

Shelley's grave re-visited

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The grave in Rome of Percy Bysshe Shelley soon became a place of pilgrimage for admirers of his poetry, and remains one today. Evidence derived from cemetery records, early visitors' accounts and depictions of the grave reveals how, during the 19th century, it acquired an aura of sanctity, an aspect of his posthumous fame that has not hitherto received much attention.

I.

Why were the ashes of Shelley, who drowned in July 1822, not buried in the grave of his little boy William who had died in Rome in June 1819? William's grave lay in the old Protestant Cemetery adjacent to the pyramid of Caius Cestius, which Shelley himself had called the most beautiful and solemn cemetery that he had ever beheld.¹ But in October 1821, the Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Consalvi, forbade the Protestants to make any more burials there and allocated instead an adjacent plot of land further west.²

Burials started to be made in this New Cemetery on November 8, 1822.³ In letters written to Charles Brown, Joseph Severn in Rome on October 26 declared that he had not yet heard about Shelley's ashes being dispatched to the city; but by December 7 he reported that they had arrived.⁴ Reminiscing fifty years later, the Reverend Richard Burgess recorded that he learned about the ashes when he visited the acting consul John Freeborn "a few days" after his arrival in Rome in the latter part of November.⁵ It therefore seems unlikely that the ashes had reached Rome much before, if at all by, November 8; i.e., they probably arrived after the New Cemetery had started to be used for burials.

Even so, for three weeks Severn and Freeborn tried to persuade the Papal authorities to make an exception to the new rule.⁶ Over the next fifteen years, several exceptions *were* granted, the first being as early as June 1823: C.C.J. Bunsen, the Secretary to the Prussian Legation, was given permission to bury his infant son Frederick in the grave of his year-old daughter Maria (died July 22, 1821) in the Old Cemetery. But it seems that a close family relationship was not sufficient

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, December [17 or 18], 1818, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 59–60.

² Nicholas Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome. Its history, its people and its survival for 300 years* (Rome: The Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome, 2014); Wolfgang Krogel, *All'ombra della Piramide: storia e interpretazione del Cimitero acattolico di Roma* (Rome: Unione internazionale degli istituti di archeologia storia e storia dell'arte in Roma, 1995); Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Il Cimitero acattolico di Roma. La presenza protestante nella città del papa* (Viella, 2014).

³ *Rubrica Generale 1765-1961. Registro de' Sepolti acattolici nel Cimitero eretto in Roma presso la Piramide di Caio Cestio... Impiantato da Francesco Trucchi Custode di detto Cimitero e proseguito da Giovanni figlio*, archives of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome. For a database of burials, see <http://www.cemeteryrome.it/graves/databases.html> (accessed April 2015)

⁴ Severn to Brown, October 26, 1822 and December 7, 1822, in *Joseph Severn. Letters and memories*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Ashgate, 2005), pp. 217 and 221.

⁵ The Revd. Richard Burgess in Helen R. Angeli, *Shelley and his friends in Italy* (London: Methuen & Co. 1911), p. 312.

⁶ Severn to Leigh Hunt, January 21, 1823, in Scott, *Joseph Severn*, p. 231. See also Harry Nelson Gay, "The Protestant burial-ground in Rome: a historical sketch (with unpublished documents regarding the graves of Keats and Shelley)," *Bulletin and review of the Keats-Shelley memorial, Rome*, 2 (1913), 53–54.

justification for an exception to be made. Bunsen had diplomatic status whereas Freeborn did not. Arriving in Rome in 1818, Freeborn had set up in Via Condotti as a wine merchant, but not until 1824 did he acquire any diplomatic status when he was given the title of British Vice-Consul.⁷ The coincidence of Shelley's ashes reaching Rome just as the New Cemetery was being inaugurated favoured their being buried there.

The funeral took place in the New Cemetery on January 21, 1823. Writing later that day, Joseph Severn listed the members of the British community in attendance, including "the Rev^s W. Cook and Burgess".⁸ Anglican services in Rome had resumed after the Napoleonic wars in 1816, and by 1822 were being held in rented rooms in Palazzo Corea.⁹ The Revd. Wolfe who had officiated at the burial of Keats was apparently no longer in Rome. As an Anglican chaplain in the city, the Revd. Joseph Cook had preceded Richard Burgess, who arrived only in November 1822 but went on to become, in 1828, the first permanent, salaried chaplain.

Fifty years later, Burgess recalled the presence of only two of those listed by Severn (viz. Cockburn and "Slyte"), overlooking the presence of Severn himself but mentioning the Italian custodian.¹⁰ This would have been Francesco Trucchi, whom Severn knew well through dealing with Keats's burial. On Trucchi's death in 1840, his son Giovanni took over as custodian, followed in turn on his death in 1874 by his own son Achille, a family succession which lasted for 85 years.¹¹ Severn also noted the presence of Freeborn, the sculptor Richard Westmacott jr, the painter Seymour Kirkup, the architect Joseph John Scholes, Sir Thomas Charles Style (mis-recorded by Burgess as "Slyte"), and General Cockburn.¹²

Severn marked the spot of the burial and, in the same letter, promised Leigh Hunt to be present when the gravestone was placed. Severn had still not managed to erect a stone for John Keats, two years after his death, being a great procrastinator when erecting gravestones, even for his own wife and infant son.¹³ In the Protestant burial-ground, the practice was to mark a newly dug grave with a small wooden cross until—if at all—a stone memorial was erected. Given Severn's dilatoriness, it is safe to assume that only a wooden cross marked the location of Shelley's grave until the situation changed dramatically six weeks later with the arrival in Rome of Edward Trelawny.

II.

The New Cemetery that Trelawny encountered lay on ground sloping quite steeply down from the old city-wall which had been landscaped into a series of shallow, descending terraces.¹⁴ The whole area was enclosed. William Webb who visited on February 26, a month after Shelley's burial (although he does not mention it), reported: "one side of this space being already enclosed by the

⁷ *Galignani's Messenger*, Paris, no. 2968, Friday September 17, 1824. From 1831 he was recognized as British Consular Agent; *Diario di Roma* 34 (1831), Roma sabato 22 ottobre.

⁸ Severn to Leigh Hunt, January 21, 1823, in Scott, *Joseph Severn*, p. 231.

⁹ Ariane Varela Braga, *All Saints' Church Rome: a history and guide to the church* (Rome: Gemmagraf, 2006), p. 6.

¹⁰ Burgess in Angeli, *Shelley*, p. 312.

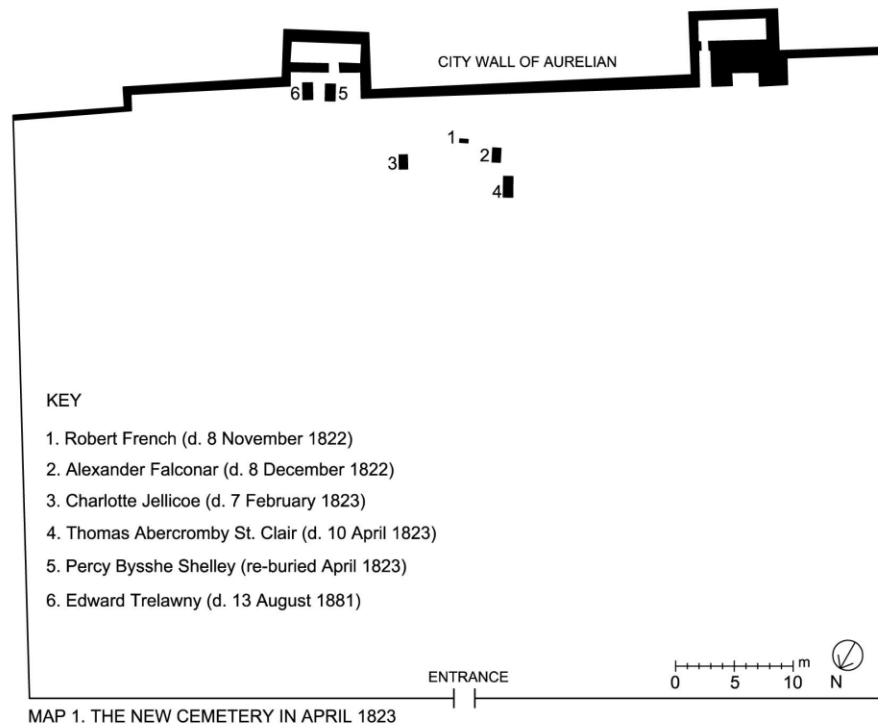
¹¹ Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, pp. 121-3. In correspondence, Achille Trucchi often signed himself "A. John Trucchi".

¹² Severn to Leigh Hunt, January 21, 1823, in Scott, *Joseph Severn*, p. 231. For General Cockburn, see Raymond Astbury, "George Cockburn. An Irish traveller and collector," *Classics Ireland* 3 (1996), 1-17.

¹³ Sue Brown, *Joseph Severn, a life: the rewards of friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 150.

¹⁴ Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, pp. 35-36 and illustrated in Ills. 10, 11, 31, 32 and 35; Krogel, *All'Ombra della Piramide*, pp. 155-56.

city wall, they enclosed the other three with a new and substantial wall of, perhaps fourteen feet, in handsome finish of plaster without and within; and the entrance secured by a suitable iron gate.”¹⁵ Shelley’s grave was the third to be made in the New Cemetery, at the top of the slope opposite the entrance gate (Map 1). By the time Trelawny arrived in March 1823, another three had joined them. But he was outraged: “On my first arrival here, my first object was to see the grave of the noble Shelley, and I was most indignant at finding him confusedly mingled in a heap with five or six common vagabonds.”¹⁶ Who were these common vagabonds?



Map 1. The New Cemetery in April 1823

The first burial recorded in the New Cemetery was of Robert French who died on November 8, 1822.¹⁷ The epitaph on his gravestone records his having been for 27 years a faithful servant to the Earl of Rochford. One month later, Alexander Allan Falconar was buried, having died at the age of 21. Born in Madras, he was the son of Alexander Falconar, a merchant and at one point the Chief Secretary of the East India Company who by 1822 had moved back to his house, Falcon Hall in Edinburgh.¹⁸

Between Shelley’s funeral in January 1823 and the transfer of his ashes in April, four further burials took place, of which two were later exhumed and no gravestone has been recorded (there may never

¹⁵ William Webb, *Minutes of remarks on subjects picturesque, moral and miscellaneous: made in a course along the Rhine, and during a residence in Swisserland and Italy in the years 1822 & 1823* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1827), p. 263.

¹⁶ Trelawny to Mary Shelley, undated, in *The life & letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Mrs Julian Marshall (New York: Haskell House, 1970), vol. 2, p. 72. The letter is dated to April 2, 1823 in *The letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), vol.1, pp. 326–7.

¹⁷ For details of all burials, see <http://www.cemeteryrome.it/graves/databases.html>

¹⁸ N.S. Ramaswami, ed., *The Chief Secretary Madras Diaries of Alexander Falconar, 1790-1809* (New Era Publications, 1983).

have been one). The two later exhumations were of a German from Saxony, Christian Berthold, who died on January 19, 1823 but of whom little is known, and of Robert Mowbray, who died on March 3, 1823. Webb was probably referring to him in the same diary entry of February 26: “The curtain of death is nearly drawn over poor M---, the interesting and amiable young Scotsman” who had been sent abroad by his family when already in a late stage of a pulmonary disease.¹⁹ The other two burials, with extant gravestones, were of Charlotte Jellicoe (died February 7, 1823 aged 45) and Thomas St Clair Abercromby (who died aged 72 on April 10, 1823, while Trelawny was in Rome). Both came from landed gentry backgrounds in Britain, she the daughter of Egerton Leigh of Leatherlake House in Cheshire,²⁰ and he the youngest son of General James Abercromby of Glasshaugh House in Aberdeenshire in Scotland.²¹

Trelawny’s dismissal of these people as “common vagabonds” was therefore an unworthy slight. Nevertheless, he proceeded to exhume Shelley’s ashes and to re-inter them in what he described to Mary Shelley as “the only interesting spot”. He reported to her on April 27 that “...the ashes are buried in the new enclosed Protestant burying-ground, which is protected by a wall and gates from every possible molestation, and that the ashes are so placed apart, and yet in the centre and most conspicuous part of the burying-ground.”²² This spot was a recess in the old wall bounding the burial-ground, which he illustrated in a drawing (now lost) that he enclosed with his letter.

For his later account, the return visit that he claims to have made in 1844 would have helped refresh his memory. His recollection in 1858 that “There were no graves near it at that time” was correct: the four burials described earlier whose gravestones survive today are all located at a short distance from the recess in the wall (see Map 1). Surprisingly, he adds that “There was no ‘faculty’ to apply for, nor Bishop’s licence to exhume the body,” explaining that the Cemetery’s custodian was all-powerful in his domain and “scudi impressed with the image of Saint Peter with the two keys ruled him.”²³ This seems to be another unworthy slur made by Trelawny. The custodian, Francesco Trucchi, had only recently been appointed to the post but he was scrupulous about submitting to the Capitoline authorities the requests for burial licences and for erecting monuments.²⁴ Since burial licenses did not specify where the burial should be made, Trucchi probably felt that moving Shelley’s ashes to another spot nearby was not in breach of the license that he already held. It is also significant that the permission granted for installing Trelawny’s plain slab and for incising the inscription on Shelley’s stone is dated May 8, 1823, whereas Trelawny had already written to Mary Shelley on April 27 as if the work had been completed, adding that he was due to leave Rome the following day. Clearly Trelawny felt confident in leaving Rome after entrusting the remaining tasks to Trucchi, who then proceeded to request the necessary permissions. Any money that passed hands would have been a fee or tip rather than a bribe, as Trelawny unworthily implied years later.

The “recess” in the wall is within one of the regularly spaced towers of the city-wall whose construction under the emperor Aurelian started in AD 271. It is the remnant of a room of which only stumps of walls abutting the main city-wall survive. From the recess, a doorway directly behind Shelley’s grave gives access to another adjacent room at the foot of the tower whose own external wall is pierced by an arrow-slit or loophole (Map 1). The recess between the two wall-stumps is a little over 6m. wide. The plot in which lie Shelley’s and Trelawny’s horizontal marble

¹⁹ Webb, *Minutes of remarks*, p. 263.

²⁰ L.G. Pine, ed., *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry*, 17th edition (London: Burke's Peerage Ltd, 1952), p. 1505.

²¹ <http://dcodriscoll.pbworks.com/w/page/9954962/Abercromby> (accessed 8 March 2015).

²² Marshall, *The life and letters*, p. 73; his letter is quoted also in Mary Shelley to Maria Gibson, May 3 [May 6] [1823], in Bennett, *The letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, p. 334.

²³ E.J. Trelawny, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), pp. 136–9.

²⁴ For various licenses duly requested for the graves of both Shelleys, see Gay, “The Protestant Burial-ground,” pp. 54–56.

ledgers is elevated above local ground-level and nowadays is delimited by a low wall of mortared stone. It is off-centre within the recess, but in such a way that Shelley's gravestone occupies an almost central position in it, with Trelawny's lying to its left. To its right there remained a space more than 2m. wide between Shelley's slab and the right wall-stump defining the recess. Trelawny offered this space to Mary Shelley for her own eventual burial.²⁵

At the close of Trelawny's operation, the plot that he had acquired held the two graves: Shelley's containing his ashes under a marble slab inscribed with his epitaph, and Trelawny's empty and ready eventually to receive his remains, covered by an un-inscribed marble slab. Shelley's ledger measures 1.25 x 0.77m. while Trelawny's is slightly smaller at 1.22 x 0.74m.

In front of the recess, Trelawny planted six young cypresses and four laurels, explaining years later that he had bought not only the recess but "sufficient space for planting a row of the Italian upright cypresses" and had finished by enclosing the ground that he had purchased.²⁶ Many of the larger nineteenth-century monuments in the Cemetery were surrounded by iron-grille enclosures and smaller ledgers by chains suspended from corner-posts, but there is no other evidence for an enclosure around or in front of Shelley's grave.²⁷ By the time of Trelawny's claimed return visit in 1844, the monuments would have extended halfway down the slope towards the entrance-gate. Reassured, perhaps, by the eminence of the names inscribed on them, he omitted any reference to "common vagabonds" when composing his *Recollections*.

III.

Shelley's grave soon became an object of pilgrimage for those who knew his poetry. The Protestant burial-ground was located just inside the ancient city-walls, near one of the southern gates, the Porta San Paolo. This area was an uninhabited one of vineyards and meadows, and was quite distant from the *abitato* of the city centre where visitors lodged. Some of them came across it, seemingly by chance, while viewing the Pyramid of Caius Cestius or on their return from an outing to the Basilica of San Paolo outside the walls. But, as it became better known during the nineteenth century and mentioned in the first popular guidebooks for tourists, it was often the object of a deliberate excursion.²⁸ Of the earliest visitors who mention Shelley's grave in their accounts, some, such as Harriet Morton in 1826, include it as one of several notable graves that they saw. For others, such as Walter Savage Landor in the same year and Arthur Hallam two years later, it was the graves of Shelley and Keats that moved them most.²⁹

Several visitors commented on the simplicity of the slab over Shelley's grave (so simple that some appear to have missed seeing it). Samuel Cox, viewing it in 1851, was deeply disappointed in the "plain, flat, almost black marble slab" over which snails and caterpillars lazily crawled (as they do today). Other graves had flowers on them and box hedges surrounding them. Why not Shelley's?

²⁵ Trelawny to Mary Shelley, April 2, 1823 (see note 16). In her letters Mary Shelley mentioned several times her desire eventually to be buried in Rome, e.g. "But Rome must be my grave & not my living residence", in Bennett, *The letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, p. 329.

²⁶ Trelawny, *Recollections*, p. 139.

²⁷ Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, pp. 110–111. The Bertie-Mathew monument, described later, is one of the very few which has surviving chains.

²⁸ E.g. [Octavian Bluitt], *Handbook for Travellers in Central Italy, Including the Papal States, Rome, and the Cities of Etruria, with a Travelling Map* (London: John Murray and Son, 1843), p. 464.

²⁹ Harriet Morton, *Protestant vigils, or evening records of a journey in Italy in the years 1826 and 1827*, 2 vols. (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1829), vol. 1, p. 154; Martin Blocksidge, *'A Life Lived Quickly': Tennyson's Friend Arthur Hallam and His Legend* (Sussex Academic Press, 2011), p. 66. Hallam wrote a sonnet on each of the poet's graves.

“Can it be that this apparent neglect springs from prejudice against the young sceptic Shelley?”³⁰ In contrast, for others, description seemed superfluous as the emotion aroused by the *genius loci* overwhelmed them: “Saddened as I was at the grave of Keats, I was yet unprepared for the flood of emotion which swept over me beside that of Shelley... ‘The spirit of the spot’ bowed me over the stone which covered his ashes, till my brow, my lips, touched it, and my heart throbbled against it all its sorrow and regret.”³¹

Perhaps for this very reason, the accounts of fellow-writers such as Dickens, Ruskin and Gissing are short on any description of it. Their references to it are often perfunctory.³² George Eliot, however, finding herself in what she declared to be the most attractive burying-place she had seen, did go further in evoking its setting: “A spot that touched me deeply was Shelley’s grave... one of the quietest spots of old Rome. And there, under the shadow of the old walls on one side, and cypresses on the other, lies the *Cor Cordium*...”³³ Writing in 1873, Henry James was equally touched: “The cemetery nestles in an angle of the city wall, and the older graves are sheltered by a mass of ancient brickwork, through whose narrow loopholes you peep at the wide purple of the Campagna. Shelley’s grave is here, buried in roses—a happy grave every way for the very type and figure of the Poet. Nothing could be more impenetrably tranquil than this little corner in the bend of the protecting rampart, where a cluster of modern ashes is held tenderly in the rugged hand of the Past.”³⁴

For some first-time visitors, however, the grave was hard to find and, once found, its inscription hard to read. In spring 1845, the Revd. William Kip had to ask the custodian for help, and needed to push aside the long grass to read the epitaph.³⁵ In 1860 George Eliot made no adverse comment about the condition of the grave and, two years later, in his diptych oil painting of the graves of Keats and Shelley, John Linton Chapman was able to depict quite clearly the epitaph on Shelley’s slab (though possibly he had copied the text from a written source).³⁶ But during the 1860s other visitors commented that it was over-grown and uncared-for, and difficult to find³⁷ or green with mould with the inscription decipherable only with difficulty.³⁸

Other than grass, it was the cypress trees planted by Trelawny that were growing. Only three years after Shelley was buried, Morton noted his grave and remarked how “affection has planted trees” in

³⁰ Samuel S. Cox, *A buck-eye abroad. Or, Wanderings in Europe, and in the Orient* (Columbus: Follett, Foster and Company, 1860), p. 148. But two years later, it was reported to be cared for with the greatest of attention by William Porter Ray in “The Graves of Shelley and Keats”, *Graham’s Magazine* 42, no.5 (May 1853), p. 543.

³¹ Grace Greenwood, *Haps and mishaps of a tour in Europe* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1854), pp. 186–7.

³² E.g. Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy* (New York: William H. Colyer, 1846), p. 52; *Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903), vol. 1, p. 254; *Journals. The writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Howard C. Horsford and Lynn Horth (Evanston & Chicago: Northwestern University and The Newberry Library, 1989), pp. 106-7; *Letters of George Gissing to members of his family*, ed. Algernon Gissing and Ellen Gissing (London: Constable, 1927), p. 249.

³³ *George Eliot’s Life, as related in her letters and journals*, ed. John Walter Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 193.

³⁴ Henry James, “The After-Season in Rome,” in *Italian Hours* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), p. 269. Originally published in *The Nation*, 12 June, 1873.

³⁵ The Revd. William Ingraham Kip, *Christmas Holydays in Rome* (New York, Philadelphia: S. Appleton, 1846), p. 219.

³⁶ Reproduced in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760–1914* (Boston Museum of Fine Arts 1992), p. 219; and in Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, Ill. 9.

³⁷ [Elizabeth Missing Sewell], *Impressions of Rome, Florence and Turin* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862), p. 204.

³⁸ M.B. “A Ramble – to a Tomb,” *Temple Bar*, London, February 1866, p. 454. “M.B.” may possibly be identified as the writer Mary Braddon. Similar comments about poor condition were made by Arthur Austin, referring to the 1860s (qtd. in Robert Underwood Johnson, *Remembered Yesterdays* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1924), p. 426) and by the painter Edward Freeman, *Gatherings from an artist’s portfolio* (New York, 1877), p. 284.

the burial-ground.³⁹ The most prominent ones would have been the cypresses planted in front of Shelley's grave.⁴⁰ They remained a striking landmark of the Cemetery even after many others had been planted there:

“Like burnt-out torches by a sick man's bed
Gaunt cypress trees stand round the sun-bleached stone;”⁴¹

They feature in several visitors' accounts and in early views of the Cemetery. Seven years after they had been planted, a visitor to Keats's and Shelley's graves remarked that in front of the latter are planted five dwarf cypresses.⁴² The precision of this statement in 1830 finds support in three drawings: David Scott's ink drawing of 1832; a detailed view made only 30m. from Shelley's grave, datable to 1838-39; and a distant view by James Hore, dated precisely to 1829.⁴³ The number of cypresses planted by Trelawny that survived therefore appears to have been five. The four that stand there today are, quite possibly, among them. One stands in the small space between his own grave slab and Shelley's, the other three stand directly in front of the graves (see Map 2). Their survival would have been favoured by the long-lived nature of this species and by the 'sanctity' that the area of Shelley's grave had acquired.

IV.

The acquired sanctity was largely a result of efforts by the cemetery's custodians to ensure that no extraneous construction should detract from the *genius loci*. The environment has two components: (1) the confined space within the recess of the tower where the grave lay (discussed in the next section), and (2) the larger area in the vicinity of the recess, discussed here.

At the foot of Shelley's and Trelawny's twin stone ledgers, a path runs parallel to the city-wall. The area immediately across the path, where Trelawny had planted cypress trees, remained free of graves for many years. His initiation of burials in the wall-recess led to others being made in the years 1823–24 on the slope below and in the empty area between them and the earliest graves (Map 1). But none of them was less than 4m. distant from Shelley's grave. This 4m.-wide space remained sacrosanct, as did the area adjoining the path running to the left and right of the recess. But by the mid-nineteenth century, the area adjacent to the path also started to be used for burials (Map 2).

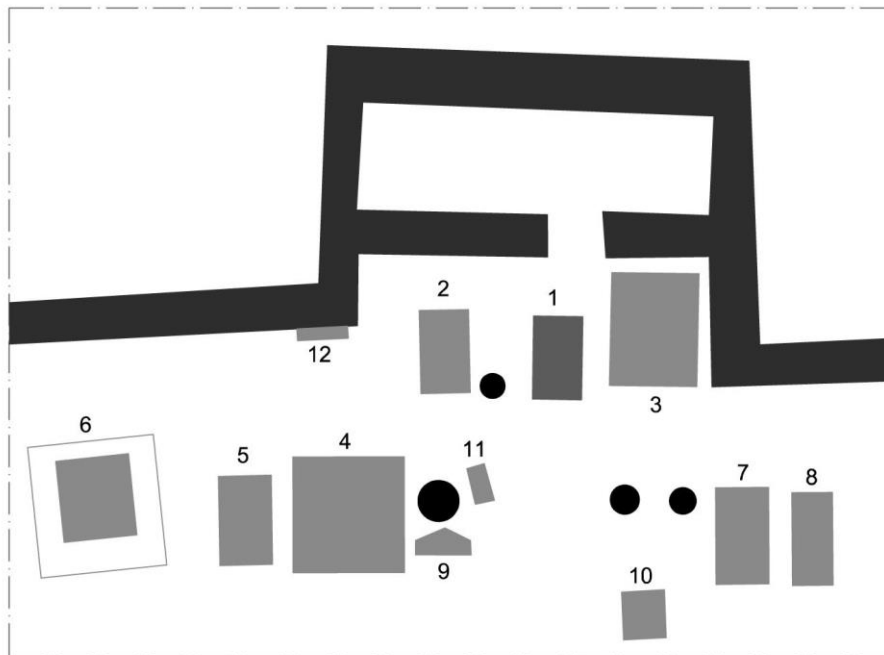
³⁹ Morton, *Protestant vigils*, vol. 1, p. 154.

⁴⁰ Trelawny in his *Recollections* claimed to have planted eight, seven of which survived to a height of some 35 feet when he apparently saw them in 1844. Trelawny was in Livorno in late 1844 where he met Robert Browning, but his presence in Rome that year is not confirmed. Browning had recently visited Shelley's grave in Rome; was he perhaps the source for Trelawny's statement and the latter's 'return visit' a pure invention?

⁴¹ *The complete works of Oscar Wilde. Poems and poems in prose*, ed. Russell Jackson and Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 43.

⁴² Richard Chenevix Trench, *Letters and memorials*, 2 vols. (London: K. Paul, Trench & Co. 1888), vol. 1, p. 52.

⁴³ The first two drawings are reproduced in Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, Ills. 49, 11; for Hore's drawing, see Michael Wynne, "James Hore, gentleman view-painter," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 65 (Spring, 1976), 46–51.



MAP 2. THE ENVIRONS OF SHELLEY'S GRAVE TODAY

KEY

1. Percy Bysshe Shelley (re-buried April 1823)
 2. Edward Trelawny (d. 13 August 1881)
 3. Bertie Bertie-Mathew (d. 19 November 1844)
 4. Joseph Story (d. 23 November 1853)
Maud Story (d. 4 February 1889)
 5. John Addington Symonds (d. 19 April 1893)
 6. Emelyn Story (d. 7 January 1894)
William Wetmore Story (d. 7 October 1895)
 7. Mary Broadwood (d. 14 June 1920)
Elsa Pfafferott (d. 30 June 1978)
 8. Ada Broadwood Story (d. 25 February 1932)
 9. Herbert Norman (d. 4 April 1957)
 10. Belinda Lee (d. 13 March 1961)
 11. Gregory Corso (d. 17 January 2001)
 12. Plaque to Frederic Myers (d. 1901)
- Cypress tree

Map 2. The environs of Shelley's grave today

Remarkably, the area adjoining the path is dominated by graves of the members of a single, extended family. Just to the left of the recess, lies the tomb of Joseph Story, son of William and Emelyn Story, who died aged six in 1853, and of Maud, the infant daughter of Waldo, their son, who was buried there in 1889. Further to the left, the Story parents themselves are buried under William Wetmore Story's monument known as the *Angel of Grief*. Between the two Story tombs is the grave of John Addington Symonds (1840–1893), one of the early biographers of Shelley. In the other direction, to the right of the recess, are found the graves of Mary Hennen Broadwood (died

1920), the mother of Ada who married Waldo Story, and her niece (died 1978), and finally the grave of Ada herself (died 1932).

How did this come about? Many admirers of the two Romantic poets who died in Rome wished to be buried near their graves. Since the closure of the Old Cemetery excluded burial near to John Keats, the vicinity of Shelley's grave acquired considerable prestige as a sought-after location. For example, when the social reformer Elizabeth Phelps died in 1894, burials were then being made far away at the western end of the Cemetery. But her daughter managed to secure for her mother a plot located some 30m. down the slope from Shelley's grave. Thus she was able to record in the tomb's epitaph that: "knowing her mother's devotion to literature [she] is glad to carry out her wish to be buried near the poet Shelley."⁴⁴

William Wetmore Story (1819–1895) had a similar motivation. Known mainly as a sculptor during his long residence with his family in Rome, he was also a minor poet. Julia Power noted that his poems, often included in anthologies of his time, betrayed a deep debt to Shelley's poetry.⁴⁵ His admiration for Shelley helps to explain why his own and his relatives' tombs are located where they are, starting with the grave of his young son Joseph in 1853. Any hope that he might have had of "reserving" the lot adjacent to his son's for his wife and himself was foiled, however, when the custodian allocated it to John Addington Symonds who pre-deceased his (Story's) wife by nine months. Symonds's daughter Margaret was delighted with a plot so close to Trelawny's and Shelley's.⁴⁶ Another eye-witness at Symonds's burial ceremony reported that Story arrived when it was all over,⁴⁷ probably annoyed at finding where Symonds had been buried.

By the 1930s, repeated requests for a burial plot near Shelley's were jeopardising its sanctity. The cemetery's director, Marcello Piermattei (in charge for nearly fifty years from 1916 to 1963), was against inserting new graves where space allowed even though it had financial benefits: the cemetery had to cover its costs and many of the older tombs were no longer yielding annual maintenance fees. In 1930 Piermattei put pressure on some of the concession-holders for tombs in this zone to renew their concessions and pay the due charges.⁴⁸ After Ada Story died two years later, he wrote a revealing letter to her daughter, Anna Broadwood, pointing out that various plots "reserved" for the Story family's future use had never been fully paid for. His predecessor as custodian, Achille Trucchi (grandson of the Francesco Trucchi who attended Shelley's funeral) had shown an excessive regard, Piermattei wrote, for distinguished families. He had used plants and other means to cordon off certain plots so as to prevent others from erecting simple or ugly tombs on them. The Story descendants agreed to pay the taxes due for permanent concessions to the family plots already occupied, and to give up another plot nearby that had been "reserved" for them.⁴⁹

The threat to the *genius loci* of Shelley's grave was further diminished thanks to the archaeologist David Randall-MacIver (1873–1945). Soon after the burial of his wife there in 1931, one of several donations that he made to improve the cemetery guaranteed the permanent maintenance of some of the older graves, no longer being paid for, that were located along the main path leading to

⁴⁴ Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Julia Power, *Shelley in America in the nineteenth century* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1940), p. 41.

⁴⁶ Horatio F. Brown, *John Addington Symonds, a biography* (London: Smith, Elder and company, 2nd ed., 1903), p. 480.

⁴⁷ Robert Sénécal, ed., *"Every body comes back to Rome": the complete letters of Matilda Lucas, 1871-1902*, 2 vols. (London: Gatehouse Editions, 2013), vol. 2, pp. 832–3.

⁴⁸ E.g. correspondence in John Maclean burial file, 1826/29, Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome archives.

⁴⁹ Correspondence in Ada Broadwood Story burial file, 1932/7–2037, Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome archives.

Shelley's grave. With these old graves now paid for permanently, the cemetery could afford not to allow any new ones to be made in the vicinity of Shelley's.⁵⁰

The success of this policy can be appreciated today, since the area immediately in front of the recess remained free of graves or memorials until the late 1950s (Map 2). In 1957 the ashes of a Canadian diplomat, Herbert Norman, who died in Cairo were scattered at the foot of one of Trelawny's cypresses, and a modest stone memorial to him placed on the ground.⁵¹ A little further out from the recess, a substantial monument over the grave of the English actress, Belinda Lee, was authorized in 1961. Finally in 2001, pressure was brought to bear on the Cemetery to allow the burial of the ashes of the American "beat" poet Gregory Corso, right across the path from Shelley's grave. With these exceptions, the area immediately outside the recess has remained relatively sacrosanct and unused. What about the area within the recess under the tower?

V.

The status of the burial plots inside the recess of the tower came into question in 1891 as the centenary of Shelley's birth approached (August 4, 1892). As a result of pressure from numerous well-wishers to erect a more substantial monument to her father-in-law, Lady Shelley had commissioned a sculpture from Edward Onslow Ford. On April 18, 1890, the custodian, Achille Trucchi, received a letter from the sculptor announcing that he had started work on the monument and requesting the precise dimensions of the space available and any other useful information.⁵²

Shortly before he died, Trelawny in correspondence had recorded his strong views against adding any sculpture to Shelley's grave.⁵³ As soon as his daughter, Laetitia Call, heard of the proposal, she threatened legal action, and the British Embassy in Rome found itself asked to find a solution. Lady Shelley told Rennell Rodd, a family friend and diplomat at the Embassy, that she would have preferred to leave the grave as it was but had been apprehensive that, after her death, some ugly monument might be installed there.⁵⁴ Rodd managed to have the two parties sign in December 1891 the Call-Shelley agreement which required that the two tombs (Shelley's and Trelawny's) remain in their present condition and be kept in good repair.⁵⁵ So far advanced had been the Onslow Ford proposal, however, that Augustus Hare actually announced it as a *fait accompli* in the 13th edition of his *Walks in Rome*.⁵⁶

In making known her opposition to Lady Shelley's proposal, Mrs Call had, in Rodd's words, viewed "any alteration in the aspect of the grave as a violation of the express wishes of her father,

⁵⁰ Maclean burial file (note 48). On Randall-MacIver as benefactor, see *Newsletter, Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome* 16 (Autumn 2011), 2–3.

⁵¹ Nicholas Stanley-Price, "Innocence is not enough'. The tragic death of Herbert Norman, Canadian diplomat," *Newsletter, Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome* 27 (Summer 2014), 2.

⁵² R[omolo] Brigiuti, "Il Cimitero degli acattolici e la tomba di Shelley in Roma," *Tribuna illustrata* Ann. III, Num. 51 –C.40 (18 dicembre 1892), 690–691.

⁵³ "no bust will be allowed on Shelley's grave", Trelawny to W.M. Rossetti, 11 November [1880], in *Letters of Edward John Trelawny*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 270. An earlier proposal to install a copy of the bust of Shelley (exhibited in Edinburgh in 1882) by the Scottish sculptor, Amelia Robertson Hill, came to nothing: William Rossetti, *Some reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti*, 2 vols. (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), vol. 2, p. 397.

⁵⁴ Sir Rennell Rodd, "The preservation of the graves of Keats and Shelley (a personal reminiscence)," *Bulletin and review of the Keats-Shelley memorial, Rome 2* (1913), 66–68; Rennell Rodd, *Social and diplomatic memories, 1884–1893* (London: Edward Arnold, 1922), pp. 261–2.

⁵⁵ Stephen White, "The Call-Shelley agreement about Shelley's and Trelawny's graves," *The Keats-Shelley Review* 4 (1989), 95–100.

⁵⁶ "A fresh tomb by Onslow Ford was erected 1891." Augustus J.C. Hare, *Walks in Rome*, 13th ed., revised (London: G.Allen, 1893), p. 256, a statement left unchanged in the 14th revised edition (1897).

and as his sole residuary legatee claimed proprietary rights over the ground which he had acquired.” It is not clear in what sense he had “acquired” it, although the Call-Shelley agreement, drafted by Rodd, refers to Trelawny having purchased the plot on which the tombs lay. In his *Reminiscences* of 1858, Trelawny had also referred to “purchasing” the recess and the adjacent land for planting trees. But in his correspondence with Mary Shelley in 1823, he does not use this word. In fact, only after 1865 did it become formally possible to purchase “permanent concessions” to burial plots, and Trelawny’s name does not appear on the short list of those declared retroactively to have made “permanent” acquisitions.⁵⁷ In 1891, Mrs Call could have paid the due tariff to convert her father’s concession into a permanent one, as other concession-holders did, but there is no record of her having done so.

The status of the recess came into question again in 1901 with the installation of a memorial tablet to the psychic researcher Frederic Myers (1843–1901) who had died in Rome (his body was repatriated to England). The large tablet (measuring 0.89 x 1.19m.) was fixed to the wall of the tower directly behind Trelawny’s grave. Did this infringe the terms of the Call–Shelley agreement? Mrs Call acknowledged that she was powerless to prevent the wall behind the graves being thus used. White argues that “...the placing of the tablet was a violation of the object which the Shelley–Call agreement was designed to promote and, had the Custodian of the Cemetery or anyone at the British Embassy been aware of what had passed in 1891, the Custodian would almost certainly have refused to sanction it.”⁵⁸ But the original copy of the Agreement, made no more than ten years previously, had been lodged with the long-serving custodian, Achille Trucchi, who was still in post in 1901. It is unlikely, given the controversy surrounding it, that he had forgotten the Agreement. The family’s ‘institutional memory’ about the Cemetery was put to the test when, in December 1880, Achille Trucchi received a letter from Trelawny enquiring about the grave that he had had built for himself 57 years earlier. Making a written record of his recollections thirty years later, Trucchi stated that no owner’s name had been registered for the grave at the time, but his father remembered having been told about it. He had assumed that Trelawny must have died in the meantime; but the letter indicated otherwise and, recalling his father’s statement about the plain slab, he was able to respond to Trelawny’s request.⁵⁹

What is remarkable about the arguments of 1891 and 1901 over the sanctity of the “Trelawny recess” is that there is no mention of a substantial intrusion that had been made more than forty years earlier. This was the grave and monument to Bertie Bertie-Mathew which occupies a large part of the recess to the right of Shelley’s grave (see Map 2 and Figs. 2 and 4).

As the epitaph on the monument relates, Bertie-Mathew was killed on November 19, 1844 “by a fall from his horse while hunting in the campagna near Porta Salara”. The plot occupied by his grave and memorial extends from the rear wall of the recess to the path passing in front of it (dimensions 2.70 x 2.0m.). It fills the space to the right of Shelley’s grave which Trelawny had proposed to Mary Shelley as her own eventual place of burial. It can hardly be a coincidence that Bertie-Mathew was buried here only one year after Mary Shelley’s visit to Rome with her son Percy. Did she then let it be known that she had no wish to occupy that plot herself? It is commonly assumed, but not proven, that she saw it during this, her first return visit to the city since the death in 1819 of little William with all its painful memories.⁶⁰ In her long account of this stay in Rome,

⁵⁷ Cristoforo Fleroff burial file, 1927/10–1826, Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome archives.

⁵⁸ White, “The Call-Shelley agreement,” p. 97. In 1911, as British ambassador, Rodd persuaded a reluctant Mrs Myers to have it moved to the left of the recess, leaving its original location still visible today.

⁵⁹ Trucchi in Gay, “The Protestant Burial-ground,” pp. 57–58. Trelawny’s ashes were placed in his long-prepared grave in October or November 1881.

⁶⁰ “I revisit it as the bourne of a pious pilgrimage. The treasures of my youth lie buried here.” Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), vol. 2, p. 225. William’s stone ledger in the Old Cemetery was also visible even though imprecisely located over his actual

Mary refers to viewing the Pyramid of Caius Cestius from the Colosseum; she would have passed the pyramid when on her way to visit the Basilica of San Paolo outside the walls; but she makes no mention of the cemetery that lies at its foot.⁶¹ Did she deliberately omit from her memoir an experience that was too painful to mention in print? Or did neither she nor Percy actually visit the two graves? She may have determined not to visit a place so full of associations not only with her little boy and husband but also with Trelawny with whom her relations had become very strained. Whatever the explanation, it is striking that, only a year later, the Bertie-Mathew grave was occupying the space that had once been foreseen for her. Moreover, the installation of that grave (and, later, of the Myers plaque) in the “Trelawny recess” suggests that the authorities did not consider Trelawny to have purchased exclusive use of it.

If the Bertie-Mathew monument did not feature in the later debates about the recess, nor was it often mentioned by visitors, who must have unconsciously ignored it. It is much the largest construction in the recess (at 2.30m. high) and yet it almost escapes notice.⁶² Also rare are references to the blank slab covering Trelawny’s grave-to-be at Shelley’s side. One visitor who was curious about it found that neither the sexton nor anyone else could explain it.⁶³

From the 1860s onwards, when comments by visitors about the poor state of Shelley’s grave seem to peak, a number of improvements can be discerned. Early in that decade, the custodian was said to be using the little room in the tower behind the recess as a lumber room, storing ancient terracotta urns and bundles of cane used the previous year for a rose espalier.⁶⁴ Chapman’s painting of 1862 depicts untrained roses growing around Shelley’s slab and also a staked, young cypress sapling planted on what had become the Bertie-Mathew plot. One of the first photographs (Fig.1) of the grave that can be dated—to 1879 or earlier—shows various improvements: flowers planted clear of the slab; a footing to the grave along the path which is constructed from iron hoops and short, wooden stakes; and a trellis of canes around the other two sides of the plot. The wooden door to the tower (the “lumber-room”) stands half-closed.⁶⁵

Another photograph (Fig.2), dated to c.1890, shows the many acanthus plants in the recess that are a feature of paintings and photographs of Shelley’s grave at the turn of the 20th century.⁶⁶ The cypress sapling on the Bertie-Mathew plot shown in Chapman’s painting is visible in this photo as a mature tree, and a trellis of climbing plants covers the rear wall.

By the time of the centennial celebrations of Shelley’s birth in 1892, therefore, the grave was actively kept in order and the recess was full of flowering or ornamental plants. On June 21, 1893, a

remains (Gay, “The Protestant Burial-ground”, p. 54). Another visitor, only four years earlier, on asking the custodian how to find the poet Shelley’s grave, had met with the response “father or son?”, so evidently the custodian was able to guide any visitor to it: Anon, “Letters from the Continent, by a Fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge,” *The Monthly Chronicle* 6 (1840), 505–6.

⁶¹ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Rambles*, pp. 224, 226. I am indebted to Elizabeth Denslinger for her comments on this important point.

⁶² Two only are known to me: “A proud monument to some Englishman, killed in hunting over the Campagna”, Cox, *A buck-eye abroad*, p. 148; and Freeman, *Gatherings*, p. 285. Freeman had known Bertie-Mathew personally.

⁶³ M.B., “A ramble,” p. 453.

⁶⁴ M.B., “A ramble,” p. 453.

⁶⁵ Jessie White Mario, “Sepolchri inglesi in Roma,” *Nuova Antologia*, 16 maggio 1879, 3–21.

⁶⁶ Rodd described the flat marble slab bedded in the acanthus foliage in the ruined tower in his *Social and diplomatic memories*, p. 262, referring to the year 1891, while John L. Hurst in “The Graves of Shelley and Trelawny,” *The Critic*, 2 November 1895, p. 285, also mentioned the fantastic-leaved acanthus and black and silent cypress keeping guard.

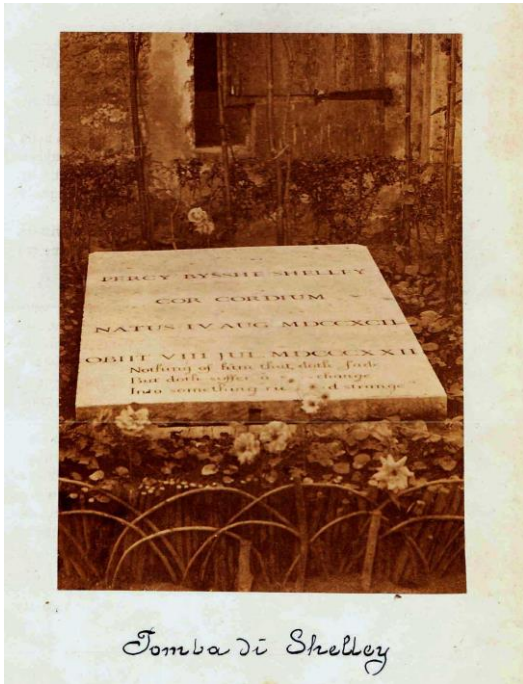


Fig. 1. Anon, Tomb of Shelley, c.1879 (from Jessie White Mario, "Sepolchri inglesi in Roma," *Nuova Antologia* 16 maggio 1879)



Fig. 2. Alessandro Vasari (studio), The graves of Shelley and Trelawny, c.1890, albumen print from a collodion glass negative

commemoration at the graveside included speeches by Giovanni Bovio, a philosopher and member of parliament, and Gustavo Tirinelli, a poet and translator of Shelley and Shakespeare. The organizing committee installed a bronze wreath of ivy intertwined with a Greek lyre. A phrase from Horace ("Spirat adhuc amor") was inscribed on the bronze and the words "ROMA M DCCC XCII"

on the sash of the wreath. The municipality of Rome deposited a wreath of bay with gilded berries and Lilli Helbig, a member of the organizing committee and daughter of the archaeologist Wolfgang Helbig, laid another of oak with gilded acorns.⁶⁷ A photograph (Fig.3) shows that the bronze wreath was affixed to a black support erected at the head of the grave, and not to the grave-slab itself.⁶⁸

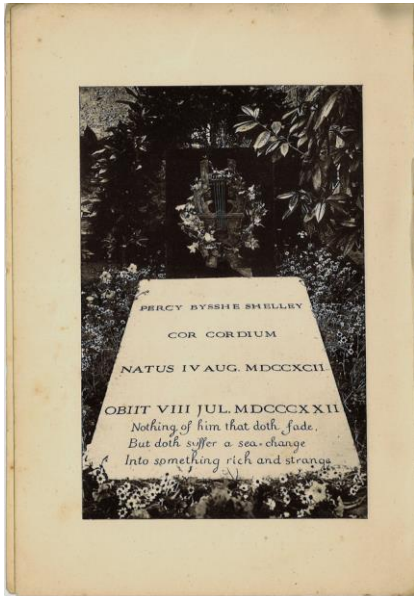


Fig. 3. The bronze wreath placed at Shelley’s grave in 1893 (from *Commemorazione di P.B.Shelley in Roma* (Rome: Forzani, 1893)).

In February 1899 the bronze wreath was forcibly removed and discarded.⁶⁹ In recounting this incident three years later, W.M. Rossetti’s informant, “an Italian, a devotee of English literature, and a critical writer of superior repute in the fields of fine art and archaeology”, was one of the two perpetrators, the other being “an Italian Shelleyite of special mark”.⁷⁰

Since the *Commemorazione* of 1893, Shelley’s grave has remained unchanged. The founding in 1909 of the Keats Shelley Memorial included a commitment, which continues today, to care for the four graves of Shelley, Trelawny, Keats and Severn.⁷¹ By the time of the centenary of Shelley’s

⁶⁷ The sculptor, Ettore Ferrari, who designed the bronze wreath, had successfully proposed to the municipality of Rome that the centennial also be marked by installing a commemorative plaque on Palazzo Verospi where Shelley had stayed in early 1819: *Commemorazione di P.B.Shelley in Roma* (Rome: Forzani, 1893); also *New York Times*, Sunday July 9, 1893, and *Toronto Daily Mail* August 11, 1893. See too Susanne Schmid and Michael Rossington, ed., *The reception of P.B.Shelley in Europe* (Bloomsbury, 2008), pp. 67–68.

⁶⁸ *Commemorazione*, frontispiece; also Laurence Hutton, *Literary landmarks of Rome* (New York: Harper and brothers, 1897), the photo opposite page 40, in which the wreath appears lopsided and seemingly already damaged.

⁶⁹ Anonimo, *Esse Pi Qu Erre – Alla tomba di Shelley*, in *Il Don Chisciotte*, 21 febbraio 1899, qtd. in Passalalpi Ferrari, Ettore, *Ettore Ferrari: tra le muse e la politica* (Città di Castello, 2005), p. 176. “One morning the bronze wreath was found to be gone: it had been wrenched off the grave-slab, and thrown to the other side of the cemetery wall” reported William Rossetti (*Some reminiscences*, 396–7), who wrongly attributed the bronze wreath to the “zeal of English and American local Shelleyites” rather than to the predominantly Italian organizing committee.

⁷⁰ The informant was probably Diego Angeli (1869–1937), whose brother Gastone was to marry Rossetti’s daughter Helen the following year and who was Rossetti’s guide in Rome on this visit (Diego Angeli, *Le cronache del Caffè Greco* (Palombi, 1987), pp. 71–72; 1st ed. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1930). He was a prolific journalist, historian, poet and the translator of Shakespeare’s complete works. His co-conspirator may have been his friend Adolfo De Bosis, translator of Shelley’s works. Despite their great admiration for Shelley, Angeli and De Bosis are conspicuously absent from the list of those attending the wreath-laying of June 1893.

⁷¹ Rodd, “The preservation of the graves”, p. 68.

death in 1922, the recess in the wall had acquired a hallowed status that made any alteration unthinkable. A ceremony brought together many of the parties who were committed to its continuing protection and celebration: the Mayor of Rome, the British Ambassador, the curator of the Keats–Shelley House, the correspondent of *The Times*, and the Director of the Cemetery (Fig.4).⁷² By then too, the cemetery as a whole had been officially recognized as a monument of international interest. Shelley’s grave, as one among many in the cemetery, henceforth enjoyed a degree of legal protection that reinforced the status as a sanctified space that it had acquired ever since his ashes had been buried there in 1823.



Fig. 4. Shelley’s grave on the centenary of his death, 1922 (Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome archives).

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⁷² Stanley-Price, *The Non-Catholic Cemetery*, pp. 132-133 and Ill. 84, the participants being named on the reverse of the photo. The reverse of the photo in Fig. 4 here bears the caption: “La tomba del Poeta P.B. Shelley nel giorno dell’anniversario della sua morte. 1° Centenario, IV Agosto 1922.”