

Feriköy Cemetery

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For just over a year now, the British Institute at Ankara has been an active partner in the Feriköy Cemetery Initiative. This was set up by the American Research Institute in Turkey, the Netherlands Institute in Turkey and the Orient-Institut Istanbul, and was joined in 2019 by the Hungarian Cultural Center and the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul. The initiative aims to help preserve, protect and promote the unique space of Feriköy International Protestant Cemetery. It also aims to provide advice to the diplomatic board that has administered the cemetery since its creation in the 19th century, currently composed of consular officials representing Germany, the United Kingdom, the USA, the Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary and Switzerland. Adjacent to the international cemetery is a graveyard for mostly Armenian, but also Greek and Assyrian, local protestants.

Opened in 1859, the cemetery helped make way for the northward expansion of Istanbul, allowing for the relocation of Christian graves from Taksim, then on the city's periphery but in the process of becoming an administrative and transit hub between Pera and the new suburb of Şişli to the still rural district of Feriköy. Now just a short walk from Istanbul's Osmanbey metro station and the fashionable districts of Nişantaşı and Kurtuluş, the Feriköy International Protestant Cemetery and the neighbouring Catholic cemetery form a small green island in an ever intensifying and expanding cityscape. The cemetery grounds provide shelter for birds and other wildlife and offer a place of peace, relaxation and contemplation for residents and travellers.

The cemetery is the resting place of numerous important individuals in the history of Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Missionaries are particularly well represented. Elias Riggs (1810–1901), Mary Kinney (1874–1930) and John Kingsley Birge (1888–1952) were all members of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, who did much to maintain the grounds and records of the cemetery and whose archives were inherited by the American Research Institute in Turkey. It is also home to artists and photographers, such as Wilhelm Berggren (1835–1920) and Josephine Powell (1919–2007), and even a brewer, Franz Carl Bomonti, whose name graces one of the most popular brands of Turkish beer and whose brewery, now an arts and music space, is located a short walk from his tomb. The story of European investment in the Ottoman railways is represented in the graves of Wilhelm von Pressel (1821–1902) and Heinrich August Meissner (1862–1940), engineers for rail lines that connected the capital with Thessaloniki and Baghdad respectively. Many scholars of Turkey are also among those buried, such as the Hungarian manuscript



Dutch grave with chapel behind.

collector and translator Daniel Szilagyi (1831–1885), Istanbul University professor Traugott Fuchs (1906–1997), Robert College teacher and author of the acclaimed guide *Strolling through Istanbul* John Freely (1926–2017) and the Oxford- and later Bilkent-based historian Norman Stone (1941–2019).

Many more less well-known individuals from all walks of life – sailors, soldiers, merchants and others – are also buried in the cemetery, and their records help us to understand just how international and diverse the transient and resident population of Istanbul was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Alongside Istanbul's many foreign churches and consular buildings, the cemetery at Feriköy and other international burial grounds, like the British military cemetery at Haydarpaşa or German war graves at Tarabya, speak to the degree to which the Ottoman capital became entangled in international politics and commerce.

A guidebook prepared by Richard Wittmann (Orient-Institut Istanbul) and Brian Johnson (American Research Institute in Turkey) has recently been published online and an updated printed version will be available in the coming months, offering further insights into the biographies of these figures and providing descriptions and histories of notable



Feriköy Cemetery (photo by Darwinek; CC BY-SA 3.0).

monuments in the cemetery. Copies of the guidebook will be available at the Institute's library, as well as at the libraries of the other institutions involved in the project and also the small visitor centre constructed near the entrance to the cemetery in the year 2000 thanks to a bequest left by Emma Ehrmann (1921–1995). In addition to the brief biographies and descriptions contained in the guidebook, the initiative plans to launch a bi-annual newsletter, where further research on the cemetery and those buried there can be shared as it becomes available.

The guidebook and newsletter are among many projects by which those involved in the initiative hope to make information on the cemetery available to researchers and the wider public. Fokke Gerritsen and colleagues from the Netherlands Institute in Turkey are preparing a digital map of the approximately 1,000 graves on the site, using aerial drones to capture images of otherwise hard-to-access plots. When finished, the map will allow for the easier location of gravestones for interested researchers and the relatives and descendants of those interred.

The extant graves at Feriköy represent just a fraction of the 5,000 or so individuals recorded as having been buried at the site. Those whose families had not purchased a permanent plot had their graves removed after a set period of time and their remains were placed in a collective ossuary, located near the cemetery chapel. For these individuals, only a paper record remains, in two volumes of cemetery burial logs covering the years 1858–1893 and 1894–1991. Thanks to the work of Richard Wittmann and colleagues, data from the logs – in most cases consisting of the name, nationality, age at death and date of burial – have been digitised and are available for consultation in the libraries of all member institutes, including the BIAA. Privacy concerns mean that this database is not currently available to consult online.

In spring 2021, the Institute aims to conduct an inventory to document the oldest gravestones in the cemetery, those moved from the previous Protestant burial grounds at Taksim, for which there are no extant records. Photographs of the graves will be processed using Virtual Reflectance Transformation Imaging (V-RTI), in order to make their

intricate inscriptions and coats of arms legible for researchers. In the near future, we hope to commission a conservation plan for these oldest gravestones in the grounds of the cemetery, which include many merchants of the Levant Company, the chartered trading body that managed commerce between Britain and the Ottoman Empire between the years 1592 and 1825. Of the better-known examples among them is the grave of Sarah Sarell (d. 1817) and her son James (d. 1811). James was registered as a Levant Company merchant in 1803 in Constantinople, at a time when Anglo-Ottoman relations were in a state of tumult due to the shifting alliances of the Napoleonic Wars. Members of the family married local Ottoman Greeks, and Sarah was impressed by her sons' aptitude in learning the many languages spoken in the city at the time, while she was an admirer of the the landscape and local crafts, if not the cuisine (<http://www.levantineheritage.com/testi41.htm>). Descendants of Sarah Sarell continued the family's entanglement with Turkey. Several more generations of Sarells are buried at Feriköy and Sir Roderick Sarell was posted as British Ambassador to Ankara from 1969 to 1973.

It is hoped that the details of these gravestones can provide a core source in a future academic publication on the history of British relations with the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth to nineteenth century.



Gravestone of Sarah and James Sarell.