



The Friends of Southampton Old Cemetery

Special May issue of FoSOC Newsletter 2026 Celebrating the 180th Anniversary of the Old Southampton Cemetery

On Sunday 10th May, from 10.00am to 5.30pm, an event was held at Southampton Old Cemetery to mark the 180th anniversary of the cemetery. The Programme was hosted by the Friends of Southampton Old Cemetery (FoSOC), supported by Bereavement Services, represented by Heather White FICCM(Dip)(Hons), Service Manager/Registrar, Bereavement Directorate (Environment and Resident Services).



The event began with the arrival of the Town Crier, Mr Alan Spencer, followed shortly afterwards by the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Winchester, accompanied by his wife Ruth and their dog, Noggin. The Lord Mayor, Cllr James Baillie, and the Lady Mayoress, Becky Baillie, arrived soon after.

The Town Crier then announced the Wessex District Sea Cadets Marching Band, who led a short procession with the Lord Mayor, the Bishop of Winchester and FoSOC Chairman William Ferguson.



After the band halted, the Lord Mayor spoke about how truly remarkable it was to stand in the cemetery on this occasion, drawing a link to a similar event held here 180 years ago. He noted that the cemetery began as 10 acres and has since grown to 27 acres, and that it remains active today, cared for by FoSOC in partnership with Bereavement Services.

The Lord Mayor concluded: "Today, we have all come together in this cemetery as a mark of respect and celebration. Our presence here signifies our collective intention to honour this special place, recognising its rich history and significance."

The Bishop of Winchester then spoke and reflected on the history of the cemetery, including the role of Charles Sumner, the Bishop of Winchester at the time of its consecration, before bringing this part of the ceremony to a close with a prayer.



Photos taken by Bruce Lerner



Wessex District Sea Cadets

After the Lord Mayor, James Baillie, and the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Winchester, had given their address and a prayer, the Wessex District Sea Cadets continued to entertain visitors for around 30 minutes. Their varied repertoire and bright harmonies combined with visual displays to bring atmospheric echoes of maritime heritage that were much enjoyed.



Bandmaster, S/Lt (SCC) Pete McCullagh RNR, Unit Training Officer Southampton Sea Cadets, DSO – Bands Wessex District. Photos taken by Tim Burden.



The Southampton Health Choir

At 11.00am everyone assembled in the Anglican Chapel for a performance by the Southampton Health Choir.



A large gathering filled the Chapel including the Lord Mayor of Southampton James Baillie, his wife Becky, the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Winchester, accompanied by his wife Ruth and their well-behaved dog, Noggin.



Photos taken by Bruce Larner and Tim Burden

A Porch to Eternity

At 12 noon, a talk was held at the Non-Conformist Chapel, titled 'A Porch to Eternity', and given by Geoff Watts. This was also a talk in honour of the late FoSOC President, Professor James S Curl, and a personal 'thank you' from Geoff Watts. The Professor passed away in November 2025, a great loss to FoSOC.



There was a very good and attentive audience that filled the chapel, and the talk was very well received.

Photos taken by Bruce Larner

The Shantywomen

At 1.00pm the Shantywomen entertained a large audience in the Anglican Chapel for 45 minutes, with many a sea shanty. Their harmonies and rhythms were much-appreciated by the audience, along with their storytelling and dramatic energy.



'Café' Open

At 1.00pm the Non-Conformist Chapel was turned into a 'Café'. Refreshments were supplied by FoSOC with many members supplying handmade cakes and biscuits. This was very well received, by all. Photos taken by Tim Burden.



Structure and History Walk

At 1.50pm was the first walk, Guided by Mr Graham Linecar.

Before setting off, an explanation was given of the national importance of the Old Cemetery as an early example of a municipal cemetery where the original structures survive, and 'scene setting' about Southampton in the 1840s.

We looked at the approach road from The Avenue, the Main Gate and Lodge. From the yew tree path, we looked at a section of what we think is the original iron railings on a dwarf brick wall on the 1840s boundary with The Common, and the race course.

We looked at the Anglican chapel, and the carved stone heads under the eaves. We walked along the main cross-carriageway and noted the sweep to the doors of each chapel. We looked across the valley talking about the landform before the cemetery and looked at the Loudon-inspired planting. We walked to the main spine path and talked about the drainage.



Then we went to the Hill Lane gate to see the brick and stone boundary wall – more substantial than the railings on The Common boundary. We ended at the Dissenters' chapel.

We acknowledged what we owe to two Southampton family businesses, the Doswell's, surveyors, who superintended construction of the Cemetery and the Rogers, who ran the Red Lodge nursery, who prepared the amended design, landscaping and planting in the Loudon 'gardenesque' style.



Words by Guide, Graham Linecar
Photos taken by Bruce Lerner

Trees and Shrubs Walk

At 3pm Phil Budd led the Trees and Shrubs Walk.



Phil pointed out the low growing Bottlebrush Buckeye from the southeast USA, not yet in flower, in the southern area, and the nearby Wellingtonia (Giant Redwood) which is currently leaning to the north at the same angle as the Leaning Tower of Piza. The group learnt that there used to be an Eastern Hemlock Spruce where the Wellingtonia is now located, but that former tree died in the 1980s. Like many trees from the eastern USA our winters aren't cold enough nor the summers hot enough for them.



Near the end of the walk, Phil amused the crowd by quoting Alan Mitchell's comments on his least favourite tree – the Red Horse Chestnut – now fully in bloom. Regarding the flowers, most of the spring species were finished for the season but there were fine displays of Wild Pignut in several places.

Words by Guide, Phil Budd

Photos taken by
Bruce Larner



Mike Blatchford and The Haze Band

From 4.00pm to 5.30pm the last act of the day was Mike Blatchford and his band, The Haze.



This was very well-attended, bringing the afternoon alive with people dancing and cheering. Photos taken Bruce Larner and Magen Sharp



A huge thank you to everyone in FoSOC who helped with, or came along to, the 180th Anniversary event. The day was thoroughly enjoyed and your support was very much appreciated.

More can be found on the FoSOC website from which this Newsletter is brought together, with many thanks to Val Ferguson and Guides Graham Linecar and Phil Budd for words, to Bruce Larner, Tim Burden and Magen Sharp for photos, and to Val and Billy and all involved for the myriad of ways they brought this special 180th Anniversary event together.