

Winter 2020

FRIENDS

No. 53

of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

NEWSLETTER



COVID-19 and the Cemetery during lockdown

The national lockdown declared by the Italian government on 10 March to confront the COVID-19 pandemic brought most of our usual operations to a halt. We strictly observed all government regulations as they evolved. We worked from home, processing payments for concessions and completing the annual audit of the accounts. As a registered funeral company the Cemetery continued with its primary function of burials; but no family members could attend. Nor were funeral ceremonies allowed.

As Director I was able to self-declare and I visited the Cemetery twice a week. Il Trattore, the social co-operative contracted to maintain the garden, is registered as a 'key business' and the gardeners continued their essential work.

The closure was the most difficult part of the lockdown. Not being able to attend burials was hard on family members and friends. After more than two months, we re-opened in phases: initially, on May 18 for three days a week to enable concession-holders to visit their family graves; then on June 2 for other visitors too. Two weeks later,



Presentation of the book on the graves of Keats and Shelley

when shops resumed business, we opened the fully sanitized Visitors' Centre on our usual opening schedule, with the volunteers helping to enforce distancing measures.

For all their help and tolerance during this difficult year, I thank especially our small staff, the volunteers and the ever-willing members of Il Trattore. As usual, we are indebted to the Friends for supporting restoration work on the tombs and in the garden, and we welcome you to re-visit when you can.

Contributed by Amanda Thursfield, Director

New light on the Bowles monument (1808) and its massive column

No-one who enters the Old Cemetery can avoid seeing the outsized monument to William Sidney Bowles (1778-1806). Our re-discovery of who designed it came as a surprise (see *Newsletter* 35). It was a German architect, Karl Müller, who erected it in 1808 to designs by the distinguished Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen and one of his students, Christian Daniel Rauch.



The worksite before starting treatment

Its recent restoration thanks to a Danish foundation (see *Newsletter* 49) has allowed us to understand better its different components. Other written sources have also come to light. The Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen notes on its website that the sculptor did not include the Bowles project in any list of his work. Remarkable too is a letter that Rauch wrote on 15 August 1811 to Caroline von Humboldt (mother of the two children buried 50m. from the Bowles monument, which she therefore knew well). Rauch, invited to design a tomb memorial for the recently deceased Queen Louisa of Prussia, commented that fortunately the King had not seen the Bowles monument; otherwise he might never have been invited. Thorvaldsen and Rauch were evidently not proud of their design.

An overlooked source is an article (*Strenna dei Romanisti* 1978) by Jørgen B. Hartmann, Danish art historian, Thorvaldsen specialist and long-term resident of Rome. He noted that two alternative projects for the Bowles monument are preserved in the national print collection in Berlin. One shows a broken column, the other the design that was implemented. An anonymous friend of the deceased added (in German) that Bowles's widow employed Thorvaldsen to work with the architect Müller; and that the grey granite column came from the Temple of Peace.

The monument and its ancient column

The memorial consists of a tall column shaft crowned by a Doric-style capital, set on a base in the shape of a truncated pyramid. Its height in total is c.6.62m, of which the column alone measures 4.82m. On its north and south sides the base of travertine blocks is constructed to contain semi-circular niches or alcoves; above these are framed epitaphs for Bowles in Latin (north) and English (south). The capital con-



Base with alcove and epitaph

sists of an *abacus* formed of two adjacent slabs (each 0.67 x 0.135m) and, below it, an *echinus* and *anuli* (0.2m high and 1.00m in circumference). The slabs of the marble *abacus* are joined by two bronze clamps (0.3m long, 0.03m wide). One slab has a socket-like aperture on its surface (0.06 x 0.05m; see photo). This is likely to have been made to accommodate a lifting device, dating either from Roman times or from the re-use in 1808.



Clamps and socket on the capital

At the top of the shaft under the capital and extending around its entire circumference, there are the fragmentary remains of a lead sheathing. The sheathing presumably served to smooth out irregularities in the granite surface and to ensure good adhesion between the top of the broken shaft and the capital. Just below the lead sheathing, Bowles's name, nationality and year of death were inscribed in letters large enough to be legible from ground-level (see photos



Detail of lead sheathing



The inscription before conservation

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Where did the column shaft come from?

It is a section of an ancient Roman column shaft in grey Egyptian granite known in antiquity as *marmor claudianum* and commonly referred to as *granito del Foro*. The regular black inclusions and the sandy-pinkish vein are characteristic. The Romans quarried extensively in the area of Mons Claudianus (Gebel Fatireh) in the eastern Egyptian desert and used the granite for many imperial monuments, especially during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian. In Rome, the columns of the Pantheon porch are of this granite, as were those in the porch of the Temple of the Deified Trajan, built by Apollodorus of Damascus. These granite shafts are impressive for their overall size of 40 and 50 Roman feet (c.12m and c.15m) respectively.

The measurements of the Bowles column (lower diameter 1.06m and upper diameter 0.96m) suggest instead a smaller column shaft of 30 Roman feet (when complete, shaft height of 8.85m with a lower diameter of 1.10m and upper diameter of 0.99m). Grey granite column shafts of these dimensions can be seen today in the lower interior of the Basilica Ulpia in the Forum of Trajan. The first extensive excavations of the Forum between 1812 and 1814 were conducted by the Napoleonic Government, and then continued under Pope Pius VII. But accidental finds of column shaft fragments from the Basilica could well have occurred prior to 1808. So the Basilica is a possible source for the Bowles column shaft fragment; in which case it is a little over half of its original height. The note in the Berlin archive giving a provenance in the Temple of Peace may refer generally to the area of the Imperial Fora.



The monument restored

Elizabeth Rushout's memorial to her husband

Bowles's widow had her request for a memorial approved in January 1808, more than a year after her husband had died. A Domenico Ferrari then asked permission to demolish a section of wall (probably the one along Via Marmorata) and to cut a furrow so as to haul in a massive element of a mausoleum (the usual road access was impassable after rains). This must refer to the column shaft.

This was a very expensive project: commissioning a design from the famous sculptor who that very year (1808) was elected to the prestigious Accademia di San Luca; employing the architect Müller; organizing the purchase and transport of the column from the Roman Forum; and financing the difficult project on-site to erect the column on its new base. How could Bowles's widow afford such an expensive memorial? Elizabeth Rushout was the first cousin of her husband (their fathers were brothers). The Bowles family wealth came from joint-ownership of the Vauxhall glassworks in London until it closed in the 1780s.

Elizabeth's uncle, George Bowles, was very fond of his sister Rebecca

and her three daughters. As a leading patron in England of the Swiss painter Angelica Kauffmann, he commissioned from her a painting of Rebecca with one of her daughters, Anne (Elizabeth's sister) (1773; private collection). Angelica Kauffman died in Rome on 5 November 1807 and Elizabeth's request to erect a monument to her husband is dated 22 November. Elizabeth was therefore probably in Rome then, and would have represented the Bowles family at the artist's spectacular funeral held in the church of S. Andrea delle Fratte. She then saw to the memorial to her late husband. The imposing column inscribed with his name and the two long epitaphs in Latin and English have ensured the survival of Bowles's name. As the only monument in the Old Cemetery on this scale, it seems almost to be competing with the neighbouring memorial to Gaius Cestius.

Contributed by Gianfranco Malorgio and Sara Toscan (both of the restoration company Sinape srls), Gianni Ponti (IES Abroad Roma, center director), and Nicholas Stanley-Price.



NEWS FROM THE CEMETERY

Michael Jonas, pastor of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Rome, has joined the Advisory Committee.

During the autumn the Garden Room hosted two exhibitions with Cemetery-related themes:

Cosetta Mastragostino, who has shown widely in Italy, presented 'anime vagabonde', six ingenious works in papier-mâché that evoked writers who had found their resting-places in the Cemetery (Antonio Gramsci, Andrea Camilleri, Luce D'Eramo, Dario Bellezza, Emilio Gadda and Amelia Rosselli). Then Marta Abbott, a Czech-American artist resident in Rome, revealed in 'Stargazers' her unusual collages that combine photographs of lichens with images in inks made from leaves and plants growing in the Cemetery. Both exhibitions have attracted a good audience.



The exhibition of Marta Abbott

The Swedish artist Hans Björsson has published a collection of his artwork featuring the Cemetery. www.hansbjorsson.se

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HANS BJÖRSSON

WHO THEY WERE

'He who moves clouds'. The painter Alfred von Schüssler

On 7 April 1820 on an estate near Hannover a child was born and baptised with the name Hermann Ludwig Lohmann. The estate of Equord, where the 17-year-old mother lived, belonged to Hans Georg von Hammerstein (1771-1841), a fickle character, a general under Napoleon and, above all, a great womaniser. A 'Chronology of the von Hammerstein family' of 1856 relates that a sister of the baron and her husband Christian Heinrich von Schüssler adopted Hammerstein's natural child under another name. 'Alfred achieved much in the field of painting' and 'for his love of art went to Rome where he died in 1849.' Alfred von Schüssler however retained his first baptismal names, which also appear on his gravestone (Zone 1.8.12).



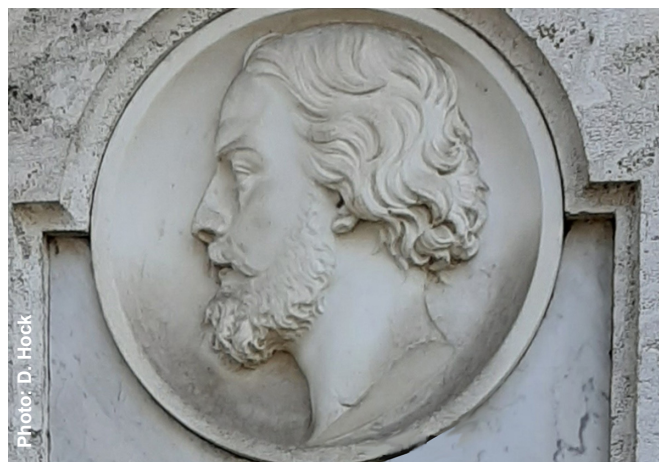
Alfred von Schüssler, *Children reading*, oil on canvas

The family moved from Hannover to Dresden where Alfred became in 1835 a pupil of the painter Eduard Bendemann (1811-1889), director of the Dresden Academy. He specialised in historical and architectural subjects. In 1840 the review "Kunstblatt" praised his painting of *Moses abandoned*.

His arrival in Rome in 1843 was presumably thanks to the support of August Kestner (Zone 1.1.23), who since 1818 had represented the Kingdom of Hannover at the Holy See (he being the son of Charlotte Buff who inspired Goethe for his *Werther*). In an undated letter Hammerstein asks Kestner for news of 'Alfred Schüssler' – evidently the baron was not indifferent to the fate of his son, now moving in German artistic circles in Rome and using the German library. His closest friends were the Hannoverian sculptor Heinrich Kümmel (Zone V.2.5) and the painter Karl Hummel. Alfred was much indebted to Kestner, accompanying him in 1843 on a trip to Naples and Sicily. When in 1845 he returned for some time to Dresden, he brought with him some portraits done by Kestner to send to his nephew Hermann Kestner in Hannover.

Schüssler took part in the famous 'German carnival' at Cervaro, an occasion for allotting rather fanciful titles and tasks. In 1843 he was the 'Carrier of the wine flags', the next year he was chosen as 'He who moves clouds'. He owed this title to his great height – in fact, he was also called the 'long' painter, often accompanied by the 'short Hummel'. In 1845 he was 'Corporal of the Gendarmerie' and the next year 'Inspector of salad'. He makes no further appearances at these light-hearted occasions. He suffered often from acute fever and died the evening of 22 November 1849 in the Protestant hospital on the Campidoglio. The death registry records his funeral in the afternoon of the 24th. The Lutheran pastor was ill and the organist Schultz 'recited the prescribed prayers.'

The writer-diplomat Ernst Zacharias Platner took care of disposing of the estate which consisted only of a few drawings and paintings. Artist friends cared for him: they partially covered his debts of 178 *scudi* and made a collection to redeem a ring and a clock that Schüssler had taken to the pawnbroker. The only official heir was his adoptive father's sister, the Countess Caroline Amelie (née von Schüssler), now the wife of the Count d'Octave Renaud de Falicon. She accepted two paintings, *St Peter* and *Woman at prayer*, and asked Platner to dispose freely of what remained. She confirmed her late nephew's esteem for Kestner and suggested erecting a funerary monument should there remain sufficient funds (though without intending to contribute).



Von Schüssler's gravestone (detail)

Only two works by Schüssler are known to today in German public collections. In 2008 his *Coastal landscape* and *View of Cogoletto* were among works by better known painters that were dramatically stolen from a bank in Düsseldorf and never found. Sadly, there are no portraits of Schüssler – the only one known, made by Kestner, was destroyed when Hannover was bombed in 1943. There is only the gravestone relief, probably the work of a friend, perhaps his compatriot Kümmel.

Contributed by Dorothee Hock, Casa di Goethe, Rome

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

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

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

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