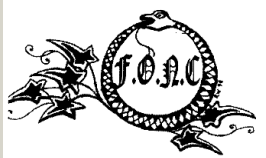


ISSN 1478-0631



FONC News

No 171 ~ Spring issue ~ March ~ May 2026

Journal of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery



*Jane Hart (left) with the late Gwyneth Kimble at Open Day 2024 (obituary on page 22).
Photo: Ron Woollacott.*

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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

FONC Membership: Please direct all membership enquiries to the Membership Secretary, Carol Stevenson. email: membership@fonc.org.uk

Further information about FONC and Nunhead Cemetery can be found on our excellent website managed by Simon Quill at www.fonc.org.uk

Cemetery Opening Times: 1st April to 30th September, 8.30am - 7.00pm; 1st October to 31st October, 8.30am - 5.00pm; 1st November to 28th February, 8.30am - 4.00pm; 1st March to 31st March, 8.30am - 5.00pm. *Times are subject to change.* See 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). If you would like to help on an occasional Sunday please contact Jane Hart on mobile phone 07764 600693 or by e-mail: volunteering@fonc.org.uk

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 for the Zoom website link. Other events are announced in *FONC News* and on the FONC website www.fonc.org.uk

Nunhead Cemetery Staff: The cemetery staff can be contacted by 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

Contributors to this issue: Michèle L Burford; Ann Coley; Nicola Dunn; Bruno Guillaume; Jane Hart; Jeff Hart; Cathy Mercer; Leslie Reilly. *The editor and FONC Trustees do not necessarily agree with all the views expressed by the contributors.*

Editorial:

By the time you receive this copy of *FONC News* spring will be almost sprung, but I believe that another very cold spell is on its way as I write.

There is a lot of interest to be found in this issue including stories about families buried at Nunhead Cemetery and looking for and finding their graves. More of these wanted please!

Rather sadly, we have to report the passing of a number of valued Friends. On a happier note, however, cemetery buffs might want to take advantage of Cathy Mercer's invitation to visit Tower Hamlets Cemetery and Park; she also writes about going to Heaven by way of Manor Park, and Ann Coley waxes lyrical about visiting a fascinating cemetery in Seville. Of course there is all the latest news from Jane and Jeff Hart about what's going on in the cemetery, and more besides.

Ron



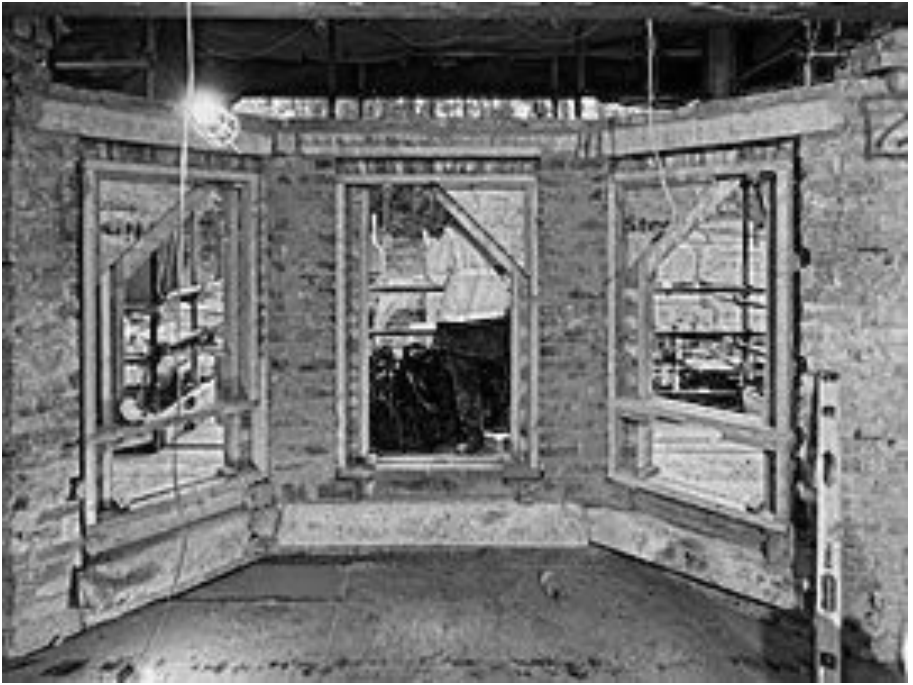
**Nunhead's East Lodge:
From Ruin To Revival**
latest news by Jane Hart



East Lodge re-build

The structural work on the East Lodge has continued during the wet winter months with the most visible being the construction work on the entrance portico with a storage area below - currently looking like a rather unattractive concrete box (see illustration on page 5). This will be clad with appropriate brickwork and the salvaged stone from the portico, which was taken down several years ago (before it fell down), will be reconstructed. The bay window to the south side of the East Lodge has been rebuilt (see illustration on page 4) and a temporary roof has been

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Reconstructed bay window in East Lodge.

Photo courtesy of PAYE.

erected. Work has commenced on repairs to the walls which will enable the structural roof steels to be installed to support the roof timber rafters. There is still a great deal of work to be done and a number of factors, including the wet weather turning the site into a quagmire, has resulted in a slight delay in the proposed completion of this phase of the work. It is, however, anticipated that the structural work will be finished by this June.

After the structural work has finished, the six-month contract for landscaping work will commence. This will include putting in ramped access to both levels of the building and terracing the grounds. The tenders for this work have been received and will be reviewed shortly. Internal fit out of the building will follow on after the landscaping work has been completed, by which time it is anticipated that the building operator will have been selected to enable their input into fit-out requirements. The end of July 2027 is still the target date for the completion of the building!



Photo: Courtesy of Roger Mear Architects.

In addition to the structural work on the building itself, work has commenced on the trenching work required for new water and electricity supplies for both the East Lodge and the FONC cabin during which time access to the cemetery through the Linden Grove entrance will be affected. Hopefully, any inconvenience will be kept to a minimum.

Concrete storage box that will be hardly visible under the reconstructed portico of the East Lodge.

Outreach and Development activities

by Jane Hart

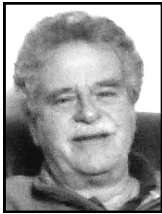
Following successful pilots of the ‘wild woodland adventurers’ sessions aimed at young children, these will now continue to be run on a quarterly basis. Although free to attend, participants can find details of the booking arrangements through posters put up on site and on Southwark Council’s website. Catrin, the Outreach and Development Manager, has also been busy liaising with a number of other partner organisations. Among the events in gestation are the arrangements for the first ‘Nunhead Cemetery Lates’ event to be held in conjunction with Goldsmiths, University of London. These seasonal ‘Lates’ events, aimed particularly at local residents who haven’t visited the cemetery before, to be

continued on next page

delivered by Goldsmith staff and students, will be aimed at providing a range of different outdoor activities for visitors attending the events. The first 'Lates' will take place on the evening of Friday the 15th of May 2026, the evening before the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day. Further details about this new event will be publicised on the noticeboards in the cemetery and on social media.

Nunhead Cemetery News No 61

by Jeff Hart FONC Co-ordinator



Service as usual

Our annual All-Souls Service and the Act of Remembrance held in November 2025 were both well attended. At the All-Souls Service, the Lighthouse Cathedral choir's singing drew a number of visitors into the chapel who stayed for part of the service. For the first time, a black poppy wreath was laid at the Remembrance Service on behalf of Southwark Council by Cllrs Reggie Popoola and Gavin Edwards to commemorate the contributions of black, African and Caribbean communities to the war effort.

Here we go a-Carolling!

The FONC Carol Concert held at the Anglican chapel on Saturday the 13th of December 2025, was a phenomenal success with more than 630 people attending! Our free refreshments, provided by a number of volunteers, and Ann Coley's special non-alcoholic mulled wine, warmed attendees and got them in the mood for some enthusiastic carol singing. There were many small children who also enjoyed the hot chocolate and participated in the singing led by the ad-hoc choir put together by Kate Jopling. As dusk fell and darkness descended, our resident crows, highlighted by a nearly full moon, seemed to join in with the singing, although more raucously! It was a magical event and we were amazed by the generosity of people who made donations for FONC funds on the night.

Raffle all the way

Although attendance at the FONC Christmas Social on the 9th of December was a little disappointing, a good time was had by all, with

FONC volunteers from different activities meeting others and swapping experiences of working in the cemetery. The owner of El Vermut wine bar, and her staff, were most welcoming and their potent mulled wine was a particular hit! Thanks are due to FONC volunteers who provided the refreshments and to those who donated items for our eclectic Christmas raffle. It was a great way to start the Christmas festivities and to thank all our supporters. And, of course, we toasted our dear Friend, Gwyneth (*see obituary on page 22*).

Christmas woollies

Thanks to Ann Coley, who did the knitting, and Pete Trotman, who helped place the twenty-nine items that were distributed around the cemetery from mid-December until early January to form the ‘Winter Woollies’ walk around the cemetery. These fun items were searched for by children and adults alike and provided a little festive fun during the generally overcast weather at that time. It is really encouraging that, despite their desirability, all twenty-nine items were successfully collected up ready for use next year!

Water works

A new FONC Sub-Committee has been formed to take forward the Biodiversity Fund Grant project to rejuvenate the pond area towards the top of the West Hill. Chaired by Harry Copp, site preparation has taken place, investigation into to a clay-based liner to help retain water has identified suitable material and quotes are being obtained for construction of the planned boardwalk and fencing. Work has started on enlarging and excavating the old pond with the help of Southwark Bereavement Services and the clay removed is being used to level the adjacent area that we hope to use as an outdoor classroom. The whole project is to be completed by November, if not before.

Read all about it

The new noticeboard on our splendid FONC cabin is attracting a great deal of attention from cemetery visitors. Information about our tour programme, practical work and inscription recording sessions and ad-hoc events can be found, together with contact details and even a

continued on next page

QR code through which to make donations to FONC. We are now fully settled into the cabin which provides a cosy and well-appointed base for our volunteers on site.

A long goodbye

On the 4th of November we waved good-bye to the 20' freight container used to contain FONC belongings decanted from the old FONC cabin prior to delivery of our new base. Sited opposite the ruined East Lodge, this container replaced the old freight container, gradually rusting away, that was used for storage which had been on site since 1996! FONC volunteers have now cleared, levelled and seeded the site so that hopefully all memory of this eyesore will soon be forgotten.

New Habitat creation

During November 2025, two additional practical workdays were facilitated and supervised by FONC volunteers. The first, organised by London Wildlife Trust's secondee funded by Southwark Council as the Woodland Recovery Officer for the Borough, Tom Brodie, took place on the 6th of November. This was followed by a FONC organised corporate workday for staff from Goldsmiths College on the 13th of November. Fantastic progress was made in clearing back invasive bramble, ivy and sycamore and ash saplings from the area from behind the Dissenters chapel site to the Welsh Path. This area had been cleared of headstones by the Council in the late 1970s and the undergrowth has now been taken back to the mature tree line and first row of remaining headstones to produce a scalloped edging of what is now an area letting in much more light. This will produce a more suitable habitat for invertebrates including butterflies, moths and various beetles and insects to colonise. Already flora such as winter heliotrope is emerging to enjoy the new conditions which FONC volunteers will continue to enhance and maintain in the future.

Speak up!

Pre-Covid, FONC was regularly asked to give presentations to various groups about both the cemetery and our work. However, demand seems to have fallen off dramatically as groups have been slow to get back to face-to-face gatherings. It needed a little dusting off, therefore, to provide a PowerPoint presentation to the Bexley Village Women's Institute last

November. With an audience of over fifty, and a number of memberships signed up and sales made, a generous donation helped to boost FONC funds.

Ladies Day at the cemetery!

International Women's Day falls in March and to mark the occasion, Jane Hart will be leading the popular tour of the cemetery seeking out the stories of some of the Notable Women buried there. It takes place at 2.00pm on Sunday the 15th of March 2026. Although attracting a largely female audience in the past, we do not discriminate against males! As usual the tours are free of charge and no prior booking is required.

Another apology

Unfortunately, our Black History month tour of the cemetery had to be cancelled at the last minute as a result of a bereavement in the tour guide's family. We were able to give as much notice as we could on social media and on-site on the day. However, we will run the tour in October this year which we hope will include new material.

Nunhead Publications & Enquiries Desk (PED) – desperately seeking helpers by Jane Hart

During FONC's practical workdays and when we run tours, FONC set up our Publications & Enquiries Desk (PED) in front of the FONC cabin. It's a great way to meet and talk to people about the cemetery, its history and future plans. And we also have over twenty different FONC publications for sale covering *Nunhead Notables* Vols 1-6 - about notable people buried in the cemetery, *Investors in Death* - providing a history of the London Cemetery Company, books on some of the notable graves to be found in the cemetery, Victorian symbolism, trees and shrubs, butterflies spotted in the cemetery, a colouring book for children, so basically something for everyone!

Although the practical workday volunteers cover the desk during the practical workday sessions, a small band of volunteers provide cover for the PED which operates between 1.45pm and 4.00pm on afternoons when we run cemetery tours - the last Sunday of every month and some

continued on next page

Sundays in-between. We also cover ad-hoc events from time to time. The FONC website provides details of forthcoming tours. We are now desperately short of people to help cover the desk so, please, if you are interested in giving back to the community, meeting and chatting with cemetery visitors, please do consider helping on the PED. Now that we have the new FONC cabin, providing decent shelter, superb heating and tea and coffee making facilities, volunteering is a lot more enjoyable - even when we have slightly inclement weather in the cemetery! Please contact Jane on e-mail: volunteering@fonc.org.uk for further details.

Obituary: Margaret Curtis-Whittaker (1934-2025)

by Nicola Dunn

I can't remember a time when I didn't know Margaret and she was Auntie Margaret to me as soon as she and my Mum met, while waiting for their daughters to finish the ballet class at Forest Hill - I was seven. Whenever they got together, laughter was guaranteed and days out to garden centres became a regular event in their retirement, as did growing plants for the stall at Nunhead Cemetery Open Day.

Interested and active in all sorts of projects, it was Margaret who first alerted Mary and Alan (Bavin) to the 1987 Open Day, advertised on an A4 photocopy, which I still have. This kick started their involvement with FONC.

In her 91st year, Margaret was still contributing to the plant stall, something that she loved doing since joining forces with Cy Dale and Mary in the late 1980s. Not only did she grow plants from cuttings, but she also had a keen eye for miscellaneous garden items that were discarded and so started the sideline of second-hand tools, pots, gardening books and ornaments, that to this day, attract a lot of attention at one



*Margaret Curtis-Whittaker. Photo:
Nicola Dunn.*



Plant stall—Open Day at Nunhead Cemetery 2018.

Photo: Nicola Dunn.

end of the stand.

As the friends worked together, the plant stall grew from one trestle table to the six or seven that we have now. The laughter and banter increased too, not just between themselves, but with the customers as well, who returned each year to tell them how their plants were doing. Margaret was also responsible for the 'booby' prize we presented to Jeff Hart at the end of Open Day (in 2015 it was the gnome!). Sometimes these items appear at the Christmas raffle and I have had the misfortune of winning one or two back. This year it was a book of yoga exercises with killed men demonstrating the moves - look out for that one at this year's raffle.

At her funeral, her great-grandchildren released a dove, which was a beautiful and appropriate farewell and afterwards, at The Brockley Jack pub, her family and friends celebrated a long life well-lived, by recounting their many happy memories.

Industrious as ever, Margaret already had a box of items ready for 2026, so although she won't be there, she will be in spirit.

Join Cathy Mercer's FONC visit to Tower Hamlets Cemetery and Park on Saturday 25th April 2026

A quick reminder of this visit to one of London's Magnificent Seven Cemeteries - see www.fothcp.org. Meet me at the ticket barriers at Mile End Station on the Central Line. We can walk together to Tower Hamlets Cemetery which is about five minutes' walk away. If you come by car, there are no parking restrictions on Saturdays on Southern Grove. The address is Cemetery Park Lodge, Southern Grove, London E3 4PX

To sign up for this trip and to learn our meeting time, please e-mail cathymercer@myyahoo.com or text me on 07943 925224, or ring 020 8452 5239.

Eliza Webb – Celebrating a hidden life *by Bruno Guillaume*

For the 20 or so years I have been a member of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, my interest has been primarily with the environmental characteristics of the site. We are blessed to have this nature reserve in our neighbourhood. I looked on the graves and tombstones with only passing interest and did not relate to the persons immortalised by the monuments. However, circumstances altered my perspective. Shortly before the COVID pandemic, my wife and I started researching her family history. I am from foreign lands, but my wife is local, raised in Camberwell. Our research received a boost during the pandemic, when Southwark Council provided access at home to family history databases available in their libraries. It was a revelation to find ancestors who were buried in Camberwell Old Cemetery, next to where we live.

We did not find any connections with Nunhead Cemetery until recently. I had laboured under the misapprehension that the commercial cemetery was a privilege for the wealthy, unaware of the thousands of paupers interred here. But now I know for certain that three of my wife's great-grandparents were buried here and, in their memory, I'd like to share with you the life of Eliza Webb, buried on the 8th of August 1951

in grave 42850, square 74. You will not have heard of her: like so many, she has been forgotten. And yet, her life, with all its hardships, serves to illustrate some of the great social achievements of the twentieth century.

Eliza Ann Jane Webb was born on the 22nd of January 1864 in Union Street in the Parish of St George the Martyr, Southwark, to William Robert Webb, general labourer and Eliza Isabella Webb, formerly Butler. She was their first born and was baptised on the 28th of February 1864. By the 1871 census, the family of William and Eliza had grown with two more daughters, though searches on the government's General Register Office site indicate other births and lives that did not go beyond infancy.

In 1881, Eliza Webb was 17 and living with her parents at 21 Kell Street, off Borough Road, where London South Bank University Buildings stand today. Her occupation is listed in the census as charwoman, like her mother. Her father's occupation is listed as furniture porter.

On the 8th of March 1885, Eliza Webb married Alfred Suatt, a 21-year-old carman, at the church of St John the Evangelist. The church still stands in Larcom Street, SE17, in Walworth. The marriage certificate has her mark in place of a signature: Eliza was not literate. On the 26th of April 1885, Eliza and Alfred were back at St John the Evangelist to baptise their daughter, Eliza Ann Suatt, born on the 4th of April. Over the next 21 years, they had a further 10 children, but all except 3 of their children died before reaching adulthood.

On the 31st of May 1886, Eliza Suatt gave birth to a boy, named Alfred after his father. He died of convulsions the next day. Her third child, Mary Ann (my wife's grandmother) was born on the 25th of September 1887. Rose Emily, born in February 1889, died aged 15 months, of convulsions. Ethel Jane, born in November 1890, died of measles, aged 18 months. Alfred Suatt, born in July 1892, died aged 15 months of congenital syphilis in St Saviours Union Infirmary. In October 1896, another Alfred Suatt was born, but died on the same day, accidentally suffocated during the process of delivery, as certified by the coroner following an inquest. At the end of January 1899, two more children died: Albert Thomas, aged 13 months, died of measles. Within a week, his brother Henry Richard, aged 3 years old, died of whooping cough of which he had been suffering for two months. A daughter, Louisa, was born in De-

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ember 1899 and is recorded in the 1901 census. In 1911, she was at the Children's Infirmary on Stanley Park Road, Carshalton. On the 19th of February 1917, Louisa Suatt, suffering from tuberculosis of lungs and spine, was admitted to Lambeth Infirmary, where she died two days later. In January 1901, a son, Alfred Richard was born who did survive to marry and have children. The last sibling, Ellen Edith was born in November 1906 when her mother Eliza Suatt was 42 years-old, but Ellen died of infection and heart failure at the age of three.

Alfred and Eliza Suatt raised their family in Walworth. All their children were baptised either in St John the Evangelist or in the church of St Peter on Liverpool Grove. They were poor and it seems that Alfred Suatt survived from hand to mouth. He is described in various records as a labourer, general dealer, hawker and costermonger. In 1893, he was fined for 'exposing unsound fish for sale' in the East Street market, Walworth.

One can only imagine the impact of losing so many children on Eliza Suatt and her husband. By 1915, Alfred Suatt was not in good health. He was admitted to the Workhouse Infirmary in 1915 and again in 1916 and on the 19th of April 1917, two months after the death of his daughter Louisa, he died of pulmonary tuberculosis in the temporary Workhouse Infirmary in Westmoreland Road, Walworth.

His wife, Eliza Suatt, was present when he died. He was buried at Nunhead Cemetery in grave 32803, square 153.

In the 1921 census Eiza Suatt is at 108 Barlow Street, Walworth, with her 20-year-old son, Alfred, a porter. She was still there in the 1939 Register, noted as an OAP and widow, but in the electoral register for 1948 she is recorded as living in Dawes House, SE17, newly built by the Metropolitan Borough of Southwark, where she lived until her death. She passed away on the 1st of August 1951 from heart failure at St Olave's Hospital, aged 87. Her daughter, Mary Ann registered her death and her grandson, David (my father-in-law) left his military service in Richmond, Yorkshire to come and support his mother at this time.

Mary Ann, who married George Moore in 1908, had many children, like her mother. David was her 12th child, but only one of her children died in infancy. Both mother and daughter lived their life in Walworth, but Mary Ann benefitted from improved social conditions and better public health. Eliza Suatt must have had a strong constitution to survive

to the age of 87 and she will have experienced slums and hardships, but her final years were spent in a flat with modern facilities and her last days were in the care of the National Health Service.■

To Heaven by Way of Manor Park

by Cathy Mercer

You know how it is, we FONC members like our cemeteries. I was meeting a friend in Manor Park and got there early - that's the super-fast Elizabeth Line for you. So, I thought I'd pop into Manor Park Cemetery - just around the corner from the station, and gosh, was I impressed.

Some 43 acres of graves and chapels, Manor Park Cemetery and Crematorium, to give it its full name, was founded 152 years ago in 1874. It's one of very few cemeteries still owned by its founders the original cemetery company, and it's full of East End heroes and heroines. Here are some highlights:

- Jack Cornwell VC - he earned his Victoria Cross at the Battle of Jutland, manning his gun to the very end, despite being fatally wounded, and all at the age of 16 (*see figure 1 on page 16*).
- John Clinton, who died at the tragically early age of 10 while rescuing another child from drowning in the Thames (*see figure 2 on page 16*).
- Sarah Dearman, who successfully led the matchgirls' strike at the firm of Bryant & May in 1888.
- Annie Chapman, Jack the Ripper's second victim.
- Wall commemorating victims of the 1943 Bethnal Green Station disaster.

Initially I thought Manor Park Cemetery would make a great FONC visit, but it is so easy to find your way round and locate significant graves, because the Cemetery Company celebrated their 150th birthday by making Manor Park Cemetery very accessible to visitors.

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The outstanding monuments are all clearly marked and there are full colour booklets to pick up with details of the incumbents. And all completely free. Even the cemetery paths have large clear labels, like street signs. The original chapel fell victim to Nazi bombing, but the 1955 re-



Fig 1. Monument to Jack Cornwell VC.



Fig 2. John Clinton's gravestone.

Photographs by Cathy Mercer.

placement is comfortable, with good stained glass. And loos! There is even a friendly coffee cabin by the main entrance. And it's so easy to get to Manor Park on the Elizabeth Line - turn left out of the station and left down Whitta Road and you're there in a couple of minutes.

If you want to make more of your visit, 2,000 acres of Epping Forest is on the doorstep - Manor Park's park is Epping Forest's most southerly section. And the Golden Fleece, a Green King pub, is a short walk up Whitta Road overlooking Wanstead Flats, another part of Epping Forest - it offers a great lunch bargain - sandwich, chips and a drink for just £8.49p (at time of writing).

But if you're a real cemetery buff, you might want to add nearby City of London Cemetery to your outing, again just a short walk away. At 200 acres and much grander than Manor Park Cemetery, it also deserves a visit. We are blessed in London with so many wonderful cemeteries, but perhaps none are more accessible than Manor Park Cemetery. ■

Visit to Cementerio de San Fernando (Seville)

by Ann Coley

What are the essentials for a good holiday? - nice food - a bit of culture - interesting buildings - some gentle relaxing - and, of course, a trip to a cemetery!

The internet has made cemetery hunting so much easier - Google maps shows me where they are, Wikipedia tells me a bit about them, and CityMapper tells me how to get there. Cementerio de San Fernando met all the criteria for a visit in October 2025, including a walk along a river, interesting monuments and a few interesting facts.

This cemetery is another one that is broadly contemporary with Nunhead - opened in 1853 (I suppose all cities were growing fast in the mid-1800s) and is 69 acres. It is roughly triangular with an 800m long central avenue. The main roads take the names Faith, Hope, and Charity, minor roads are mostly the names of Saints. Despite some patient searching I haven't been able to determine how many people are actually buried there (burials are still ongoing).

Whilst originally divided into Catholic and dissident sections, in 1932 the wall built in the 19th century to separate the two parts was demolished. This reflected the secular nature of the Second Republic.

Having done a very small amount of research, my main target was to find the tomb of the bullfighter Joselito (completed in 1926 - *see picture on page 18*). As always, these things can go one of two ways - you spend hours wandering around looking, or in this case, the tomb was just inside the main gate and couldn't be missed, seeing as it consists of a sculpture of several people carrying an open casket. The monument was so impressive it prompted a visit from King Alfonso XIII in 1930 to have a look.

Away from the monuments to bull fighters, artists and flamenco dancers, there was a vast swathe of family graves, mostly with their lids propped open giving a view of the stairs down to the burial area below. Off on the edges there was some rather colourful, (some might say garish) plastic floral displays. In an area where graves are lined up and pretty similar the decorations rather stood out.

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The impressive tomb of the bullfighter Joselito. Photo: Ann Coley.

On the day we visited there were a number of staff making sure the place was clean and tidy and replacing flowers.

As with most old places there is a bit of myth and mystery. In 1895 the sculptor Antonio Susillo made a bronze crucifix for the cemetery. No one knows why he did this, or who commissioned it. In 1896, days before Susillo committed suicide, visitors to the cemetery witnessed what they thought was a miracle - honey flowing from the mouth of the statue. Sadly, not a mystery at all, bees had settled inside the statue and the heat of the day caused the honey to melt. Many believed the miracle showed forgiveness though and indeed Susillo's remains were moved into the cemetery in 1940.

One of the reasons I find cemeteries fascinating is the window they give into social history. In complete contrast to the grand monuments round the entrance, I am rather more shocked than fascinated to find that there are eight mass graves, containing between them almost 29,000 bodies. Of these, three contain an estimated 4,000 victims of the Franco re-

gime. I have found a very dry academic paper ¹ that states that ‘the disposition of the bodies is contrary to the usual funerary rituals of the area’ which I think means they were just chucked in any old how without a wrapper, never mind a coffin. Work is ongoing to exhume and identify these remains and give them a dignified burial. A sobering reminder that history isn’t very far behind us.

As I always find, more wandering in cemeteries lead to more questions. In this case, who were the family Garcia Montoya and why does their monument have two life sized statues of men who I can’t help but think look like Hale and Pace (a 1990s comedy duo for any youngsters reading). In this case, the internet hasn’t been able to help me. ■

¹ The Traces of Repression in the Bones: Experiences of Exhumation, Identification and Anthropological Analysis in Mass Graves in Andalusia (Spain) <https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wfs2.70021>

My visit to Nunhead Cemetery

by Leslie Reilly of Ottawa, Canada

I have been doing genealogy for the last 25 years or so. I had an old newspaper clipping of the obituary for my great-great-grandmother, Matilda Sophia Jones who died in 1916 at the age of 81 and who was buried in Nunhead Cemetery. I wrote to the cemetery back in 1999 and Ron Woollacott kindly sent me the section number that she was buried in (along with her husband, George and three of their young children) and even told me of two other nearby graves associated with the family. I felt like I’d hit a gold mine.

This past September, I finally travelled from Canada to Nunhead with the hopes of seeing these graves. As we walked from the train station around the periphery of the cemetery, we could see how overgrown a lot of it was. We went to the front gates and saw a hut so we went there for help. We were greeted by volunteer Jeff and his wife, Jane. I showed them the old letter I had from Ron Woollacott and Jane pulled out a book and quickly found the section we needed. They looked at each oth-

continued on next page

er with a bit of a surprised look and proceeded to tell us that we were very lucky because that was the section that had just been restored. Jeff kindly guided us to the correct section and, to my delight, we found all three graves.

We were shocked to see in the section right beside ours what it would have looked like if we had come a month or two earlier. It was so overgrown and the graves were virtually inaccessible.

I'm so grateful to the Nunhead cemetery volunteers for restoring my family's graves. Seeing them stirred my interest to research the other family members in the other two graves. Right next to Matilda and George were George's parents and a young son they lost, and close by, in the third grave was George's sister, Amelia and her husband Thomas, and an infant son

I have now learned that, although they lost their first son, Amelia and Thomas went on to have at least ten more children. One interesting thing about their grave was that it stated the name of the street they lived on, very unusual in my experience and helpful in my research. While on our trip, I visited two other cemeteries where I knew other relatives were buried.

At one of these other cemeteries, there was absolutely no one or any office to help me locate the section I was looking for. In the end, after walking all over the cemetery, we found some workmen who directed us to the proper section. It took a lot of looking (and digging) but I eventually found the grave I was looking for covered in moss.

At the third cemetery I didn't know which section my relatives were buried in, only that they were there - from 'find a grave'. Fortunately, there were funeral directors there because the cemetery is still an active one. They looked up my relatives name and sent us off on our own to find the right section. It was a very large area and very overgrown so it was difficult to find. We persevered, however, and eventually found it too. Visiting these other two cemeteries made me really appreciate the work the Nunhead volunteers do. First of all, restoring the graves, and secondly helping me to find them.

I'd also like to comment on the work FONC does by producing a newsletter and other informative literature and running various programs in the cemetery. These need to be supported.

When I was there, the newsletter that was produced that month

showed the restored section containing my ancestors graves. Pretty cool!

The photo is of my great-great-grandmother Matilda Sophia Jones (seated on the right) a few years before she died and was buried at Nunhead. With her is her daughter, Lilian (my great-grandmother) and granddaughter, Phyllis (Lilian's daughter).

I'm afraid I don't have a photo of Matilda's husband, George J. Jones but I know from the 1871 census that he was a victualler running and living at the Angel Hotel, Islington High Street, with Matilda and three of their children.



Photo courtesy of Leslie Reilly of Ottawa, Canada.

Thanks again for all that you do at Nunhead Cemetery. ■

~ Subscription Reminder ~

Please note that all subscriptions are due to be paid on or by the 1st of April 2026. Donations are most welcome. The annual subscription is still £2 (£10 overseas if a paper copy of *FONC News* is required). If you received a reminder form with this issue please return it with your payment to FONC Membership. If you did not receive a reminder form that will be because you have already renewed or have sent FONC a bank standing order. We thank you for your continued support.

Obituary: Gwyneth Kimble née Stokes (1931-2025)

by Jeff Hart

It was with great sadness that we learned from one of her friends, Caroline Aldridge, that Gwyneth had died in Croydon University Hospital on Sunday 2 November, at the age of 93, after a short illness.

Gwyneth Stokes, as we always referred to her, was one of the very earliest FONC members, joining in 1982. She lived then in one of the cottages at the foot of Nunhead Grove.

She was born at Hartlepool to a father who served the turnstiles at Hartlepool United FC, although we don't believe Gwyneth was a football supporter herself! Gwyneth soon became a FONC Committee member and remained as a

Trustee until she decided to stand down in 2022. She was universally appreciated as a voice of moderation, kindness and good sense, always looking for the best in people and seeking to lend her support wherever needed. She would, however, argue her case strongly when necessary. She regularly encouraged people to visit the cemetery and was ardent in extolling its virtues. We believe that much of Gwyneth's working career was spent in medical administration, including working on *The Nursing Times*. She also spent time working in Australia. Gwyneth used her jour-



Gwyneth is presented with crystal glasses at her last NFCF AGM held at Brompton. This photograph was on prominent display at the FONC social in December 2025. Photo: Jeff Hart.

nalistic skills to edit and proof-read our members journal and various FONC publications for many years. She was one of the first volunteers to run the FONC Publications and Enquiries Desk on site at the cemetery and attended every annual Open Day at the cemetery, usually serving on publications sales, right up until 2025. All this despite the fact that she had moved to South Croydon when, relatively late in life, she married Peter Kimble, a retired Royal Navy officer. Typically, of Gwyneth, we did not realise that Gwyneth and Peter married on a beach in Hawaii until many years after the event! Sadly, Peter died in 2014. Of her many and varied interests, Gwyneth continued participating in poetry discussion groups and was passionate in continuing to maintain her large garden. On several summer occasions, FONC Trustees were invited to enjoy drinks and a buffet lunch followed by a tour of the garden. When Gwyneth stood down as a Trustee, she was delighted that we presented her with a framed print of the Anglican chapel at Nunhead and displayed it prominently at home with pride.

Although Nunhead was the starting point, Gwyneth's interest in Victorian cemeteries grew and she was a great supporter of the initiative in 1986 to form the National Federation of Cemetery Friends which then consisted of eight groups, including FONC. As a FONC representative, Gwyneth attended the first AGMs of the Federation, which were held all over the country. She was soon elected as the Secretary of the Federation, a position she held right up to 2023. In this capacity she assisted many cemetery groups in their early days and represented the Federation on national bodies. She also edited the NCF newsletter for many years. When Gwyneth decided that she no longer had the energy to continue with this work, she was appointed as the Federation's first Honorary President at the 2024 AGM held at Brompton Cemetery.

Tragically, although we continued to keep in touch with Gwyneth by e-mail in recent months, we were not aware of the severity of her illness. We understand from her friends that she requested no funeral. We were told that the solicitor in charge of her affairs would get in touch with FONC and we were informed that 'whilst Gwyneth did not want a formal funeral, wake or memorial, she asked you [FONC] to consid-

continued on next page

er regarding her death: “if some members would like to mark the occasion, you raise a glass at a ‘wake’ of some sort.” Also, up to £500 are available... towards the cost of such an event, should you wish to have one’.

Given the typically generous gesture by Gwyneth, the Board of Trustees decided that, to respect Gwyneth's wishes, members providing refreshments for the FONC Christmas Social would be reimbursed for the cost of ingredients etc and that we would pay for members' drinks at the event. At a suitable moment, Co-ordinator Jeff Hart gave a eulogy for Gwyneth and photographs were displayed, including the one illustrating this article.

Gwyneth was a trooper and FONC will miss her greatly.■

Professor James Stevens Curl (1937-2025)

Professor Curl died on the 5th of November 2025, aged 88, and it came as a complete surprise to me, because I was in touch with him just a few weeks earlier congratulating him on his most recent publication, *The Life and Work of Thomas Downes Wilmot Dearn (1777-1853)*. Perhaps I should have realised he was not in the best of health, because he said the Dearn book was to be his swansong. Back in December 2024 he wrote: ‘I hope you and Maureen are well. I read the *newsletter* each time it arrives with great interest. I thought the neglect of Bunning’s two lovely lodges was a disgrace. Dithering bureaucrats and politicians are a real pain.’ Referring to the Dearn book, he said ‘It will positively be my very last book as I have neither the time nor the strength to take on another big project such as a book.’

Older members may remember that when FONC was in its infancy, on the evening of the 22nd of June 1982, the then Dr Curl, a leading authority on Georgian and Victorian architecture, and I believe the first academic to draw the general public’s attention to the desperate plight of the great commercial cemeteries of the 19th century, delivered a fascinating and well-received lecture to an enthusiastic and crowded meeting of Friends entitled *Nunhead Cemetery in the Context of the Nineteenth Century Movement*. Prior to the lecture, Chris Knowles, FONC’s then vice-chairman, and his wife, Mary Anne Bonney, FONC’s secretary, had in-

vited Maureen and I to an evening meal and to meet Dr Curl. I was particularly interested, because long before the formation of FONC, Dr Curl had used my article 'A Brief Guide to Nunhead Cemetery', *Newsletter 4* of the Peckham Society, Feb/March 1976, when writing his paper on Nunhead Cemetery for the Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society in 1977. After that meeting Dr Curl and I kept in touch for 43 years, originally by post, sometimes by phone, and latterly by email. He often sent book reviews to me that were published in *The Critic*. The last one was a review of *The Cottage in Interwar England* by George Entwistle, in which the Prof lambasted the quality of work now being produced by some British printers. I shall miss hearing from him. ■ *Ron Woollacott*

Curious Snippets that mention Nunhead Cemetery (from old papers) *by Michèle Louise Burford*

***Zozimus*, 17th August 1870:**

'Piling it up'

It was somewhere in Cumberland, we believe, that another statue to the memory of the late Lord Carlisle was unveiled on Monday week. Another is in the course of completion for the Islington Cattle Market, and a spout to commemorate the deceased will be shortly opened at the gate of Nunhead Cemetery. It is cheering to find that great men live in their types and associations. Let the world sneer as it will we simply answer, Bah!

NB. *Zozimus* was a weekly satirical paper published in Dublin from May 1870 to August 1872.

***Jersey Express and Channel Islands Advertiser*, 12th November 1874:**

'Death of a Dwarf'

The remains of the well-known dwarf, John Heath, aged close on 63 years, were interred in Nunhead Cemetery on Saturday. Deceased, who was known as 'Tom Thumb the II,' was well known at Aldershot, where he was frequently exhibited. Mr C Heaps kept him for 33 years, and he attended his funeral on Saturday.

NB. I could not find John Heath's grave listed on Deceased on Line.

Open Day helpers needed!

An appeal by Jane Hart

The ever-popular annual FONC Nunhead Cemetery Open Day continues to be a must-attend event for locals living in the vicinity of the cemetery and beyond. However, for the day to be a success, it requires volunteers to help make it happen! This year is no exception. The Open Day itself will take place on Saturday the 16th of May between 11.00am and 5.00pm. So, would you like to meet new people, help with bringing this event together and contribute to the success of this fantastic community day? If you do, it would be really great if you could spare a couple of hours of your time to help at various points throughout the day. We begin setting up from 8.30am, where we start with erecting gazebos and then from 9.00am to 10.45am we need help with putting out tables and chairs, controlling and managing vehicles accessing the site and setting up the various FONC stalls. During the event itself we need help on FONC's own stalls - selling publications, badge-making, helping with refreshments, as well as stewarding and generally helping with site management. Then between 5.00pm and 6.30pm we need volunteers to help with the control of vehicles leaving the site, taking down gazebos, tables and chairs, putting them away and tidying up. If you can help with any of the above tasks, for an hour or so, please email Jane at volunteering@fonc.org.uk. Your help will be greatly appreciated. All volunteers receive a token for a free sandwich, drink and cake! In addition to volunteering on the day, donations of plants, homemade cakes and pastries are always wanted so please bring them along on the day!■

*** DIARY DATES ***

GENERAL GUIDED TOURS OF THE CEMETERY

These take place on the last Sunday in every month starting at 2.00pm. Meet near the flint circle inside the cemetery's entrance 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. Meet at the flint circle near the main gates in Linden Grove, except for the Crypt tours which start from the chapel.

- ▶ Sunday 15th March at 2.00pm: **International Women's Day tour** (see page 9).
- ▶ Sunday 22nd March at 2.15pm, 3.00pm, 3.45pm: **Visits to the Crypt and chapel.**
- ▶ *Thursday* 26th March at 6.40pm: **Bat sighting walk.**
- ▶ *Saturday* 11th April at 6.45am: **Spring bird watch.**
- ▶ Sunday 12th April at 2.00pm: **Military tour.**
- ▶ Sunday 19th April at 2.00pm: **Cemetery Symbols tour.**
- ▶ Sunday 10th May at 2.00pm: **Second World War tour.**
- ▶ *Saturday* 16th May 11.00am to 5.00pm: **Annual Open Day.** Tours, crypt and chapel visits, various stalls, choirs, Morris dancing, etc. (also see page 26).
- ▶ Sunday 24th May at 2.15pm, 3.00pm, 3.45pm: **Visits to the Crypt and chapel.**

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 and 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 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 and notice boards in Nunhead Cemetery.*

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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

The deadline for letters and articles for the next issue is 20th April 2026

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

Printed by Catford Print Centre, www.catfordprint.co.uk
and published by the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, LONDON, SE15 3RT

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