

## Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

## NEWSLETTER



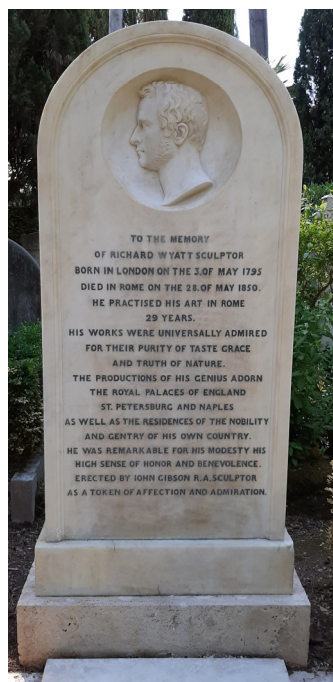
## NEWS FROM THE CEMETERY

In May, at a special opening of the Cemetery, we welcomed as visitors the President of Latvia, H.E. Mr Egils Levits, and the First Lady Andra Levite, accompanied by H.E. Mrs Solvita Āboltiņa, Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia to Italy. Their main purpose was to lay a wreath at the grave of the Latvian painter Niklaus Strunke (see *Newsletter* 25).



Photo: Valsts presidents/Latvia State President

The conservators Gianfranco Malorgio and Sara Toscan have been busy during this year. Among the monuments they have restored are those of the sculptors John Gibson (Zone 1.12.28) and Richard Wyatt (Zone 1.5.2). Gibson raised the stone to Wyatt, his friend and rival, commemorating him with an 18-line epitaph. His own funeral (see *Newsletter* 50) marked the end of a 48-year residence in Rome.



The Richard Wyatt headstone



The John Gibson headstone

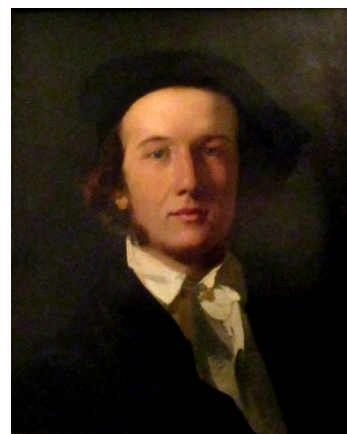
## ARTISTS IN THE CEMETERY

## Gustavo Witting and his unusual watercolour of the Cemetery

Born at Naples on 4 August 1827, Gustavo Witting was the first of eight sons of Theodor (Teodoro) Wilhelm Witting, born at Frankfurt in 1793, who died in Naples in 1860 where he lived in the Vico Dattero (also, Dattilo) 2, in Mergellina. Teodoro had married Flora Vianelli, daughter of Achille Vianelli (1803-1894) and was the brother-in-law of Giacomo Gigante (1806-1876), exponent of the Posillipo School who had married Eloisa, another daughter of Achille Vianelli. This underlines how Gustavo was born and grew up in an essentially artistic environment. Moreover, his father Teodoro was a writer and poet and in Naples exercised his main activity as a painter and engraver under the signature 'Teodoro Witting' or at times only the initials 'T.W.'

When little, Gustavo accompanied his father and his fellow-artists on travels to all the small islands near Naples. He thus developed a precociously advanced ability for drawing and painting which, at the same time, he cultivated with the great masters such as Giacinto Gigante of the Posillipo School, founded by the Dutchman Anton Sminck van Pitloo (1890-1837) who lived next to Teodoro in the Vico Dattero in the charming Mergellina with its little harbour.

Gustavo being much esteemed, he together with Gigante's son Achille (1823-1846) illustrated with their engravings the volume *Viaggio da Napoli a Castellammare* (Naples, 1845). Gustavo painted wherever he found himself travelling, in Rome as in Florence, and there survive many of his drawings, engravings and paintings. His work is on display at the Museum of San Martino in Naples and is found also in notable private collections. Among the prized works of a contemporary master, Domenico Morelli (1823-1901), is a portrait he did of Gustavo which, for its artistic significance, was on display at the Uffizi in Florence before the war. Morelli's famous oil portrait of the great Giacinto Gigante is today exhibited at the Museum of San Martino in Naples.

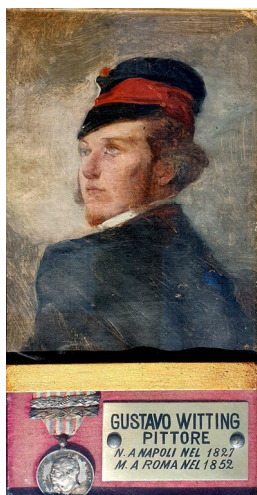
Domenico Morelli (1823-1891), *Gustavo Witting* (family collection)

As a very young man Gustavo took part in the first of the Wars of Independence in 1848, together with 1600 volunteers from Naples and others from Tuscany. He distinguished himself for his passion and courage fighting the Imperial Austrian army at the battles of Curtatone, Montanari and other encounters. It is reported that on 29 May 1848 he excelled in the battle to capture the powder-magazine at Peschiera. His role as a volunteer caused him to be exiled from Naples for a period which he spent at Bagni di Lucca. There he married Natalia Tolomei of an old Siena family. Their son Edoardo Witting (1851-1906) studied intensively as an engineer, graduating at Bologna in 1883 and became mayor of that city in the following

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Gustavo Witting, *Self-portrait*  
(family collection)

years while he amused himself writing about his excursions with the new Club Alpino Italiano.

With a small self-portrait by Gustavo hangs a medal of King Vittorio Emanuele II of Italy dated 1849, which commemorates his role in the first war of Independence (see photo). However, he had also suffered wounds and trauma which threatened his health and led to his death on 23 January 1852 in Rome at the age of only 25. In contrast to this short life, his brother Augusto (1846-1921) had a military career in the Navy until, as an admiral, he played a leading role in the late 1800s in the re-planning of the port of Naples. This brother is remembered even today in a small street in the port area named Via Augusto Witting.

grave. To its right stand two monuments inside iron enclosures. On the left is the headstone to Eliza Hankey (1786-1850) which partially hides the monument to the English sculptor Richard Wyatt (1795-1850). The monument on the right no longer survives. Nine months after painting this watercolour, Witting himself, in poor health from his war wounds, died and was buried here. Recorded erroneously as an American painter, he was later exhumed to Ossuary 1.

This fascinating view was on the art market in Germany in 2014 when it failed to sell. Its current whereabouts are unknown.



Gustavo Witting, *Cemetery in Rome*, 1851. Watercolour over pencil, on textured vellum, 25.50 x 36.20 cm., signed, dated "Aprile 28./1851" and inscribed "Roma"/1851" (Winterberg Auctions)

Contributed by Vito Witting and Daniele Witting  
(Florence)

The Editor adds:

Witting's view of the Cemetery, signed and dated April 28, 1851, is unusual. Rather than painting the Old Cemetery and the Pyramid, he depicted the area then in use for burials. Had he foreseen his likely destination? The artist positioned himself with the entrance gate behind him. On the left the path ascends between the hedges towards Shelley's

## WHO THEY WERE

### Helene Železný-Scholz, sculptor from Czechoslovakia

Born under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1882, Helene Scholz spent her childhood at the family's small castle at Trebovice (today part of Ostrava, Czech Republic). Her mother, the German-speaking poet and writer Maria Stona (1859-1944) supported her studies first in drawing in Vienna and Dresden and then, as Helene showed talent and interest in sculpting, in Berlin with Fritz Heinemann and especially in Brussels with Charles Van der Stappen. In this period she knew personally Auguste Rodin, the Belgian painter Fernand Khnopff and the Austrian-Bohemian pacifist Bertha von Suttner. From 1906 she exhibited in different countries to public and critical acclaim.

Fascinated by Quattrocento sculpture, she moved around 1907 to Florence but she spent the First World War in Vienna, producing official portraits of members of the royal family (Empress Zita, Crown Prince Otto), and of Austro-Hungarian army officers, together with commemorative medals and plaques (see photo).



Portrait medal (1914) of Eugen, Archduke of Austria (1863-1954)



*The three kings* (1928), Austrian Institute in Rome

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The grave's headstone before installation

With the end of the war she returned to Florence with her husband John (Jan) Železný (1874-1957), a former colonel in the Austro-Hungarian Army who was an excellent violinist and glass painter. In 1922 (or 1923) they moved to Rome where they settled for the rest of their lives, occupying a studio at Via Margutta, 54. There she produced free compositions, monumental sculpture and especially portraits for ambassadors, writers, artists and other private clients. American visitors in particular bought her statuettes as souvenirs. King Vittorio Emanuele III in

1928 purchased her bronze *Sicilian Woman*. In the same year she produced *The three kings* which combined her religious devotion and her fascination with the Maghreb countries (she first visited Tunisia in 1913). The sculpture is now in the garden of the Austrian Institute in Rome.

She had two personal exhibitions in Rome, in 1925 in the Casa d'Arte Palazzi and in 1932 at the Palazzo Doria, and one in Paris at the Jean Charpentier Gallery (1934). Representing Czechoslovakia she took part in the Rome (1925) and Venice Biennales (1924, 1934) for which, in 1934, she exhibited her expressive bronze half-figure of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia. The press were hardly exaggerating when they wrote: "Czechoslovakia has three embassies in Rome: at the Quirinale, in the Vatican and in Via Margutta".

She returned every summer to the family property at Trebovice in Czech Silesia, but in autumn 1938 this part of Sudetenland was annexed by Germany. At the end of the war her family, being mainly German-speaking, was in trouble and the property was nationalized. Her husband had to stay but Helene in 1946 emigrated to try to earn a living as a sculptor. Italy was also unpromising so she moved to the United States, teaching evening sculpture classes in Pennsylvania and, from a studio in New York, making portraits for private clients and other sculptures. In 1949 she returned to Rome and to her husband who had been allowed to leave Czechoslovakia. As well as sculpting she taught sculpture classes for adults and children, with more than 700 students of different ages, nationalities and languages attending them. They remembered 'Aunt Helene' as an extraordinary lady, fluent in Czech, German, French, English and Italian, good at creating a friendly atmosphere and developing the talent and individuality of each pupil. She produced *Praying hands* (1963), a symbol of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Italy and France, a bronze bust of His Holiness Pope Paul VI (1964), now in the Duomo at Frascati, and a bust of Cardinal Josef Beran (1967). Notable too is her bust of Leo Bruhns (1958), director of the Bibliotheca Hertziana (buried at Zone 3.3.7.7). She died aged 91 in 1974 after 'living 50 happy years in Rome' as her gravestone records (Zone 2.6.24; her husband, d. 1957, lies there too). Helene's marble relief (1930) on the headstone depicts a woman with a dove in each hand. Below are two lines from Goethe's *Vermächtniss* (Legacy).

Contributed by Jana Kebertová, her great-grandniece



## Three sisters and two houses: the Haigs of Scotland and Parioli

For the first time, the grave of three sisters, Barbara, Sophie and Mary Haig, can be linked to their two historic houses, one in the Border country of Scotland and the other in Monti Parioli in Rome. In Scotland the Haig family has occupied Bemersyde for 800 years – in fact, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century poem predicted that there would always be a Haig at Bemersyde. In 1831 J.M.W. Turner made a drawing of the house when visiting it with Sir Walter Scott and Robert Caddell. The Laird at the time, James Haig, had had nine children of whom five – including the three sisters – survived him. The middle sister Sophie (1806-1878) suffered from poor health and from 1822 the family spent time in Italy for her benefit.

The direct succession through the generations at Bemersyde halted in the nineteenth century through a failure of the Haigs to get married. The sisters' eldest brother who had inherited as the twenty-fifth Laird of Bemersyde died unmarried in 1854; his younger brother had predeceased him. Barbara, the eldest of the three sisters then aged 56, duly inherited the Haig estates. But the sisters were living in Italy for the sake of Sophie's health, and they rarely returned to Scotland. They let the Scottish house to tenants and in Rome they purchased the building once known as the Villa Poggi, located outside the city on the heights of Monti Parioli and built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as the



Bemersyde (photo Stavaiging).  
The core of the house is a 16<sup>th</sup>-century defensive tower.

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Francis Towne, *St Peter's from above the Arco Oscuro*, 1781 (British Museum). The Villa Poggi stood higher up the hill on the right

residence of Cardinal Giovanni Poggi, treasurer to Pope Julius III. Its loggia, no longer extant, commanded a magnificent view towards Monte Mario, St Peter's and the historic centre of Rome. Re-naming it Villa Haig, the sisters welcomed visitors who delighted in the fresher air to be found away from the city.

While in Rome on his extended honeymoon, the English painter Walter Crane was busy sketching one day on the Monti Parioli when a carriage heading for the house further up the road came to a halt. Its two elderly



The Haig sisters' grave (photo: M. Piermattei, Cemetery archive)



The Villa Balestra, postcard

occupants invited him to the villa, "a charming house surrounded with a terraced garden and vineyards, and commanding lovely views of Rome". The elderly ladies in the carriage would have been Barbara and Sophie Haig (Mary had died in 1871). Like their brothers, none of the three sisters had married and, as they explained to Crane, they had been worried about the succession at Bemersyde. Their solution had been to bequeath both properties, Bemersyde and the Villa Haig, to a collateral descendant, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Balfour Haig. Barbara died the year of Crane's visit (1873) and Sophie, for whose poor health they had moved to Italy, outlived all her siblings until dying in 1878. On their distinctive monument (Zone 2.15.31) Sophie's is the modest central memorial flanked by the crosses to her sisters.

The two Haig properties have had different fortunes. The collateral descendant who inherited them in 1878 decided to sell Bemersyde in 1919. The British government stepped in to raise funds through public subscription and purchased the property for Field Marshal Douglas Haig in recognition of his army service during the War. It remains in his family today – there will always be a Haig at Bemersyde. The Villa Haig, on the other hand, was sold immediately by the Haigs' heir to the Cavaliere Giuseppe Balestra (hence its current name of Villa Balestra) who developed its vineyards. But work on access roads for the international exhibition of 1911 started a process by which the property has gradually been dismembered and re-developed for housing. Part of the gardens where Walter Crane had sketched became a public park in 1928, with the Comune di Roma formally acquiring it in 1939. The Villa Poggi-Haig-Balestra, much modified and extended, now houses a centre for religious training.

Nicholas Stanley-Price

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### 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](http://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  
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Contact: [nstanleyprice@tiscali.it](mailto:nstanleyprice@tiscali.it)  
Disponibile anche in versione italiana  
[www.cemeteryrome.it](http://www.cemeteryrome.it)