



NEWSLETTER

200 years since the death of John Keats

Around the world their admirers are marking the deaths of John Keats in 1821 and of Percy Bysshe Shelley the following year. Commemorative events at the Cemetery will depend on how COVID-19 pandemic restrictions evolve.

A hundred years ago the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association organised events at the Keats-Shelley House and at the grave. Its

leaders in Rome – Robert Underwood Johnson, Sir Rennell Rodd and Harry Nelson Gay – presided and Kenneth Grahame, author of the classic *Wind in the Willows*, was invited to speak. The ceremony at the grave took place at 11.00am on 25 February 1921. Two months later the French writer Henri Buriot-Darsiles visited the grave and saw wreaths there from the City of Rome and from the Royal Society for Literature which had been founded a year before Keats's death.



C. Earle, *Keats's grave, Rome*, oil on canvas, 52 x 35.5 cm
(private collection)



The 'classic view' in a contemporary photograph

By strange coincidence, a small auction-house in Berne recently offered an oil painting entitled "Keats's grave, Rome" (John McGuigan kindly alerted me to it). It is signed "C. Earle", presumably Charles Earle (1831-1893), a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colour. Unlike other paintings of the grave, the artist has chosen the 'classic view' of the Old Cemetery and highlighted the distant gravestone, making it appear nearer than it is in reality. A white sheen distinguishes the stone as if possessing a special aura. In the foreground a shepherd with his flock gazes in awe.

Earle produced a number of watercolours of Roman scenes, the few that are dated ranging between 1863 and 1884. In this oil painting he has shown Severn's headstone next to Keats's and also, by interrupting the line of the perimeter wall, the small gravestone of Arthur Severn in its original position in front of his father's. The painting must therefore post-date 1882, a work from late in the artist's life. At the Berne auction it failed to attract any other bidders and is now in Rome.

Nicholas Stanley-Price



How to bury a Protestant (1742): a new discovery in the Stuart court archives

The Stuart Papers in the Royal Archives at Windsor are invaluable for documenting the earliest burials of Protestants in Rome, many of them members of the exiled Stuart court (see Edward Corp, *The Stuarts in Italy 1719-1766* (2011) and the *Friends' Newsletter* no. 21 (2012)). They have now yielded a remarkable document: a note on the procedures to follow and the usual costs involved when burying a Protestant.

The occasion was the death of Charles Slezer (also Slezor), a

Protestant from Scotland. In 1731 Slezer had joined the Stuart court in Rome as a pensioner, becoming also a leading member of the Jacobite Freemason Lodge there. He died on 23 October 1742 and was buried the following day. The document (SP Box 3/Folder 1/48) is in two parts: (1) a narrative in the handwriting of Pietro Marsi, the Treasurer at the Stuart court, which describes the procedures to follow; and (2) a list of the usual charges, written in the hand of a clerk, Domenico Arnoux (who in 1762 succeeded Marsi on the latter's death).

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Peter Stephens, engraved by James Roberts (attrib.), *The funeral of a Protestant gentleman*, etching, 1767 (collection of Mauro Sebastianelli; see Newsletter 35)



Palazzo Balestra, 'the King's palace', where Slezer died

Memoire de ce qu'il faut pour la sepulture d'un Protestant (English translation right column)

Il faut premierement envoyer chez le vicegerent pour la permission de faire la fosse qui est ordinairement longue 12 palms, large 6. Palms et haute 8 palmes. L'on donne cette permission au Masson qu'il faut qui ayt avec lui deux autres hommes pour remplir la fosse après qu'on y a mis la caisse, et l'on paye au dit Masson 2. sequins pout tout, à ce qu'il me semble. Il faut demander aussi au vicegerent il Barigello avec 12. Sbirri pour accompagner le cadaver, aux quels Barigello, et Sbirri on donne Sc 3.60. Il faut la caisse qu'on paye Sc 1. et 6 flambeaux pour accompagner le cadaver.

Aux cochers de la maison on leur donne un ecu pour boire. Au Becamorto pour avoir habillé le cadaver, et porter la caisse en bas et le mettre dans le caroce, et la reprendre hors du caroce aux ses compagnons jusque à la sepulture, il me semble on lui donne X. ou 12. pauls.

Il me semble que à Bernard Niriker on donne aussy un ecu pour ses peines.

Pour Mr Slezer le 24 octobre 1742

Pour un carrosse a Place d'Espagne	Sc 0. 70
12 sbirri à 30 et un capporal 60	Sc 3. 90
Becamorte e coltre	Sc 1. 02. 1/2
Per cassa e facchini	Sc 1. 20
6 torcie di cera et [illegible]jents	Sc 4. 97 1/2
al muratore [illegible]	Sc 4. 00
	Sc 15. 70

Memo regarding what is needed for a Protestant burial

One must first of all send to the Vicegerent for permission to dig the grave which usually is 12 palms long, 6 palms wide and 8 palms deep. One gives this permit to the mason who should have with him two other men to fill the grave after lowering the coffin, and the mason must be paid two sequins for everything, in my opinion. One must also ask the Vicegerent for a Captain with twelve Guards to accompany the body; to this Captain and the guards one gives 3.60 scudi. One has to pay 1 scudo for the coffin and six torches to accompany the body.

To the household coachmen one gives an ecu as a tip. To the undertaker for dressing the corpse, carrying down the coffin and putting it into the carriage, and removing it from the carriage with his colleagues to the grave, my view is to pay him X or 12 pauls.

I also think that Bernard Niriker [Nieriker] should receive an ecu for his trouble.

For Mr Slezer 24 October 1742

For a carriage at the Piazza di Spagna	Sc 0. 70
12 Guards at 30 and a Captain 60	Sc 3. 90
Undertaker and pall	Sc 1. 02. 1/2
For coffin and porters	Sc 1. 20
6 wax torches and [illegible]	Sc 4. 97 1/2
To the mason and [illegible]	Sc 4. 00
	Sc 15. 70

Comments

All measurements are given in palmi romani (1 palmo romano = 22.34 cm). All costs in the bill of charges are in scudi romani and baiocchi (the 'sequin' and 'ecu' mentioned in the narrative are equivalent to the scudo, which in turn was worth 10 paoli; and 1 paolo was worth 10 baiocchi). The total cost of around scudi 15 may be compared with Slezer's monthly pension which had been scudi 12. Some of the arithmetic, for example the final total and the costs for the *sbirri* (armed guards) and the *Barigello* (their captain) does not add up. Moreover, the account appears not to include some of the charges mentioned in the narrative such as the tips for the coachmen and for Bernard Nieriker, a Swiss Guard who served as the *Guarda Portone* at the Palazzo del Re from 1719 until his death in March 1746. The given total may be slightly under-stated.

By way of comparison, the charges 76 years later for burying the

German artist Karl Philipp Fohr (see Newsletter 50) totalled scudi 20.75, which was 25% higher than those for Slezer. For these two burials in the Old Cemetery, there is no mention of a burial licence fee payable to the Papal Vicegerent or the Campidoglio *conservatori*. That changes once burials start in the New Cemetery. A bill for a burial in 1824 includes a scudi 4 fee for a licence from the *Conservatori di Roma*. On the other hand, it has no charges for *sbirri* and the cost of torches is lower, resulting in a bill of only scudi 17.90.

This important discovery confirms that by the 1740s the burial of Protestants had become entirely routine – to the extent that it was superfluous to mention where the burial ground was located!

Edward Corp and Nicholas Stanley-Price

The burials made in the Old Cemetery numbered more than 150!

Charles Slezer's grave was one of the many burials not marked by a stone. The earliest dated stone monument is that of Georg Werpup, the young Hanoverian who died in 1765. A newly discovered reference in a German newspaper of 11 December 1767 seems to con-

firm this, suggesting that it was actually erected in 1767. Even after this innovation, the graves of many well-known figures such as the German antiquary and *cicerone* Johan Friedrich Reiffenstein (1719-1793) and the Irish sculptor Christopher Hewetson (1737-1799) never received stone markers.



Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807),
Portrait of Johan Friedrich Reiffenstein

A new study of the development of the Old Cemetery includes an inventory of all the burials known or presumed to have been made there. The total is over 150, twice the number of gravestones that we can see today. The study, published in the Swedish journal *Opuscula*, is available at

<http://www.cemeteryrome.it/books/reading.html>



Stefano Tofanelli (1752-1812), *Portrait of the Irish sculptor Christopher Hewetson*, Cologne Wallraf Richartz Museum



The Werpup monument



Detail from Jacques Sablet (1749-1803), *Elégie romaine* (1791)

HOW OTHERS SEE US

Nicola Moscardelli, *Visit to Shelley and to Keats*, 1930

This series of 'How others see us' has featured mainly non-Italians – one exception was the poet, writer and antique-dealer Augusto Jandolo (see Newsletter 38). But there are many Italian accounts, especially of visits made to the graves of the two Romantic poets. A little earlier than Jandolo, the poet and essayist Nicola Moscardelli made his own pilgrimage. Moscardelli (1894-1943) was from the small town of Ofena (L'Aquila). Coming to Rome in 1916 to have a war wound treated, he was enchanted by the city and settled here. We reproduce here the opening paragraphs of his essay (reprinted in L'Aria di Roma, Prose, Turin 1930).

Enclosed by the bastions of Honorius's walls, where the city ends and the *campagna* grows green like the sea, the Protestant cemetery opens its gates. We are used to thinking of the resting-place of the dead as a sad, desolate place, surrounded by cypresses, shimmering with white marble, squalid in its richness, which chills the heart and extinguishes every quivering of wings.

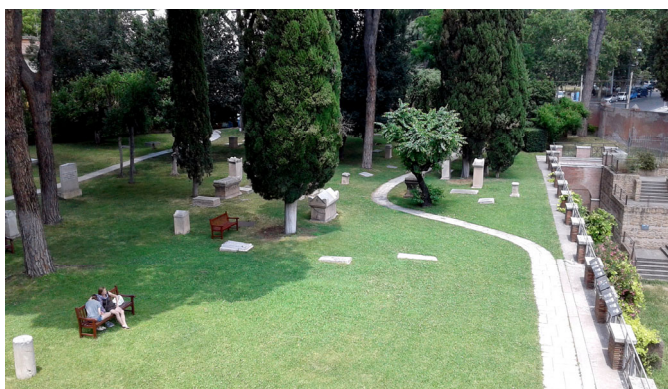
This cemetery is instead a burial-ground in which is sown the hope that flourishes under an immense, friendly silence which affects all who come near, as if the breath of a natural and supernatural world,

human and divine. The little gate by which you enter is the gate of a modest villa, and the custodian sitting at its threshold is sewing some white linen, as calm as if the children entrusted to her care might be playing nearby.

Either side of a very slight slope there are aligned the headstones, the urns, the short columns; some tombs are surrounded by a railing, others are covered with plants of stonecrop which hide the name and laud of whomever lies there. So tall are the cypresses that their branches provide no shade: their slender trunks enhance the elevation of the place and of the thoughts that they evoke.

Everything is in order, everything is quiet: every soul is at peace with itself and with God. Nothing of the past is regretted, nothing of the present hurts. Between one trunk and another the rays of the sun settle under the gaze of an angel with its wings spread. The world's noise dares not breach the silence that keeps it far off, as a fire keeps wild animals away from those camping out. The air is clammy and greenish, but warm and delicate, almost curling up even the stelae arranged along the walls. On all the tombs there grow humble violets under heart-shaped leaves, and on all the tombs there stands a vase holding tulips, hyacinths, roses which piety and memory keep as fresh as the water in which they sit.

The Old Cemetery from above



The scaffolding erected for the restoration of the Bowles monument (see *Newsletter* 53) provided a perspective normally available only to the tree-climbers who care for the pine trees. These photos, taken in June 2019, show the monuments before they were covered by the black mould caused by the invading scale insect *Toumeyella parvicornis* (see *Newsletter* 52). Conservators have been at work to clean them. One photo (above) shows part of the new staircase providing access from Via Persichetti for guided tours of the Pyramid and also the information panels about the monument that are popular with our own visitors. Both are projects of the Archaeological Soprintendenza of Rome.

In the background of the other photo, across Via Caio Cestio stands the building, now with many accretions, that was originally a powder-magazine. It was built in 1752 to house the Bombardieri of Castel Sant'Angelo who used Monte Testaccio for their target practice. The building is recognisable in many early views of this area.



The Pyramid information panels

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

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(last entrance 12.30pm)

Tel 06.5741900, Fax 06.5741320
mail@cemeteryrome.it

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Nicholas Stanley-Price, EDITOR
Anka Serbu, GRAPHIC DESIGN
Grafica Di Marcotullio, PRINTER
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Contact: nstanleyprice@tiscali.it
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