



## NEWSLETTER



The MBE medal

### The Director recognised for her achievements

In January came the news that Amanda Thursfield, Director of the Cemetery, had received a distinguished award recognising her devoted service for almost fifteen years. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II granted her the title of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). The MBE recognises outstanding achievements or service to the community which

have had a long-term significant impact. The Friends, staff, volunteers and Advisory Committee all warmly congratulate her on this thoroughly deserved award.

'A sincere thank you to all those just mentioned for their messages of support' said Amanda Thursfield, 'and especially to those who have supported the Cemetery by entrusting their loved ones to us for burial. The award is a personal honour for me, but it is also recognition for all those involved with this beautiful place.'



### NEWS FROM THE CEMETERY

#### Starlings love our healthy pine trees!

The murmurations of hundreds of thousands of starlings in flight never cease to fascinate. On the ground, however, it is a different story. The guano that the birds deposit while perched at night leads to slippery surfaces and noxious smells, a potential health hazard. In early December, thousands of starlings began to roost in our pine trees, only recently saved from the ravages of the *toumeyella* insect (see *Newsletter* 52).



The fallen pine tree

One pine tree in the Old Cemetery fell, fortunately during the night with no-one nearby and without damaging any monuments. The suddenly increased weight of hundreds of birds was the probable cause.



A gravestone covered with guano



A murmuration of starlings in Rome, January 2022

The birds' guano covered much of the Old Cemetery and its tombs, and the area had to be closed to visitors. The carpet of guano also covered the upper area of the New Cemetery, affecting almost 250 monuments in all.

Thanks to advice from LIPU (the Italian Society for the Protection of Birds), we dissuaded the starlings from returning. Our usual contractors, the gardening co-operative Il Trattore and the tree management company Alberando, quickly removed the fallen pine tree. The conservation company SINOPE, which knows the Cemetery well, worked very hard for a week, despite the mess and the smell, to clean the tombs. Our warm thanks to all those who came to the rescue and to the Friends who helped to meet these unexpected costs.



## ARTISTS IN THE CEMETERY

### The Lepsius brothers and an unknown drawing by J.J. Frey (1838)

*In memory of Dorothee Hock*

The spectacular tomb of the Swiss artist Johann Jakob Frey (1813-1865) was restored a few years ago (*Newsletter* 26). Frey first visited Rome in 1835 and by 1838 he had settled here. In that year he made a drawing in the Cemetery which has not previously been published. The Casa di Goethe in Rome, our partners for the Cemetery's Tercentenary Exhibition in 2016, recently acquired it for their collection.

Prominent in the right foreground is the monument to Carl Reinhold Lepsius. The artist has faithfully copied the inscription that is visible today (Zone 1.11.12). It gives the dates of his birth (20 March 1807) in Naumburg, a town near Kassel in Germany, and his death (12 September 1836) in Rome, adding the phrase 'Have pia anima' (Greetings, pious soul!). Carl Reinhold was one of seven siblings, the most famous one being his younger brother Carl Richard Lepsius, the Egyptologist. In the year of Carl Reinhold's death his brother was in Rome, encouraged by the Prussian legate, C.C.J. Bunsen, to study Egyptian hieroglyphs and to visit collections of Egyptian antiquities in Italy. But why does Carl Reinhold have a grave in the Cemetery? A family biography published in the 1930s discloses that he was a merchant in Livorno and died 'in his brother's arms' in Rome.

The keen Egyptologist met Frey, a promising young painter, when the latter was drawing hieroglyphs for Bunsen. Their friendship led to Frey joining Lepsius's expedition to Egypt as an artist in 1842 (see *Newsletter* 26 and photo here). It also led earlier to this drawing of Lepsius's monument to his brother, dead at the age of 29. Rather than making it the centre of his composition, Frey adopted a much broader view so as to include the Pyramid, foreshadowing his visit to Egypt four years later. Behind the Lepsius tomb several others are identifiable: the two Gothic spires to Henrietta Hunt (Zone 1.13.4) and Robert Finch (Zone V.15.20) and, to the right, the tomb of the landscape architect G.L. Meason (Zone 1.13.11; *Newsletter* 43). Frey has also depicted the wooden crosses that were either awaiting a grave-stone or that never received one.



J.J. Frey, *The participants of the Prussian Egypt expedition on the top of the Great Pyramid*, watercolour, 1842, Brandenburg-Preußen Museum

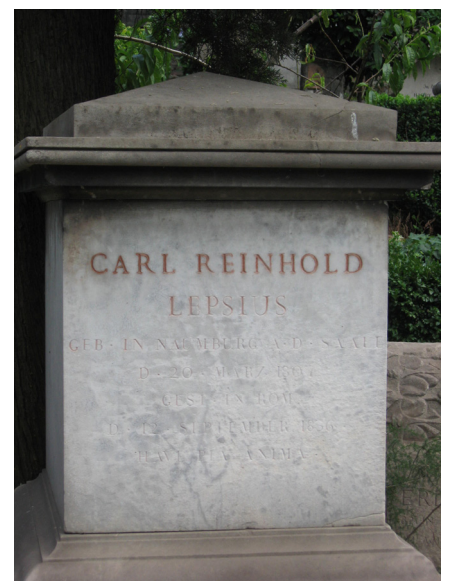
His view can be compared with a slightly later drawing in the Museo di Roma (no. 20 in our Tercentenary Exhibition catalogue). In that drawing the Lepsius tomb is outside the field of vision but the Hunt and Finch monuments, and many others, are easily identifiable as is the cemetery's boundary wall. Frey makes a visual barrier out of the bushes lining the central path and so the wall is hardly visible. A number of artists depicted the Cemetery in the years 1838-40 and Frey's is a welcome addition to the corpus.

*Nicholas Stanley-Price*

*I am indebted to Maria Gazzetti, Director of the Casa di Goethe, for permission to publish the drawing, and to Claudia Nordhoff for her assistance.*



Johan Jakob Frey, *The monument to Carl Reinhold Lepsius in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome*, 1838, pencil, pen and brown wash, 306 x 550 mm, signed middle left 'J.J. Frey 1838'



*The Lepsius monument today*



## Dating Gurlitt's beautiful painting of a funeral cortège

The view by Louis Gurlitt (1812-1897) of a funeral cortège approaching the Cemetery shows the extension that was opened in 1859. Previously (*Newsletter* 43), we guessed that the painting might date to the late 1860s or 1870s. Mira Preisig in Switzerland has written us to say that Gurlitt, after a visit in 1855, did not return to Rome until 1877. He then visited several times until April 1881. So, he is unlikely to have done even his preliminary sketches for the painting before summer 1877 and the finished work must date to around 1880 if not later.



Louis Gurlitt, *Pyramid of Cestius with Funeral Procession*, oil on canvas, Kunstmuseum Bern (photo: Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn)

## WHO THEY WERE



## The infant Cecil Brock: who were his parents?

Amongst the youngest occupants of the Cemetery is Cecil George Keith Brock, only four months old when buried in 1897 (Zone 2.12.17). His parents were not named in the Cemetery records. A clue to identifying them lay in the last will of Mary Simpson who died in Rome in 1908 (see *Newsletter* 49) and who bequeathed her Canaletto painting to "Doctor Brock". That the document was signed at the British Embassy hinted that Dr. Brock might have been employed there and indeed he is mentioned in the memoirs of Rennell Rodd, the British Ambassador at that time.

Rodd wrote that Dr Brock had spent some 20 years in Rome and in the World War directed a field hospital 'not far from the fighting line' (this was Villa Trento near Gorizia in northern Italy) and 'in younger days in South Africa had looked after the health of the Kruger family'. Rodd likewise cites as volunteers at this British Red Cross field hospital the distinguished archaeologist Dr. Thomas Ashby, Director of the British School at Rome, and G.M. Trevelyan, the historian and fervent admirer of Garibaldi. Trevelyan and Dr. Ashby operated the ambulance units, with Trevelyan taking on overall responsibility for both hospital and ambulances as the British Red Cross representative in Italy. The unexpected Austrian victory at nearby Caporetto in October 1917 caused an immediate evacuation of the Villa with a chaotic retreat to Padua, subsequently described by Trevelyan in print. Dr. Brock in a private letter of November 1917, after his safe return to Rome, gave a gripping account of the same retreat.

The South African newspapers for 1897 carried a death notice for the Brock infant, son of Dr. George Sandison Brock, residing in Rome, Italy, and formerly of Rustenburg (in the Transvaal). Dr. George Sandison Brock, FRCPE, FRSE, was born in Dunnet, Caithness, in the Scottish Highlands in 1858 and graduated from Edinburgh University with a gold medal. After marrying Marianne Scott, he migrated to South Africa where his brother Benjamin was in practice at Cape Town. At Rustenburg in 1886 Marianne gave birth to a son, George Selby Brock, but she died at the early age of 32 in 1891. By 1896 Brock had moved to Rome with his ten-year-old son, George Selby, and taken up a post as medical officer at the British Embassy. In the same year he married Lilly Maria Butler, and it was their son Cecil born the following year who survived only four months. Brock



Dr Brock (centre) at the Villa Trento (photo: British School at Rome Digital Collections, ta-L.002)

contributed occasional scientific papers to the *Lancet* and wrote a long introduction to A.G. Welsford's *Wintering in Rome* (1907), in which he allayed British suspicion that malaria was rife and provided health hints for intending visitors. The couple spent the summers in England and in 1900 a daughter, Muriel Alice, was born.

Like his father, George Selby Brock became a doctor, joining the Indian Medical Services in 1911 and at the outbreak of war was made a captain in the Army, seeing service in Flanders. In 1913 he married at Lucknow Carina Piggott, daughter of Theodore Caro Piggott, a judge at Allahabad in India and the son and biographer of the missionary Henry James Piggott whose burial in the Cemetery featured in *Newsletter* 42. George Selby Brock died of 'Spanish flu' in 1918 at Rawalpindi but his father, retiring from the Embassy in 1920, lived in England until the age of 90.

*Contributed by Geoffrey Beresford, Madrid*



## 'Countess' Matilda Wratislaw, an English painter

In the Zona Vecchia (ZV.5.21) lies a ledger stone inscribed 'MATILDA EMILY WRATISLAW / PAINTER / DIED 15TH JULY 1896 / AGED 64 YEARS'. Her name suggests a Central European origin. Roman society knew her as an unmarried lady



who often called herself 'Countess Wratislaw'. Whoever commissioned her gravestone did not include the title; and her true age was 67. She was the eighth of eleven children born in Rugby in the English Midlands where her father practiced law. Her grandfather, Marc Wratislaw, had immigrated to Rugby from Silesia, and the family were of noble Czech origin (the capital city of Slovakia owes them its modern name of Bratislava). Matilda's father, 'Count' Wratislaw von Mitrovitz, the solicitor born in Rugby, was the fourth son and so it is doubtful whether he or his daughter could legitimately use these titles.

praised her work, especially her building interiors and treatment of shadow, but had reservations about her figure drawing. One of her watercolours was later presented to the Christ Church Art Gallery.

Earning a living in Rome solely from selling paintings was not easy. The American artist Caroline Carson (see *Newsletter* 12), after twelve years in the city, wrote to her son on 30 January 1882: 'Rome is very full but people buy nothing. I shall starve. By this time I scarcely sell enough to maintain me for several months.' In the same year Matilda Wratislaw opened her own art school at Via Viminale, 38. She offered lessons three days a week with 'Able artists of the various Continental Schools as assistants.' How successful this venture was we do not know but the competition in Rome was keen. The gossiping Lucas sisters knew Wratislaw socially and admired her painting, commenting that she had 'to live very economically to help her married sister and her nephews education at Oxford'.

The nephew in question in this large family was not A.C. Wratislaw who became a British diplomat in the Middle East and wrote some entertaining memoirs under the title *A Consul in the East* (1924). His father, Matilda's brother Albert Henry Wratislaw, was a Slavonic scholar and translator of Bohemian literature, thus re-engaging with the family's Central European origins. Matilda's self-styled 'Countess' reflects a similar pride in her family's distant heritage.

Nicholas Stanley-Price

Matilda Wratislaw was among the several women artists who settled in Rome after it had become the capital of Italy. By 1872 she was exhibiting in England views or genre scenes of Italian life. During the 1870s she exhibited in London twice at the Royal Academy and regularly at the renowned Dudley Gallery in Piccadilly, showing watercolours alongside such artists as Walter Crane and Arthur Severn. She evidently travelled widely in Italy – her subjects include Capri, Venice, the basilica at Assisi, Orvieto Cathedral and, in Rome, the fountain in Via Bocca di Leone (where she had a studio), and, shown here, the Portico di Ottavia and the arcades of the Colosseum. The latter two show a variable ability to render architecture well.

Her reputation led to an invitation to exhibit at the New Zealand International Exhibition of 1882 and to the award there of a certificate of merit. The critic of *The Star* newspaper



*The arcades of the Colosseum, watercolour, inscribed 'M.E.W.'* (image by permission of Abbott and Holder Ltd.)



*The Portico d'Ottavia, Rome, watercolour, inscribed 'M.E.W.'* (private collection)

### 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)

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

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