

Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome



NEWSLETTER

Special issue on myths, mistakes and missing persons

It's risky to write about myths that have grown up about a historical place. In asserting that some received ideas are myths, there is a risk of creating new ones. Nevertheless, in this issue we try to nail a few common myths and mistakes associated with the Cemetery.

"Keats' grave has the wrong date on it"

The letters of Joseph Severn are precise in giving the time of Keats' death as around 11pm on February 23, 1821. But the grave inscription has Feb.24 1821. Was this the stonemason's fault? Errors in tomb inscriptions are quite common (see below). But in Keats' case, there is a different explanation for the discrepancy. In Rome at that period, a new day would begin, and time would be counted, from the time when the *Ave Maria* was sung in all churches. This was around half-an-hour after sunset and therefore, confusingly, its timing varied depending on the time of year. Severn kept to the English method of time-keeping, but for the Roman authorities the day of February 24 had already started when Keats died and that is the date used in the official records. (It was only in 1846 that Pope Pius IX decided to end confusion by declaring mid-day the moment from which hours were to be counted. He ordered that a cannon on Castel Sant'Angelo be fired to mark the mid-day hour, a tradition that was transferred in 1904 to the Janiculum where it continues today.)

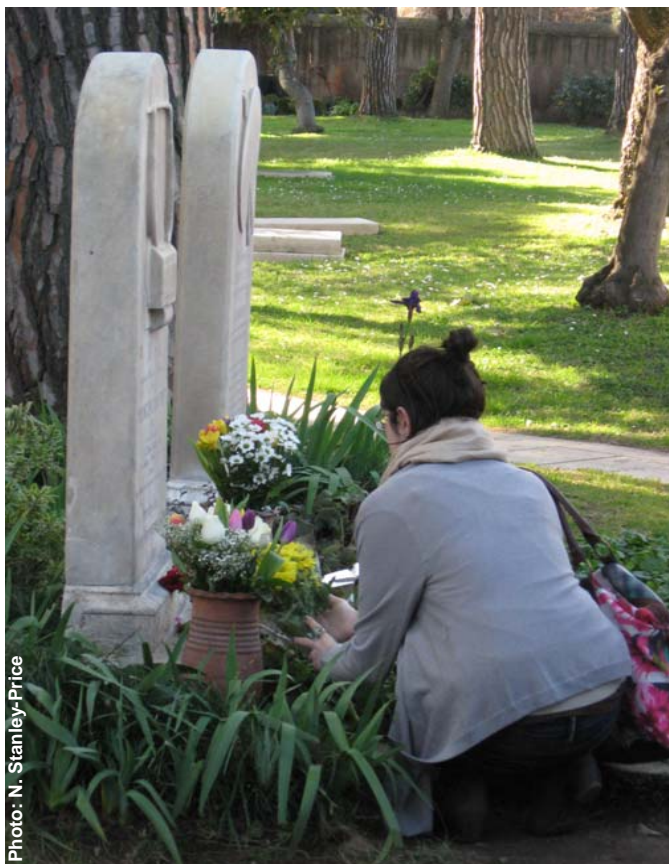
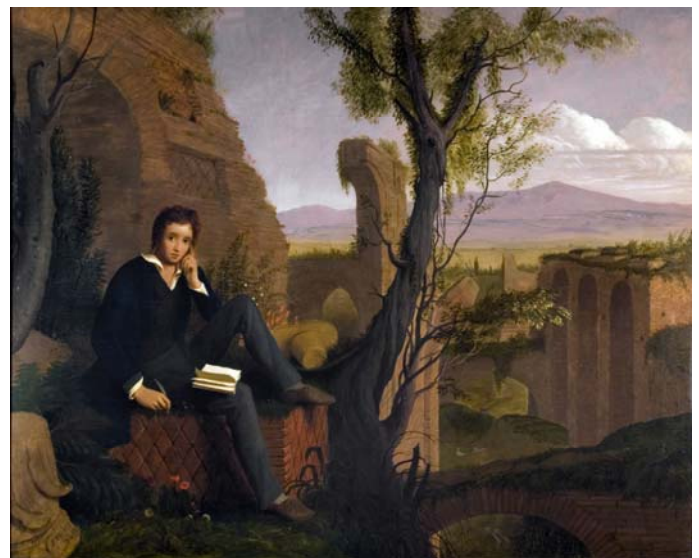


Photo: N. Stanley-Price

A Keats fan on the anniversary of his death

"Shelley's heart is buried in his grave"



Joseph Severn, *Shelley composing 'Prometheus Unbound' in the Baths of Caracalla* (1845), Keats-Shelley House, Rome

This common misunderstanding has persisted since the 19th Century, due to the Latin words *Cor Cordium* (heart of hearts) on Shelley's tombstone. It was Edward Trelawny who had organised Shelley's cremation on the beach, who had his ashes transferred to the present grave, and who decided on the inscription. For this he retained only the two words *Cor Cordium* from a longer text devised by Leigh Hunt, and added the poet's dates and the quotation from Shakespeare. And it was Trelawny who claimed to have plucked the poet's



William Edward West (1788-1857), *Portrait of Edward John Trelawny*

heart from the burning pyre and, after a dispute with Leigh Hunt, sent it to Mary Shelley in England. It was a relic devoutly revered by Mary during her life, and – by now in the form of ashes – was eventually buried with their son Percy Florence Shelley in 1889. So his father's grave never contained his heart.....unless we accept medical opinion that it is the liver, and not the heart, that is more likely to survive a cremation. In which case, ironically, there might be some truth in the myth after all.

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“The foreign Embassies in Rome pay for the Cemetery”

Magari (if only)! The diplomatic representatives of countries with large non-Catholic populations have always protected the interests of this cemetery designated for foreigners. In the 19th century British and other protestants in Rome would collect funds to pay for the caretaker’s wages and repairs. After 1870 and again between the two World Wars, it tended to be successive German Ambassadors who acted as Administrator of the Cemetery. Our greatest debt to Germany goes back to the 1890s. On behalf of the Cemetery’s Committee, it purchased an additional 4,300 sq.m. of land to create what is now the Zona Terza and to build a new Chapel (see *Newsletter* 7). But if the Embassies don’t actually finance the Cemetery, who does? It is funded mainly through the income derived from its operation as a burial-ground (concession of plots and maintenance fees), supplemented increasingly nowadays by external fundraising for restoration, by the Friends, and – to a small extent, so far – by visitors’ donations. A few Embassies (e.g. those of Germany, Russia and Norway) have made donations for tomb restoration and other purposes, and these are very welcome.

“Gramsci was buried here despite being Italian and Catholic”

Exceptions to the usual criteria for burial have been made for a few famous people, but Antonio Gramsci, the political philosopher, was not one of them. His ashes were transferred in 1938 to a family tomb that had been granted the previous year to his sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht, resident in Rome. The Schuchts were Soviet citizens and of Russian Orthodox faith, and Gramsci was entitled to burial in the

Cemetery as the husband of Tatiana’s sister Giulia. In the end, none of the Schuchts were buried in the family tomb. But the reverse of the headstone, which visitors to the grave rarely look at, carries memorial inscriptions to the sisters’ father Apollo Schucht and their elder sister Nadine (see the lead story in *Newsletter* 10.)

“Story produced the *Angel of Grief* in less than nine months”

It seems to be a myth that the copy of Story’s *Angel of Grief* at Stanford was erected in memory of victims of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, since Jane Stanford commissioned it in 1900 (*Newsletter* 17). The original sculpture in Rome gives the date of Emelyn Story’s death as Jan 7 1895. But it is not true that Story – by then a man of 78 – designed, modelled and then supervised the carving and installation of this monumental work before his own death in October, i.e. all within nine months. In fact, she had died one year earlier (January 1894), as the Cemetery’s records confirm and as is clear from Henry James’ biography of Story: ‘*The end was almost there by the time he had finished the only work that occupied him after the death of his wife. “I am making a monument to place in the Protestant Cemetery,” he wrote to a relative in the spring of 1894; “and I am always asking myself if she knows it and if she can see it. It represents the angel of Grief, in utter abandonment, throwing herself with drooping wings and hidden face over a funeral altar. It represents what I feel. It represents Prostration. Yet to do it helps me.”*’ Within only five years a photo of the grieving Angel had reached California and inspired Jane Stanford to have it copied.



“Rosa Bathurst drowned on March 14 (or March 11), 1824”

The tragic death of the teenage Rosa Bathurst in March 1824 came as a huge shock to Roman society. She had fascinated everyone with her beauty, intelligence and charm, only to be overwhelmed by the waters of the flood-swollen river Tiber while out riding. The actual day in March on which it happened matters little, except as an example of how quickly the record of even sensational events can become distorted. The fine monument to her by the English sculptor Richard Westmacott the younger was in place by 1825, but it took at least six years before the long inscriptions in English and Italian were added. The Italian inscription gives the day of her drowning as March 14 and the English version March 11. Both dates are contradicted by the March 16 given in contemporary written sources. One of these is a letter from Lady Aylmer, Rosa’s aunt and chaperone in Rome, who witnessed the incident and who surely remembered for ever which day it had happened.

New evidence has unexpectedly come from a contemporary diary which David Brunnstrom in Brussels recently told us about. His great-greatgrandfather, John S.W. Johnson, was visiting Rome in 1824 while on a tour which he published as *Journal of a Tour through parts of France, Italy and Switzerland in the years 1823-4* (Longman & Co., 1827). Keeping a daily journal of his sightseeing in Rome, Johnson writes towards the end of his entry dated March 16, 1824: “Our evening has been rendered unhappy by the melancholy account we have received of an accident which happened to a Miss Bathurst a few hours since; she was riding in company of her uncle and another gentleman near the Tiber.....” The date of March 16 therefore seems confirmed, and the two inscriptions on the tomb must be incorrect.



Serafina Carafo, *The tragic end of Miss Bathurst* (1824),
tempera on card, private collection



Tomb of Rosa Bathurst, south face, by Richard Westmacott, jr. (1825)

WHO THEY WERE NOT...

Augustus Hare, William Wordsworth, H.C. Andersen, Sophia Schliemann....the casual visitor strolling around the cemetery comes across names that seem familiar. But they are not always what they seem.....

The name Augustus Hare will always be associated with *Walks in Rome* (1871) which in its successive editions became a standard guide to the city. But the Augustus William Hare buried in 1834 in the Parte Antica was the author's uncle. He died aged only 41 while visiting Rome just before his nephew was born there and named after him. Augustus Hare the uncle was known for an influential volume of essays, *Guesses at Truth* (written with his brother Julius), and for his sermons composed while serving in a parish in England. When years later A.J.C. Hare came to describe in *Walks in Rome* the Old Protestant Cemetery (now the "Parte Antica"), naturally he mentioned that his uncle was buried very near to Keats. But why was Hare buried in the Parte Antica which had supposedly been closed for further burials in 1822? It seems that Hare made a special request to



Sophia Schliemann wearing jewellery from the 'Treasure of Priam'

be buried next to the young children of his friend Baron Bunsen, the Prussian envoy to the papal court. Whether this had official approval, we do not know.

Three years later there was another burial in the Parte Antica, that of the infant son of Joseph Severn who was laid to rest next to Keats. But no gravestone was erected until 1882 when his father was also buried there. Its curious inscription notes that "The poet Wordsworth was present at his baptism in Rome", thus neatly linking the two generations of Romantic poets.

The William Wordsworth buried in the Zona Vecchia (V.6.23; 1835-1917) was the poet's grandson. After a distinguished career of 30 years in the Indian Educational Service, he retired with

his wife to Capri. It is said that the Capresi, finding it difficult to pronounce his surname, called him "Vota e svota".

Another grave that catches the eye is that of Sophia Schliemann (Zona 2.1.24), the name of the wife of Heinrich Schliemann, who excavated at Mycenae and Troy and who famously had his young Greek bride wear the gold jewellery that he had excavated at Troy. In fact it is the grave of the daughter-in-law of Heinrich and Sophia, who married their son Agamemnon as his second wife.

Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish author of fairy tales and children's stories, is not to be confused with another H.C. Andersen, the Norwegian-American sculptor whose striking monument lies in the Zona Prima (1.7.10). The Danish author did visit Rome several times, but the sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen (1872-1940) settled here for more than 40 years. A fellow-Norwegian who had preceded him to Rome was the distinguished historian P.A. Munch (1810-1863; Zona 2.19.15), who was an uncle of the painter Edvard Munch. This year we have restored the tomb of Munch (see below) that was designed by his fellow-Norwegian Ole Fladager who is also buried here.



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

Family tomb of Hendrik Christian Andersen

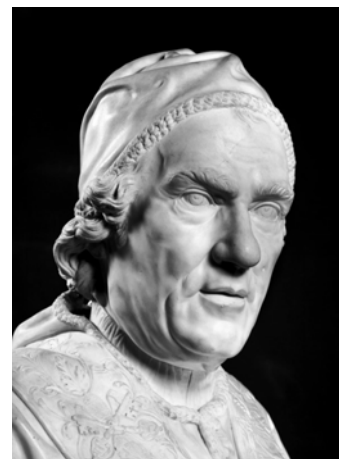
Finally, any fan of ancient Egypt might linger at the grave of Carl Reinhold Lepsius (Zona 1.11.12). But the dates on it (1807-1836) rule it out as the resting-place of the great Egyptologist, Carl Richard Lepsius. Both were born, only three years apart, in Naumburg an der Saale in Saxony and were presumably related to each other.

Missing persons

Many visitors are grateful for our volunteers' help in finding specific graves (how to use the online databases was explained in *Newsletter* 12). But what if someone is convinced that X was buried here but we can find no trace of him or her?

Over the years many older burials have been exhumed. Remains were placed in the ossuaries or in national tombs and the gravestones removed – you can see a few of them displayed along the walls of the Zona Terza. Not all the names are recorded on the plaques at the ossuaries. One regrettable absence is Sarah Parker Remond, the noted Afro-American abolitionist and doctor (1826-1894) (see *Newsletter* 10). Funds are being raised in the USA to erect a plaque in her memory – if you would like to contribute, please contact the Director.

Survival of the oldest graves has been uneven. So long as the Parte Antica was an unenclosed part of the meadows used for popular festivals, the tombs were vulnerable to grazing flocks and the occasional vandalism. There were certainly more people buried there than there are monuments today. One of these was the English



Christopher Hewetson (1731-1798), Pope Clement XIV, (1773), marble, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

sculptor John Deare (see *Newsletter* 17) who died in August 1798. Among the few friends who attended his funeral was the Irish sculptor and occasional rival, Christopher Hewetson, famous in the city for his portrait busts. Hewetson died a few months later and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery but his grave is unknown. So also are the graves of Johann Samuel Bach (1749-1778), a painter and grandson of Johann Sebastian Bach, and August Christoph Kirsch, another young painter on a scholarship from Dresden, who was buried there in 1787. These are only a few of the untraced graves.

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There are two other explanations why a specific grave might not be found. Either the person in question was not buried here – Lord Byron’s grave is the one most often sought (he was buried in England after dying in Greece) – or else they existed only in fiction. We have had enquiries as to where Henry James’ *Daisy Miller* is buried and also the *Jenny* who is the subject of Sigrid Undset’s novel of that name (published in 1911; see *Newsletter* 6). Both were fictional, of course, unlike Rosa Bathurst: her dramatic drowning in the Tiber was recounted in the memoirs of Stendhal and Chateaubriand and many others, but was also the subject of Giorgio Nelson Page’s historical novel *Il racconto di Rosa Bathurst* (Rome, 1952). In what must be a rare coincidence, both the heroine of the novel and its author are buried in the same Cemetery, since Page lies in the family tomb built for his grandfather Thomas Jefferson Page (Zona 1.12.22).



NEWS FROM THE CEMETERY



The restored Munch tomb on Norway’s National Day

The Embassy of Norway, through its previous (H.E. Einar Bull) and current (H.E. Bjørn Grydeland) Ambassadors, has generously supported the Cemetery by hosting an annual Family Day. On May 13 around 60 Embassy staff and their families and Friends of the Cemetery and Volunteers gathered for guided tours and refreshments in the late afternoon sunshine. Thanks to the Embassy too, the tomb of Norway’s great historian Peter Munch has re-



Swedish ceremony around their National Tomb

cently been cleaned by the conservators Gianfranco Malorgio and Sara Toscan of Il Laboratorio s.a.s. Some 40 Norwegians gathered at the grave to lay a wreath on it on the occasion of their National Day on May 17.



Byström’s tomb in 2009 and after restoration



Thanks to the Swedish Women’s Educational Association (SWEA) in Rome, we have been able to clean the Swedish National Tomb and those of Johan David Åkerblad and the sculptor Johan Niclas Byström (see *Newsletter* 18). Åkerblad (1763-1819) was a diplomat but also an epigrapher famous for his contribution towards deciphering the Egyptian hieroglyphic script. His grave lies in the Parte Antica very close to that of John Keats. The Association celebrated the event with the soprano Katarina Agorelius performing some songs around the newly cleaned graves of these Swedes buried far from home. But, as Carl Rupert Nyblom wrote in *Bilder från Italien* (Uppsala, 1864), “It seems a part of the homeland in the midst of a foreign country; there one feels on one’s own ground, and all those unknown who lie under the green mounds seem all to be friends from long ago. One perceives a marvellous sense of domestic peace in that sacred place.”



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

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OPENING HOURS

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(last entrance 4.30pm)

Sunday & Public Holidays: 9.00am -1.00pm

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NEWSLETTER of the Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

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ROME, 2012

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Disponibile anche in versione italiana
www.cemeteryrome.it