

Winter 2016

FRIENDS

No. 37

of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

NEWSLETTER



On to the next 300 years!



In 2016 we successfully celebrated three hundred years of continuous operation of the Cemetery. The main event was the exhibition of artists' views of the Cemetery, held in partnership with the Casa di Goethe in Rome. H.E. Jill Morris, the British Ambassador to Italy, kindly represented the President in speaking at the opening. The exhibition attracted several thousand visitors and wide coverage in the media (see http://www.cemeteryrome.it/2016Celebration/2016press/press_reviews.html).

We owe a large debt to Maria Gazzetti, director of the Casa di Goethe, and her staff for their close partnership, and to the Friends and other donors for making it possible. A special thank-you to the Cemetery's volunteers who spent hours at the exhibition 'Munch-watching' (guarding the painting by Edvard Munch) and to Tatiana Morici for managing to fill the timetables. Other volunteers kindly provided regular guided tours of the Cemetery during the seven weeks of the exhibition.



Photo: Giorgio Benni



Photo: Giorgio Benni

The three authors of the catalogue, John and Mary McGuigan (left) and the curator, with Steve Labensky, Cultural Attaché at the US Embassy in Rome which gave a grant to the exhibition fund



Photo: Giorgio Benni

All photos courtesy of the Casa di Goethe, Rome



Photo: Giorgio Benni

H.E. Jill Morris (centre) with Nicola Bulgari, a sponsor of the exhibition, and Mrs Bulgari, with Edvard Munch's painting behind her



Photo: Giorgio Benni

Maria Gazzetti and Amanda Thursfield at the inauguration

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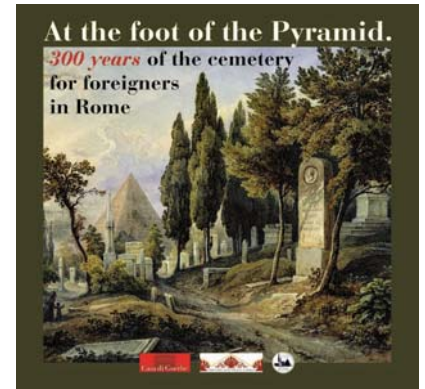


were hosted in his Residence, the Villa Grandi, a magnificent house and garden in the protected archaeological area of Via Latina inside the walls of Rome. Our thanks to the President for his generous hospitality and a memorable evening.

The exhibition catalogue is selling fast. Buy one while stocks last! (Available at the Cemetery or through our website - see '2016 exhibition').

Published just in time for the exhibition was a German edition of the editor's history of the Cemetery, translated by Katrin Marburger. This has also been selling well.

<http://www.cemeteryrome.it/St Stanley-PriceBuch.html>.



WHO THEY WERE

Henrietta Hester Barrett, a young victim of tuberculosis

In the Zona Vecchia (ZV.12.12) lies Henrietta Hester Barrett, who died at Rome on 31st January 1833 at the age of twenty-two. Henrietta ('Hetty') was the daughter of Charlotte and Henry Barrett. Her grandmother Charlotte Francis Broome was a younger sister of the novelist Fanny Burney and daughter of the historian of music Dr Charles Burney. This family of scribblers left correspondence about Henrietta's last few years. Much of it is now in the Berg collection at the New York Public Library.

In 1826 Charlotte Barrett sought help for the religious despair and 'distress of mind' suffered by her 15-year-old daughter, who feared she 'did not love God, as [she] ought to do'. Perhaps not unconnected, Hetty was showing the first signs of consumption [tuberculosis]: 'Hett is beginning to cough - & I, consequently, begin to quake - but I think *early* going to Hastings [a town on the south coast of England], would do for her'.

Only a year later she writes of 'poor Hetty...sick & feverish, & rejecting all nourishment'. By January 1828 it was clear that Hetty was in a consumptive decline, and by 1829 the disease was well advanced: 'last night I thought she would faint several times while she was undressing, & was obliged to give her sal volatile [smelling salts]'. A French physician advised staying a month in Boulogne, 'to take the hot sea Baths', as well as 'asses milk and Iceland Moss jelly'. Thence to Italy; from November 1829 Charlotte, Hetty and her sister Julia lived in Pisa, Lucca, Bagni di Lucca and Rome, until Hetty's death.

At Bagni, the three lived close to Byron's last mistress, Countess Guiccioli, 'very like our cook Caroline - pretty, but rather a rustic beauty'. Hetty took walks, her mother carrying a garden chair for her. At Pisa Italian physicians advised leaving 'all to nature' but a 'scotch physician', recently established in Pisa, carried out the usual rigorous bleeding or cupping to bring down fever.

After two winters at Pisa, the three spent the winter of 1831-1832 in Rome, taking lodgings on the via del Corso at what was then number 99. Hetty 'creeps on towards the spring, counting each day of winter that passes over...she is busy taking Julia's portrait in chalks as large as life'. Julia, 'a great comfort to us in a thousand ways', rides, takes up singing with maestro Castoni and at one dinner meets 'a great curiosity, Madame Dionigi Orfei, who is an Improvisatrice [a poet who impro-

vised on stage] and also an authoress and a very clever person'. Hetty adds a note to one of her mother's letters 'that it is a Carnival without masks as the pope is afraid to let people wear them'.

In the spring the three moved back to Bagni, returning to Rome in mid-December 1832, this time to via del Corso 39. Within six short weeks Hetty was dead. Announcing her death her mother writes: 'But, what have we not all lost in this sweet, refined, upright, noble Hetty!' Henry Barrett writes to his wife from Brighton, 'I have heard that the ground consecrated to the dead in Rome, for the English or those I

hope of the Protestant faith, is a spot beautifully situated and planted with trees. It will be some consolation that having the reliques of our dear child in a foreign land they are deposited sacredly and securely'. And Fanny Burney offers this thought: 'But She, sweet angel! for her I grieve not - lengthened life to Her, from some peculiar conformation, would but have lengthened anguish & disappointment'.

Charlotte reports finding a passage 'peculiarly' marked in Hetty's Bible and wants these words, among the last words of David, on her daughter's tombstone. They are there today: 'he hath made with me an Everlasting Covenant, well ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, though He make it not to grow'.

Contributed by Alyson Price, archivist at the British Institute of Florence



Grave of Henrietta Barrett



The Tiber Island, c. 1890

The shipwrecked sailors from Tug Boat A.S. 84

In November 1922 Marcello Piermattei, director of the Cemetery, received a phone call asking him to come over to the morgue on the Tiber Island. Could he help with some identification? He recalled reading in the papers recently that three bodies had been discovered on the beach at Fiumicino. Nearby there had been found a wrecked wooden boat and an English flag. Now, three days later, he learned that the bodies had not yet been identified. But in the pockets of one of them there had been found a letter - could he come over and help to translate it?

The morgue at the downstream tip of the Tiber Island had been opened in 1883 to display corpses found in the river Tiber for purposes of identification and autopsy. It had a capac-

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ity of three and a freezer that was rarely in working order. (Until not many years earlier, the Confraternity of the Sacconi Rossi had been responsible for this task, for which they had maintained a crypt-cemetery under their church of San Bartolomeo all'Isola.)

The letter proved to be in English and had been written by the young son of one of the crew members of the wrecked boat. Guessing that the crew were English, Piermattei contacted the British consul, Alfred Lemon, and the chaplain at All Saints' Church, Bernard Holmes. Since the morgue's freezer was out of action, the three bodies were buried temporarily at Campo Verano in plots set aside for the poor. Piermattei soon had them transferred to the Protestant Cemetery for the dignified burial that he felt they merited. The costs of the double-coffins (one of zinc, one of wood) were shared by the Consulate and the Municipality, and the Cemetery paid for the brick burial-vault. The Consulate provided three English flags, one for each coffin. Archdeacon Holmes led the burial service, in pouring rain, and the three coffins were let down into the vault. But the sailors were still anonymous. Only their different tattoos enabled them to be given separate identities on the plaques that the director placed on the grave.

Two months later the three sailors had names, presumably as a result of enquiries made by the British consulate. They were the captain of the boat, John Wilson, his cousin, George Fortune Wilson, and A.E. Nash. The Wilsons were a well-known seafaring family from St Andrews in Scotland and had lost other members to the sea during and before the First World War. John had had a distinguished career. Aged only 21 he had been chief officer of the sailing-ship *Thermopylae*, a rival to the *Cutty Sark* in the competitive tea trade with China. Both he and his cousin had been recognised for their war-service. At the time of the disaster, John Wilson and his crew were sailing a tug-boat, A.S. 84, to Greece, a contract he had accepted while waiting for his steamer to be repaired. They must have been caught by a storm off the coast near Fiumicino (see *Newsletter* 8 for the victims of another shipwreck in this same area).



F.I. Sorenson, *The tea-clipper Thermopylae*
(National Maritime Museum, London)

With their identities known, the British consul offered to have a simple stone erected at the grave. But not all went smoothly. Now that the men's relatives were known, the cemetery's director asked that due procedures be followed. A concession for the burial plot that had been given the sailors while anonymous now needed to be paid for. In the meantime he had exchanged letters (and photos) with Daniel Wilson, the father of John, in St Andrews. Piermattei had sent him a long account of how the three men had received a dignified burial. Daniel Wilson had been duly grateful for the respect shown to them and sent a short clipping from the local paper, the *St Andrews Citizen*, that had recorded the loss of the two cousins. He also informed Piermattei that usually it was the owners of the ship or the Board of Trade that were responsible for the funeral and burial expenses of those drowned at sea. We have no record of how the matter was resolved, but at some point a simple stone was erected on the grave.

The grave (Zone 2.3.18) lies at the end of a row and is distinctive for having a specimen of the turpentine tree (*Pistacia terebinthus*) growing on it. The tree, probably self-sown, is the only mature specimen of

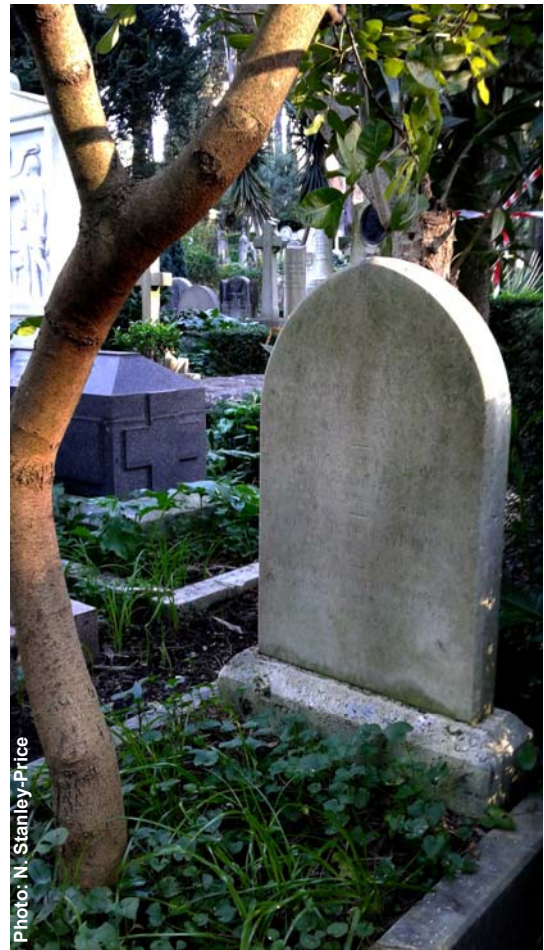


Photo: N. Stanley-Price

The grave of the shipwrecked sailors

this species in the Cemetery. More remarkable is the inscription on the headstone (John Wilson's age should have been given as 53, not 35):

CAPT. JOHN WILSON
AGED 35
ST. ANDREWS SCOTLAND

MATE GEORGE FORTUNE WILSON
AGED 47
ST. ANDREWS SCOTLAND

MATE R.H. TAYLOR
(OR A.E. NASH)

DROWNED ON THE SHORE
OF FIUMICINO NOV. 28TH. 1922
R.I.P.

The British Consul, Alfred Lemon, had testified that the third crew member was A.E. Nash, and gave the names and addresses of both his mother and his landlord in London. In the Cemetery register for 1922 the two surnames are combined as one (Nash Taylor). Possibly the boat had had a crew of four, one of whom (Taylor?) was never found. Sufficient doubt must have remained for the stone to have the inscription that it does – the only known case of 'uncertain identification' inscribed on a gravestone in the Cemetery.

Nicholas Stanley-Price, with thanks to Amanda Thursfield for allowing access to Cemetery records.

Poets in the cemetery: Charles Wright



Although poet Charles Wright was born in Tennessee, he has been a lifelong admirer, indeed *amante*, of the country and culture of Italy. Throughout his long career it has featured significantly in numerous poems and collections. Indeed, in addition to his more than twenty books of poetry, he has published book-length translations of Italian poets Dino Campana and Eugenio Montale (the latter work receiving a PEN Translation award). First coming to Italy in the 1950s with the US military, it was while he was stationed in Verona that he began to write and to read poetry. Later he was a Fulbright scholar at La Sapienza Università di Roma (primarily to study the works of Dante) and in Padua. Often considered one of the best poets of his generation, he is a former Poet Laureate of the United States and has received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. The recent award to him of the

Bollingen Prize for lifetime achievement brings Wright full circle, in a sense, for the prize was first awarded to the poet and work he has long considered his earliest guide: Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos*.

*Over the grave of John Keats
The winter night comes down, her black habit starless and edged
with ice,
Pure breaths of those who are rising from the dead.*

From: "Self-Portrait" in *The Southern Cross* (1981)

*

*Places swim up and sink back, and days do,
Larger and less distinct each year*

[...]

*Rome was never like that,
And the Tiber was never like that,
Nosing down from the Apennines,
Color of café-au-lait as it went through town...*

[...]

*At noon in the English Cemetery no one's around.
Keats is off to the left, in an open view.
Shelley and Someone's son are straight up ahead.*

*With their marble breath and their marble names
the sun in a quick squint through the trees,
They lie at the edge of everywhere,
Rome like a stone cloud at the back of their eyes.*

From: "The Southern Cross" in *The Southern Cross* (1981)

Contributed by Alexander Booth, a writer and translator whose work may be found at *Wordkunst*.



New members of the Advisory Committee



John McGhie and Cristina Puglisi at the exhibition

The Advisory Committee has two new members. Cristina Puglisi in fact joined us a year ago. Since 2011 she has been Deputy Director of the American Academy in Rome. She brings to the committee her invaluable expertise in operations and long-term planning in addition to her background in historic preservation. Our new Treasurer is John McGhie, a chartered accountant from Scotland who has had a long career with IFAD here in Rome while also volunteering his advice to other organisations. The committee meets with the Director regularly, every 4-6 weeks, and also advises the Assembly of ambassadors when called upon.



Roses and jasmine in the Zona Vecchia

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

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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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