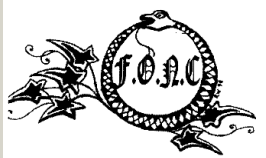


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# FONC News

No 169 ~ Autumn issue ~ Sept ~ Nov 2025

*Journal of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery*



*Restored monuments in the East Lodge enclosure. Photo: Jeff Hart See page 14*

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## ~ INFORMATION FOR FONC MEMBERS ~

**Membership including your contact preferences:** Membership of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery (FONC) costs £2 UK (£10 overseas if paper copy of FONC News is requested), renewable on the 1st April annually. 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 *FONC News*, for the purpose of reclaiming tax and to communicate other FONC matters. You can decide not to receive communications or change how we contact you at any time. Just send your request to [membership@fonc.org.uk](mailto:membership@fonc.org.uk)

**FONC Membership:** Please direct all membership enquiries to the Membership Secretary, Carol Stevenson. 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 notices 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 Enquiries Desk:** The Publications and Enquiries 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 cabin from 10.00am to 4.00pm on Sundays when cemetery workdays take place and from 2.00pm to 4.00pm on tour days or by post through the FONC website ([www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk)). If you would like to help on an occasional Sunday please contact Jane Hart on mobile phone 07764 600693 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 and are currently 'virtual'. Meetings are open to members in a non-voting capacity. If you would like to 'attend', please email [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)

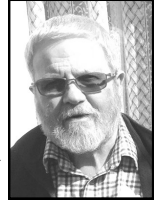
**Nunhead Cemetery Staff:** The cemetery staff can be contacted by telephoning **020 7732 9535**. If unavailable please leave a message or call the main cemetery office at **Camberwell New Cemetery** on **020 7525 5600**. The cemetery's address is: **Nunhead Cemetery, Linden Grove, Nunhead, LONDON SE15 3LP**

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

**Contributors to this issue:** Connie Beighton; Sue Bigg; Michèle Louise Burford; Jane Hart; Jeff Hart; Cathy Mercer; Carol Stevenson; Roy Vickery. *The editor and FONC Trustees do not necessarily agree with the views expressed by the contributors.*

**Editorial:**

We receive very few articles about Nunhead Cemetery's wildlife, so it is with great pleasure that we have two in this issue: one is about the White-letter Hairstreak, a rare butterfly by Carol Stevenson, and the other on Cherry laurel, a bush simply known as Laurel, is by botanist Roy Vickery.



In addition to the latest information about the restoration of the East Lodge by Jane Hart, and current news by Jeff Hart, including the latest monument restorations, we have articles about the Open Day by Connie Beighton; a touching article by Cathy Mercer about the memorial bench she had made for her late husband Simon, many years FONC's membership secretary; Sue Bigg reports on her visit to Waverley Cemetery in Sydney; and Michèle Louise Burford may have solved the mystery of the Great Vance's birth and parentage. We do hope you enjoy this issue. Why not send us an article or two, they are always welcome.

**Ron**



**Nunhead's East Lodge:  
From Ruin To Revival**  
*latest news by Jane Hart*



**A**t last, visible progress is now being made on both the replacement of the FONC cabin and on the restoration of the East Lodge itself. On the 9th of June, contractors arrived on site to start the removal of the very dilapidated FONC cabins (there were in fact two separate cabins with a space in-between used for storage giving the impression of one cabin). Amazingly, given the age of buildings, each was easily lifted in one piece from their positions to the front of the Scottish Martyrs memorial to be broken up and assigned to the waiting skip. The new pre-assembled cabin

*continued on next page*

arrived on site four weeks later and was effortlessly lifted into position. The new cabin looks fantastic, but unfortunately, at the time of writing, we are still awaiting handover whilst a few snagging issues are sorted out. These should be resolved by mid-August so FONC can then move into our new home.



*New cabin being lifted into position. Photo: Jeff Hart*

\*\*\*\*\*

Finally work has started on the restoration work of the East Lodge building. The work started with clearing the site and removing the scaffolding so that the building itself is now more clearly visible. The restoration



*Work on the East Lodge is progressing. Photo: Jane Hart*

work has been split into three separate contracts - the first is the structural work to the building itself - due to be completed by mid-April next year. This will be followed by landscaping to provide ramped access to both levels of the building and finally the fit-out of the new

building - due to be completed by July 2027. Everyone who visits the site has mentioned that it is great to see the restoration work actually progressing. It has been a long time coming to get to this stage but such a joy to see real progress at last!

*From Ruin to Revival - latest news by Jane Hart continued*

The East Lodge: Ruin to Revival project has also been of interest to other cemetery groups and we have recently hosted visits from Highgate Cemetery and St James Cemetery, Cork, to share our experiences in developing, progressing and finally starting the delivery of our restoration project.

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The Outreach and Development Manager, Catrin, has started work on liaising with partner organisations to develop a wide range of activities in the cemetery. The first of these activities have been two wellbeing walks - free guided sessions using nature-based mindfulness practices to support mental and physical wellbeing by helping to reduce stress, improve focus and deepen connection to nature in the tranquil surrounding of Nunhead Cemetery. These have been well received with participants feedback identifying their appreciation of the peacefulness of the cemetery and the use of mindfulness tools in supporting their wellbeing. Further sessions are planned to take place regularly over the next 3 years.

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## **Summer Arts Events in the Anglican Chapel**

*by Jane Hart*

A summer series of Arts events have been held in the Anglican chapel again this year with eight different artists hosting exhibitions. All have been pleased to exhibit in the chapel, recognising the octagonal nave as a beautiful unique exhibition space, though being open to the elements can bring some challenges! The final three exhibitions will take place in September with the final exhibition being part of the well-established Nunhead Arts Trail in the last weekend, the 27th - 28th September. As well as the art installations, a number of interactive engagement activities have been or will be featured. These have included a charm making workshop, a lichen identification walk and live harp performances. September exhibitions will include poetry readings and a live sound performance crafting stories that resonate with meaning and emotion. Details of the exhibitions can be found on the cemetery notice boards, and on the FONC Instagram page @nunheadcemetery



## **Nunhead Cemetery News No.59**

*by Jeff Hart, FONC Co-ordinator*

### ***Fungi foray for Nunhead***

Southwark Council Ecology officer, Liam Nash, has secured funding to enable a fungi foray walk for beginners to be held at Nunhead Cemetery. It will start from the new FONC cabin at 1.00pm on Saturday 27th September and will last between two and two and half hours, finishing with tea and biscuits at the cabin. The walk will be led by expert mycologist Clifford Davey who used to lead an annual foray for FONC many years ago! The walk is free of charge and does not need to be pre-booked.

### ***Series of Nunhead Cemetery podcasts now available***

Thanks to Tempest Productions, and with editorial oversight by FONC, an entertaining and informative series of podcasts about the cemetery and some of its 'Notables' has been prepared and is now being loaded on websites, including FONC's. Subjects covered include the Donkin family, the Leysdown Tragedy, the Scottish Martyrs and even the prophetess Elizabeth Peacock and champion swimmers! FONC contributed the very modest sum of £65 per episode towards script writer Bibi Berki and colleagues' considerable work on each of the ten episodes. The first five episodes can be accessed at:

[https://open.spotify.com/episode/5NdteVtcOFow4awbajj0P3?si=EVcLJ8hySWaa4\\_v1pm8kKQ](https://open.spotify.com/episode/5NdteVtcOFow4awbajj0P3?si=EVcLJ8hySWaa4_v1pm8kKQ).

It is hoped that this will reach an audience presently unfamiliar with the cemetery.

### ***In the doghouse again***

Since Southwark Council allowed the previous Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to lapse, there have been no controls on dog-owners taking their pets into the cemetery or either of the Camberwell cemeteries. FONC, with the support of our Ward Councillors, has been seeking to address this unsatisfactory situation and it seemed that there may be a route to do so by application of provisions within the Local Authorities Order 1977. Whilst discussions continued, we were then surprised to learn that Southwark Council have initiated a survey to gauge views on introducing a new PSPO to address anti-social behaviour in the Borough, which could include controls on dogs and their owners. The survey is/was available until the 31st of August and can be found at:

<https://engage.southwark.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/ash-survey-2025>.

FONC believes that a new PSPO is the best way to apply provisions for dog controls as these would then be enforceable and provide penalties for non-observance. The Board of Trustees will be submitting its views which will need to be considered if Southwark proceed with the necessary formal consultation on introducing a PSPO.

***We can't stand the rain...and good things comes to those who wait!***

Some years ago, Southwark Council invited residents to vote for schemes to improve their ward using funds generated from the Construction Industries Levy. FONC suggested a feasibility study to consider re-roofing the Anglican chapel, which would enable greater use of the building. This proved the most popular proposal with voters and a sum of £5,000 was allocated for this purpose. Then nothing happened for some years despite constant pressure from FONC. However, Southwark Council have now developed a draft brief to invite tenders to carry out the feasibility study and to propose and cost suitable re-roofing schemes. At the time of writing, we have not seen the final draft so we may have to wait a little longer - but you never know!

***Limesford Road boundary walls settling in***

Now that the Limesford Road boundary wall repairs have been completed (*See FONC News No 168*), FONC practical work volunteers have moved in to 'tidy up' in the area which bounds the Common-



wealth War Graves Commission site just inside the gates. We have cut back some shadowing undergrowth, filled some depressions in the grassed area with top soil and cleared the area between the memorial screen wall and the inside of the new boundary wall of debris and sapling growth. We have

*Grassed area between new wall and War Graves site.*

Photo: Jeff Hart

*continued on next page*

seeded the topsoil put down by the contractors and watered the area through the recent very dry spells. We have been rewarded with fresh green grass spouting healthily and a number of wildflowers emerging. Although some ash and sycamore saplings remain, we will root these out and continue to improve the area as part of the war graves site.

### ***Cultured National Federation meeting***

The first AGM of the newly constituted National Federation of Cemetery Friends Community Interest Company (*see previous FONC News*) was held in Bradford, this years' City of Culture, on the 14th of June and was attended by FONC Chairman Jeremy Partington and Trustee Jane Hart. It was hosted by the Friends of Undercliffe Cemetery who provided guides to the impressive site before the afternoon business meeting. There was some controversy about the Federation's advice in a legal case involving Calderstone Cemetery but the threat of legal action against the Federation seems now to have dissipated.

### ***Colfe School students muck in***

We were pleased to host 13 students and three staff from Colfe School in Lewisham as part of the Lewisham Community Day on the 19th of June. The enthusiastic group carried out work to clear memorials of vegetation along Windsor Walk, The Beeches and vicinity and were rewarded with home-made cup-cakes for their efforts! All agreed that they had an enjoyable and worthwhile day, giving many a new experience of conservation work.

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## **Cemetery flora: Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*)**

*by Roy Vickery (roy@plant-lore.com)*

**B**ushes of cherry laurel, usually known simply as laurel, can be found scattered around Nunhead Cemetery. Native to the Balkan Peninsula, laurel has been cultivated as an ornamental in Britain since early in the seventeenth century. It's likely that some of the bushes in the cemetery were planted, but others are self-seeded. In some woodlands, laurel is considered to be an unwanted invasive plant; nothing grows under its evergreen canopy.

Laurel's shiny leaves had a variety of uses, including love divination, poisoning of butterflies, and for flavouring milk puddings.

In Cambridgeshire in the mid twentieth century: 'A test for true love was to prick your sweetheart's name on a laurel leaf and wear it next to your heart; if the writing turned red all was well, but if it turned black, the young man loved you not'.

When collecting butterflies was an acceptable pastime, laurel leaves were crushed, placed in a screw-top jar in which the insect was placed, and lid screwed on, leaving the victim to die. The advantage of this method of killing butterflies was that it left them flexible, allowing their wings to be arranged however the collector wanted.

It is said that laurel was a favourite poison of the notorious Emperor Nero, 'crushed leaves were soaked in water and the resulting liquid given to unsuspecting victims.' However, despite this, laurel leaves had culinary uses. In Devon, during the 1940s, 'for flavouring milk pudding or old-fashioned blancmange a laurel leaf was dipped in milk, it gave it an almond flavour'.



*Cherry laurel-Prunus laurocerasus.*

Photo: Roy Vickery

The fruits of laurel have usually little flesh and look unappetising, although in recent times they seem to be becoming fleshier and succulent, presumably as a result of climate change. It seems that, although the fruits were eaten by children in Ireland, in England they were considered to be poisonous. Though there is one record, from Somerset, of them being stewed with apples.

Until the 1980s small laurel branches were used to decorate greengrocers' and butchers' shops at Christmas time. More enduring is the use of laurel leaves in wreaths used in commemoration ceremonies. For example, a wreath of laurel is placed on the statue of Samuel Johnson, in Lichfield, each year on a Saturday near the 18th of September, the anniversary of his birth in 1709.

# White-letter Hairstreaks in Nunhead Cemetery

by Carol Stevenson

The White-letter Hairstreak is a medium sized brown butterfly that has become increasingly rare in Britain because it requires elm flowers for its caterpillars, and since Dutch Elm Disease kills English Elm trees before they get big enough to flower, it is in trouble.

Fortunately, Nunhead Cemetery is home to a number of what we believe to be mature Wych Elms (as well as all the regenerating, but young English Elm).



*White-letter Hairstreak.*  
Butterfly Conservation  
Public domain

On the 23rd of June 2025 we were visited by Bill Downey and two colleagues from Butterfly Conservation. Among other roles Bill is the White-letter Hairstreak Champion and somebody who can recognise a mature Elm tree from a great distance! Joined by three Southwark staff and three FONC members, we walked round the cemetery and found a number of suitable trees, all of which had White-letter Hairstreak butterflies flying round their canopies! There were also plenty of other

butterflies - Large and Small Whites, Holly Blue, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral and Purple Hairstreak (which prefers oak trees).

Bill examined the Wych Elms and he told us that he thought they were actually the rarer Huntingdon's Elm, a nice thing to know. We finished off with a discussion of what we could plant to encourage more butterflies, both generally, and the White-letter Hairstreak.

Some of the trees, shrubs and low plants appearing in the cemetery over the next years may be there for more than just their beauty!



*Elm with fruit.*  
Photo: Carol Stevenson

## Nunhead Cemetery Open Day 2025 by *Connie Beighton*

**H**ow could anyone fail to be caught up in the excitement of Nunhead Cemetery's annual Open Day? I look forward to it for weeks, hoping that the Day's usual luck will hold and the weather behaves itself. What makes the day so special? Is it because the participants represent the very best of community spirit? Those stalwart FONC Trustees organising the stalls and shepherding the crowds, giving of their time and enthusiasm - they never fail us. We started coming when our daughter was nine - she is now 40 - and have seldom missed it, tiresome though the journey from SW London to SE London can be. This year we were accompanied by relatives from Australia who had never participated in anything like it. They were stunned to see such a vibrant crowd in a city for the dead but instantly appreciated the energetic atmosphere and the buzz.

What was 2025's Day like? Certainly, the weather was fine. It helps, of course, that mid-May - the most beautiful time of year for gardens and open spaces - is peak wild flower season, with the cemetery's pathways cutting through hip-high cow parsley, fragrant, white and lacey.

Every year I wonder who I might bump into, someone last sighted decades ago, and then there's the anticipation of combing through stalls to find something I didn't know I needed, but once sighted, I absolutely have to buy. Custom dictated that the food stall was our first stop (vegetarian slice with walnuts cannot be equalled) followed by the plant table. Though I'm not a keen gardener, or a good custodian of indoor plants, there's always something that will fit perfectly into a spot in the house or garden.

As usual the Main Avenue up to the chapel was busy with welcoming stallholders, happy to chat with everyone. I was delighted with an appliqued cushion, a present for a friend, and with a beautifully made patchwork pinafore dress for a granddaughter. The problem now is to remember where I've hidden them!

We browsed the Nunhead publications stall, looked at more plant stalls, and other inviting displays before coming across that talented man who makes wooden robots from off-cuts, facial features courtesy of nuts, bolts, keys and screws. Every robot definitely has a strong personality.

*continued on next page*

No question, but there had to be another one bought for a grandson, adding to his collection. It took us an age to walk up the Avenue, where our visitors wanted to know the history of the chapel and how it became a magnificent ruin. Surrey Quays City Farm animals drew children and adults alike, as did the funeral horses. Magnificent, calm giants, seeming to enjoy being stars of the show, though I suspect they also had expert handlers. Morris Dancers, choirs, it was all there.

Then I turned the corner and came across a lady selling unusual jewellery and hair slides. The penny dropped. I'd met her years ago when she'd opened up her house for passers-by going to Open Day so they peruse her collection of vintage kitchenalia and clothes. Ever since that day I'd searched for her open street door and never found it again. It was a thrill to see her this year in Nunhead itself and to buy some of her extraordinary things. A real serendipity to find her at Open Day itself.

It was time to head home and as we neared the main entrance our visitors continued telling us how much they'd enjoyed the event, and how it would be a good fundraiser to have volunteers with buckets at the cemetery gates for visitors to either ignore or drop in something as a donation. I wondered if the idea would go against the day's ethos, but pass it on, nevertheless. Then it was off for the P12 bus to Honor Oak Park Station. It's a lovely route, but its timetable can be, shall I say, hit and miss? I discovered once aboard that it was going to terminate before it reached Honor Oak Park but was reassured when half the passengers helpfully told us that we could get off where the bus was terminating in Brenchley Gardens, take a route through Camberwell New Cemetery and we'd be by the station. Unable to resist walking through a second cemetery we followed their advice and it worked out well. Strangely, our visitors were thrilled to visit two cemeteries in one day!

It wasn't till several days later that I began to fathom my attachment to Nunhead Cemetery, an understanding sparked by the friendliness of the P12's driver and passengers. Once I gave it thought, it was so obvious. I grew up and went to school in SE London and so from birth was imprinted with the camaraderie and sociability of SE Londoners. I'm sure that Nunhead Cemetery's Open Day gives me my annual top-up of SE London traditions and long may that last...

NB. *Open Day 2025 was attended by 5,646 visitors.* Ed.

## Having the last laugh by Cathy Mercer

**M**y husband Simon died in July 2024. He always wanted to make the world a better place, and so he wanted to be cremated, with a simple memorial bench in Gladstone Park in Dollis Hill, at the end of our road.

Brent Council were very helpful. A park officer met me in the park and we discussed possible locations in the park and the details of their fine benches, which are made in a workshop in Inverness. I asked about the problem of recent thefts of memorial benches, but he told me not to worry, as the benches were now being cemented in place. Simon and I had discussed the memorial plate and come up with: In fond memory of Simon Mercer, 1955-2024, who loved Gladstone Park. From his wife Cathy, his family and his many friends.



*Cathy on Simon's memorial bench in Roundwood Park, Willesden. Photo: Courtesy Cathy Mercer*

The months passed and I received an email from Brent Parks saying that thefts of memorial benches had started again, despite the cement. They offered me the choice of another more secure park, one that's locked up at night, or asked me to sign a waiver, saying that I took full responsibility for the bench and would not

request a free replacement if it got stolen. The problem is that Gladstone Park is a large park used as a right of way and so is not locked at night.

I took just five minutes to think it over and decided to go with nearby Roundwood Park in Willesden, a very pretty park with magnificent Edwardian gates which is completely fenced in and locked up at night, so

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very secure. The decision really was a no-brainer, as I really did not want the grief or financial loss of losing Simon's bench and I did not want thieves to benefit from our loss.

Simon's bench is now beautifully positioned in Roundwood Park, near the café and opposite the children's playground. It is well used and, whenever I pass it, there is someone sitting on it. The only problem is that the bench and its memorial plate were already complete. However, I'm not sure that people read the memorial plate very closely, though if they do, they may wonder why someone who loved Gladstone Park is remembered in Roundwood Park. But I suspect that Simon is looking down from his cloud and having a good laugh at the mix-up!

However, none of this should be necessary. Stealing memorial benches is no different from stealing gravestones, or indeed from grave robbery, as ashes are often scattered round the memorial bench. The thefts are obviously done by organised gangs, who operate at night and have the equipment to remove and transport several benches at a time; benches that are fixed by large metal bolts, as the original stolen benches were, or with both bolts and cement, as was the latter case. These benches are sold on, and I cannot even start to imagine the criminal mentality of people who steal and trade in this way, benefitting from and increasing the grief and loss of the recently bereaved in stealing beautiful benches given for public benefit, clearly labelled as being in memory of cherished loved ones.

So, if you're offered a cheap bench, cash only please, just say no, especially if it's got a blank patch where the memorial plaque should be!

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## **Latest Tranche of Monument Repairs Completed** *report and photographs by Jeff Hart*

**A**s reported in the last issue of *FONC News*, Southwark Council's contractors, Conway, began work on the latest tranche of monument repairs that had been identified by FONC. We have been delighted by the quality of work carried out, and we were able to make a financial contribution to enable more monuments than originally intended to be included in the work programme, which was completed at the end of July 2025.

Work started after the Easter break on the first group of headstones adjacent to that of Jenny Hill, the 'Vital Spark', that had been recently broken by falling trees over this spring. Work in progress was illustrated in the last issue but rather than the group of five memorials originally intended for repair, eight have been restored, including putting three broken crosses back together and finding a column buried in the ground which has been re-erected.

Three re-erected polished red Aberdeen granite memorials on The Slope give presence to the east side of the path whilst an open-sided vault opposite has been repaired. Another group of three pedestal memorials on the East Crescent are now revealed as an elegant group which include the obelisk-topped tomb of George Millar Robinson, a solicitor.

The huge monument to members of the Ravenscroft family, to be found near the war memorial on the East Path, was previously leaning at an increasingly worrying angle and its kerbing was regularly underwater whenever it rained. This now looks resplendent with its top-most cross now safe and sound. A little further down the path, on the opposite side, and adjacent to the war memorial, can be found the War Grave Commission headstone to Flight Lieutenant Douglas Barnes, who was killed on landing, having attempted to shoot down one of the first Zeppelin airship raiders in May 1915. His plot has now been tidied and the collapsed monuments in front of his grave re-built, providing a dignified and attractive group. What a shame that the missing parts of the figure atop the Manning memorial could not be found!



*The restored Ravenscroft monument*

Perhaps the most visually stunning group of repairs are those in the FONC side of the fenced-off East Lodge compound. Two vaults were reinstated in the last tranche of

*continued on next page*



Left. *East Path by the War Graves site: Headstone for Flt Lt Barnes. The Manning memorial is in the middle of the group.* Right. *Restored group on The Slope (from left to right) memorials to Butcher, Macpherson and Odell.*

repairs and this time seven further memorials in various states of disrepair were scheduled to be worked on. This needed Southwark's tree team to take down several invasive sycamore trees, which were undermining



#### Restored monuments in the East Lodge enclosure

Left. *The modest Hart tomb is fourth from the left, the Chapman memorial is on the far right.* Right. *Another view of the restored memorials towards the rear of the East Lodge.*

the memorials, to enable work to be carried out. Further shrub vegetation was cut back to give the tree team access. However, once work had begun, it became clear that ledgers adjacent to those vaults to be repaired would have to be moved to enable the work to continue. FONC successfully proposed that the whole group should be tackled whilst the necessary heavy equipment was on site, thus saving potential future costs, since these will be readily accessible to visitors to the restored East Lodge. As a result, it was decided to level the ground, and some fifteen



*The Chapman grave*



*East Crescent group including Robinson obelisk.*

memorials have now been restored. The fact that one of these vaults is the repository of the Hart family is purely coincidental!

Finally, when walking around the cemetery to identify candidates for repair in this tranche, we speculatively mentioned the ruined mausoleum of the Bevan family, which is situated at the junction between the East Path and the Catacomb Path. One of only four mausolea in the cemetery, this had been badly vandalised in the early 1970s and was now almost invisible under thick ivy growth and sycamore saplings. Impossible to see what state the building was in, FONC was invited to remove the vegetation in order to assess what might be needed. Even we were horrified to discover how bad its condition was, with three-inch thick ivy stems growing through the remains of the roofless structure and with little intact brickwork which collapsed at the slightest touch! Having revealed what was left of the structure, it was clearly unsafe to leave it as it was, and so there was little choice but to either demolish what was left or to attempt a reconstruction. Fortunately, it was agreed to take the latter approach. Regrettably, for safety reasons, the original entrance to the mausoleum could not be reinstated but the original stonework which included the inscription: THE FAMILY TOMB OF GEORGE BEVAN OF GREENWICH LATE LIEU<sup>T</sup> OF H<sup>R</sup> M<sup>S</sup> 10<sup>TH</sup> REG<sup>T</sup> was found and included in the repair. A concrete roof has been provided on which the remains of the original stone roof now sit. Whilst the vault looks rather stark at present, FONC plans to introduce non-invasive planting in the vicinity to make a real feature of this newly evident structure.

*continued on next page*

All of this splendid work really adds presence to various parts of the cemetery and we are promised a further tranche of monument repairs next year. FONC is already giving thought to what we would like to see included for future repair.



*Please turn to page 25 for the story of George Bevan and his mausoleum.*

*The modest brick built Bevan mausoleum or tomb nearing completion in July 2025.*

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## **Annual General Meeting 2025 Report by Jeff Hart**

The FONC AGM was held on Saturday, the 28th of June in the Anglican chapel. It attracted over 30 members so the meeting met the required quorum. The meeting arrangements worked well, with the chapel proving again to be a suitable location for the AGM. Gazebos were set up inside the chapel in case of bad weather but in this instance, they were useful to provide shade from the blazing sun! The usual reports were well received, noting the considerable improvements made to the cemetery itself over the year and, although frustratingly slower than expected progress towards delivering aspects of the National Lottery Heritage Fund project. Questions from members were asked on the Limesford Road boundary walls, the impact of the Cemetery Conservation Management Plan, Gift Aid receipts and fees charged for Open Day stalls. All were satisfactorily answered and all reports were adopted unanimously. Oli Lomer stepped down as a Trustee and was thanked for his contribution and on-going work on the FONC Communications strategy. A third of the Trustees were required to stand down following their three-year term but could seek re-appointment. Jeff Hart, Keith Turpin and Ron Woollacott duly stood down but were unanimously re-appointed. Following refreshments prepared by several Trustees, a visit to the chapel crypt was much enjoyed as was chatting away to members old and new.

## Waverley Cemetery – The Cemetery by the Sea

*Text and photographs by Sue Bigg*

**W**averley Cemetery, one of the world's most beautiful cemeteries in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, Australia, can be encountered on the famous Coogee to Bondi coastal walk. The land was traditionally occupied by the Bidjigal, Birrabirrigal and Gadigal people prior to the arrival of the British colonisers.

In May 2024, on re-visiting Sydney where I lived for eleven years from 1979 to 1990, I booked a place on one of Waverley Cemetery's guided tours run by the Friends of Waverley Cemetery. Although it was a cold and blustery day, that did not detract from the informative and fascinating tour of the final resting place of some of the notables buried

there, where every grave tells a story.

More than 100,000 people are interred at Waverley Cemetery which has operated continuously for almost 150 years.

Famous people buried at Waverley Cemetery include Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, poet Henry Lawson ('the minstrel of the Australian



*Waverley Cemetery Sydney - Tombs with a View.*

people'), Test batsman Victor Trumper, Australia's first gold medallist swimmer Sarah 'Fanny' Durack (the world's greatest female swimmer who broke every record from 100 yards to a mile) and suffragist Catherine Winifred 'Kate' Dwyer.

Seeing every notable grave on my brief visit would have been an impossibility, but those I did see were very impressive. My favourites were the following:

Author Henry Kendall (1839-1882) once regarded as the finest poet in Australia and was particularly renowned for his poems and stories set in the natural environment. Author and poet Henry Lawson (1867-1922) who was something of a legendary figure in his lifetime with most of his

*continued on next page*



*Monument to Henry Kendall*

‘Nosey Bob’ was so-called because he claimed to have lost his nose due to being kicked in the face by a horse, but it was more likely due to syphilis. His executions were not always successful



*Grave of Charles Owen Peart*

best work being achieved by the time he was 35. Some of his most famous works were ‘The Drover’s Wife’ and ‘While the Billy Boils’. He was buried in a state funeral on the 4th September 1922.

Charles Owen Peart (1872-1896), a champion high diver who was only 24 when he was killed doing one his daring circus acts, diving from a 50ft tower into a 6ft x 6ft tank of water which was only 3ft 6ins deep!

Robert (Nosey Bob) Howard (1832-1906), Sydney’s longest-serving hangman.

‘Nosey Bob’ was so-called because he claimed to have lost his nose due to being kicked in the face by a horse, but it was more likely due to syphilis. His executions were not always successful due to the rope being too short, so several attempts had to be made. He executed the last woman

to be hanged in NSW, Louisa Collins (1847-, 1889) who was found guilty of poisoning her first and second husbands.

For anyone visiting Sydney, a visit to Waverley Cemetery is highly recommended. The Friends of Waverley Cemetery offer guided tours, usually taking place at 9.00am on Saturday mornings. To book go to [friendsofwaverleycemetery@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwaverleycemetery@gmail.com)



*Henry Lawson’s grave*

Further details about Waverley Cemetery can be found at: <https://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/cemeteries/about-us/waverley-cemetery>

NB. Jane and Jeff Hart have visited Waverley Cemetery and can confirm that its setting is spectacular!

## Alfred Peck Stevens *aka* The Great Vance

The Great Vance, a popular Victorian Lion Comique, is a Nunhead Notable and is featured in the following FONC publications, *Nunhead Notables*, 1984, by Ron Woollacott, revised 2002; *Nunhead and the Music Hall* by Rex Batten, 2000; *The Enigmatic Mr Peck Stevens or the Great Vance*, by Ron Woollacott and Michèle Louise Burford, 2018; and *Nunhead Cemetery - The Entertainers*, by Ron Woollacott and Michèle Louise Burford, 2023. Accounts of his life have appeared in numerous publications over the years including Boase's *Modern English Biography*, Vol III, 1901, and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, but the year of his birth and his parentage have never been discovered. However, following a brief correspondence between one of his descendants, Vances's two times Great-Granddaughter Wendy Campbell of New Zealand, and Ron Woollacott, and the meticulous research carried out by Michèle Louise Burford, the mystery surrounding his birth and parentage may finally have been resolved.

Email to Ron Woollacott from Wendy Campbell of New Zealand dated 25th July 2022: 'Hi Ron, I have just received your book on the *The Great Vance*. He is my two times Great Grandfather and I have really enjoyed reading it. I have been researching Alfred and Eunice for several years and it has been great to read and compare research. Would you be interested in any other information? I can understand if you aren't, as you must have searched many newspaper articles etc, at the time of drafting the book. I have been trying to discover who Alfred's parents are and even with the DNA test of my 90-year-old father have not been able to yet!'

Ron's reply dated 4th August 2022: 'Dear Wendy, Lovely to hear from you and to know our book has reached the other side of the world. I have long been interested in Vance especially so when I discovered he once lived in Peckham. Nunhead was once a private cemetery and was taken over by Southwark Council, the local authority, in 1975. They demolished Vance's memorial (a pedestal monument) among others, on taking possession of the cemetery in order to widen the path for the movement of heavy vehicles etc. I should like to see some sort of a replacement at some time in the future. I should explain that my daughter Michèle has done most of the research. When I started my research back in the 1970s, we did not have the benefit of the internet. Anything more you can tell us will be most welcome. With your permission I should like to mention your connection to the Great Vance in a future issue of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery's quarterly journal *FONC News*.'

*continued on next page*

Wendy's reply dated 7th August 2022: 'Hi Ron, I am happy for you to mention me and you could mention my father Henry Searle, who is 90 and the Great-Grandson of Alfred. The Music Hall Society got in touch with me about ten years ago as they restore graves and also put up Blue Plaques and they wanted to do so for The Great Vance but needed information about his birth. I do hope to solve that mystery one day. I have been using DNA but no luck yet. Do thank your daughter Michèle for me. I will keep in touch and will definitely let you know if I find his parents and birth information.'

Email from Wendy dated 4th August 2024: 'Hi Ron, Just thought I would get in touch as I am coming over to London in a couple of weeks and was hoping to catch the music hall tour of Nunhead Cemetery but unfortunately my dates don't work. I am still researching the Great Vance most weekends and still looking for his parents. I have had some interesting leads and been down a few rabbit holes, but nothing definite yet.'

I found this newspaper article 'A Yarn with the Great Vance'\* a few months ago where he talks about his birth (very exciting) but even though I have searched the 1841 census returns for Nelson Square and Blackfriars Road I still haven't been able to find a suitable household. Any ideas for what else I could look at with this new clue? I will be staying with an Aunt in Kew near the National Archives so maybe I can find something there.'

\*The article was featured in *The Evening News* on Saturday the of 11th August 1888, just a few months before Vance's untimely death on Boxing Day that year.

Ron's reply, 10th August 2024: 'Dear Wendy, Thank you for your email. Sorry for the delay in responding. Also, thanks for the newspaper cutting, that is one we must have missed. It is certainly most interesting but doesn't get us any closer to solving the mystery of his birth. Michèle sends her thanks too and says she may have made a break through which explains why we were unable to trace his birth and parentage. It makes interesting reading. I will send the information to you as soon as possible.'

From Wendy 11th August 2024: 'Hi Ron, Thank you for your reply. I had missed the newspaper article too and think maybe it was digitized after I had searched a few years ago. A great interview given the year of his death. That would be amazing if Michèle has found something. I will be keen to hear and can look at my DNA matches to help confirm.'

Ron's reply 15th August 2024: 'Dear Wendy, I trust you are well. As promised, I attach a Word file containing the research carried out by Michèle. We are interested to know if any of this information can be confirmed by the recent research

carried out by you. In any case it would be great if the information that Michèle has found can be confirmed by you. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.'

From Wendy 19th August 2024: 'Hi Ron, Thank you so much for sending. I seem to have the same people in one of my working trees but can't find my notes at the moment as to why I put them there. I agree with the birth year being 1836 due to his age on his first marriage certificate and being 25 in the 1861 census. He had no reason to change his age until later on I suppose, especially when he met Eunice, my two times Great Grandmother who was so much younger. His second wife Susan was younger too. I arrived in London yesterday but was pretty tired.'

Ron's reply 20th August 2024: 'Dear Wendy, We do hope you have fully recovered by now following your long and tiring trip from the other side of the world, and we thank you for your reply, and I feel sure we may have finally cracked the mystery of Vance's birth.'

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## **'The Great Vance' Solving the Mystery of his Birth?** *by Michèle Louise Burford*

When the popular music hall Lion Comique, The Great Vance *aka* Alfred Peck Stevens, died at the Sun Music Hall, Knightsbridge on Boxing Day 1888, his age was recorded as 49, which suggests he was born about 1839. Having carefully searched the GRO records, I was unable to find a record of anyone by the name of Alfred Peck Stevens or a similar name, so it would seem, therefore, that he was most probably born before the year 1837 when compulsory registration began in England and Wales.

When Vance was interviewed by a journalist in August 1888 he said he was born at a house in Nelson Square, Blackfriars Road, Southwark (newspaper article kindly provided by Wendy Campbell of NZ), and that he was orphaned at the age of ten and brought up by his grandmother, but I was unable to find anything to connect him with Nelson Square.

The place and year of his birth and parentage were unknown when my father Ron Woollacott and I co-wrote Vance's biography entitled, *The Enigmatic Mr Peck Stevens or The Great Vance*, published by FONC in 2018. The revised entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* by Nilanjana Banerji reads: 'Vance, Alfred

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Glenville (sic) [real name Alfred Peck Stevens] (1839?-1888), actor and singer, was probably born in London in 1839.' Please note that Glanville is the correct spelling of his second adopted name. Banerji does not name his parents.

Further research undertaken by me in 2023/24 may have solved the mystery surrounding his birth. I believe he was three years older than he claimed to be, and that he was most probably born in 1836, the illegitimate son of Martha Stevens, and that is why researchers have been unable to find a record of his birth. I think he was aged 15, and not 10, when his mother died in 1851, at which time he was living at Shard's Square in Peckham with his stepfather Henry Johnston Lloyd and maternal grandmother Sarah Stevens, who he himself said, cared for him after his mother's death.

The above deduction is based on the following research:

Martha Stevens, aged 21, was the unmarried daughter of Richard Stevens, a printer, and his wife Sarah, of 8 Holiday Yard, Creed Lane, London, when she gave birth to Alfred Stevens in 1836.

On the 30th of July 1838, Martha Stevens, a spinster, now calling herself Caroline Martha Stevens, married Henry Johnston Lloyd, a bachelor, at St Marylebone, and gave her father's name as Richard Stevens.

In the 1841 census, Henry Lloyd (aged 25) and Caroline Lloyd (aged 25) were living at Canterbury Cottages, White Post Lane in the Hamlet of Peckham, Surrey. Living with them was Alfred *Lloyd* (aged 5), who I believe is Alfred Stevens (see 1851 census), born in 1836, two years before Caroline Martha Stevens married Henry Lloyd. Unfortunately, relationships i.e. husband, wife, son, etc. are not shown in the 1841 census. Also, at the time of the same census, Richard Stevens (72), printer, and Sarah Stevens (grandparents of Alfred Stevens) were living in the City of London.

Richard Stevens, printer, of Holiday Yard, Creed Lane, St Paul's, London, died in 1843, aged 73, and was buried in a common grave, number 176, square 75, at Nunhead Cemetery on the 25th of August 1843.

In the 1851 census, Henry Johnston Lloyd, aged 36 [*born St Marylebone*] and Caroline Martha Lloyd, aged 34 [*born Creed Lane, St Paul's*] and Alfred Stevens (note the change in surname from Lloyd to Stevens), aged 15 [*born Lambeth*] were living at Shard's Square, Peckham, together with Sarah Stevens, aged 58, the mother of Caroline Martha and Alfred's grandmother. Alfred is recorded as the son-in-law of Henry Lloyd, but today we would say stepson.

Alfred Steven's mother, Caroline Martha Lloyd, died aged 35, at Shard's Square, Peckham, in September 1851 and was buried in a common grave, number 1979, square 4, at Nunhead Cemetery on the 8th of September 1851.

Vance himself resided for some time at No 3, Clifton Crescent, Peckham, Surrey calling it 'Slap Bang Villa' and that's where his first wife Jenny Vance *nee*

Parkinson died in October 1866. She too was buried at Nunhead Cemetery. Vance was buried in the same private grave, number 9234, square 78, in January 1889. Based on the above research, it would appear therefore, that Vance's maternal grandfather, his mother and his first wife, as well as the mystery man himself, are all interred at Nunhead Cemetery.

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## George Bevan and his Mausoleum

*Research by Michèle Louise Burford, text by Ron Woollacott*

George Bevan was born about 1785. He enlisted in the 10th Regiment of Foot as an ensign by purchase in September 1805. By 1810 he was a lieutenant, in which year he married on Saturday the 8th of September Miss Anne Deprose at Burnham in Buckinghamshire. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend George Murray. It is not known when George Bevan left the army. According to the census, in 1841 he was then a schoolmaster at Church Fields Academy in Greenwich. Residing with him were his wife, Anne, his son George, also a schoolmaster, and daughters Sarah and Sophia.



*The desecrated Bevan mausoleum in 1972. Photo: Ron Woollacott*

In 1845 Bevan purchased two catacomb cells in the Eastern Catacombs at Nunhead Cemetery for the sum of £15 each. Sophia, his youngest daughter, died at Church Fields in 1845, aged 13, and was laid to rest in the catacombs on the 17th of September.

His wife, whose name is recorded as Ann Winder Bevan in the burial records, died at Church Fields after an illness of two days, on the 22nd of September 1847, aged 55. She was laid to rest in the second catacomb cell on the 29th of September.

In the meantime, George Bevan had commissioned the construction of a modest brick-built tomb or mausoleum close to the catacombs. The first occupant was Eliza Bevan, aged 21, who died at Brentford in Middlesex and was laid to rest on the 9th of April 1852.

George Bevan died at Oxford Street, Marylebone on the 23rd of June 1853, aged 68, and was laid to rest in the mausoleum on the 30th of June.

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The burial service was conducted by the Reverend Thomas Hill, perpetual curate of Holy Trinity, Minories. The notice of his death published on the 8th of July 1853 in the *Home News for India, China and Colonies*, ended as follows: George Bevan Esq, late of Clifden House, Boston Road, Brentford. Also of Edgware, Middlesex, St Omer, France and Greenwich. Formerly a lieutenant in HM 10th Regiment of Foot.



*The reconstructed Bevan Mausoleum 2025.*

Photo: Jeff Hart

Annie Winder Bevan, aged 14 months, granddaughter of George Bevan senior, and daughter of George and Mary Bevan of Brentford, was the last of the family to be laid to rest in the mausoleum on the 9th of October 1854.

NB. The two catacomb compartments are numbered 495, and the mausoleum in square 119 is also numbered 495.

**Sources:** Burial records; Census 1841; *London Gazette*, 1st September 1807; *Stamford Mercury*, 21st September 1810; *Kentish Independent*, 25th September 1847; *Home News for India, China and Colonies*, 8th July 1853; Ron Woollacott, *The Victorian Catacombs at Nunhead*, 2003.

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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.** Meet near the flint circle just inside the cemetery's main gates in Linden Grove, Nunhead, London SE15 3LP. Tours take between one and a half to two hours. The Publications and Enquiries Desk will be present, weather and volunteers permitting.

**In addition to the monthly General Guided tours of the cemetery the following specialist tours and events will also take place:**

► Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th September from 1.00pm to 5.00pm on both days: **Open House and Heritage Open Days:** general tours, crypt and chapel visits, and visits to the East Lodge may also be possible. The Publications and Enquiries Desk will be present.

- ▶ Sunday 21st September: **Woodland Trail tour** at 2.00pm. Meet your guide at the flint circle just inside the Linden Grove entrance.
- ▶ Saturday 27th September: **Fungi foray** will be led by expert mycologist Clifford Davey and will start from the new FONC cabin at 1.00pm. (*see page 6*)
- ▶ Saturday 11th October: **Month of the Dead tours**. To book a place visit [www.londonmonthofthedeath.com/tickets](http://www.londonmonthofthedeath.com/tickets)
- ▶ Sunday 12th October at 2.00pm: **Cemetery Symbols tour**. Meet your guide at the flint circle just inside the Linden Grove entrance.
- ▶ Sunday 19th October at 2.00pm: **Black History Month tour**. Meet your guide at the flint circle just inside the Linden Grove entrance.
- ▶ Sunday 9th November at 2.00pm: **First World War walk**.
- ▶ Saturday 13th December at 4.00pm: **Carol Concert**. Gather outside the Anglican chapel. Refreshments will be available from 3.00pm.
- ▶ Sunday 14th December at 2.00pm: **Military Connections tour**. Meet at the flint circle just inside the Linden Grove entrance.

### **ALL SOULS SERVICE 2025**

Sunday afternoon 2nd November at 2.00pm. Please meet inside the cemetery at the new FONC cabin near the Scottish Martyrs monument.

### **REMEMBRANCE DAY 2025**

This takes place on Sunday morning the 9th November at 10.45am. Please assemble at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's monument and screen wall near the Limesford Road entrance.

### **PRACTICAL WORKDAYS IN THE CEMETERY**

*These 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, MI Co-ordinator at [foncinscriptions@gmail.com](mailto:foncinscriptions@gmail.com) or by mobile phone 07799 971597. *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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*Vice-Chairman:* **Carol Stevenson** - email: [practicalwork@fonc.org.uk](mailto:practicalwork@fonc.org.uk)

*FONC Co-ordinator:* **Jeff Hart OBE** - 020 8694 6079 email: [fonc@btconnect.com](mailto:fonc@btconnect.com)

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Please send all letters, news items and feature articles for publication to:  
**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 19th October 2025*

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

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