

## **SHORT HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CEMETERY, MONTEVIDEO**

The first British Cemetery, also known as the “English Cemetery” was on the spot where Montevideo City Hall stands today. In those days this was a plot of land outside the city walls, bought by the British Consul, Thomas S. Hood in 1828 from an Englishman called John Hall. It is the first and only private cemetery in the city.

In its beginnings it was known as the Protestant or Dissidents Cemetery, holding the graves of British residents of Montevideo, as well as French, orthodox Greeks, Methodists, Baptists and Freemasons amongst others who were not allowed to be buried in Montevideo’s Catholic cemeteries. The President, Maximo Santos ordered a compulsory land purchase there in 1884 to construct a Presidential Palace. The first burial was that of a French woman, Rosa Monteux. The British Society obtained a new plot of land in 1875 in the Buceo neighbourhood which was considered to be a long way from the centre in those days. Worshippers of many religious denominations and nationalities (Chinese, Russian and Jewish amongst others) have been buried there over the years. To date more than 8500 burials have taken place including many noteworthy personalities in the history of Uruguay and worldwide.

Here is a brief selection of those notable figures:

Thomas Tomkinson set up large eucalyptus tree plantations and was the first foreign businessman to work in the Uruguayan Railway Company. Businessman Samuel Fisher Lafone owned meat processing plants and mines in Uruguay and Argentina, as well as parts of the Falkland Islands which were then called Lafonia. He founded a village called Victoria and was largely responsible for the construction of the English Church on the “Cubo del Sur”, Montevideo. There are various figures from the national sporting scene: Enrique Lichtemberger and William Leslie Poole, who founded the Albion Football Club, while Poole also set up the Uruguayan Football Association in 1900. It is well worth a visit to the beautiful tomb dedicated to the Scotsman John Harley, who played football for C.U.R.C.C. which later became the Peñarol Football Club. He was the first player to represent the Uruguay national team as well as its first coach.

Herbert Percival Coates founded the Rotary Club of South America in 1918.

Industrialists of national and international renown such as Franz August Hoffmann, who started the Liebig meat plant, which later became known as the Anglo, and made innovations in meat processing which were acknowledged worldwide. Also Von Metzen of the Metzen y Sena company.

Some of the personalities representative of Uruguayan culture who are buried in this cemetery include Miguel Patrón Marchand, the famous Director of S.O.D.R.E. and other orchestras in Uruguay and Chile, writer Armonía Somers, German sculptor and painter Carla Witte, and the poet Carlos Sabat Ercasty. Also Margaret Jamieson, who was the second wife of revolutionary leader Timoteo Aparicio, and Cecilia Güelfi, a

Methodist school teacher who founded the Crandon Institute.

“Another flower in Heaven”. Children are remembered by their loving parents through headstones, angels, peaceful monuments and figures carved in stone.

Important events such as the 80 victims of the tragic sinking of the ship “Royston Grange” are commemorated by a memorial stone. There are also sailors from HMS Achilles who died during the Battle of the River Plate along with three sailors from the German pocket battleship Graf Spee.

These are life stories that allow us to discover men and women, politicians, sportsmen, servicemen, Uruguayans and foreigners who have left their mark in Uruguay.

The sculptures, gravestones, and epitaphs lead us to try and interpret other, no less important, elements. We view and try to understand the symbolism behind these monuments: Celtic or three-arm crosses, winged clepsydra, wreaths, poppies, roses and other symbols and words carved in marble or granite that leave us their message in search of eternity.

They are part of our Heritage and of that life that still has value in the city of the living in a permanent dialogue between past and present.