

A Spring Morning at the British Cemetery in Madrid

Many of us will be familiar with Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard:

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

...and wonder how we can compare an English country graveyard with the British Cemetery, located now in the confines of a big capital city - Madrid?

On revisiting the cemetery after many years, I did find some similarity to Gray's quiet and reflective rural graveyard. Located south of the river, bounded on two sides by roads with the names Inglaterra and Irlanda, and only 100 yards from a main road, yet it is indeed an oasis of shade and calm with stones and monuments of forefathers from many different hamlets, towns and countries, who are buried there.

The purpose of the visit was the unveiling of a memorial plaque honouring John Allen Young CBE, a man who was, for many years a generous benefactor to this cemetery and to the Anglican church of St George's as well as those in need in the British community in Madrid

On Monday, April 9th, 2007, the Reverend Susan Buell celebrated a simple ceremony in remembrance of John Allen Young and others of his family circle, particularly his brother Roger. The family was represented by Mrs. Winifred Young and her sister Miss Kathleen Wildman MBE. Also present were the British ambassador, Sir Stephen and Lady Wright, the British Consul-General, Michael John Holloway, and several close friends such as Commander & Mrs John Rigge.

There were members of the various committees within the British Community representing :

- The British Benevolent Fund of Madrid
- The British Cemetery Foundation
- The Council of St. George's Anglican Church
- The British Ladies' Association
- St. George's Guild

After the blessing and unveiling of the plaques to John Allen Young and his brother Roger by the Reverend Buell, the ceremony was over and we were free to walk around a cemetery that is no longer neglected as it once was but a place full of peace and harmony, a place to visit and revisit in memory of loved ones known and unknown.

Jenny Effer