

# FONC News

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*Journal of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery*



*Mikayel Margaryan stands by the side of Sir Charles Fox's vault*

Photo: Jeff Hart      see pages 6 to 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** or email: [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 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](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**. 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**

## ***THE SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL OUR READERS***

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

**Contributors:** Michèle Louise Burford; Sue Burgh; Ann Coley; Jane Hart; Jeff Hart; Jeremy Partington; Bryan Welch; Garry Wiles. *The editor and FONC trustees do not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors.*

### ***Editorial:***

In this issue Jane Hart updates us on the restoration of the East Lodge and Jeff Hart provides an update on monument repairs as well as the regular cemetery news. Chairman Jeremy Partington reports on the FONC visit to Paddington Cemetery, and Garry Wiles locates the grave of a former superintendent of Nunhead Cemetery. Bryan Welch tells us about his visit to the infamous Picpus Cemetery in Paris, and Sue Burgh makes a long overdue visit to Nunhead to locate her family graves. Ann Coley visits Ohlsdorf Cemetery in Hamburg and Michèle Louise Burford discovers some interesting information about certain stained glass windows that were installed in the Anglican Chapel at Nunhead. We do hope you enjoy this issue and wish everyone an enjoyable Christmas holiday and a happy and prosperous New Year.



***RW***

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## **New Look Christmas Events!**

*by Jeff Hart*

**N**ow that Trustees meetings have changed dates and will be meeting on Monday 21st December (no rest whilst the East Lodge project goes forward!) we have decided that the usual FONC Christmas meeting will be a little different this year and it will be held on Monday 11th December. Although the El Vermut wine bar venue last year was much enjoyed, we don't think it will be big enough for this years' planned Christmas Social. We want the event to be a real celebration of the efforts of all FONC volunteers and members who have worked so hard over the past year for the benefit of the cemetery. There will be no speaker/

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presentation although we will hold the infamous FONC raffle which usually results in a mix of disbelief and hilarity. It may not solve all your Christmas present problems, but who knows...! The event will be held in the upstairs room at the Old Nun's Head pub on Nunhead Green and starts at 7.00pm. Light refreshments will be provided but drinks are on an own cost basis. Please do make an effort this year to come and socialise with other FONC members and swap experiences and feel free to bring partners along.

The first ever FONC Christmas Carol event will be held in the Anglican Chapel at 4.00pm on Saturday 16th December. All FONC members and members of the public will be welcome to join with us for the singing of some traditional Christmas carols in this candle lit and atmospheric venue. We hope to provide non-alcoholic mulled wine and mince-pies at the conclusion of the singing. Because the cemetery closes at 4.00pm, attendees are advised to arrive by 3.45pm and leave as a group at the end of the event via the Linden Grove gates.



## **East Lodge: from Ruin to Revival**

*The latest update by Jane Hart*

**A**fter many months of hard work, and what seemed like a never-ending review of draft reports prepared by the multitude of consultants during the development phase, the application for funding for the delivery phase of the East Lodge restoration from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) was due for submission of 16th November.

The NLHF awarded the joint application by Southwark Council and FONC over £100,000 funding towards the development phase costs in September 2022. Just before Christmas 2022 we finally received the 'permission to start' and then went out to tender to recruit consultants to help develop our proposal to restore the East Lodge. In all ten consultancies were appointed, with a tight timeline for completion of their work by end of October 2023 to enable us to finalise the delivery phase application. The consultants have helped us develop proposals, not only for the design and layout of the East Lodge itself, but through their work, have identified how the project will impact the wider cemetery. In the East Lodge, as well as a FONC office and reception facilities, the visitor expe-

rience will be enhanced through the provision of a café and accessible toilets with the local community benefitting from new financially and environmentally sustainable community spaces. The landscaping around the East Lodge will provide fully accessible step-free access to both floors and will include lawns and gardens planted with native species, bulbs and herbs.

**An Outreach and Development Manager** will be appointed for an initial 4-year period to develop a wide-ranging community led programme of activities and wider volunteering opportunities, partnering with local groups, aimed at attracting a more diverse range of visitors including children, young people, families from ethnically diverse communities, and those dealing with bereavement and the celebration and commemoration of the deceased. Connecting with nature; health, well-being and mindfulness; uncovering heritage; and remembering and reflecting are among the activity strands to be developed.

**The interpretation material** will embrace both the built heritage and rich natural habitats found within the cemetery gates. The new external interpretation will include welcome panels at both entrances drawing visitors into the site with guidance panels, separate to the interpretation, will provide key information, such as opening hours. Interpretation in the East Lodge will mostly be located in the reception area and the main first floor community room. In the reception area, visitors will be invited to view life stories of individuals buried in the cemetery. Interpretation in the community room will focus on the built and natural heritage of the site covering the history of the Lodge, its restoration, and the architectural vision behind the cemetery. It also explains how the ecology of the cemetery is managed and cared for, balancing the needs of conserving historic monuments with those of the natural environment.

**A new FONC cabin**, at the same location as the existing dilapidated one, will provide a more comfortable, accessible base from which practical volunteering activities can be undertaken. It will comprise a large kitchen/mess room, dedicated tools storage room and toilet for FONC volunteers. Two additional accessible public toilets, separated from the FONC space, will be made available when FONC events take place.

**The Business Plan** has looked at operational models for the East Lodge that will cover the costs of its future management and maintenance.

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nance, exploring the likely impacts on income and expenditure and governance models and seeking interest from potential operators. The marketing and selection process will take place early in the delivery phase to enable a future operator to be on-board at an early stage to help influence fit-out of the building. **A Woodland Management Plan** has been developed in line with the new Nunhead Cemetery **Conservation Management Plan** to set out a balanced and informed strategy for the management and maintenance of the trees and woodland which reflects the value of the cemetery to local people and wildlife. The digitisation strategy has focused on growing FONC's online content and reach.

We are not expecting to learn of the outcome of the application until the end of March next year, so there is now time to draw breath!

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## **More Major Monument Repairs for Christmas**

*Update and photographs by Jeff Hart*

**S**outhwark Council have committed to carry out a programme of work on large monuments in Nunhead Cemetery which continues this year and into the next financial year. The choice of monument to repair is based largely on the degree of hazard they present to visitor and the visual impact they present. The work carried out is to reinstate safely what is there to ensure their stability and, although missing parts are often found in the vicinity and are reinstated, the work does not include replacement of missing parts.

The work is carried out under contract to Conway, who infill dangerous vaults and lay concrete foundation pads, and who sub-contract Fulker Contractors who dismantle and re-erect the memorials. Work started on the current tranche at the beginning of October and is due for completion by the end of the year. This follows the completion of similar work at Camberwell Old Cemetery where the standard of work is excellent, as has been the previous work carried out by Fulker at Nunhead. Fulker's foreman is Mikayel Margaryan, an Armenian, who has been meticulous in ensuring that the work is carried out to the highest standard and has been assiduous in searching out missing parts which are often to be found yards away from the memorial they belong to and are fast disappearing

into the soil. Whilst we were earlier led to believe that the current programme would consist of six to nine memorials, additional funding has been found to enable 25 monuments to be repaired at this time. In addition, FONC is hoping to be able to finance some additional memorials to be added at the end of the current programme. In addition, FONC practical work volunteers have also assisted by removing almost impenetrable brambles from the vicinity of some memorials to enable Fulker's workers better access to carry out the repairs.

Although concentrated around the Anglican chapel area, two very large vaults of the Barnett and Hawke families, adjacent to the recently completed Briggs and Foreman vaults on the West Path, opposite the distinctive Figgins memorial, are being tackled. On the Scouts Path, near to the new burial area behind the chapel, four ledger-topped vaults with collapsing side and rear brickwork are being completely rebuilt. They are the vaults in which, in order from the chapel end of the path, are interred Hannah Beaumont Collins; John Patrick Rickartson, Ellen Gunter; and Dorothy Parker. The very unsightly flat ledger stone vault sinking into the ground behind the bench on the west side of the chapel is being in-filled and the broken pieces of the ledger stone pieced together. This is the vault in which Jonah and Elizabeth Weight are interred. Two currently unidentifiable vaults (FONC will check the burial records) nearer the chapel which have sunk dangerously below the surrounding ground are also being made safe. A little further along the path towards Windsor Walk, and close to the recently planted magnolia tree, the large Mason family and adjacent unidentified vaults have been re-set and



*The Mason family vault and the adjacent vault which has lost all trace of an inscription. Surrounding vegetation was removed by FONC volunteers*

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*The row of pedestal monuments over vaults commemorating (from left to right): Susanna Knight; Walford Stevens; John Parkes; James Hockley; unidentifiable; Arthur Browning Hockley (still to have its needle top added); Edward Samuel Shaw; George Hockley; John Anthony, Sarah, James Jesse, Sarah Morris and Charles Massingham Shepherd; Anthony & Elizabeth Shepherd.*

made safe. When opened, the Mason vault was found to be about 20 feet deep and containing at least seven coffins with room for several more.

Work is also being carried out to repair the red granite rounded ledger topped vault wherein lies Sir Charles Fox, the civil engineer knighted for his work in assembling Joseph Paxton's designed Crystal Palace in Hyde Park and subsequently removing and re-erecting this magnificent edifice at its new site at Sydenham. Next to Fox are two vaults commemorating Anne Maria Butler and Henry Carey. We believe that the missing top-pieces from both lie in the undergrowth behind the vaults which can be reinstated once the vaults have been re-set.

All but one of the remaining memorials consist of a row of ten smaller pedestal memorials in a row opposite the Mason vault. These were leaning at variously precarious angles, several with top stones laying half buried in the ground nearby. These have all been reinstated and now form an impressive group which transforms the visual impact of this part of the cemetery. There are some magnificent urns atop these vaults which were found almost completely buried behind the vaults they belong to. Finally, the imposing English Heritage Listed Proom memorial on the Main Ave-



nue, which is on the 'At Risk' register, is to have its grey granite surrounding ledger stones reset.

What a Christmas present this is for the cemetery! We are also promised a further tranche of repairs in the 2023/24 financial year, the choice of memorials to be worked on being in consultation with FONC.



*Anthony and Elizabeth  
Shepherd's urn*



*The Hockley (r) and Shaw (l) urns*



*Mikayel Margaryan stands by the side of  
Sir Charles Fox's vault*



*The magnificent urn atop the  
Knight pedestal*

# FONC tour of Paddington Old Cemetery

*Text and photographs by Jeremy Partington*

On the 23rd September 2023, a pleasant autumn day, a group of around 20 members of FONC made a visit to Paddington Old Cemetery. Lloyd, a member of the Friends of the cemetery, provided an informative tour, highlighting some of the monuments of famous cemetery residents and their accompanying stories.

Paddington Old Cemetery opened in 1855, one of the first permitted by the 1852 Cemeteries Act. It has had a number of names over the years. The London Borough of Brent is now custodian of the cemetery, having acquired the site from Westminster in 1986. Interments still take place. Whilst around half the size of Nunhead at 25 acres, it is estimated that almost 200,000 people are buried here.

A link with Nunhead exists in that the Anglican and Dissenters' chapels - which are linked with a central belfry between them - was designed by Thomas Little who also designed the layout of the cemetery. The Dissenters' chapel has not been used for several decades so still has the remnants of gas lighting. The Anglican chapel was used for funerals until around 20 years ago. Although currently inaccessible the Grade II listed chapels look to be in good external shape. However, neither is as imposing as the Nunhead Anglican Chapel. We saw Thomas Little's grave, a simple, albeit quite substantial raised monument although his name is carved (and eroded) such that it's difficult to read unless the light angle highlights it.



*The architect Thomas Little's grave*

Famous interments at Paddington Old Cemetery include Cuthbert Ottaway (1850-1878), the first England football captain. As well as being a member of the Oxford University team that won the FA Cup, Ottaway also played for Crystal Palace. He was also a renowned cricketer, playing for

Kent, Middlesex and England. He can also make what is probably a unique claim - to have represented Oxford University at five different sports. Another notable figure is Laura Bell (1831-1894) born in County



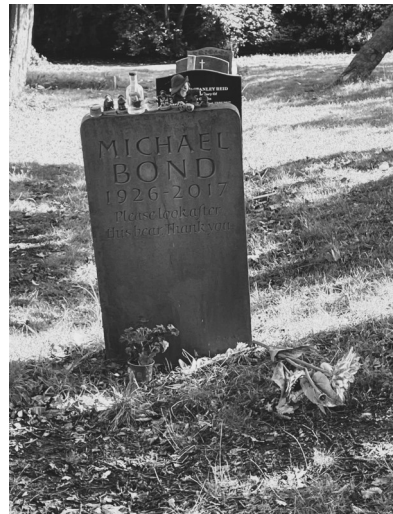
*Lloyd speaking to the FONC group  
about Laura Bell who rests beneath the  
Thistlethwayte monument*

Antim. Laura was a famous society beauty - first in Dublin and then in London. She was described as a courtesan and was reputedly a friend of both William Wilde, father of Oscar, and William Gladstone, the Prime Minister. History remembers that Jung Bahadur Rana, the Prime Minister of Nepal, fell in love with her in 1850 and over a 90-day relationship he spent £250,000 on gifts for her - at a time when

that was a lot of money! This equates to something like over £30m today. Laura married Captain August Frederick Thistlethwayte in 1852 so is buried in a substantial grave bearing that name. Later in life she became a Methodist preacher. Despite this, Queen Victoria never agreed to meet her!

There are also a number of casualties of the First World War, many with headstones dated 1922. With a number of hospitals in the area around Queen's Park and Willesden it is very likely these were men wounded in combat who died later from their injuries.

From our own era, the most famous person buried at Paddington Old Cemetery is - perhaps appropriately - the author Michael Bond. His simple head-



*The headstone of Michael Bond, creator of Paddington Bear*

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stone is carved with his famous phrase ‘please look after this bear’.

It is interesting to note that whilst the cemetery was thought to be ‘full’ as far back as the late 1940s, there are still some modern burials.



*A view across to Thomas Little's chapel and associated buildings*

These were originally head-to-toe along smaller paths (being the only available space) and now are in a modern sort of pre-prepared grave. On top of a man-made mound lines of squat uniform headstones, surrounded by gravel, are waiting to be pushed back to allow a coffin to be placed underneath.

After the tour, some of the party adjourned to the café

in Queen's Park for lunch, where we enjoyed catching up in the sunshine. With thanks to Cathy Mercer for arranging what was such an enjoyable and informative visit.

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## **Nunhead Cemetery News No 52**

*by Jeff Hart (FONC Co-ordinator)*

### **Parking in reverse?**

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, has caused a real stir (see Cemetery News No 51). However, after some heated meetings, at which FONC was present, the ruling Labour Council seem to be back-tracking a little. Having said that the public survey about the proposals was only about details and that the CPZ would be implemented irrespective of any objections received, the required statutory consultation originally intended to take place in October has been put back, with no new date yet announced. Noises are also being made by Councillors that this is not a

‘done deal’ amid threats of judicial reviews over the way in which Southwark Council have handled consultation. Our assessment of the likely impact on the vicinity of Nunhead Cemetery, if carried through, is that this is likely to be minimal. However, we will keep a watching brief.

### **Plenty of Bats and American Werewolves in the cemetery!**

The Peckham and Nunhead Free Film Festival showing of ‘An American Werewolf in London’ in the cemetery on 2nd September was a great success. The atmosphere was helped by a nearly full moon on that evening peering through the trees on the Main Avenue. The licence granted by Southwark Council limited the audience to 300 and the queue outside the gates for the 8.00pm opening started to form around 6.30pm. By opening time, FONC stewards estimated that there was something like around 450 people in the line stretching along the Linden Grove boundary wall! Unfortunately, this meant many people not being able to gain entry. We tried hard to inform people of this as early as possible and those who were disappointed were remarkably good natured about it. This may have been helped by telling people about the forthcoming evening bat walk in the cemetery on 7th September. This was led by Dr Iain Boulton who proved to be an inspiring bat enthusiast and was armed with plenty of modern acoustic bat detectors for the 70 or so people who attended. We can almost guarantee bat sightings and, indeed, between 30 and 50 bats were seen hunting near the Anglican chapel! So successful was the walk that Iain has not only agreed to lead a walk next September but also to lead an additional walk in March (see tour schedule in this issue).

### **Conservation Management Plan finally adopted**

The long-awaited draft Nunhead Cemetery Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was approved by the relevant Southwark Council Cabinet Member at the end of October just in time for inclusion as an essential element of the East Lodge NLHF delivery phase grant application. FONC has not yet received a copy of the final version but we believe that it is very similar to that which was consulted on in the summer and which we were very happy with. A more detailed report will appear in the next issue of *FONC News*.

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## **Cemetery bustles with activities and new tour guide**

Whilst we enjoyed something of an Indian Summer stretching well in to October, FONC events this autumn have come fast and furious. In addition to the film night and bat walk, Open House/Heritage Weekend on 9th/10th September saw visitors from far afield enjoying our cemetery tours and chapel and crypt visits, as well as our excellent home-made refreshments, helping to raise £574 for FONC funds.

Artist Urte Janus also curated a very well attended exhibition, with over 300 visitors, by various local artists in the chapel as part of the Nunhead Arts Trail on 23rd/24th September. The October symbols tour was well attended and the Month of the Dead tours organised by Antique Beat and led by FONC guide Keith Turpin were fully booked. FONC receives 20% of the ticket sales for the latter tours. Our Black History Month tour on 15th October was also well attended and there are further events to come in November and December. It is just as well then that we welcome a new FONC guide, Robert Dunn, to our ranks. Husband of Open Day Plant Stall and Journal hand-delivery co-ordinator Nicola Dunn, Robert is a qualified City of London guide. His first tour at Nunhead Cemetery will be on New Years Eve at 2.00pm so do come along and give him plenty of moral supports! Look out too for our new Christmas Carol event on 16th December (details elsewhere in this issue).

## **‘Notable’ developments**

We have recently been contacted by two organisations interested in helping to commemorate some of our ‘Nunhead Notables’. Surrey County Cricket club have asked about the grave of Bobby the ‘Guv’nor’ Abel, a Surrey player who still holds the record for the single highest run score (357 runs not out!) for the county, set in 1899. He was Wisden’s Cricketer of the Year in 1890. We have responded positively and pointed out that Henry ‘Harry’ Jupp, who played for Surrey, is also buried at Nunhead. Jupp played in the first two Test matches against Australia in 1877. There are also several other Surrey and Kent cricketers buried in the cemetery.

We have also been approached by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, London, who are dedicated to memorialising those veterans who do not have a marked grave. In 2016, we worked with them to commemorate Ensign John Davis with a grave marker at Nunhead Cemetery

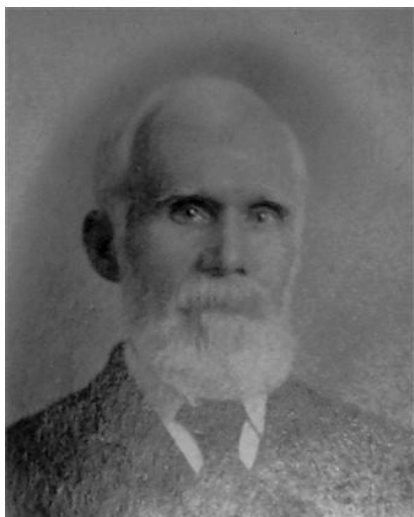
provided by the US government Veterans Association. It seems that nine other veterans have now been identified as resting at Nunhead and FONC is currently exploring their locations. We also have a Confederate veteran buried at Nunhead but, as the Confederacy lost the American Civil War, the US government does not provide memorials for their dead!

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## **Another ‘notable’ burial discovered at Nunhead Cemetery**

*by Garry Wiles*

**I**n 2022 I received an enquiry from the great-granddaughter of Robert Forster, who she advised was the Superintendent at Nunhead Cemetery in the early 1900s. She wanted to know whether there was a transcription of the inscription on the headstone and any information about the superintendent’s house where Robert Forster and his wife Martha Eleanor Forster would have lived.



*Robert Forster*

I located the grave site on the map for square 69 and discovered it was located behind the large Chillingworth monument next to the Stearns Mausoleum. This area is very sparsely populated with burials, so colleagues were able to locate the grave quite quickly. After clearing and cleaning, they revealed a three-tier stepped stone monument with kerbstone, and a very elaborate and striking stone cross, which had fallen and broken, but seems to have been placed very carefully within the kerbstone enclosure.

A photo of the cleared monument can be seen in this article.

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The inscription reads as follows below:

*TOP STEP:*

MATTIE  
MARTHA ELENOR FORSTER  
BORN JULY 28TH 1856  
DIED APRIL 24TH 1907

*MIDDLE STEP:*

..... LIVES MADE BEAUTIFUL AND ...  
BY SELF-DEVOTION, AND BY SELF-RESTRAIN

*BOTTOM STEP:*

ALSO  
ROBERT FORSTER  
BORN AUGUST 27TH 1854  
DIED JANUARY 25TH 1924  
WE THANK GOD UPON EVERY REMEMBRANCE/  
OF THEM

*CROSS:*

THY  
WILL BE  
DONE  
IN  
LOVING MEMORY  
OF

*FOOTSTONE:*

FAMILY GRAVE OF  
R & M E FORSTER

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The family later responded with the full quote on the middle step that is partially illegible. It is taken from a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Giotto's Tower, 'How many lives made beautiful and sweet, By self-devotion and self-restraint.'

They also provided photos of Robert and Martha, and another of the grave in its original glory which can be seen on request to Garry Wiles)

Robert and Martha Forster presumably would have resided in the East Lodge during Robert's tenure as Superintendent of Nunhead Cemetery, and there is a photo of this on page 47 of *Investors in Death* published by FONC.

Ed: A brief biography of Robert Forster will be found in the forthcoming volume number five of *Nunhead Notables* to be published by FONC.

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*The family grave of  
Robert and Martha Eleanor Forster*  
Photo by Garry Wiles





## **This terrible place: Picpus Cemetery, Paris**

*Text and photos by Bryan Welch*

**P**lace de La Nation is today one of those vast, featureless round points where Paris's grand boulevards terminate. In 1794 the Barrière du Trône was located there: the customs barrier where taxes were levied on goods entering Paris. From June to July 1794, during 'The Terror' unleashed by the Committee of Public Safety under Citizen Robespierre to 'safeguard' the French Revolution, this was a place of execution. The guillotine, introduced as a scientific and egalitarian method of execution, had been transformed into an instrument of terror. There were 40 to 50 executions a day at the Barrière du Trône, amounting to 1,306 in all. This bloodbath only ended after the execution of Citizen Robespierre and others of his party at the end of July 1794.

Mass executions require mass graves. The administrator of public works, who was instructed to find a burial site nearby, found a large walled garden owned by the Canonesses of Saint Augustine. They had left the area in May 1792 and let the property to a tenant who had established a sanatorium there. Much about the garden is unchanged from that time. Entering by a gate on Rue de Picpus, you see a large courtyard with a church and on its left a gate. This opens onto a very long walled garden laid to lawn with some trees at the far end. In the left hand wall there is a stone lintel set into the wall. This surmounted the gate through which the carts from the Trône rumbled at night with their grisly cargoes. A free standing stone door frame is all that remains of the small chapel that the nuns had built in their garden as a place of prayer. This chapel became an office where the clothing and possessions taken from their bodies were recorded before the victims were tossed into a communal pit.

To the right of this garden through another gate is normal looking paved cemetery with tombs. In one corner is the grave of General Lafayette over which the American flag always hangs. Having fought against the British in the American War of Independence he was granted citizenship. He is in the cemetery because his wife's mother, sister and grandmother are amongst those beheaded. At the end there are locked gates through which we can see an area the size of a large suburban garden. It

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*Plaque commemorating the 107 women and 1,109 men guillotined and buried in the Cemetery at Picpus*

by one they were cut down and their voices silenced. They have been canonised; they have also been immortalised in Poulenc's opera 'Les Carmelites'.

The cemetery is a private cemetery and only those with a relative who was beheaded may be buried there. So we see on the wall memorials to later members of the same families, including some who died in Nazi concentration camps. These remind us that the execution of those of the wrong religion, class or for their dissent from the ruling ideology did not stop with 'The Terror'.

When it became safe to do so the families of those executed searched for their graves and purchased the property. They built a chapel where the victims are recorded and prayers are said not only for the victims but also

is laid down to lawn with a few trees and monuments apart from two austere rectangles of gravel. It is these that mark the two common grave pits where aristocrats, commoners and the religious were thrown in indiscriminately. These included 16 Carmelite nuns from Compiègne who sang as they went to their execution, kneeling at the scaffold to receive their Mother Superior's blessing, before one



*Mass grave of guillotine victims*

the executioners and victims of oppression everywhere. On either side of

the transept there are large marble panels inscribed with names. Anywhere else we would take these for war memorials. Here they contain the names of the victims, aristocrats, soldiers, labourers, religious, trades people and so on. As with all memorials names are the most powerful feature. They remind us that the 1,306 victims, a cross section of society, were individuals like us.



*General view of Picpus Cemetery, Paris*

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## **A Long Overdue Visit !**

*by Sue Burgh*

On Wednesday 12th September 2023, my cousin Mick and I left home in Kent and travelled to Nunhead Cemetery in search of our grandparents' graves. We had for many years wanted to try and locate and visit the graves. I had an old photograph of our grandparents' grave just after our nan had been buried along with my granddad, Joseph Symes (1886-1936). Joseph had died on the 26th December 1936 and was buried on the 1st of January 1937. Our nan, Harriet Ellen Symes, *nee* Rutland (1887-1963), died on the 25th January 1963 and they were now reunited in grave number 39278, square number 144. Our grandparents were for Mick his mother's parents, and for me, my father's parents.

Our other search was for my grandparents on my mother's side. I knew my nan, Clara Annie Ashdown, *nee* Smith, (1885-1956), was buried at Nunhead, as again I had an old photograph which had been taken just after she had been buried. However, I did not know where my grandfather was buried, I had hoped he was in with my nan. So, our search was two-fold, one to locate the grave and two, to see if my grandfather had indeed been buried in the same plot.

On our arrival at Nunhead I contacted Garry Wiles to say we had ar-

*continued on next page*

rived, as he had very kindly offered to meet us at Linden Grove entrance with a map of the cemetery and an offer of help to locate the graves.

We headed off first to locate my nan's grave and this we found quite quickly and easily as we had the grave number 43556 and square number 164. After clambering over some old and broken gravestones, untangling ivy, holly and other natural tree and bush growth, we found the grave in quick time. On arrival, we could see a corner of the Angel incorporated into the headstone, so with the very kind and very much appreciated help of Garry, the three of us set about clearing the overgrowth and tidying up the grave itself.

To my happiness we found that my grandfather, William Joseph Ashdown (1879-1965), had been buried along with my nan, so that for me was a wonderful find and answered a long wondered question. We cleared everything away that we could move, and we placed the flowers we had brought with us on their grave. It was great feeling of finally doing something that was a long-awaited event for me, and it brought with it a sense of achievement and a very personal satisfaction.

After we had finished with my nan and granddad's grave, we took some photos and ventured off into the wilderness of such a fine cemetery to search for our grandparents to both of us: the Symes family grave. Unfortunately, although we had the grave number 39278, we didn't have a square number and despite Garry's best efforts of trying to locate the grave, without the square number it was going to be very difficult. So, once more with Garry's invaluable help, I joined Deceased



*Joseph William and Harriet Ellen Symes*  
(photo courtesy Sue Burgh)

Online and managed to find a plot number! square 144. We were off. Mick had a vague recollection of visiting the grave in the late 1960s with his parents and remembered turning right at the fork next to the monument to the Scottish Martyrs and then crossing over a small path on the left to the grave. So, with Mick's memory in working order and a square number we set off on our search; surprisingly Mick easily found it before Garry and I managed to catch up with him, and his memory was perfect - not bad for an oldie!

When we were all together, we once more thanked Garry for his expertise and invaluable help in locating our family graves, and he went on his

way to continue with the volunteers who were waiting for him. Mick and I set about clearing the grave, which had sometime previously been cleared by some other family members, but we had no prior information from them regarding the location and it had by now started to become overgrown with ivy again. We cleared it all away and Mick had brought with us some replacement vase cups for the flowers, so we replaced the old and broken holder with the newer one and Mick placed the flowers on their grave too. We also knew that a cousin of ours, John Rutland, who was disabled and had died aged eight on 26th February 1959, was placed in the grave with his nan and granddad, so it was great to be able to remember him as well. He was often spoken about when our families were younger and around us.

We both felt exhausted at the end of the day, but it had been such an exciting and fulfilling day that we felt very pleased with ourselves for finally paying our respects to long lost family members who were a part of our history and are now a part of Nunhead Cemetery's history. Neither of us knew our Granddad Symes, but we've always felt a strong family



*Symes family grave*  
(photo courtesy Sue Burgh)

*continued on next page*

bond with him and nan, and so this was a very personal journey for both of us, and for me to visit my Nan Ashdown and to find my granddad's resting place was with her was extra special to me as well.

So, our plan is to visit next year if we are still around and able to, and maybe try and clean the graves a little; it's an idea at the moment, but we hope to make it possible. It was an extremely interesting and informative day out and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and were pleased with the days' events

It was also good for me to meet with Garry, as I communicate with him through emails in a volunteer role with the FONC and again we both very much appreciated his hard work and the help he gave us, (and the cup of tea too)! We haven't stopped talking about our day and the satisfaction it gave to both of us, well worth the visit and so glad we managed to accomplish the task we set ourselves. Garry continued to search for another member of my family, David Smith, and found he was buried in a common grave, grave number 20622, square 34, and I appreciate his help in locating my uncle David. This visit is for another day.

We would also both like to say thank you to all those that work at Nunhead Cemetery, especially the volunteers and the FONC team; you all do wonderful, time consuming, yet satisfying and a fantastic job that is invaluable in keeping the grounds and history alive. Thank you all.

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## **A Visit to Ohlsdorf Cemetery in Hamburg**

*Text and photos by Ann Coley*

I hope we are not the only members of FONC who investigate cemeteries when they go on holiday. We don't choose a place based on its cemetery, but it is always good when we find there is one worth visiting, and even better when we can get to it easily.

As such, a sunny July Saturday morning found us in Ohlsdorf Cemetery. Yes we had done a little research in advance and knew it was huge but it was also opened in 1877 so we thought we might see some parallels with Nunhead.

Some facts - this is the largest rural cemetery in the world, and at 966 acres the fourth largest cemetery anywhere. That makes it 18.5 times bigger than Nunhead Cemetery, and more than three times the size of all of

the Magnificent Cemeteries added together. It has 230 gardeners to take care of it all and there are around 1.5m people buried.

It has two bus routes through it (and 25 bus stops). I found myself getting chapel envy as it has 12 chapels, and at least the ones we saw all had a roof, never mind the lakes and streams. Wikipedia tells me that about



*The View Tower*

two million people visit each year... which only makes me wonder more why the Café only opens Monday to Friday.

We wandered for three hours or so and only covered a small portion. There were a few grand memorials, but not really the variety that we are used to seeing in our own Victorian Cemeteries. There was a sensory garden though, and a clematis walk. I also liked the view tower although actually due to tree cover not much was visible.

As you can imagine, in such a large cemetery there are many special memorials and areas. In particular there are memorials for the victims of Nazism, the Hamburg firestorm, Firefighters and I am sure many others as well as a Commonwealth war graves site.

One of the most impressive monuments we saw was the Mausoleum Riedemann, which one of a dozen or so mausolea in the cemetery. Wilhelm Riedemann (1832-1920) lived in Hamburg between 1890 and 1917. He was a pioneer of tanker shipping and in 1890, along with J D Rockefeller, F Schutt and C Schutte he founded the German American Petroleum Company -



*The Riedemann Mausoleum*

later becoming Esso and now Exxon Mobile. The mausoleum is dedicated to his daughter Sophie, who died aged 19. Under the funeral chapel is

*continued on next page*

a crypt with 35 spaces.

German laws around the disposal of bodies are particularly strict, especially in relation to cremated ashes. For example only two German states allow cremated remains to be handed to relatives. In the rest of the country

the ashes have to be passed to a cemetery for burial or to placed in a Columbarium/urn wall. We did see some beautiful urns in all sorts of shapes that were decorated to reflect the personality or interests of the person contained. These laws have led to ‘Corpse tourism’ where the family have the deceased cremated in a neighbouring country and then have the remains handed to the family who then dispose of them as they wish. Interesting to note also that the costs of burial/cremation are so high in Germany that people donate their bodies to science in such numbers that some receiving institutions have started to turn away donations or have started to charge.

Like our own Nunhead, Ohlsdorf combines cemetery with nature and recreational space. It is beautiful and thought provoking and worth a look if you are in the area.



*Monument to victims of Nazi Persecution*

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## Faith and Hope

**Stained Glass Windows in the Anglican Chapel at Nunhead Cemetery**

*(Part 1) by Michele Louise Burford*

Many of us may have wondered what the original windows in the Anglican chapel at Nunhead Cemetery looked like

In 1844 Thomas Little, architect (1802-1859), won the competition to design two chapels at Nunhead, but his designs did not include any proposals for the window glass. A century later, during the Second World War, several bombs landed in the cemetery causing considerable damage, including the destruction of the chapel's glass windows. After the



war the windows were filled with plain glass, and when the chapel was set alight by arsonists in 1974 the building became a ruin, and has been without glass in its windows ever since.

I have recently discovered that the chapel did in fact once contain some stained-glass windows.

On the 15th January 1877 Mrs Jane Elizabeth Pickstock was buried at Nunhead Cemetery in grave number 2853, square 122. She was the wife of Dr George Newport Pickstock MD of Peckham. Dr Pickstock arranged for Messrs Clayton & Bell of Regent Street, a popular firm of stained-glass window manufacturers, to design and make a memorial window for his late wife to be installed in the Anglican chapel at Nunhead Cemetery.

The design, according to the *South London Observer* of the 29th November 1879, was of two of the three virtues described as 'two elaborately designed life size figures of Faith and Hope, with appropriate emblems.' The emblems were of a cross for Faith and an anchor for Hope. It was a stock design that was used by Clayton & Bell in other buildings, with slight variations in colour and dress, but the faces of the figures usually remained the same. An accompanying Memorial Brass pronounced the windows as 'a tribute to the memory of an adored wife and a valued friend,' with a text from Psalms 146:5, 'Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.'

*to be continued*

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**FONC's Christmas Social**  
**will be held at the Old Nun's Head pub, Nunhead Green, SE15**  
*in the upstairs room on*  
**Monday 11th December 2023 at 7.00pm**

Please do come along and socialise with other members and share your experiences and bring partners along. There will not be a speaker but the infamous and hilarious FONC raffle will be held  
Light refreshments will be provided but drinks are on an own cost basis

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The final part of 'The Reminiscences of a Local Historian' will be in the next issue of *FONC News*.

## **Friends of Nunhead Cemetery Tour Programme 2024**

**All tours start promptly at 2.00pm**

**(except Open Day and Open House or as indicated below)**

**Sunday 14th January Military Connections tour**

**Sunday 28th January General tour**

**Sunday 11th February Music Hall artistes tour**

**Sunday 25th February General tour**

**Sunday 10th March International Women's Day tour**

*Thursday 14th March at 6.00pm Bat sighting walk*

**Sunday 17th March Crypt and Chapel visit**

**Sunday 24th March Woodland Trail tour**

**Sunday 31st March (Easter) General tour**

*Saturday 6th April at dawn Spring bird watch*

**Sunday 14th April Cemetery Symbols tour**

**Sunday 28th April General tour**

**Sunday 12th May Second World War tour**

*Saturday 18th May 11.00am to 5.00pm Open Day: general tours, crypt visits*

*Saturday 25th May (Bank Holiday weekend) crypt and chapel visits*

**Sunday 26th May (Bank Holiday weekend) General tour**

**Sunday 9th June Woodland Trail tour**

**Sunday 16th June Waterloo Anniversary event**

**Sunday 30th June General tour**

**Sunday 7th July Cemetery Symbols tour**

**Sunday 21st July Crypt and chapel visit**

**Sunday 28th July General tour**

**Sunday 11th August Music Hall artistes tour**

**Sunday 18th August Military connections tour**

**Sunday 25th August (Bank Holiday weekend)**

*Thursday 5th September 7.20pm Bat sighting walk*

*Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th September from 1.00pm to 5.00pm Open House  
and Heritage Open Days: General tours, crypt and chapel visits*

**Sunday 15th September Woodland Trail tour**

**Sunday 29th September General tour**

**Sunday 13th October Cemetery Symbols tour**

**Saturday 19th October Two Month of the Dead tours (pre-bookings only)**

**Sunday 20th October Black History Month tour**

**Sunday 27th October General tour**

**Sunday 10th November First World War walk**

*Tour Programme 2024 continued*

**Sunday 24th November General tour**

**Sunday 8th December Woodland Trail tour**

**Sunday 29th December General tour**

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~~~ **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.

**WOODLAND TRAIL TOUR:** *Sunday afternoon 10th December at 2.00pm.* Meet your guide for the afternoon at the flint circle just inside the main cemetery gates in Linden Grove.

**FONC's CHRISTMAS SOCIAL:** *Monday 11th December at 7.00pm.* Old Nun's Head pub, Nunhead Green, SE15. *For details see pages 3 and 25*

**NEW: FONC's CAROL SERVICE:** *Saturday 16th December at 4.00pm.* The Anglican Chapel, Nunhead Cemetery. All FONC members and members of the public will be welcome to join with us for the singing of some traditional Christmas carols in this candle lit and atmospheric venue. *For details see page 4*

*See tour Programme 2024 for tours scheduled to take place in February and March.*

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**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 MIs in the 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.*

**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](http://www.fonc.org.uk) and notice boards in Nunhead Cemetery.*

# FONC TRUSTEES

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*Other Trustees:* **Oliver Lomer, Teresa Neary, Charles Newman,  
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\*\*\*\*\*

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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 21st January 2024*

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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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