

# THE BRITISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PORTUGAL

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## SUICIDE IN THE BRITISH CEMETERY

1857

Carol Rankin

*Below is a transcription of a handwritten document included in the Register of Funeral bills at St George's Church Lisbon dating from 1855. This document is written in ink, some of the spelling is not as currently used and the occasional word is difficult to read. I have added some punctuation in order to make more sense of it; any words in italics are also my additions.*

Desperado de todos, sem meios de poder subsistir nem poder pagar vivendo na mais solidão e não podendo por mais tempo resistir, perdão peço a todos é so desejaria ser interrado ao pé da minha Carlota. Querido neto recebe hum triste adeus. O ente Supremo me dé rezignação para poder resistir e me dé força por termo o que a muito tenciono. Deus seja comigo.

Despised by all, without means of subsistence, unable to pay my debts and not having power longer able to resist, I ask pardon of everyone and would only desire to be interred near my Carlota. My beloved grandson, receive a sad farewell. May the Supreme Being give resignation to resist and give me strength to put an end. It is what I have long intended. God be with me.

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Exmo Rmo Snr. Cardeál Patriarcha de Lisboa

Participo a V. Ema que no Cemeterio Protestante que pertence a nação Ingleza a asfixou-se hontem 10 do corrente, um homen lançando do uma corda a um (*a word is missing here*) e no fundo

do chapéo se encontrou uma declaração cuja copia remitto a V. Ema. Os Inglezes não tem duvido a em o enterrar no seu cemeterio porem elle é Catholico Romano nem nos podemos lá funcionar, nem elles tambem. O consentem mesmo par o Cemeterio deos Prazeres preciso que V. Ema conceda a faculdade par ser enterrado en Sagrado portanto V. Ema. ordenerá o que for servido, declarando a V. Ema que este cazo hé urgente, elle acha-se depositado no dito Cemeterio Protestante.

Does guarda a V. Ema.

Parochial de Santa Isabel 11 do Janeiro de 1857

O Coadjutor João dos Dores Roiz (*Not sure of spelling of last name*)

Emminent and Reverend Sir

I beg permission to inform your Emminence that a man was found hung by a rope on a cypress tree yesterday the 10th instant in the Protestant Cemetery, belonging to the English and in his hat was a note of which I forward your Emminence a copy. The English have no objection to bury him in their Cemetery but he is a Roman Catholic and we cannot bury him there nor will they allow it and even in the Prazeres I require that your Emminence will give us the liberty to bury him in Sacred Ground. Therefore trusting that your Emminence will ordain what you think best. It is an urgent case. He is deposited in the above mentioned Cemetery.

May God guard your Emminence.

Parish Church Saint Elizabeth 11<sup>th</sup> January 1857

Emminent and Revd Sir Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon

Remettido ao Rdo Parocho.

Para a que informando de que o defunto dera segnaes arrependimento possa dar-lhe sepultra ecclesiastica

S. Vicente 11 Janeiro de 1857

G. Cardeal Raitva (*not sure of spelling of this last name, the Cardinal Patriarch at that date was Henriques de Carvalho, known as D. Guilherme*)

*Translation:*

*Sent to the Parish office:*

*To inform you that if the deceased showed signs of repentance, he can be given a church burial*

S. Vicente 11 January 1857

G. Cardinal Raitva

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Em referencia ao despacho supra do Emm Prelado, e não havendo conhecimento algum do seu arrependimento, mas sim sinais de conhumacia (? *spelling*), não se lhe pode dar sepultra ecclesiastica.

Parochial de Santa Isabel em 11 de Janeiro de 1857

O Coadjutor João dos Dores Roiz.

*In reference to the despatch received from the Emminent Prelate, and not having any knowledge of his repentance, but without signs of ?, it is not possible to give him a church burial.*

*Parish of Santa Isabel, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1857*

*João dos Dores Roiz*

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*Clearly burial at the Prazeres Cemetery was not an option. The Prazeres Cemetery area started to be used for burials in 1833 after Lisbon was hit by an outbreak of cholera. A large cemetery was needed to bury both rich and poor victims. The cemetery only became legal in 1835 when a law was passed that public cemeteries should be established throughout Portugal, away from houses, surrounded by walls and consecrated. 1857 was still a time when the Roman Catholic Church denied funeral rites to those who had committed suicide, nor would they allow the person to be buried in consecrated ground.*

*Whilst The Book of Common Prayer 1662 says that the burial service is not to be used for those who "have laid violent hands upon themselves" there would have been nothing to stop his actual burial at The British Cemetery in Lisbon as it was not subject to English Canon Law. However, the Registers of Copies of Funeral Bills and Undertaking for January 1857 at St George's do not include expenses for the suicide victim's burial in their lists.*

*History does not relate what happened to this poor man, what his name was or where he was eventually buried.*

*CAROL RANKIN (BA Hons) spent many years leading Fine Arts tours to Portugal and wrote part of two guide books. She has lectured to the BHS on a variety of subjects and contributed articles to previous Annual Reports. She currently works as an Archivist and researcher and is sorting out the archival material at St George's Church.*