



The Friends of Southampton Old Cemetery

Spring issue of FoSOC Newsletter 2026

Very Sad News

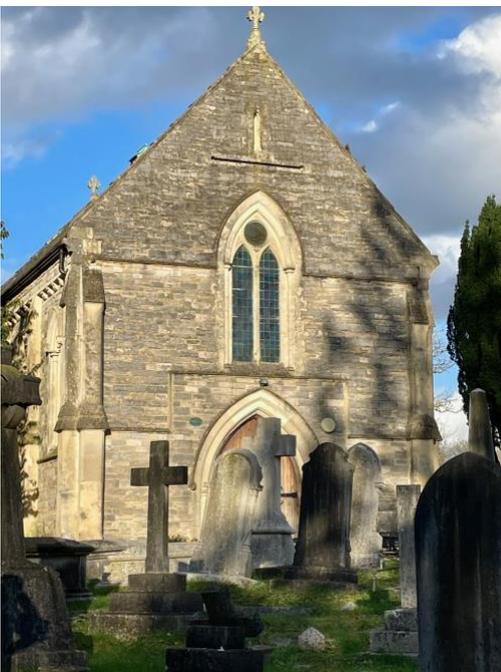
It is with great sadness that we reflect on recent losses within the FoSOC community. In November 2025, we experienced the unexpected passing of Professor James S. Curl, who served as President of the group. His loss was deeply felt by all who knew him and worked alongside him.

Tragically, in December 2025 we lost two other dedicated and hardworking supporters of the group: Sheelagh Horton and Nick Bryant. Their commitment and contributions to FoSOC were invaluable, and their absence will be profoundly felt by everyone connected to the organisation.



We are extremely fortunate that the FoSOC Treasurer had a photograph of Sheelagh Horton and Nick Bryant together, as Sheelagh was not fond of having her picture taken. This image will serve as a treasured memory of their friendship and dedication to FoSOC.

Celebrating 180 Years of the Old Southampton Cemetery – Sunday 10th May 2026, 10am-5pm



The Old Cemetery marks its 180th Anniversary in 2026. To celebrate this significant milestone we will be hosting a variety of activities on Sunday 10th May 2026 from 10am to 5pm, including:

- live music
- an informative talk and guided walks (booking on the FoSOC website, with limited spaces)
- displays on the history and importance of the cemetery
- artwork from King Edward VI School.

Both chapels on the grounds will be open to visitors throughout the day, with refreshments available.

All are welcome. Thank you to all who have volunteered to help – if you would like to help also, please contact fosoc1846@googlemail.com

The Weeping Beech

During the period between Christmas evening and Boxing Day morning, the cherished Weeping Beech tree in the Old Cemetery on the southern part of the main carriageway was uprooted. Its moods through the year have been wonderfully caught in photos by Bruce Larner as shown here, with more on the website. It was always well worth going to the cemetery in the different seasons of the year, to look at this wonder.



It was very sad to witness the magnificent tree, which had stood for many years in the cemetery, now lying on the ground. Having been present for countless events and changes, the tree had silently observed a great deal of history. For many members of the community it offered shelter from the hot weather, while others marvelled at the distinctive knots and bumps that had formed over decades on its trunk and branches. The Weeping Beech will long stay in our memories.



While some headstones were regrettably affected, it is reassuring that any damage has been relatively limited. Our thanks to Bruce Larner for documenting the progress of the fallen Weeping Beech on the website, including images captured using a drone, providing a unique perspective.

A member of FoSOC has taken cuttings from the fallen tree, hoping that they may eventually grow again. However, it will take many decades for any new growth to resemble the original tree. Fingers crossed for the future!

Words: Val Ferguson and Geoff Watts; Photos: Bruce Larner

Upcoming Events

During Spring, Summer and Autumn there will be at least one heritage event and one wildlife event each month, however, they are subject to a FoSOC volunteer guide being available. In addition, our conservation work continues throughout the year.

Booking is advisable for all talks/walks to avoid disappointment (see FoSOC website).

Numbers are limited, maximum 25 persons per walk.

Please be aware of the weather, sturdy clothes for the cold and wet and at all times suitable footwear and plenty of water for when it's HOT!

All talks are around 1 hour and all walks last up to around 90 minutes but some Titanic walks are longer due to the amount of graves visited.

These events are free, though if possible a donation is very much welcome. All walks approved by Southampton City Council and subject to the UK Guidelines. Please note: due to unforeseen circumstances events can be cancelled/postponed.

Saturday 11th April 11am: Titanic Walk – Survivors



Back for a second time, FoSOC guides centre on the stories of the survivors of the sinking of the RMS 'Titanic'. There will be a display in the former Non-Conformist Chapel to view. This walk will be around 1 hour.

Sunday 12th April 11am: Titanic Talk – Southampton and RMS Titanic



A talk by Geoff Watts focusing on how RMS 'Titanic' came to be here so as to be able, important for the then town, to leave from Southampton on its maiden voyage, and the tremendous impact its subsequent loss caused for people of the town. The ship, some of the passengers, and the voyage, feature as part of the overall Southampton story. Taking place at the former Non-Conformist Chapel in the cemetery, the talk will be around 45-50 minutes.

Sunday 12th April 2pm: Titanic – Longer Walk



A longer walking tour of the Old Cemetery, exploring connections to the sinking of the White Star RMS 'Titanic'. Good shoes are recommended and if HOT, a bottle of water. There will be a display in the former Non-Conformist Chapel to view. The walk takes more than 90 minutes.

Sunday 26th April 2pm: Spring Insects



An exploration of the rich insect life in the Old Cemetery, led by Phil Budd. If it is sunny or bright, we should see many and various pollinating insects, bees, hoverflies, bee-fly, small moths and butterflies. If cloudier, we will concentrate on what insects, spiders and invertebrates we can coax out of the trees, shrubs and grassland, including shield bugs and ladybirds. There should be plenty of other spring wildlife including flowering trees and singing birds. Magnifying lenses/binoculars may be useful. Please wear appropriate clothing and stout footwear. Meeting at the main cemetery entrance off Cemetery Road, SO15 7NN.

Sunday 10th May 10am-5pm: Celebrating 180 Years of the Old Southampton Cemetery



You are invited to a celebration of the 180th Anniversary of the Old Cemetery on Sunday 10th May. Activities will include **live music, free talks and walks, a display on the history and importance of the cemetery** and **artworks from King Edward VI School**. Both chapels will be open to visit through the day and refreshments will be available. In addition to scheduled activities there will be much more to see and experience. The Lord Mayor, Councillor James Baillie, the Right Reverend Bishop of Winchester, Philip Mounstephen, and the Town Crier, Alan Spencer, will be attending the event. FoSOC warmly welcome everyone to participate. Please take care moving through the grounds and ensure safety. Your support and presence are greatly valued.

Sunday 10th May 11.45am: Celebratory Talk – 'A Hampshire County Treasure'



This description of Southampton's historically, nationally, and locally very important Victorian Cemetery, was made by the late Professor James Stevens Curl, FoSOC's Founder President. In this talk, prepared for the Cemetery's 180th Anniversary Commemoration, Geoff Watts will be looking at the reasons why, and how, the Old Cemetery came to be on Southampton Common and the involvement with its creation of John Claudius Loudon and William Henry Rogers. Held in the former Non-Conformist Chapel, 45 minutes to 1 hour. *Limited spaces and booking only – see FoSOC website.*

Sunday 10th May 1.50pm: Heritage Walk Celebrating 180 Years



A guided walk about the structure of the cemetery and its notables. Around 45 minutes to 1 hour. *Limited spaces and booking only – see FoSOC website. The time of this walk might change due to the schedule of events during the day – please check by contacting: fosoc1846@googlemail.com*

Sunday 10th May 2.55pm: Conservation Walk Celebrating 180 Years



A guided walk about the history of, and why, certain trees, shrubs, flora and fauna came to be planted in the cemetery when it was opened. Around 45 minutes to 1 hour. *Limited spaces and booking only – see FoSOC website. The time of this walk might change due to the schedule of events during the day – please check by contacting: fosoc1846@googlemail.com*

Sunday 14th June 2pm: The Signs and Symbols of the Old Cemetery



A guided walk exploring the various signs and symbols engraved on some of the headstones in the Old Cemetery. During the walk you will learn about the significance of these carvings and how they may relate to the individuals laid to rest in the graves. Comfortable footwear is recommended due to the length and nature of the walk. If the weather is HOT, please bring a bottle of water to stay hydrated. The walk lasts about 90 minutes.

Sunday 12th July 2pm: Mid Summer Insects



An exploration of the rich insect life in the Old Cemetery, led by Phil Budd. If sunny or bright, we should see many and various pollinating insects, bees, hoverflies, diurnal fly species, grasshoppers, crickets, day-flying moths and butterflies. If cloudier, we will focus on what insects, spiders and invertebrates we can coax out of the trees, shrubs and grassland, including shield bugs, bush-crickets, coneheads and ladybirds. There should be plenty of other high summer wildlife to see including a range of flora and maybe early fungi. Magnifying lenses or binoculars may be useful. Please wear appropriate clothing and stout footwear. Meeting at the main cemetery entrance off Cemetery Road, SO15 7NN.

Saturday 18th July 2pm: Jane Austen



Last year marked the 250th Anniversary of Jane Austen's death. Due to popular demand, there is now another opportunity to be guided through the Old Cemetery, exploring all the connections to this highly admired author. Comfortable footwear is recommended due to the length and nature of the walk. If the weather is HOT, please bring a bottle of water to stay hydrated. The walk is over 90 minutes.

Sunday 9th August 11am: The Good, the Bad and the Sad

The Good, the Bad and the Sad

HERITAGE EVENT

A new talk by Geoff Watts looking at stories from the Old Cemetery that have, within them, one or more of these descriptions including the results of unfortunate decisions. Held in the former Non-Conformist Chapel, the talk will be around 1 hour.



Saturday 22nd August 10.30am: Late Summer Flowers



An exploration of late summer flowers, led by Phil Budd. When the Old Cemetery was first laid out in the early Victorian period it was planned as an arboretum, but as well as trees certain flora was established, indeed much of it was probably already there as the site had previously been part of Southampton Common. Subsequently the original flora has not been affected by being disturbed or sprayed with chemicals and over the years and decades more plants had been introduced on the graves. The Old Cemetery is now one of the richest parts of the whole Common for summer flora. We should see native plants like harebell, heathers, St John's-wort, rosebay, orpine, and devil's-bit scabious in flower. Non-native species include broad-leaved everlasting pea, the foodplant of the rare long-tailed blue butterfly which if it visits us this year, will be around in August. Magnifying lenses or binoculars may be useful. Please wear appropriate clothing and stout footwear. Meeting at the main cemetery entrance off Cemetery Road, SO15 7NN.

Sunday 6th September 2pm: Commonwealth War Graves



In this walk we will visit graves of the armed forces people who died during World Wars 1 and 2. These people were in uniform or in the services but happened to be in England for different reasons at the time of their deaths. Some were coming home on leave, others were stationed at or near home and some had been sent home because of their war wounds. We will hear their story and understand why they are commemorated by a Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWG). Comfortable footwear is recommended due to the length and nature of the walk. If the weather is HOT, please bring a bottle of water to stay hydrated. The walk is over 90 minutes.

Sunday 8th November 2.30pm: Remembrance Sunday Ceremony



FoSOC is pleased to announce they will be holding a Remembrance Sunday Ceremony on Sunday 8th November 2026. It will commence at 2.30pm at The Cross of Sacrifice, just inside the main entrance to the Old Cemetery. The ceremony will conclude at the Belgian War Memorial. All are welcome. If you wish to lay a wreath at either cross please do let FoSOC know and we will include this in the ceremony. There is no need to book, just come along on the day.

Upcoming Events

All walks and talks are free, though if possible, a donation is very much welcome. Please book on the FoSOC website at: <https://fosoc.org/upcoming-events/>

Arrange an Event

As well as the public events listed here, we are able to arrange, for an appropriate donation, private walks and talks for individuals and groups. Please contact us for details at fosoc1846@googlemail.com