

of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

NEWSLETTER



Foreign artists in the time of cholera



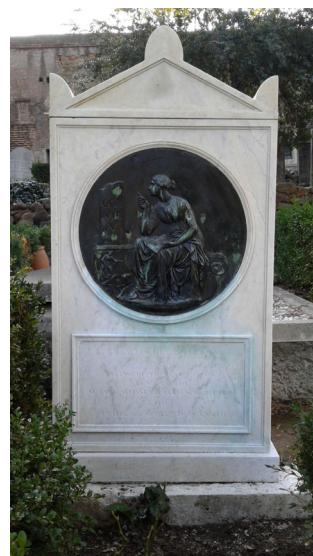
Constantin Hansen, *Portrait of Gottlieb Bindesbøll*, 1849, Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen

In July 1837 the first case was confirmed in Rome of a cholera already widespread in northern and southern Italy, having erupted in northern Europe five years earlier. All cities, and even small villages, imposed *cordons sanitaires* to keep people out. His friends persuaded Bertel Thorvaldsen to leave Rome but the fierce defenders of nearby villages forced him back to the city. Similarly, the Danish painter Constantin Hansen and architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll set off for Florence but they also had to return.

Hansen's painting of his fellow-artists dates from mid-1837. This scene of Bindesbøll, in the red fez, re-

city's sights.

Severn had been fortunate. Following the tragic death of his infant son Arthur in July, he left with his family to spend the summer in Olevano, the village much favoured by artists in the Monti Equi east of Rome. But other foreigners – as well as many thousands of Romans – met their deaths from cholera. The French painter Xavier Sigalon was one of them; his tomb can be seen in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi. For the non-Catholics we can compare our own burial records with the first-hand accounts of residents such as the Severns and Frances Bunsen, wife of the Prussian Legate. Henry Behnes Burlowe, for instance, was a popular young sculptor who lodged in the coach-house of Severn's residence at Via Rasella, 155. He declared that he had too much work to do and would not move. He succumbed on 8 September (his monument is at Zone V.11.8). A week earlier so too had Olaus Kellermann (Zone 1.12.6), a gifted young Danish epigrapher who was tutor to the Bunsen sons. A Norwegian cabinet-maker, Christoph Vinter (d. 24 August), was known to the Bunsens as a stalwart member of their chapel choir.



Gravestone of Olaus Kellermann, restored in 2019

counting his recent travels in Ottoman Greece is now viewed as alluding to contemporary debates about artistic truth. The serious expressions of the artists were once interpreted as their dejection at the cholera outbreak. But the disease had barely reached Rome by then: its peak was in late August to mid-September. It was almost over by December when the English painter Samuel Palmer and his wife arrived (on their honeymoon!) and Joseph Severn guided Palmer around the



Constantin Hansen, *A Party of Danish Artists in Rome*, 1837, oil on canvas, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Popular feeling ran high. A priest suspected of giving children sweets was attacked, as was an English teacher, George Houseal, who was assaulted on the Ferragosto holiday in Piazza Montanara. Three *carabinieri* who came to his aid were stabbed and taken to hospital. Houseal never recovered from his wounds and died on 22 August.

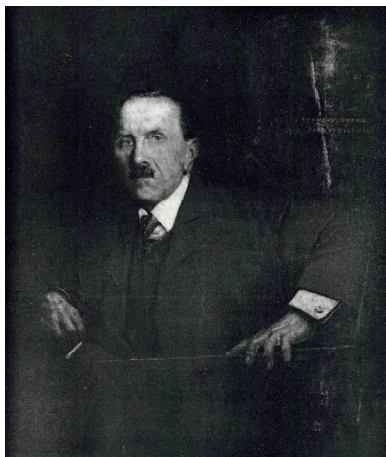
For the foreign artists who remained, commissions suddenly dried up. The otherwise successful sculptor Joseph Gott, who had carved Keats's gravestone, wrote in November 1838 that for two years he had had no orders. More devastating for Rome's art world, Bertel Thorvaldsen finally acted on his decision to return home after forty years in the city. The cholera epidemic was at its height, one of his girl models caught it (she survived) and on 23 August he made a will valid under Roman law. As a result, plans could go forward for a museum, to be designed by Bindesbøll, dedicated to him in his native city. A year later he and his collections were in Copenhagen.

Nicholas Stanley-Price

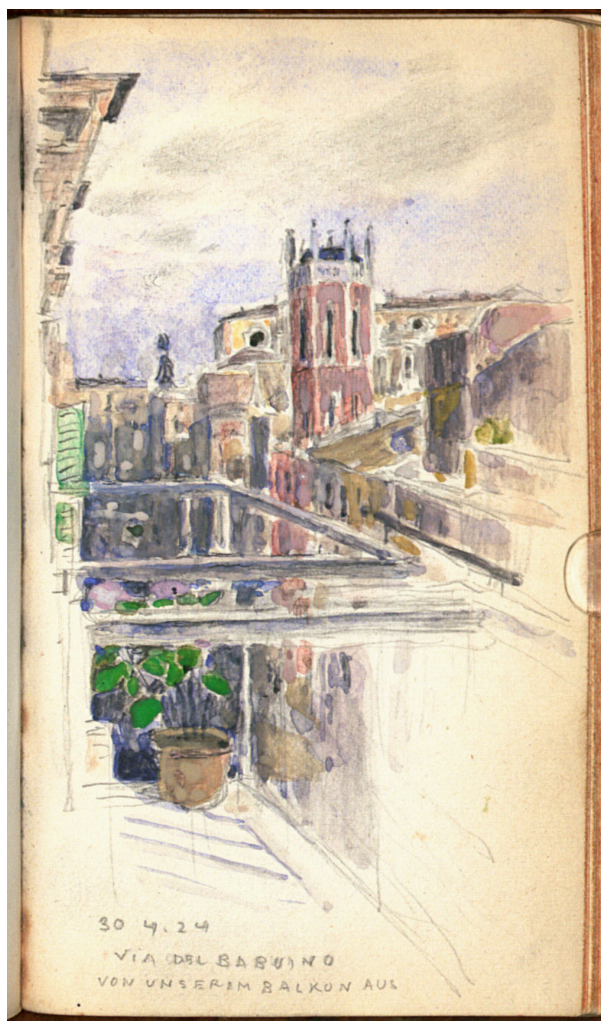
WHO THEY WERE

The dark shadows of Friedrich Stahl, German painter

Son of the publisher Ernst Stahl and Anna Pustet, the painter was born in 1863 in Munich where he had his first studio. His genre painting *End of season* made him known at the *Berliner salon* exhibition in 1887 and he moved to Berlin. In 1892 he was among the founders of the protest movement 'XI' in which the Jewish painter Max Liebermann also participated. Stahl's copious work of illustration involved the *Fliegende Blätter* magazine, Goethe's *Faust* and Heine's *Book of Songs*. Travelling to England, he studied the Pre-Raphaelites and painted the famous Henley Royal Regatta on the Thames. There followed stays in Rome and Florence where he studied early Italian Renaissance painting, and in 1913 he was back in Bavaria with a studio on the Starnberg lake. His painting style continued to be inspired by Impressionism but also by the 15th century Italians and the Pre-Raphaelites. He enjoyed a certain fame thanks to solo exhibitions at



Self-portrait (1917), now lost, from *Die Kunst im Deutschen Reich*, December 1943



Via del Babuino from my balcony (1924), watercolour, Bavarian State Library, Munich. The tower of All Saints' Anglican Church is recognisable.

the *Münchener Glaspalast* and various awards but he wanted to return to Italy and in December 1922 he was again in Rome at Via del Babuino, 79. Up to April 1924 he recorded the city and the Roman *campagna* in a tiny sketchbook (10 x 4 cms) of elegant watercolours and drawings that he did for his American wife Amelia (1866-1944).

The rediscovery of Stahl in Nazi Germany was due to Hitler himself. Probably on the advice of Heinrich Heim, assistant to the Head of the Party Chancellery Martin Bormann, he acquired some twenty works of various kinds, some of them later destined for the never-realised *Führermuseum*. Other senior Nazis such as Himmler, head of the SS, and Reichsmarschall Göring then also purchased works by the painter being praised by the art critics of the Third Reich. He was given the title of professor; there were important exhibitions in Berlin and Munich. The review *Die Kunst im deutschen Reich* dedicated several articles to him and a longer profile for his 75th birthday. In Italy too representatives of the regime were active: at the start of 1939 Werner Hoppenstedt, director of the 'Section dedicated to scientific cultural research' of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for art history and cultural studies (Bibliotheca Hertziana) organised an exhibition at Palazzo Zuccari that included works by Stahl. It was inaugurated by the German ambassador von Mackensen and the Minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai. Himmler lent several works to it. Hoppenstedt and Bormann secured an important prize for the painter who was by now very ill. The Italian review *Le Arti* reported in 1940: 'The German ambassador, von Mackensen, in the name of the Führer has conferred on the German painter Professor Friedrich Stahl, resident for many years in Rome, the 'Goethe medal', the highest German recognition for the arts and sciences.'

Shortly before Stahl's death on 12 July 1940 'comrade Hoppenstedt' informed the director-general of the Bavarian State Library that the artist wished to leave his travel sketchbooks to his native city. At the funeral celebrated at the Non-Catholic Cemetery's chapel on 16 July, a swastika covered the coffin and Rust, Minister of Education, and Rosenberg, Head of the Foreign Affairs Office of the NSDAP, sent wreaths. In his funeral address Hoppenstedt described Stahl to the numerous Nazi representatives present as 'the most patriotic German imaginable', 'a hater of the English' and Party sympathiser 'proud of our great victories'. Notable too was the support of the Ambassador (President of the committee responsible for the Cemetery) for his burial in the Old Cemetery 'reserved exclusively for outstanding men'. The sculptor Walter Rössler (1904-1996), on a scholarship at the German Academy in Villa Massimo in 1939-40, designed in 1941 the funerary monument as a small altar. A preparatory model of the work was approved by Hitler himself.

After Stahl's death he was still favoured by the Nazis. In November 1942 Heim asked Bormann to prevent a possible rise in market prices in view of the imminent sale of the painting *End of season* (starting price 40,000 Reichsmark). The same year Hitler donated the painting *Parzifal* to the Munich Neue Pinakothek where it is still conserved together with other work by Stahl.



Tomb of Friedrich and Amelia Stahl

Contributed by Dorothee Hock, Casa di Goethe, Roma who thanks the Director, Amanda Thursfield, for access to the Cemetery archive.

The Bissens and their descendants



Headstone of Johanne Bissen

The distinctive slender headstone (Zone 2.20.9) inscribed to Johanne Bissen (1836-1862) was erected by her grieving husband, the well-known Danish sculptor Vilhelm Bissen. He had made use of a design by his equally famous father, Herman Wilhelm Bissen (1798-1868). Both sculptors spent periods in Rome. Their work is found widely in public spaces and in museum collections in Copenhagen. Johanne Bissen died young, shortly after giving birth to a daughter, Hanne, who in due course married Alfred Benzon, a Danish pharmaceutical company owner. Their own daughter Johanne Benzon lived in Italy on Lake Garda until the end of World War II when she moved to Rome. One of the two daughters from her first marriage, Else (known from her nickname as Monne), died only a week after the end of the war, aged 20. The long



Bissen family grave, Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen (photo Copenhagen Museum)

text under her name on the family tomb is from one of her poems. In Rome Johanne Benzon married the Danish lawyer Andreas Frederik Basse (1877-1958). He was a Danish High Court lawyer who had settled in Rome in 1915. He became the Attaché (1920) and later (1927) Legation Secretary at the Danish Legation in Rome. He also played an important role in the 'Skandinavisk Forening', serving as its Administrator (1927-32) before becoming its chairman (1935). This historic institute, known as the *Circolo Scandnavo*, has been hosting Nordic artists since 1860 and operates now from the

Casino di Vigna next door to the Villa Farnesina. Both Johanne and Andreas Basse lie in the same family tomb originally designed by Vilhelm Bissen.

Contributed by Baron Fredrik Rosenørn-Lehn, great-great-grandson of Johanne Bissen.



Trees and plants in the garden: a botanist investigates (no. 5): the Bird of Paradise



The *Caesalpinia* near the Anderson tomb

flowers). Flowering is in summer – you can find one of the shrubs near the Hendrik Anderson tomb (Zone 1.7.10).

Unusually for a cemetery, we have two fine examples of the Bird of Paradise shrub (*Caesalpinia gilliesii*). It is found in parks and gardens in central and southern Italy but in the north the winters are too cold for it to be outside. Another species, *Caesalpinia regia*, can grow as a tree some 12–15m high but ours is a shrub, rarely higher than 4m. Its leaves are bipinnate and its striking red flowers are carried on long racemes. Each flower has five yellow petals and ten long red stamens (see the photos with buds and open

The plant is native to South America. It was brought to Europe by the Spanish, Portuguese, French, English and other navigators in the Age of Discovery. Linnaeus named the genus after a governor of the Antilles named Ponci, hence *Ponciana*. But now *Caesalpinia* is the preferred genus name, derived from the Italian botanist Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603). He proposed a classification of plants based on their reproductive organs and was promptly excommunicated for disseminating ideas inconsistent with the version in *Genesis*. The '*Gilliesii*' recognises John Gillies (1792-1834), a Scottish navigator who explored South America.

The popular name is due to the distinctive red flowers resembling a bird of Paradise, a name also commonly applied to flowers of the *Strelitzia* genus which are botanically quite unrelated.

Giuliano Russini and Nicholas Stanley-Price

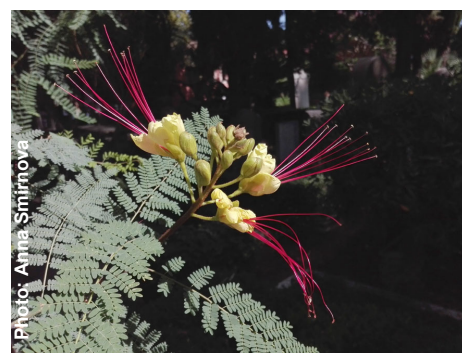


Photo: Anna Smirnova

POETS IN THE CEMETERY

'Cimitero Acattolico' by Peter Bridges

St. Paul walked out this road en route to die,
 Passing in scorn the tribune's pompous tomb.
 Now friends—and poets, sculptors, princes—lie
 In peace beneath these pines, their final room
 In Rome, brief stop, some thought, on their Grand Tour:
 For fevers like recessions may surprise
 Both ministers and maidens, rich and poor,
 And any grave fits every rank and size.
 Great Goethe thought they'd bury his bones here

But ended up in Weimar, never saw
 The blackshirt bullies, gulags, gore, and fear,
 The years that truth brought death and lies were law.
 O Keats and Shelley, sing us some brave new song
 From your green graves in our world that's gone so wrong.

Peter Bridges, contributor of several profiles to the *Newsletter* (nos. 12, 16 and 40), has published his diplomatic memoirs as *Safirka: An American Envoy* (2000).



The Piermattei photoarchive: the Woodruff grave



Major Woodruff's gravestone, Arlington

The gravestone to Annie Sampson Woodruff (1856-1933), was freshly carved when photographed by Marcello Piermattei (see *Newsletter* 50). In 1882 she had married Lieutenant Thomas Woodruff whose career in the US military ended with his death from yellow fever caught at Santiago de Cuba while serving in the Spanish-American War. His grave in Arlington National Cemetery has a fine stone designed by Tiffany in 1901. The simpler stone in our cemetery was added to when their daughter Elizabeth died here in 1971; it has recently been restored (*Newsletter* 45; Zone 3.4.5.6).



Copyright Cimitero Acattolico per gli Stranieri al Testaccio,
 Foto: Marcello Piermattei / Digital Image Fototeca della Biblioteca
 Hertziana – Istituto Max Planck per la storia dell'arte, Roma



In its publicity to advertise its charms, one of Rome's historic hotels, the Grand Hôtel de la Minerve, in Piazza Minerva, used to feature famous sites such as the Spanish Steps and Castel Sant'Angelo. This was one of the series, despite the funereal associations of the Cemetery and the Pyramid – which in this view has acquired a strange, large aperture on one face.

Correction to *Newsletter* 50, p.5: the photo caption should read: "Robert Macpherson, *View of the Cimitero Acattolico*, albumen silver print, Canadian Centre for Architecture PH1987:0885 (with permission)".

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

via Caio Cestio, 6, 00153, Roma

Director: Amanda Thursfield

OPENING HOURS

Monday to Saturday 9:00am - 5:00pm
 (last entrance 4.30pm)

Sunday & Public Holidays: 9:00am - 1.00pm
 (last entrance 12.30pm)

Tel 06.5741900, Fax 06.5741320
 mail@cemeteryrome.it

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

Nicholas Stanley-Price, EDITOR
 Anka Serbu, GRAPHIC DESIGN
 Grafica Di Marcotullio, PRINTER
 ROME, 2020

Contact: nstanleyprice@tiscali.it
 Disponibile anche in versione italiana
www.cemeteryrome.it