

of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

NEWSLETTER



New book!

The Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome. Its history, its people, and its survival for 300 years, by Nicholas Stanley-Price, 2013. ISBN 978-88-909168-0-9. Soon on sale through website and Visitors' Centre

The Cemetery after almost 300 years: a new look at its history

Why is there such a contrast between the Parte Antica, with its few tombs dispersed among the trees, and the other zones with their densely packed rows of graves? Burial in the Parte Antica was stopped in 1822 not because it was 'full', as I sometimes hear people saying, but because of a ruling by Pope Pius VII. He objected that the Protestants' tombs and the trees that they planted were spoiling the view of the Pyramid.



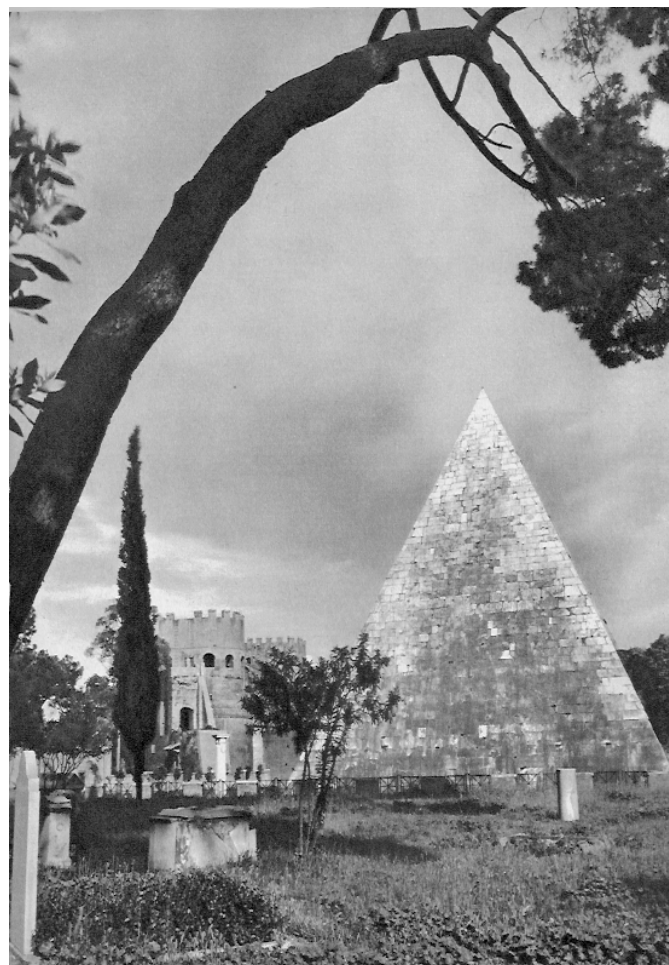
Lorenzo Scarabelotto's view from Monte Testaccio (1840s)



The Parte Antica after bombing in 1944

A new book explains why the Cemetery looks the way it does today. It asks other questions: did the early Protestants really have to hold their funerals at night? And did they have to get permission for their tombstones? Yes, they did....but so too did Catholics and Jews. The Church's Statute of 1707 required all designs for tombstones to be authorised. And night funerals made sense in

Rome's climate. A law of 1874 formalised this by forbidding bodies to be transported through the streets before 11pm in summer and 10pm in winter. So there was one law for all faiths.



The Parte Antica in 1957, before renovation. Photo by Herbert Kreft in German travel magazine *Merian*, retrieved by Alexander Booth

The book also breaks new ground in describing the recent history of the Cemetery. For instance, the generous bequest made by Clare Benedict in 1961 allowed the Ambassadors to renovate the Parte Antica. They installed an irrigation system for grass lawns, planted trees and laid out the paved paths that we see today. But not everyone liked the result. Georgina Masson, author of the popular *Gardens of Italy* and the *Companion Guide to Rome*, wrote a letter to the *Architectural Review* complaining how awful it looked. At least it looked better than it had in 1944 after bombs had fallen on it, another episode that the book investigates.

This is all part of the Cemetery's eventful 20th century history. But equally fascinating are the stories behind the people buried there.

continues on page 2 →

→ continued from page 1

Much of the book is devoted to those whom W.W.Nevin in 1880 called “a silent congregation from all over the world” and the author Norman Douglas “a jumble of names and nationalities”. There is a special section devoted to the two ‘twin graves’ of Keats-and-Severn and Shelley-and-Trelawny, but many less well-known personalities make their appearance. An attractive feature of the book is its more than 80 illustrations. Many of these are little-known paintings and photos, such as those reproduced here.

Research by Christina Huemer on the Cemetery

All history-writing depends on the work of others. One of these is Christina Huemer who launched the Friends and their newsletter (see *Newsletter* 13). Her enthusiasm came through in her public talks and in her writing. Three of her articles have been published since her death and deserve to be better known.

One of them (see *Newsletter* 21) describes the funeral in 1795 of the Swedish artist Jonas Åkerström. The rare coincidence of having both a description and a drawing of a night funeral took Christina to Stockholm for research, but she didn't ignore her native country. A painting exhibited nearer her own home that she wrote about was Thomas Cole's view, dated to 1832-33, of the “Protestant burying ground” in Rome. The painting hangs at Olana in New York state, the former home of Frederic Church who was Cole's pupil and whose landscapes epitomise the Hudson River School that Cole founded.

Published only this year is Christina's review of sculpture in the Cemetery. Prepared for a conference, it is only a summary, as she herself admitted. But she draws attention to the wealth of sculpture for others to study in more detail.

For details of these articles, see <http://www.cemeteryrome.it/history/reading.html>

News from the Protestant cemeteries in Venice and Livorno

For some time there has been concern about the Evangelical Section of the municipal cemetery on the island of San Michele in Venice. Among those buried there are Ezra Pound and Joseph Brodsky. Still actively in use, it has suffered especially from problems of subsidence (due to its lagoon location) and a lack of funding for maintenance. Among those taking action have been Lady Frances Clarke, the President of Venice in Peril, and John Mowinkel, an American businessman who has Norwegian ancestors buried there. Working with the national and city authorities in Venice and with the Valdese, Lutheran and Anglican churches there, they have set up an ONLUS (non-profit association) to raise funds for conservation. For information, contact aresm@gmail.com

The Protestant or English Cemetery of Florence maintains a high profile thanks to the efforts of Julia Bolton Holloway (<http://www.florin.ms/cemetery.html>). Meanwhile the Old English Cemetery in Livorno has also been in the news. The cultural association Livorno delle Nazioni is dedicated to studying and preserving what was the oldest Protestant cemetery in Italy (the first burial was made in 1644). See their blogs www.livornodellenazioni.wordpress.com (mixed Italian and English) and <http://leghornmerchants.wordpress.com/> (English). Their new book, *Un archivio di pietra: l'antico cimitero degli inglesi di Livorno* (eds Matteo Giunti and Giacomo Lorenzini), Pacini Editore, Pisa, 2013, has useful essays on its history and flora, along with options for preservation.

Finally, two other recent books each devote a whole chapter to our Cemetery: Peter Stanford's *How to read a graveyard* (Bloomsbury, 2013) and Valeria Paniccia's *Passeggiate nei prati dell'eternità* (Ugo Mursia editore, 2013). Both authors visited us when researching their books. It's good to see the Cemetery receiving so much attention.

Danish artists in Rome: Niels Ravnkilde (1823-1890)

There were so many British, German and American artists who flocked to Rome in the 18th and 19th centuries that other nationalities are sometimes overlooked. If calculated relative to the population of Denmark, the Danes must have been among the most numerous visitors to the Eternal City. Steen and Inge-Lise Neergaard have studied the Danish presence in Rome and generously give us copies of their books to sell in the Visitors' Centre.

Their notes on Danes buried here can be found on their website (<http://www.cimitero-acattolico-venner.dk/>). Now Steen has published the diaries of a composer, Niels Ravnkilde, who lived in Rome from 1853 until his death and burial in the Cemetery (Zone 1.3.40). Ravnkilde's music is little known but his diaries give a fascinating account of life in the Scandinavian community in Rome. Visitors such as the playwright Henrik Ibsen and the composers Edvard Grieg and Franz Liszt flit across the pages. The diaries cover the years 1853-57 and 1880-1890. Why the big gap? Supposedly, one of his friends burned the other volumes after Ravnkilde's death because they were too frank about his unhappy emotional life. Steen has edited those that survive (in the Royal Library in Copenhagen) and adds substantially to our knowledge of Danes in Rome.



The Evangelical Section in Venice



The Old English cemetery in Livorno

NEWS FROM THE CEMETERY

Who was "PO 1875"? Another mystery solved

As you walk under the arch into the Parte Antica, the stone standing nearest to you has always been a mystery. It is a small marble column, less than a metre high. It has two inscriptions on different faces, carefully engraved, one of them larger than the other. Both read "PO" above and "1875" below. So who was Po?



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

There is no trace of a Po in the burial records. In fact by 1875 (if it is indeed a date) there had been no burials in the Parte Antica for almost 40 years (the infant Arthur Severn had been buried there in 1837). Also strange is that this column is not visible in old photographs of the Parte Antica, even as late as the 1920s.

Does the stone provide any hints? Its top seems once to have been domed and later chiselled flat. High up on one side are a pair of holes filled with metal, as if a chain had once been attached to it. If you think of a chain and ignore its location in a cemetery, it looks more like a bollard. Some of the older bollards and chains that surround fountains in Rome look similar.



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

Po 1875 in centre

The bollard-hypothesis has now been given a boost: in a collection of miscellaneous old photos in the Cemetery's archives we have found one of this column. Pencilled on the back are the words "Colonna del ponte sul Po" (column of the bridge over the Po). The words were probably written by Marcello Piermattei, Director of the Cemetery from 1916 for more than 40 years. If it was he who had the column erected, what was its purpose? And what was a column from the river Po doing in Rome? Another mystery to solve....

Nicholas Stanley-Price



Heather Munro (1944-2013)

It was Heather who created the tight-knit group of volunteers who run the Visitors' Centre. She interviewed them, trained them, and then made sure they kept to her high standards. This was no easy task: the volunteers include retirees and young, British and Italian, but other nationalities too, all bringing their own cultural backgrounds – American, Danish, French, German, Romanian, Swiss – and others from her native New Zealand. Heather could be brisk and outspoken but she was a great judge of character and made everyone feel welcome. She was committed to making the Visitors' Centre function smoothly but, in the end, it was people that mattered to her most. For over seven years she played this vital role until her illness made it impossible to continue. On 6 September, the chapel was full to overflowing with family members from New Zealand and many friends gathered in her memory. At her request, her ashes were scattered around a young cypress tree that stands not far from the entrance. She will remain in our memories as long as the tree stands, and longer.



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HOW OTHERS SEE THE CEMETERY

Heather Munro would have loved the following extract. In 1972 five members of the English Garden Club visited gardens in and around Rome, and wrote up their impressions in the Club's new journal. It was to see the graves of Keats and Shelley that two of them arrived at the Cemetery after an excellent lunch at Perilli's in Via Marmorata.

As we entered the cemetery, near the pyramid which covers the tomb of Gaius Cestius we saw a notice asking visitors to call at the office, but this proved to be shut, it being scarcely 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I pulled open a wooden door to see the custodian fast asleep in a wheelbarrow. We turned back towards the gate and saw just inside it and against the wall a cistern with goldfish in it. A stream of water from a lead pipe flowed into the tank. There was a notice saying in English "Drinkable", and a little marble shelf alongside with two cheap drinking glasses. I filled the palm of my hand from the jet of running water and drank, knowing that there was something sacramental in what I was doing then and in that company.

'So did I', said Mrs Laing.

We went on, past camellias in large tubs sunk in the ground. The cemetery is full of ilex, box, pines and oleanders. When you first go in it seems full, close-ranked, with many English graves but many others also, non-Catholic, Greek and Russians and Scots, one Drummond of Logie.

Mrs Laing said, 'Someone ought to write a novel in which, after a little research into names, a binding theme is discovered.'

We turned away to the left where there still seems to be room for burials and walked through the pervading resinous smell of pine, passing two English women sitting on a bench having a light luncheon of excellent-looking pears. We came to the graves of Keats and Severn....

From Jules Margottin, *Some gardens and saints in Rome. Garden History* 1, 1 (1972), 24-48

WHO THEY WERE...

Mary Ellen Hingston (1846-1895)



Mary Ellen Hingston with her twin daughters and a son

Mary Ellen Hingston was my great-grandmother. She was born in 1846, one of the seven children of Theodore Davis, a doctor at Clevedon in Somerset. In 1869 she married Ernest Alison Hingston, born in Plymouth and then a successful businessman in Bristol. Ernest and Mary Ellen had five children including twin girls one of whom, Margaret (always known as Daisy), was my grandmother. They were a typical late Victorian family and the girls grew up to be skilled in painting, needlework, music, riding and archery.

Mary Ellen was a good pianist and doubtless an affectionate mother although the children were definitely to be "seen and not heard". She was also very fond of travelling. My grandmother told me that she and her mother had been around the world as passengers on cargo ships, and Granny had a collection of weird souvenirs that fascinated me and my sister when, as children, we were allowed to play with them. As well as being an excellent needlewoman, Daisy was also good at making belts and shopping bags out of string and weaving baskets from willow twigs. It is likely that she learned these skills from the sailors on the cargo ships.

In the end Mary Ellen's love of travelling proved to be her undoing. In 1895 she and my grandmother, on their way to Italy, stayed at a cheap hotel in Paris where Mary Ellen contracted typhoid. They pressed on to Rome where she succumbed to the fever before her husband Ernest could get there. She died on 6th June, aged only 49, and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery (Zone 1.8.21).

Coping with this tragedy in a foreign country must have been quite traumatic for the 23-year-old Daisy. But according to a sketch book still in my possession, four days before her mother died she was sketching a view of Trajan's column. In early July a view of Castel Gandolfo appears on the page above a hand-written note saying "What mother suggested as a good foreground for Castel Gandolfo."

But Mary Ellen's name did not irrevocably die with her on that June day. On 7 February 1969, under a heading "Those Were The Days – 100 years ago", the local newspaper quoted from the *Clevedon Mer-*

cury of 6th February 1869 an account of the wedding between "Dr. Hingston of Plymouth and Mary Ellen, youngest daughter of Theodore Davis, Esq., of Lea Grove, Clevedon...The church, which was crowded with the elite of Clevedon, was proof of the high esteem in which the father of the bride and the family are held in Clevedon and its neighbourhood. Six carriages and pairs conveyed the wedding party to the church. A carpet had been laid from the church path outside to the gates of the sacred edifice....."

More strangely still, in his column in *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper on some unknown date in the 1960's or '70's, Peter Simple – pseudonym of Michael Wharton – wrote about visiting the Protestant Cemetery. He mentioned that, besides the tombs of the famous poets Keats and Shelley, there were also "memorials of Mehetabel, daughter of the Rev. Henry Stobridge and Kate Stobridge, of Frederick Stopford, of Mary Ellen Hingston ...". After an hour with the English dead, he rushes off to Babington's Tea Rooms for "Earl Grey tea, scones, toasted bath buns, anchovy toast, muffins, crumpets, shortbread, queen cakes, seed cake and rich plum cake." He finally staggers out with "indigestion caused not so much by over-eating as by sheer nostalgia".

Mary Ellen's spirit still hovers over Rome. In 1961 her great-granddaughter married a Roman and in 2009 her great-great-great-grandson, Giacomo, was born in the city in which she met her death 114 years earlier.

Contributed by Jill Whitelaw, a volunteer and a Friend of the Cemetery.



Visit from the President of Venezuela

In July we had an unannounced visit from the Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro, who headed directly to the grave of Antonio Gramsci to pay his respects there. This was his first official visit to a EU country since assuming the Presidency. His programme in Rome included meetings with Pope Francis and the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, so we can feel flattered that he also managed to squeeze in a visit to the Cemetery.



President Maduro adds a pebble

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

THE NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

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OPENING HOURS

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Sunday & Public Holidays: 9.00am -1.00pm
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