

# of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

## NEWSLETTER



### ICCROM and the Getty restore six tombs

One of the most beautiful sculptures in the Cemetery is now looking resplendent, thanks to a restoration project last summer. It was one of six tombs restored by ICCROM, the international conservation centre based in Rome, and the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) as part of their regular Stone Conservation course. Aimed at providing advanced specialised training, the biennial course started in 1976 under UNESCO auspices in Venice. Since then it has trained numerous conservators from around the world. With the course transferring to Rome in 2011, the Cemetery offered to host the practical work component.

For the course organisers this meant that the participants could document, analyse and then restore a range of monuments of various designs, materials and condition, something that had not been possible in Venice. For the Cemetery it was an opportunity to have several tombs restored to the highest standards, conditional upon all work being completed by the end of the ten-week course (and subject as always to the approval of the Soprintendenza). Its successful outcome was due to close co-operation among all three partners.

Cleaning the tomb (Zona 3.2.4.2) of Violet May Court (1868-1914) involved one of the Cemetery's outstanding sculptures that is only now being properly recognised (see the following article). Also treated was a re-used fragmentary statue of a Roman Vestal in white



Photo: Rhong Zang

Detail of the Court tomb at start of cleaning



Photo: ICCROM

Baldwin after treatment

marble, set on a travertine base. Here (Zona V.15.11) lie the cremated ashes of Belinda Lee, a popular English film star whose career was tragically cut short by a car accident in California in 1961. Another performer who once enjoyed fame was Hermann Wichmann, pupil of Felix Mendelssohn and Louis Spohr and a conductor and composer whose songs were sung by the great soprano Jenny Lind. The monument to him (d.1905) and his wife, Clara Jentges (d.1920), takes the form of a temple pediment on columns in the Tuscan style. Except where sheltered, the black paint filling the inscription – the central two lines are from Dante's *Inferno* – has been lost.



Photo: Scott Warren

Rouba Jlalati (Syria) and Rutger Morelissen (The Netherlands) work on the Wichmann monument. © J.Paul Getty Trust.



Photo: ICCROM

Field after treatment

The tomb of Florence Baldwin (Zona V.10.22) in *peperino* volcanic tuff is also of classical form, being a smaller-scale copy of the Scipio Barbatum Roman sarcophagus that has long been an attraction of the Vatican Museums. After cleaning, the inscription is now more legible – Florence Baldwin was an American Classical scholar who spent much of her life in Rome – and measures have been taken to prevent rainwater from pooling at its base. Another monumental tomb nearby is that of the wealthy American Osgood Field (d.1900) and his wife Katherine (Zona 1.11.4) who married late in life and then settled for seven months a year in Rome, living in Palazzo Colonna. The ancient marble basin, resting on lion's feet, exhibited various cracks that previous restoration had failed to resolve.

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Photo: Scott Warren



Photo: Scott Warren

Michel Salameh (Palestine) and Valerie Monteiro (India) work on the Belinda Lee tomb; © J.Paul Getty Trust.



Photo: ICCROM

Belinda Lee after treatment

The only exception to the conservative approach to restoring these monuments was the replacement of a missing sloping roof panel (on the left in the photo here) of the monument to Dimitri Biryokov (d.1928) and his wife Yuliya Glass (d.1925) (Zona 3.4.4.3). Otherwise, the work on all tombs consisted principally of grouting cracks and fissures, applying biocides, mechanically removing surface accretions, and treating the “black crusts” using poultices of ammonium carbonate. The result has been six monuments in much better condition, valuable hands-on experience for the participants, and a joint project that served the interests of all three parties.

*With thanks to ICCROM, the GCI and the course participants for access to the excellent documentation of their work. For more detail, see a blog written by one of the participants, <http://scottishlimecentre.blogspot.com/>*



Photo: ICCROM

Reverse of Biryokov headstone after treatment



## The re-discovered sculpture by Antonio Sciortino

The beautiful sculpture in Carrara white marble on the Court grave (see above) is signed and dated “A.Sciortino. Roma, 1915”. The inscription is on the reverse which is uncarved, as if the sculpture had originally been intended for installation against a wall. It then became illegible over the years, and was not spotted by the survey of 1984-86 (see the Graves Database), although noted in the Cemetery’s own records. The work, in an *Art Nouveau* idiom, shows a female winged angel, half-bending to pluck one of a bunch of lilies, symbol of chastity and virtue.

Antonio Sciortino (1879-1947) was one of Malta’s best-known artists. Leaving Malta to study art in Rome, he made his career here, teaching at and then directing the British Academy of Art located in Via Margutta where he had his own studio. Following the invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 and the crisis in British-Italian relations, the Italian government closed down the Academy, and Sciortino returned a disillusioned man to his native Malta. In his thirty years as a sculptor in Rome, he developed a distinctive style and secured a number of international commissions, several in Malta and others in Britain, Brazil and Russia (as a foreigner he was not allowed to enter Italian national competitions). In Rome his portrait bust of the musician Francesco Baiardi (1911) is in the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna.

Shortly before he died the sculptor recalled having done two tomb sculptures, one of them for “the tomb of Miss Court at the

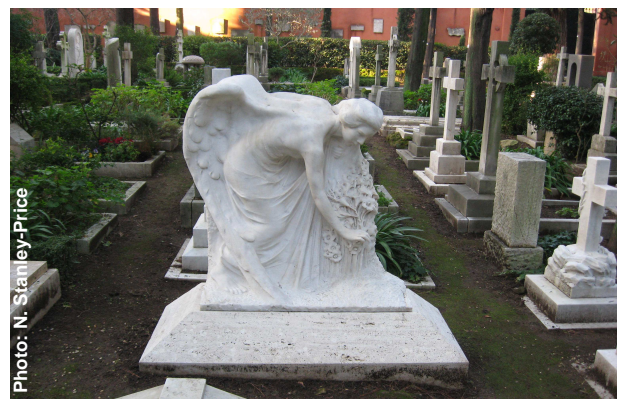


Photo: N. Stanley-Price

The sculpture after conservation

English cemetery”. But it was only in 2004 that Dennis Vella, a Maltese art historian and leading authority on Sciortino, visited the Cemetery and, to his delight, identified the sculpture for what it was. Who commissioned this remarkable work? Both Violet May Court, born in Cape Colony, and Sciortino were British subjects of the colonies, and Sciortino was well-known in the British community in Rome. More than that we do not know. By publicising such stories – and by continuing to restore tombs in poor condition – we hope to learn more about the many works of art in the Cemetery.

*In tribute to Dennis Vella (1953-2009), and with thanks to Anthony Pace in Malta for his help*



## Descendants and donors support conservation

Thanks to an increasing number of generous descendants and other donors, we are managing to improve the appearance of many graves in the Cemetery.

Two Embassies have continued their support. The German Embassy in Italy helped make possible the restoration of the monument (Zona Vecchia 7.5) of the painter Johann Christian Reinhart (see *Newsletter* 14); while the Russian Embassy funded work on the graves of Anatole Kroupensky, Russian ambassador to Italy during WWI, and his wife (Zona 3.3.3.17) and of Nikolay Muraviev (1850-1908), ambassador from 1905 to his death (Zona 3.3.1.16). Other graves have been restored thanks to donations from family descendants, including those of Frederic Crowninshield, who was featured in *Newsletter* 17 in an article written by his great-granddaughter, Gertrude Wilmers; and Walter Lowell (1850-52; Zona 1.5.20), the only son of James Russell Lowell, the American Romantic poet and critic. Following the painful loss of his mother and two infant daughters, Lowell had accepted an invitation from Wm. Wetmore Story to spend a winter in Rome, only for his little boy to die here of cholera.

Notable for its beautiful bas-relief sculpture is the Searle family tomb, also now restored thanks to a donation from family descendants. The extensive dedicatory inscriptions identify the members of this family who in 1878



Relief on the Searle family tomb

turned the abandoned Sant'Antonio monastery at Tivoli into their family home. The sculpture was donated to Georgina (Searle) Hallam (1863-1944) by the town of Tivoli in gratitude for her charity work there during her lifetime (Zona 1.11.19).

The *Friends' Newsletter* has proved to be a valuable medium for raising interest among donors. It was thanks to Susanna Widjeskog's article in *Newsletter* 11, and her own intermediary role, that the Runeberg Foundation in Finland gave us a grant. It funded the restoration of the headstone (Zona 2.14.29) to the three young children of Walter Runeberg, sculptor and son of Finland's national poet, and also the monument (Zona 2.10.1) to the businessman and arts patron Victor Hoving.

Other Scandinavian tombs will benefit thanks to a grant made by the Swedish Women's Educational Association in Rome. We will be cleaning the Swedish National Tomb and that of the neoclassical sculptor Johan Byström. The poor state of the latter (Zona 1.6.4) is



The Hoving tomb restored

evident in the photo that accompanied the accounts of past Swedish visitors to the Cemetery published in *Newsletter* 14. Byström (1783-1848) divided his time between Stockholm, teaching at the Royal Academy of Arts, and Rome which he first visited on a scholarship from the Academy to work with Thorvaldsen. When in Rome he lived at the Villa Malta, home to so many northern artists, while spending the summers in Carrara where he owned a house and a lucrative marble quarry (thanks to Bo Lundin for this information).

## Visits from other descendants

One of the greatest pleasures for the volunteers staffing the Visitors' Centre is meeting descendants of those buried here, many of whom arrive without prior notice. In recent years we have met descendants of John Keats' brother George, who emigrated to the United States, and several of Joseph Severn's descendants from England. A year ago Clive Eldridge – visiting Rome for the first time – came to look for the grave of his great-great-grandfather, Edward Trelawny, who in 1823 had bought the plot for Shelley's ashes and eventually (fifty years later, as it happened) for himself. "I didn't know what to expect" he told us, "and thought I might have to battle through ivy and brambles to find the grave, but it's in a wonderful spot. I'm very impressed."

Nor had the two great-granddaughters of William Wetmore Story ever seen his "Angel of Grief" sculpture until they visited in late 2009. But at least they knew that it was there....unlike William Mead's great-grandson who, when he entered the Parte Antica, stopped in his tracks. He had not known that it was the burial place of his great-grandfather, partner in the American architectural practice of McKim, Mead and White which built the American Academy in Rome of which he later became President. Mead had died in Paris



Manse Batchelder (left) and Clive Eldridge



Manse Batchelder (left) and Clive Eldridge

(1928) but was accorded the distinction of burial in the Parte Antica.

George Brooks emailed us from Lashkar Gar in Afghanistan about his great-great-grandfather, James Hattrick Lee (1844-1903), who is buried in Zona 2.18.5. An Episcopalian priest, Lee left the church after reading Darwin on evolution and instead taught Greek, Latin and physics at the prestigious Milton Academy in Massachusetts. He was in Rome on sabbatical when he succumbed to typhoid. We have learned more about another clergyman, thanks to

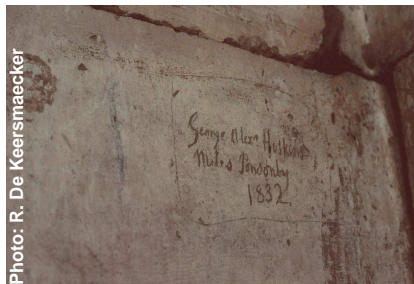
the Rev. David Markay of the Chiesa Evangelica Metodista in Milan, who visited his grave (Zona 2.14.22) last summer. Henry James Piggott (1831-1917) was the first Methodist missionary in Italy, sent by the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1861 during the tumultuous days of the Risorgimento. He and his wife Mary Ellen, buried with him, served the church for more than 50 years, setting up a school for girls, journals, and church communities throughout Emilia and the Veneto.

Finally, among too many visitors to mention, Mansfield Batchelder was delighted to find the grave (Zona 3.2.7.13) of his great-uncle Nathaniel Cobb and Nathaniel's sister Caroline. Cobb was a painter from Vermont who settled in Rome in the early 1900s. We plan to have more about them in a future *Newsletter*.

## Garibaldini in the Cemetery – an addition

From our list (*Newsletter* 16) we left out Adriano Bompiani (1824-1912). Roman in origin, he volunteered in 1848 against the Austrians in the Veneto, and then during the 1860s as a lawyer he played a leading role in fomenting insurrection in Rome against Papal rule. In 1875 he married the American Sofia van Matre (author of *Italian Explorers in Africa*, 1891) and converted to Protestantism. Both are buried in Zona 1.10.26.

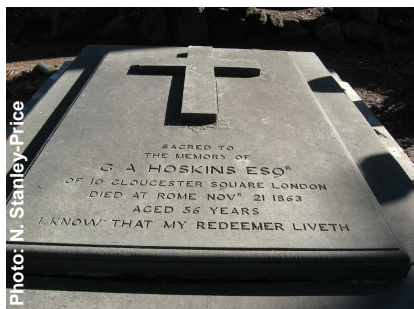
## George Hoskins – the remorseful graffitist



One of the many amateur artists buried here is George Alexander Hoskins (1802-1863) whose name is known to Egyptologists for the fine drawings and water-colours he made while travelling in Egypt and Ethiopia in 1832-33. In common with other

early travellers in the Near East but also in Italy, he could not resist inscribing his own name at some of the sites that he visited. Unusually, however, we know that he later regretted doing this. Thirty years later Hoskins made a return visit to Egypt which he wrote up in his *A Winter in Upper and Lower Egypt 1860-61* (London 1863). Observing the damage done by visitors to Seti I's tomb in the Valley of the Kings, he made the following confession:

*"I can easily suppose such travellers would write their names on the frescos of Raphael in the Vatican, if there were no custody to prevent them. With the thoughtlessness of a young traveller, I confess, on my first visit to the Nile (1832-1833), I wrote my name on one of the colossal statues in the interior of Aboo Simbel, and was greatly annoyed at what I had done when, elsewhere, and especially in this tomb, by the light of my illumination, I saw the destructive effect of an accumulation of such offences, and was really relieved to find on my last visit to the temple that time and decay had completely effaced my only offence of that description."*



In fact it was not his "only offence of that description" since his name is also inscribed, along with that of Miles Ponsonby, at the Temple of Medinet Habu at Luxor (see photo). We owe this information to Roger De Keersmaecker in Belgium who has spent years studying

travellers' graffiti in Egypt ([www.egypt-sudan-graffiti.be](http://www.egypt-sudan-graffiti.be)) and who wrote us asking about Hoskins' grave. The gravestone gives his London address and date of death in November 1863, so let us hope he had been able to see his book published that year.

## New treasurer

We welcome Roy Stamme as the new honorary treasurer and mem-

ber of the Cemetery's Advisory Committee. Roy is a Chartered Public Accountant employed by one of the "Big-4" auditors in Rome, with more than 15 years' experience of working in Italy.

## Precious support from the Friends

This Newsletter is a valuable means of attracting funding for restoration (see above). In addition to making the Newsletter possible, the Friends have purchased two wooden benches for the use of visitors and have helped fund our new computer programme for managing the business side of the Cemetery's work (concessions, maintenance payments, etc.). This has replaced the previous mix of non-compatible computer and manual systems. A heartfelt thank you to the Friends.



## POETS IN THE CEMETERY

### Juan Rodolfo Wilcock



Juan Rodolfo Wilcock (1919 – 1978), an Anglo-Argentine writer (who died before his request for Italian citizenship was approved), was more than anything prolific. To paraphrase his friend and publisher Roberto Calasso, it is probably easier to say what Wilcock did *not* write, or attempt to write, rather than what he did. Over thirty years and in various languages, he produced six books of poetry; literary, musical, and art criticism for international journals and magazines; numerous novels; plays; and more than thirty works in Spanish translation from the English, French, German and Italian.

Born in Buenos Aires to an Englishman and an Argentine of Swiss and Italian roots, Wilcock published in 1940 his first collection of poems, which won a number of national prizes. Shortly thereafter he became friends with Jorge Luis Borges and Silvina Ocampo and continued to study civil engineering, in which he took his degree in 1943. In the early 1950s Wilcock worked in London as a translator and for the BBC Latin American service before establishing himself permanently in Rome in 1957. In Rome he quickly became known for his eccentricity, imagination, formidable intellect and savage, Swift-like wit while writing for, among others, *Il Mondo*, *Il Messaggero* and *Il Tempo* and publishing works with Adelphi, Bompiani, Einaudi and Rizzoli.

However, in the end Wilcock saw himself primarily as his headstone (Zona 1.1.4) simply and elegantly tells us: "Poeta".

Don't stay far away from me for long  
unless you want memory to devour all  
and leave no space for the present,  
I often see you now beneath the trees,  
the streets repeat you, the bathtub,  
rooms, records, and the sea's the same

From Juan Rodolfo Wilcock, *Poesie* (Adelphi, 1996)

*Text and English translation by Alexander Booth (see the Italian version of Newsletter 18 for the original text)*

### HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

This Newsletter is made possible by the contributions of the Friends of the Cemetery.

The Friends also help fund the care of the trees in the cemetery and the restoration of tombs. Please can you help us by becoming a Friend? You can find a membership form at:

[www.cemeteryrome.it](http://www.cemeteryrome.it)

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