

Report from the Friends of Nonsuch.

2025 was a year of change for the Friends of Nonsuch. A new chair (Richard Harris) was proposed in November 2024 and confirmed at the AGM in May 2025. A new secretary (Richard Gill) also volunteered his services in May. There will be more changes to come after this year's AGM due to some of the long-standing committee members standing down, so we will be looking to find new volunteers for the committee over the coming months. This is one of the drawbacks of having long periods of calm and stability, where people don't have as much of an incentive to join organisations such as the Friends of Nonsuch.

The Friends of Nonsuch currently has three main ongoing activities. The first is the running of the two museums and bookshop in Nonsuch Mansion. The gallery is open every Sunday except over the Christmas period. The Service Wing Museum and Bookshop is open every 2nd and 4th Sunday from 12 – 4pm between April until the end of September. We currently have around 25 active Stewards who inform our visitors of the history of Nonsuch Palace and the Mansion House. Each room of the two museums requires a volunteer, so during the Summer, this requires around 16 stewards, split over two 2-hour shifts. Due to falling numbers of volunteers, the decision was made this year to stop opening on Bank Holidays until we can get volunteer numbers back up again. Even so, the visitor numbers for 2025 was an impressive 3,337, so on average around 66-67 per Sunday. Obviously, due to things like the weather, some days can be a lot busier than others. There have also been some school visits this year, where the Museums are opened during the week.

The second activity is to provide talks on various subjects at the Mansion House followed by refreshments in the Stables. This is particularly popular with our older members, including one centurion who attends every event. These are generally held every other month and due to the numbers who attend we have to hold these in the main part of the Mansion House, rather than in the Stables area. The subjects of these talks have been "Courtroom Dramas" – Stories from Peter Thompson, a former barrister; "Burmese Days" – a personal history of Burma (Myanmar) from Paul Whittle; "My Musical Journey" – stories and music with Rory Gilbert; "How We Developed Such a Taste for Tea" – with Rev. Michael Dunk; "Hannah – an Insight into Disability" – with one of the UK's leading disability campaigners: Hannah Deakin. We also held a singalong Christmas event in the stables in mid-December. The numbers attending these events tend to range between 25-40 depending on the weather.

Our third activity is our Thursday working party which meets up around 9:30 to carry out repairs/maintenance, prepare the museum/gallery and tend the garden outside the stables. The number of volunteers attending this has grown since the start of last year and on one particular Thursday in November we had 16 people all working together. Maintenance carried out last year included repairing and re-painting of all of the external doors into the

service wing, clearing out the drains to prevent further damp issues and flooding of the laundry, repairs to the rose arch in the formal gardens and much more.

After more than 3 years away, we were finally able to get back into our social media pages in February and start sharing news and events. This has raised our online profile and hopefully we can attract more people to either come along or even better, get involved.

The repair of the wall, steps and statues near the rear of the Formal Gardens that were vandalised in 2016 were completed last summer. This was a “pet project” of our former Chair: Gerald Smith MBE, who sadly passed away before he could see it completed. Whilst it was organised through EEBC, the Friends of Nonsuch paid the £12,129 cost of this repair. We will be adding a memorial bench in this area, dedicated to Gerald Smith and all the founding members of the Friends of Nonsuch. We would also like to thank Epsom and Ewell Borough Council for contributing towards the cost of the bench and for organising it on our behalf.

Finally, in 2026 we hope to increase our profile in the community and attract more people to get involved with the Friends of Nonsuch, whether that is by working with other local groups or by encouraging people to branch out from within the Friends of Nonsuch. Ten years ago, we produced a booklet called: Twenty-five years of The Friends of Nonsuch 1991 – 2016. The final page included a list of actions for the future, many of which are still outstanding. The new Solar Walk information boards in the park highlight the poor state of the current Nonsuch Palace information board, and also the lack of information on what is a very significant historical location. It was always an ambition of the Friends of Nonsuch to increase the amount and the quality of information at the actual site of the Palace and hopefully this is something we can get moving, especially if we can get other groups interested through the fledgling Epsom and Ewell Cultural Partnership.