To the best of our knowledge only FONC Trustees attended the open consultation drop-in session held on 28 June and there were no takers for the virtual session on 4 July. FONC is very keen to see adoption of the Plan and has written to the Council in support of the Plan whilst offering some few remaining comments of clarification or last-minute updates which we hope can be taken account of. Hopefully the Plan will be approved by the relevant Cabinet Member in September in good time for inclusion as an essential element of the East Lodge NLHF delivery phase grant application. Thereafter, the CMPs for Camberwell Old and New Cemeteries will be formally consulted on.

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Further monument repairs planned

In addition to the recent monument repairs reported on in the last issue of *FONC News*, Southwark Council have committed to carry out work on large monuments on the west side of the area adjacent to the Anglican chapel. This will include some very depressing vaults which are currently only evident at ground level with some alarming gaps now appearing. In the meantime, two vaults adjacent to the recently restored Foreman and Briggs memorials have been repaired. Southwark has additional funding available for such work and FONC will now be conducting with Southwark Council an inventory of further priority monuments for repair in other parts of the cemetery during this financial year.

NFCF enjoys Brompton hospitality

FONC pledged support for future National Lottery Heritage Fund cemetery applicants by providing templates for consultants' briefs and model Partnership Agreement to be placed on the NFCF website at the National Federation of Cemetery Friends AGM held at London's Brompton cemetery on the 10th June. In addition to a very hot, sunny tour of some of Brompton's highlights, the business meeting appointed Nunhead's Gwyneth Stokes as its first President following her standing down as Secretary after some 30 years of service to the Federation.



Gwyneth Stokes is presented with a pair of engraved crystal wine glasses at the NFCF AGM

The Big Help Out

A report by Jane Hart

The Coronation weekend 'Big Help Out' provided a great opportunity to publicise volunteering in Nunhead Cemetery. FONC arranged a taster event – an introduction to volunteering in Nunhead Cemetery –

which took place on the Bank Holiday afternoon of Monday 8th May. The event was advertised on the Big Help Out website and associated app with a total of 12 new volunteers attending. We offered the opportunity to participate in both vegetation clearance of monuments and monument inscription recording. A total of six regular FONC volunteers assisted with the event – providing encouragement, instruction, supervision and refreshments. The majority of participants were local, though there were also volunteers from Camden and Greenwich. Volunteers ranged from 25 to 65 plus in age. Volunteers found it a very positive experience making comments such as the ‘opportunity to give something back’, ‘I recognise the need to help to preserve Nunhead Cemetery as a green, tranquil and historically important place’, ‘volunteering gives me a sense of community and an opportunity to socialise with like-minded people’ and ‘a really well organised event, I will be coming back on regular workdays!’ And indeed, some volunteers have attended our practical workdays subsequently. Good news all around!

Annual General Meeting 2023 Report

Unfortunately, the FONC AGM held on the 15th June was poorly attended by members. The Trustees are giving careful consideration on how to address this for next year. Papers for the meeting can be found on the website and FONC Chairman Jeremy Partington was able to report on a very busy and successful year for the Friends. Treasurer Ann Coley reported on a very healthy financial position and Vice-Chairman Carol Stevenson recalled the progress made with practical work on site.

Maureen Woollacott stood down as a Trustee after some forty years’ service as a committee member/Trustee/’Queen of Catering’/fundraiser. She was presented with a bouquet and two splendid fuchsias and a resplendent blue hydrangea to augment her garden. The three retiring Trustees were re-appointed, and we welcome new Trustee Charles Newman who is now able to offer his legal and HR experience to our Board of Trustees. Following refreshments provided by various members, Jane and Jeff Hart gave an update on the progress and next steps on the East Lodge restoration project.

Change of Trustee Meeting Dates

Please note that the meeting date for future Trustee meetings, now held virtually and open to all members, has been changed from the third Thursday of the month to the last Monday of the month. This is to better facilitate Trustee attendance.

Open Day 2023 - A View from the Tea Tent

by Ann Coley

It is now the Monday after Open Day and I am surrounded by empty tea pots and cake tins, boxes of spare plates and cups, and a pile of aprons and tea towels to be washed.

We had a pretty much perfect day - it was dry and warm enough for people to stop, sit, chat, and eat, but not so hot that the volunteers overheated, icing started to melt or we worried about the cream in the Victoria sponges. A little too breezy at times as our cups blew around before we had a chance to add hot drinks (better next year as we will be using slightly heavier cardboard cups).

We had an enormous selection of homemade cakes and other delights delivered on the day, including from people I don't recognise. If you made something then a huge thank you. It is a real pleasure to be able to put out a such an amazing variety.

The (very) little we had left over was donated to a community project on Nunhead Green for them to enjoy.

Our range included:

(Please don't be offended if I have missed your contribution off the list, I lost track of what we had in the end.) *See opposite:*

We are always looking for different things to add variety. If you are a star baker then please bring something along next year - we accept donations from around 8.30 am on the day until about 4.00 pm, or in the week before by arrangement. If you can't cook or don't have time but

Cakes

Victoria sponge
Fruit cake
Gingerbread
Parkin
Lemon drizzle cake
Carrot cake
Coffee and walnut cake (GF)
Cinnamon bun cake
Semolina cake

Other bakes

Scones
Chocolate buns
Chocolate bites
Pistachio macaroons
Brownie (Veg)
Date slice (Veg/GF)
Shortbread (Veg/ GF)
Banana and peanut muffins (GF/
Veg)
Bread pudding
Biscoff cheesecake

Savoury

Sandwich selection (including V
Veg and GF)
Pizza slices
Cheese and bacon slice
Walnut, cheese and olive slice (V)
Savoury slice (Veg and GF)

Cookies

Chocolate hazelnut
Choc chip
Lemon (GF/DF)
Peanut (Veg)
Bug biscuits (Veg)
Gingerbread people

have a suggestion then please let me know (treasurer@fonc.org.uk) and I will see if I can adapt my baking plan to include it, but no promises!

We were not due to open until 11.00 am, but from about 10.30 am I could see hopeful people having a look to see if the boilers were up to temperature yet. As soon as we were ready we got going, and served the last item at around 5.10 pm.

Every time I looked up I could see people waiting, or looking and trying to assess their options. If you were a visitor in our queue, thank you for your patience and good humour. We had ten people staffing the stall and can't really fit any more in at one time, although if you would like to come and help next year then please do volunteer (volunteer@fonc.org.uk) it will give all our volunteers a chance to have a breather. We had four new volunteers this year, who tell me they enjoyed it and will probably come again and I can't give a better recommendation than that.

Thanks again to all of you who contributed or were customers, I hope we see you all again next year - **Saturday 18th May 2024.**

GF = Gluten free. V = Vegetarian. DF = Dairy free. Veg = Vegan.

Private 6090470 Joseph Francis Stubbs (1919-1940)

by Stephen West

The following email was sent by Stephen West to Jeff Hart, FONC Co-ordinator, with the accompanying article following a Second War walk in Nunhead Cemetery:

Thank you for the time, effort, and kind consideration on your Second World War guided walk at Nunhead. More so, thanks for pointing out the grave of Joseph Stubbs to mother and me. It may not seem it, but this was a special occasion for her and, despite being in her mid-80s, it is the first time either of us have seen his grave. Her mobility may limit further trips so the timing, weather, distance, surroundings were wonderful. She's talked of little since! I certainly intend to come again and finish your fascinating tour.

Joe was her uncle and, although she was two at the time of his death, Joe's name held much reverence in her family circles over the years - but also much myth to the events. Following the end of the war, the family continued, lives took off in marriages, children, work etc. and Joey became just a name. We knew he was buried in a family plot at Nunhead, but the location became long lost to knowledge after the cemetery closed. Indeed, we had no idea until a month ago that Joe even had a CWGC headstone! Personal attempts to locate Joe's grave somewhere in a wildly overgrown cemetery effectively ruled out physical searches. It was a surprise to see how close to the path the plot actually was! How strange that I must have walked past him many times in my previous searches for him.

In recent years, I've found replacement medals and insignia for Joe and built a frame for him. However, it was superb to hear about the historical details you found, and which seem to coincide with our family recollections.

You asked for a scan of the photo of him and Titch. Please find this attached. You're welcome to use this in any way which helps keep Joe's memory alive. I have no children to pass his story on to and it would be great to know that, after us, future visitors will know more about Joe's loss than a headstone can tell.

Here, for the records are what we know:

Private 6090470 Joseph Francis Stubbs was born in 1919, the first son of Rose and Joseph Henry Stubbs. Joe (or Joey as he was popularly known) joined the Territorial Army in the 6th Battalion of the West Surrey Regiment (which was the TA catchment area for Rotherhithe and Southwark).

Although he passed the army physicals, Joe's 'Achille's heel' was his eyesight, which required him to use thick lensed spectacles. This resulted in him becoming a unit cook. On the 3rd April 1940, Joe's unit was sent to France as part of the Queen's Royal Regiment as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in our rush to trump German expansionism.

As history shows, the Allies were out foxed by a German army which had recently 'cut its teeth' on other nation's armies in its



Privates 'Titch' (l) and Joseph Stubbs (r) taken shortly before going to France

Blitzkrieg across Europe. Consequently things went unfavourably for the BEF. On the 20th May, the German Army hit the Escaut River - and Joe's unit which held it. The British Army found itself increasingly 'on the ropes,' and the Queen's casualty combat losses holding off the Wehrmacht were so desperate that the need for riflemen outstripped its need for support personnel. Thus, 21-year-old Joey found himself in one of the rifle companies.

After two days heavy fighting, the Queens were ordered by higher command to withdraw to St Omer, and then fall back again, closer to the beaches of Dunkirk. The confused nature of the fighting meant military formalities were beginning to waver as the defensive area round the beach contracted. This is attested to by the shortage of contemporary unit records for the Queens. So, at this point family lore cuts in, (which seem

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to parallel historical events).

Joey, alongside one of his closest friends called 'Titch', found themselves somewhere at the beachhead on the 30th May 1940. It is unclear if he was enroute to the beach, upon it or whether he was on a boat, but Joey was badly wounded, believed to be by a JU87 Stuka - the Luftwaffe's dive bomber. Whichever option, the certainty is that 'Titch' was physically engaged in the struggle to get his wounded mate to safety, and that at some point on the way home, Joe succumbed to the severity of his injuries. Our 21-year old's cook's tour of combat was less than ten days.

Joey's soaked, broken remains were returned by the army to his father Joseph in a sealed coffin. Against advice, Joseph bribed the undertakers to unscrew and open his son's sealed coffin. This was partly to see his beloved son for the last time but, less romantically, it was to ensure that in all the ensuing evacuation chaos these were the actual remains of his son.

The remains were taken and buried at Nunhead Cemetery in a grave his parents had as a family plot. We do know that Joey was an ordinary

son, in an ordinary working-class family. But Joey's death was felt most strongly by his parents - particularly his father. The bond between them is highlighted by the addition of his father's name to the WGC headstone instead of the usual soliloquy.

Had Joe survived Dunkirk, his regiment would go on to participate in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, and Holland under the 7th Armoured Division. Strangely mirroring Joey's war experience, in 1944, the 1/6th Battalion was itself stripped of its men who were taken to fill rifle-men casualties in other units.

Titch is the only name we have and appears in the photo. In the



*CWGC headstone marking grave of
Private Joseph Francis Stubbs
Photo: Garry Wiles*

British Army ‘Titch’ (a nickname ironically awarded to tall soldiers, but curiously not in this case). We would like to know more of him.

I have a water damaged wallet, bearing the unit crest and *alleged* to be taken from the coffin, which was passed to me by my grandmother (Joey’s sister).

Book Review

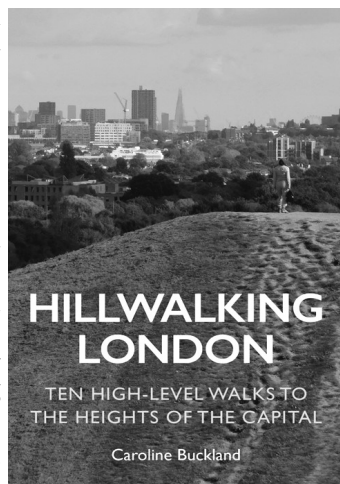
Hillwalking London by Caroline Buckland

ISBN 978-1-8384051-7-5 180 pages £14.99

London is indeed a very hilly city, and when the reviewer was a boy, he delighted in climbing to the top of One Tree Hill and travelling by tramcar down the steep Dog Kennel Hill in south-east London. Dog Kennel Hill may not be mentioned in Caroline Buckland’s book, still, there are many more hills north, south, east and west of Greater London to be explored and to be walked.

Hillwalking London covers ten routes, and includes, among others, the Crystal Palace and the seven hills of Croydon; the former telegraph stations of south-east London and Nunhead Cemetery; Romford to Havering in the east; Perivale to Northolt in the west; the hills of Hampstead and Highgate in the north; the hills of the City of London; and Greater London’s highest hills, of which the highest is South Street, Bromley at 220 metres, approx. 721 feet.

No matter where you live in Greater London there is a hill to be walked near you. *Hillwalking London* is a delightful book and is beautifully illustrated throughout with over 160 original colour photographs by Graham Coster, together with additional illustrations and route maps of all the walks featured and is packed with local history facts. So, if you are interested in walking up and down the hills of London or just want to know more about this great city of ours, then this book is for you. *RW*



The Unfortunate Architect: Thomas Willson

by Ron Woollacott

My research into the history and origins of Nunhead Cemetery way back in the 1970s, long before the advent of the World Wide Web, led me to believe that when the cemetery was consecrated in July 1840 (see FONC publication *Investors in Death*, 2010 p.29), the infamous Edward Buxton was appointed as the first superintendent, but my super sleuthing daughter, Mrs Michèle Louise Burford, has discovered that it was most probably an architect, one Thomas Willson, when in 1841 he was living at the Crescent (now Nunhead Crescent) Peckham Rye with an office in Duke Street, St James's, Westminster. In 1842, as the superintendent at Nunhead Cemetery, he received a salary of £200 from the London Cemetery Company which ceased in 1843.

Many years before his brief appointment as Nunhead Cemetery's superintendent and subsequently, Willson had embarked on a few unsuccessful schemes that eventually bankrupted him.

Thomas Willson was born in Fulham about 1780 and was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools at the age of 20. His exhibits at the Royal Academy included, among others, 'a Royal Military College, designed for the Emperor of Russia' (1805), and 'a gentleman's house in Stockwell' (1805).

In 1820, Willson now calling himself a commercial agent and architect, living at Bridge Cottage, Chelsea Water Works, led a large party of emigrants to South Africa. He claimed a first instalment of £5 each from his prospective settlers, to be followed by a further two instalments of £5 per man to cover the cost of obtaining stores, etc. In addition, he levied a five per cent surcharge on the total amount paid, as a fee for his efforts on their behalf.

The party of 307 (100 men and their families) boarded *Le Belle Alliance* at Deptford and after a month's delay the ship finally sailed on the 12th of February 1820, arriving at Simon's Bay, Western Cape, South Africa on the 5th of May 1820.

When *La Belle Alliance* sailed from Simon's Bay on the last leg of her voyage to Algoa Bay, Eastern Cape, Willson issued a circular to his party claiming 'indemnification' for the effort and expense he had been put to and claimed the right as 'Lord of the Manor' to hunt, fish and cut timber on the party's lands and to call on the settlers for labour. The settlers, however, resisted Willson's demands, and submitted a petition to the Acting Governor, Sir Rufane Donkin (1772-1841) asking for his interven-

tion. Sir Rufane held a meeting with Willson and the petitioners, and it was thought the matter was resolved. Willson, however, abandoned his settlers when they reached their destination and fled to Cape Town, claiming that some of his party had threatened to 'put a bullet through his head.' Sadly, his vision of founding a town called Angloville, where he intended to erect a colossal monument to Queen Victoria, came to nothing and he returned to England about 1823.

In the 1820s when ideas were being sought to relieve the overcrowded and indecent burial grounds of London, another foolhardy scheme of his was to build a gigantic pyramid to hold five million bodies. The designs, of which he exhibited in 1824, would be higher than St Paul's Cathedral and would cover an area the size of Russell Square. It was rejected by the General Cemetery Company who favoured a garden cemetery which is now Kensal Green Cemetery. He nevertheless had great faith in his project and set up a company called 'The British Pyramid National Necropolis Company.'

At the Great Exhibition in 1851 he exhibited a model of 'The Great Victoria Pyramid' a much smaller version that would contain 620,000 bodies rather than five million. Once again, his fantastic idea fell on stony ground.

In August 1852, a young man named James Sykes advertised for a situation and offered a deposit of £200 to anyone who could secure for him a permanent situation. Thomas Willson answered the advertisement and told Sykes that he had a practice as a patent agent and architect, and as the principal of the British Pyramid National Necropolis Company could offer him a permanent position in his office at 31 Charing Cross at a salary of £100 per annum. Sykes accepted the offer and deposited the sum of £200 with Willson.

Having taken up his situation Sykes found that he had very little to do, other than drawing diagrams and copying circulars for a monument to the Duke of Wellington. In November 1852 Willson told Sykes that he must dispense with his services due to the stagnation of business. He paid him £23 salary and said he would return the £200 deposited later but failed to do so. As a result, in July 1853 Sykes summoned Willson to Bow Street for obtaining money under false pretences.

Willson, now bankrupt, claimed that he was owed money by the Treasury for the conveyance of emigrants to South Africa but had never received payment. He had been in correspondence with the Treasury only recently, but still he had not obtained the money to which he was enti-

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tled. When the court rose at 5.30 pm the commissioner postponed giving the period of imprisonment due to the late hour. The length of sentence eventually served by Willson is not known.

On the 1st of July 1862 Willson's wife Mary Ann passed away aged 80. The *London Evening Standard* noted her death as follows: 'On the 1st inst, at Acton, Middlesex, the exemplary and beloved wife of Thomas Willson, architect, after long and painful suffering. She zealously shared all the perils of her husband's arduous enterprise to South Africa in 1820, taking out 100 families, and colonising the Cape of Good Hope.'

In 1863, Willson's daughter Mary appealed to the nation to alleviate the sad distress of her father, 'who was ruined by his patriotic enterprise as head leader of a settlement in the frontier of the Cape of Good Hope'. She continued, 'He is known as the architect of the Great Pyramid Necropolis and The Suburban Cemeteries of London vide page 122 of *Routledge's Guide to the Exhibition* 1851. He is now in his old age, nearly blind and living in obscure poverty at Acton.'

Thomas Willson died three years later in 1866, aged 86, and was buried in St Mary's churchyard, Acton on the 15th of October.

Sources: Census returns 1841-1861; *London Gazette* 1853 and 1908; *Perry's Bankrupt Gazette* 9th July 1853; *Morning Herald* 20th July 1853; *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 23rd July 1853; *London Evening Standard* 8th July 1862, 11th February 1863; Burial registers of St Mary's Church, Acton 1866; James Stevens Curl, *Egyptomania - The Egyptian Revival, a Recurring Theme in the History of Taste*, 1993, pp.,177,178, 183, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, 2000, pp.53, 55; *Kensal Green Cemetery - The Origins and Development of the General Cemetery of All Souls, 1834-2001*, 2001, pp.35, 36, 46; Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 3rd edition, 1995, p.1062; www.1820settlers.com/genealogy

Walks in Summer Shadows

by Michèle Louise Burford

One hundred and thirty-nine years ago, in August 1884, the editor of the *South London Observer* received a letter from a Mr Mark A -Y, complaining about the loss of amenity of a picturesque lane that ran alongside Nunhead Cemetery. This lane ran along the eastern wall of the cemetery and became the rear gardens of the long row of houses in Ivydale Road, most of which remain to this day. The gardens were described by the writer as 'Miserable squares of garden ground.'

He argued that the lane was 'one of the most pleasant and contempla-

tive walks, especially in springtime when the thrush and nightingale soothe the soul with sweetest melody,' adding that 'It seems almost sacrilege as you look down by the side of that long length of bricks and mortar, to feel that this important outlet is blocked up forever and that you can never again walk along its peaceful and quiet shade.'

Of course, the Limesford Road entrance to the cemetery was not opened until 1909, so the lane was used by many persons wanting to go to Nunhead Station. The closure of the path meant that pedestrians would now have to climb the steep Brockley footpath, the hill on the western side of the cemetery, turn right at the bottom and walk along Linden Grove and past the cemetery gates, which was a long way round and extremely inconvenient for the elderly, infirm, mothers with children living about the Newlands and cottages beyond, especially in bad weather and during the winter months.

Mr A concludes his letter with, 'From time immemorial this has been a public right of way, when all at once, in less than three days, and I believe without any notice (though this I cannot believe); a dead wall is stuck up at one end and a great pole at the other. Would to heaven I had the power to remove them.'

Sources: *Investors in Death* by Ron Woollacott, British Newspaper Archive, Ancestry.co.uk, Godfrey Edition Maps 1868, 1894 and 1914, Stanfords Map 1894.

A Column about Columns

Text and photos by Cathy Mercer

When we think about columns in architecture, we tend to think in terms of Greek temples like the Parthenon in Athens, all columns and no walls, though there were some inner walls originally, or like the columns fronting St Paul's Cathedral or grand country houses in a neo-classical style, such as Kenwood on Hampstead Heath.

However, once we started looking around our local suburbs, we found more columns, often more decorative than structural, and very rarely with the delicate fluting, capitals and pediments of the three classical orders. And all of course made of plaster and brick, not stone columns.

The columns on these Victorian terraced houses in Cricklewood

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(figure 1) illustrate this perfectly - they have plain pediments and anglicised capitals, with oakleaves occasionally picked out in colour, but not here, though the white paint makes a bright contrast with the bricks. These mini-columns extend a short way only down the building and not to the ground - they stop beneath the porch and are engaged, not free-standing. Their purpose is purely ornamental and not architectural, as they are not load-bearing, but they certainly help to brighten up an otherwise plain wall – making the house look a bit smarter and more elegant at little extra cost.



Figure 1

Just down the road in Willesden Green, on a Victorian terrace of slightly larger houses, a grander set of columns is used (figure 2). Once again, the columns are not fluted but they do serve a struc-

Oaklands Road. A Victorian terrace in Cricklewood, north London, with reduced length supporting and/or decorating small porches



Figure 2

Columns supporting porches and balconies on Chatsworth Road Willesden Green

tural as well as ornamental purpose, in that they actually hold up a quite substantial porch, at least by Victorian suburban standards, and they also support a small balcony. It is funny though that these balconies very rarely seem to be used, perhaps because Victorian houses usually also come with back gardens. Once again, the columns are unfluted and stand on dainty plinths with plain capitals. And so once again an important purpose of these columns is appearance and raising the status of the house. This is surely reflected in the care the current owners take of their columns, shown by the careful paintwork.

It is easy to under-estimate these suburban columns but, if we look harder at the porches, we can see that the area between the adjoining front doors has been

given not a rounded column but a squared-off pilaster, with its own capital, again picked out in white paint, though the effect here is slightly spoiled by the different coloured paintworks. We can also see that the balcony too has a touch of classicising in the dainty baluster in the balcony balustrade – each complete with its own little supporting plinth and capital on top. The nod to classical architectural styles is topped off with a balcony rail that looks more like a classical frieze, with a row of classical guttae below, like little droplets, designed to help run-off of rain.



Figure 3

Edward's Baker on Willesden High Road, with splendid pilasters framing the door

of Edward's, our local bakers on Willesden High Road (figure 3). Here the squared-off 'pilaster' is not at all free standing, is not really a column at all but just part of the structural wall. However, the point of it surely is that it looks like a classical pilaster, with the fluting and capital giving it the appearance of an engaged pilaster. This effect is carefully picked out by the current warm brown and cream paint, reminiscent of the delicious coffee which may be purchased inside.

Sometimes however the aimed at grand effect of columns within supporting walls is less successful, for example. with these adjoining supporting walls between shop fronts. These are in the style of engaged pilasters, though each is rather different, with rather oddly angled column capitals in a semi-classical style which do not match each other - all a bit clumsy. This may be because they were put up by different contractors or because the builders' yard had run out of the original capitals (figure 4)!



Figure 4

Adjoining shop fronts on Dudden Hill Lane, Dollis Hill, with slightly different capitals topping a ghost of a pilaster

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Victorian terraces often have classical touches and columns, but the interwar semis of London's suburbs owe more to Arts and Crafts rustication in their style. Quite often however a house will have a later grand classicising porch plonked in front of the front door, complete with fluted columns (figure 5). This is often seen in council estates, where often people bought their rented homes in the 1980s and added a porch to differentiate the property from their neighbours.

It is interesting to see how columns have been used and abused to ornament and occasionally support structures. It is interesting also to see how more recent owners have re-interpreted, accentuated or just ignored columns on their homes and businesses and I am sure other towns and suburbs are no different from London NW10 and NW2!



Figure 5

Classical columns on a porch added recently to a semi-detached house on Dollis Hill Lane

FONC POLICIES

Over the years FONC has adopted a number of policy statements. The Trustees would like to remind members that some of these apply to the activities of members on site and when representing FONC. In particular, policies regarding child protection and vulnerable adults have been updated. Please familiarise yourselves with these policies by visiting the FONC website at <https://www.fonc.org.uk/fonc-policies/> If you have any questions regarding these policy statements, do please contact the FONC Co-ordinator Jeff Hart.

The Proom family monument (*see photo on cover*)

One of nine monuments listed Grade II in Nunhead Cemetery. Constructed of pink and grey granite and Carrara marble. Tall column upon a square plinth surmounted by a marble figure of a praying woman on the west side of the Main Avenue leading to the Anglican chapel.

A Visit to Nunhead Cemetery in 1870

Whilst perusing old local newspapers Michèle Louise Burford came across the following article which was published anonymously in the South London Observer on Saturday 11th June 1870:

There are many less pleasant and less profitable ways of passing a Sabbath afternoon than in sauntering through Nunhead Cemetery, whose winding pathways and peaceful aspect has a charm which seems more peculiarly its own, and is heightened by its contrast with the mighty bustling metropolis it overlooks, and whose ever extending boundaries appear to encroach even to its gates.

After a week of feverish toil and exertion, how inexpressively soothing and refreshing, is the rustling of the wind through its trees, which comes to the senses laden with the perfume of the thorn and sweetbriar, and musical with the note of the Cuckoo and the Blackbird. The trees shrubs and flowers are now in the full beauty of early summer time, and many visitors are attracted hither merely by the beauty of the place; others render a willing tribute of respect to the memory of lost friends by paying periodical visits to that spot of earth where their remains are interred; and of this latter class we should pronounce an old lady clad in deep mourning and holding a small clasped book in her hand. She is seated upon the grass beneath the grateful and protecting shade of a laburnum tree, which at the same time overshadows a tomb upon which two crossed swords reversed, and a touching inscription indicate that a warrior is taking his rest.

Passing this we came upon a group of children, the eldest ones engaged in plucking away the rank undergrowth of weeds that has almost hidden the narrow and unpretentious enclosure where reposes Annie, aged two years and five months while the younger ones chase a passing butterfly, or gather daisies and forget-me-nots, their childish laughter breaking the prevailing stillness and sounding strangely discordant in such a place. Some distance further and seated on a bench commanding an extended view, the foreground of which is the cemetery, and the most conspicuous object in the distance is the towering dome of St. Pauls, are a pair of lovers evidently labouring under mistaken notions as to their

continued on next page

invisibility; hastily passing these we pursue the path leading to the chapel which is at the termination of an avenue of lindens, forming a carriage drive from the principal gates. Here we encounter many well dressed ladies and a group of dandies in lavender gloves and startling collars, who evidently use this part of the cemetery as a promenade, and whose presence is certainly not out of keeping with the well kept flower beds and smoothly shaven lawn, which seems to have been specially designed for them, and from which (we are thankful to say) they do not wander far.

Reminiscences of a Local Historian (4)

by Ron Woollacott

In the last issue I recalled meeting Elaine Bayly (Vivienne Browning), a former President of the Browning Society, and taking her to see the graves of the Brownings to whom she is related. After that first meeting we continued to keep in touch, and met again at FONC's Open Day. In August 1991 she wrote to say that she had now finished the biography of her father, Vivian Deacon, a Spiritualist medium and herbalist, entitled *The Uncommon Medium* and that it was promised for the Christmas market, adding that she would believe it when she saw it. It was eventually published in 1993.

In December 1992 Elaine wrote to say she had been out of circulation for some time having had major brain surgery and was looking forward to taking up her life again. Having recovered sufficiently from her operations, in August 1993 she wrote to say that she had lectured to the Boston Browning Society and on the love of Robert and Elizabeth in the Special Collections Room of Wellesley College, Massachusetts, where the love letters between Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are kept.

The last communication I received from Elaine was in March 2006 when she wrote from St Ives in Cornwall, where she was being cared for by her son. She wrote as follows: 'I don't do much anymore, though I do enjoy playing with my granddaughter. I'm afraid I don't remember very much anymore. My son John is helping me write this card. Love from Elaine.'

According to her son, her short-term memory was seriously impaired

from the effects of several brain operations in the mid-1990s. Although she enjoyed hearing from people from her past, she had difficulty in placing them, which is so very sad.

Elaine was born in Sydney, Australia in 1922. She came to England with her parents in 1930 and was educated at the Mary Datchelor School in Camberwell. In 1942 she was enrolled in the Intelligence Corps until 1946, in which year she joined the well-known potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979) at St Ives in Cornwall. On returning to London, she served with the Metropolitan Police and worked with the CID. She married in the 1950s and brought up her young family in Turkey and Ethiopia. She has broadcast on BBC Radio and TV and has lectured on Robert Browning in the USA.

In 2004, the American design historian, Joan Maria Hansen, whilst researching Lewis Foreman Day (1845-1910), the arts-and-crafts artist, at the British Library, came across a copy of my little book *A Historical Tour of Nunhead and Peckham Rye* in which I mention the artist and his family. She wanted to visit Peckham Rye and see the house in which he was born. Having contacted me by 'phone, she later came to see me at home. We spent an enjoyable morning discussing Lewis Foreman Day, his work and his family, and I took her to see the house where he was born overlooking Peckham Rye Common. She did not know where Day's parents and his siblings were interred, so I took her to Nunhead Cemetery. I had found the Day family graves quite easily many years ago, but the undergrowth defeated us that day. Nevertheless, she was pleased to see the beautiful cemetery in which they were laid to rest. Lewis Foreman Day, the subject of her book, is buried at Highgate Cemetery. Her large and beautifully illustrated volume entitled *Lewis Foreman Day (1845-1910), Unity in Design and Industry* was published in 2007, and she very generously presented me with a copy.

In March 2005 the features editor of the *South London Press* invited me to write a fortnightly column about Peckham. John Beasley, a fellow local historian and author, who had written a column on the local history of Peckham and Southwark, had suggested I take his place. This time, however, the features editor wanted something entirely different - in fact what

continued on next page

she wanted was a regular column about what it was like growing up and living in Peckham. Although I was born in Lewisham and lived in Brockley, my mother brought me to live in Peckham in 1942 when I was six years old. Our first house in Peckham was in Geldart Road, off Meeting House Lane, and this was followed by a house in Nutt Street, close to the Grand Surrey Canal; the house and the canal have long since disappeared. Our next house was in Pepler Road, near the Old Kent Road, also long gone and now covered by Burgess Park, where I lived with my family until marrying Maureen in 1958 and moving to Nunhead – so there was much I could write about growing up and living in Peckham and thereabouts. More than 100 articles were published in the newspaper between April 2005 and January 2009. In those days the *South London Press* was part of the Mirror Group, it is now an independent publication.

~~~ 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.

FILM NIGHT IN NUNHEAD CEMETERY: *Saturday evening 2nd September at 8.30pm. Part of the Peckham and Nunhead Free Film Festival.* Meet at the cemetery gates in Linden Grove. Film showing: *An American Werewolf in London.* Adults only over 18. **Free - first 300 persons only.**

LWT BAT SIGHTING WALK: *Thursday evening 7th September at 7.00pm.* Meet at the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove. To be led by Dr Iain Boulton.

OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND AND HERITAGE DAYS: *Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th September from 1.00pm to 5.00pm on both days.* General tours of the cemetery, crypt and chapel visits.

WOODLAND TRAIL TOUR: *Sunday afternoon 17th September at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

DIARY DATES *continued*

CEMETERY SYMBOLS TOUR: *Sunday afternoon 8th October at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH TOUR: *Sunday afternoon 15th October at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

MONTH OF THE DEAD TOURS: (Pre-bookings only): *Saturday 14th October. To book please visit:* www.londonmonthofthedeath.com/tickets

ALL SOULS SERVICE: *Sunday afternoon 5th November at 2.00pm.* An ecumenical service. Please meet at the FONC cabin near the Scottish Martyrs monument.

REMEMBRANCE DAY: *Sunday morning 12th November at 10.45pm.* Please assemble at the Limesford Road entrance.

FIRST WORLD WAR WALK: *Sunday afternoon 12th November at 2.00pm.* Meet at the FONC cabin near the Scottish Martyrs monument.

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 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 or by mobile phone 077 999 71 597. *Appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear is essential.*

Please note: *All tours and events are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances. If possible up-to-date information concerning any changes will be announced in FONC News or on our website www.fonc.org.uk and notice boards in Nunhead Cemetery.*

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The deadline for letters and articles for the winter issue is 19th October 2023

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

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