

Graveyard tales

A long history, an unusual location, and years of hard work. Jeff Wiseman pays a visit to Madrid's British Cemetery and discovers some extraordinary stories behind the stones

Even though the expansion of Madrid has long since swallowed the neighbourhood of Carabanchel, the names Calle del Inglés and Calle de Irlandés hint that not everything in the suburb may be entirely Spanish. Nearby, a further clue lies in a large rust-coloured gatehouse from which a high wall branches off to isolate a small plot of land. Clearly more historic than the surrounding apartment blocks, a simple plaque above the gatehouse doors reveals the secret within: "British Cemetery", it reads.

The cemetery was established in 1854, when fields and pastures would have separated Carabanchel from the city. At the time there was an increasing need for a burial site because of the rising number of British nationals beginning to live and work in Madrid. The majority were non-Catholics so they were not permitted to be buried in Catholic cemeteries.

The cemetery had the misfortune of finding itself on the front line during the Spanish Civil War and encountered further neglect during World War II. In the 1980s it fell into disrepair, and access to some of the plots became treacherous. Indeed the fact that the cemetery has survived at all owes much to the hard work of the expatriate community, the British Consulate, and not least to David Butler, the author of an extensive cemetery history that was written after trawling through a chest of timeworn documents and records.

Grave concerns

"In the end, in the late 80s, weeding parties were formed," David explains. The description brings to mind Native American-style warmongering, but actually refers to groups of expat volunteers armed with spades, trowels and garden shears, ready to battle the overgrowing greenery. "The biggest prob-

lem was ivy, which was attacking the gravestones," he continues, "and particularly the cemetery walls. It took about eight years to put all of the problems right, and to make it a pleasant and peaceful place to visit."

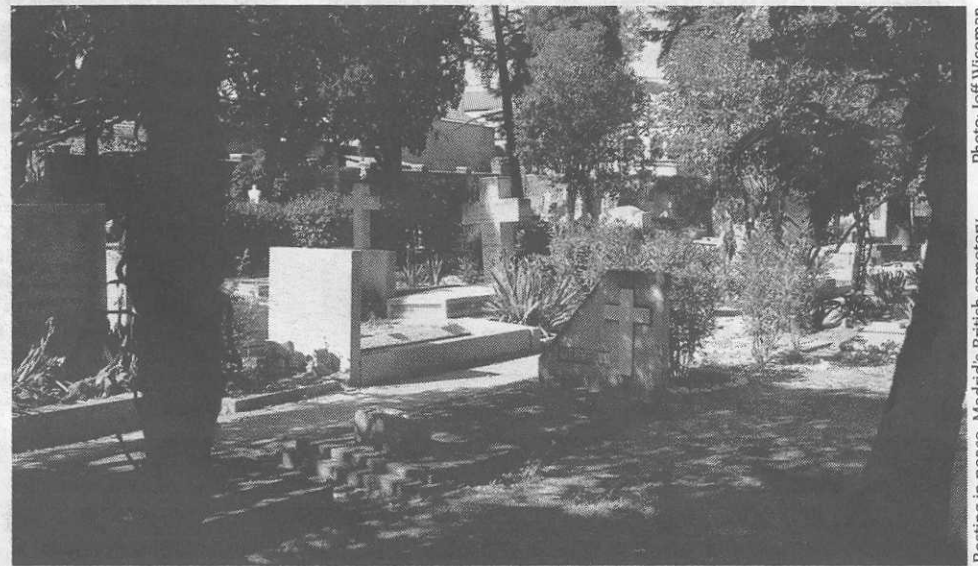
A stroll provides a wonderful composite view of *extranjeros* in Madrid over the last 150 years. Despite the title "British", the headstones and monuments identify a strong international presence. There are people from Germany, Holland, Australia and the US, as well as Jewish, Russian and Greek Orthodox graves.

But it's the individual stories here that often prove most poignant. The cemetery is the last resting place of some well-known names, such as members of the Loewe family, who created the exclusive accessories brand, and the founder of Madrid's Circo Price, the circus and theatre company that still operates from a multi-purpose cultural space in Ronda de Atocha today. The Bauer family, with a long history in banking, has a mausoleum.

Fame and misfortune

But size, as they say, isn't everything. A smaller headstone shows the name of Albert Sheldon Pennoyer, and reads "An American artist who loved Spain and painted much of her beauty". Mr Pennoyer died in 1957, aged 59, in a car accident outside Madrid. He studied painting and architecture in Paris before World War I, and became a notable landscape painter, with a love of railroad and train pictures. Intriguingly, during World War II, he was one of only 345 "Monuments Men" who served with the US Army in the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) section. The group was created to trace artistic and cultural treasures stolen by the Nazis, and according to the MFAA website, Pennoyer helped recover Italian artwork.

Creative arts are also represented by British



Resting in peace: Madrid's British cemetery
Photo: Jeff Wiseman

pioneer photographer Charles Clifford, who died in 1863, aged only 44. He had photographed Queen Victoria, as well as worked for Queen Isabel II of Spain, although he specialised in photographing Spanish architecture. Many of his remarkable photos are held at Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional.

I spy?

Perhaps the most interesting tale concerns diplomat Arthur F Yencken, who died in an air crash in May 1944. His small plane took off from Madrid, but crashed near its destination airport of Barcelona. Yencken and the aircraft pilot, Squadron Leader HC Caldwell, are buried in the cemetery, but the plane crash raised suspicions about wartime sabotage, and some years later questions were asked in the House of Commons. According to UK Parliament records, Anthony Eden, then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, responded that no evidence existed for foul play and that bad weather was the cause. The pilot had apparently been advised to delay the flight because of heavy mist, but the matter still remains contentious. A further comment from the floor of the House suggests that during World War II Yencken was working extensively behind the scenes. One Right Honorable Member stated, "Until the war is over it is not possible to record what the British war effort owes to that man [Yencken]."

In a refreshing contrast to recent UK parliamentary problems, at one point it was suggested to Yencken that he was overworking and using his private finances to supplement his allowance for expenses. He replied, "Don't worry. It is my contribution to the British Empire in which my children are going to live."

Curiously, it was Yencken who, as British Minister in Madrid in 1941, issued and signed a British passport to Ian Fleming. Fleming was working for the British Secret Service at the time, and the creator of James Bond used the document for an undercover operation codenamed "Goldeneye". In February 2000 the passport was auctioned by Sothebys and sold for €15,525.

Last words

Sometimes a single phrase can admirably encapsulate a life, and an inscription for Renee Manteau, "loving and loyal wife of William Hall", who "departed from this world 8/11/1934", is perhaps a fine example. Ms Manteau left "having scrupulously accomplished all her earthly duties". That's not just accomplished, but scrupulously accomplished. In doing so she has, no doubt, scrupulously set very high standards for the rest of us.

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For further information about the British Cemetery, see www.britishcemeterymadrid.com.