

MADRID'S BRITISH CEMETERY

By David J. Butler M.B.E

An expert on the subject celebrates the enduring history of one of the Spanish capital's most legendary burial grounds

It was a triumph in 1854 when the British government was permitted to acquire land in Madrid for a burial ground for British citizens who were not Roman Catholics. This Cemetery, still in occasional use today, depends on a few families who make contributions for their burial sites, some local fundraising and the generosity of two important cultural foundations based in the U.K.

Among those buried there is Charles Clifford (1863), the renowned world pioneer in photography and Emil Lhardy (1887), the French immigrant whose business, in the tradition of a belle-époque restaurant, still bears his name today. Also, there are families from the United States who introduced life insurance and other state siders who created refineries for gasoline in the early years of motor vehicles.

Indian Army Colonel William Petrie Waugh, (1880), upon retirement created a bank using the savings of brother officers, and then had to leave for Spain in a hurry when all the creditors closed in as a result of the Colonel's costly restoration of Brownsea Castle to create a comfortable family home.

Another colonel, self-styled and whose name is not to be found in army

records in Britain, Spain or Portugal, unsurprising considering his life style of deceit was George Fitch, (1882) who first served in Portugal, then in Spain and in the course of frequent visits to London got married, dishonestly pawned his wife's jewellery and created a number of fraudulent railway schemes.

Sam Richardson, a draper from Derby, who had embezzled the takings at sporting events, fled to Madrid in 1890 bringing with him his wife and large family. Under a new identity as John Roberts, he set up a tailoring business and draper's shop in a prime location and named it El Corte Inglés. Upon retirement in the 1930s he sold the business to a newly-arrived immigrant who retained the name for the shop he was to open and thereby the brand El Corte Inglés has been perpetuated as department stores in major cities in Spain testify. Several of the "Roberts" family are buried in the Cemetery

An interesting United States citizen was William Jackson Maltby who died of typhus in 1869 at the age of 29 within days of arrival in Madrid, after surviving more than ten years of travel from Hamburg northwards to Hammerfest in Norway and southwards to Turkey and Palestine, mainly on foot.

Other interesting U.S citizens include artist Walter Shirlaw, (1909), whose engraving skills produced part of the design for Union banknotes following the American Civil War.

Another United States artist was Sheldon Penoyer (1957). Towards the end of the Second World War, by then an artist with a certain fame, he was sent to Italy by the MFAA, Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section popularly known as the Monuments Men.

A significant United States citizen was Alice Bache Gould (1953), mathematician and researcher, who broke new ground in her lifelong investigations into the voyages of Columbus.

British citizens include William Parish (1917), a circus acrobat who came to Madrid in the 1850s and whose business evolved into the well known Teatro Circo Price which now enjoys a new lease of life in municipal ownership.

Walter Starkie (1976), eminent writer and academic from Trinity College, Dublin held both British and Irish nationalities and was appointed director of the British Institute in Madrid in 1940, the cultural counterblast of the Allies to the imbalance in numbers by German citizens settled in Madrid as emissaries and agents of the Nazi régime.

In wartime, many British residents lived double lives taking risks to open safe routes for people fleeing Axis-dominated territory. The British community gave silent support to Margaret Kearney Taylor, a lady whose 1982 burial site in the Cemetery is visited by many admirers of her composure. From her elegant tearoom and cocktail bar, Embassy, new identities were secretly provided to refugees who, though fortunate enough

to arrive in neutral Spain, held identity documents which would make them liable to deportation to hostile countries.

Buried in the British Cemetery are the victims of an air accident in 1944 : the Deputy Head of Mission in the British Embassy in Madrid Arthur Yencken, and the pilot Squadron-Leader Hilary Charles Caldwell. (See profile of Yencken).

A whole network arose in those times and has become the subject of written accounts, some based on fact, some fictitious,. There is a galloping trend towards the glorification of those difficult days with, of course, a sidelong glance towards the 1942 film Casablanca.

**The [Madrid British Cemetery](#) is located in the Carabanchel district of Madrid, Calle Comandantes Fontanes. It is open to the public on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings (except public holidays)*



Note on the author:

David J. Butler, M.B.E. was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1934, and is a graduate of Durham University. After a career on the worldwide export scene, changed activities and took employment in Madrid. Since retirement has entered new areas, including taking groups round the historic British Cemetery in Madrid and other forms of immersion in local history.