

In Search of Margaret Emily Shore

The following article appeared in the Potton History Society Newsletter 15 in the Autumn of 1993. The then society treasurer, Anita Lewis, holidayed on Madeira and went to see if she could find the grave of Emily Shore.

Emily, who lived for a while at Brook House, Potton, was one of the daughters of the Rev. Thomas Shore and died of consumption, aged only 19, at Funchal, Madeira on 7th July 1839 and was buried in the New British Burial Ground on 9th July 1839. She left behind her Journal (published in edited form by her surviving sisters in 1891), giving us an insight into her observations on the social and natural world around her.

We started asking questions almost as soon as we had unpacked our suitcases. Where was the Visitor's Cemetery or was it the English Cemetery? We learned that there was an English church and an English Vicar. We must certainly meet him.

We found the English Church – Holy Trinity; it had been there at 22 Quebra Costas since the early 1800's. Emily Shore had certainly worshipped there. The door was opened to reveal a medium sized church with the most beautiful flowers arranged on the altar, A lady was sweeping the floor; we asked for the vicar. We would have told you that everybody in Madeira speaks English, but not this lady and moreover, she was most suspicious of us and did her utmost to send us away. We asked if the Casa was where the vicar lived – yeas it was. We knocked on the door and again she came to move us away.

However we were not to be discouraged; we were on the trail; the bit was between our teeth; we would press on. Up the hill and on and on we were told to go, until you see the bishop's house. It is opposite there. Sure enough, there it was, a cemetery behind a high stone wall and big green gates. We had been told to ring at the little gate and the caretaker would let us in. Again no English but we recognised that he was saying "familias" .. he thought we were looking for our family. We couldn't tell him otherwise.

He lead us through the chapel into a side room and opened up the safe and there were three or four ledgers waiting for us joy of joys. The first was dated 1870 Not old enough! We turned to the next. It was in alphabetical order and there, where it should be, under the S was the entry for Margaret Emily Shore (even with a cross reference). The plot number was 66.

On the wall were several plans of the layout of the graves, printed at different times. Next to 66 there was no name. The caretaker lead us to the graveyard. How different it was! The stones were just like in an English churchyard but all around grew this sub-tropical vegetation. Hibiscus, Jacaranda, Oleander, Bourgeanvillea, giant Gladioli, Palm Treesbright green colours so unlike the sober greens of England. He lead us to plot 66. The coffin shaped flat stone bore initials but they were not M E S. This was not it.

He took us to another stone marked 66. The inscription was almost illegible but running my fingers over the stone I could not feel a J. This was not it.

The graves were not in chronological order and so we went all over from side to side. No Emily Shore. Many of the stones were no longer legible, many were buried under a sea of agapanthus plants.

Finally he took us to the walls where there were tablets set in; again not in chronological order. We walked right round and it made fascinating reading. So many of them were young people in their 20's; many were women, some were military men. Again our luck was out, we could find no stone that commemorated Emily Shore. We took photos of all sides of the cemetery for certainly there, somewhere, amid the agapanthus plants and the giant strelitzia (bird of paradise) under the palm trees lay the mortal remains of Emily Shore.

We did make contact with the vicar, the Rev. Arthur Brown, by telephone a few days later. He didn't know the story of Emily Shore and was most interested when I told him all about her and her diary. Unfortunately he was unable to cast any further light upon the whereabouts of the grave.

Anita Lewis

On the Trail of Emily Shore Part 2. A Boat Trip on Maderia in 1839

Emily, who lived for a while at Brook House, Potton, was one of the daughters of the Rev. Thomas Shore and died of consumption, aged only 19, at Funchal, Madeira on 7th July 1839 and was buried in the New British Burial Ground on 9th July 1839. She left behind her Journal (published in edited form by her surviving sisters in 1891), giving us an insight into her observations on the social and natural world around her.

An article appeared in the Potton History Society Newsletter 15 in the Autumn of 1993 written by the then society treasurer, Anita Lewis, who holidayed on Madeira and went to see if she could find the grave of Emily Shore. She found a record of her burial but no evidence of a surviving gravestone.

English visitors arriving in Maderia in 1838 would have found no modern tourist hotels at Encosta Cabo Girao on the south coast of Maderia not far from its capital of Funchal. Today, in 2014, as the sun shines down on a calm May day at my holiday oasis, a faint wisp of white cloud is the only break in the azure blues of sky and sea. From my balcony, through the trees, are the first of the days tourists walking out onto the glass platform at the top of the 1,902 feet (580m) of the sea-cliff face of Cabo Girao. Beneath is the sea, strangely lacking any kind of boats or ships. These were the life blood of the island, bringing its discoverer, Zarco, and back in December 1838, a young woman of 18 aboard the 'David Lyon' to be part of the English community on the island.

Emily Shore, whose father was the Rev Thomas Shore, M.A., (Wadham College Oxford), began her Journal in July 1831, at Brook House in my home town of Potton (Bedfordshire). She wrote about some of the local events and also about the plants and bird life of Gamlingay Heath around Woodbury where she lived for a few years. Her short life was one of gentle physical decline, moving to the South Coast, before being taken to Maderia, whose climate was known to be beneficial to those suffering from consumption. In contrast to her health the quality of her writings on the natural and social world around her went from strength to strength. I took on my Maderian holiday my copy of 'The Journal of Emily Shore', the final portion of which deals with the last six months of her life in the island's capital of Funchal. The entry for Saturday March 16th 1839 contains the following:-

"At breakfast time came a note to me from Miss Freeman, saying, "Dear Emily, The morning is so fine we hope you will be able to go with us in a boat to Cabo Girao; we will send the horse for you about nine o'clock." I forthwith put on my bonnet, and in great delight mounted the horse as soon as it arrived. We pursued our way to Cabo Girao. Miss Freeman made me lie down on a sofa of cushions they had made for me at the bottom of the boat, and I reposed in luxury, watching the tall cliffs that gradually opened to our view as we glided towards this celebrated headland.

Cabo Girao is the loftiest precipice in Maderia and is said to be the loftiest in the whole world. The height (measured to the highest point a little inland) is rather more than two thousand one hundred feet; but the height immediately from the brink is not much less). We rowed out a little way into the sea, and I gazed with extreme admiration on the stupendous precipice. Looking up is much the least favourable way of viewing a lofty object, because you then see it only contrasted with the sky, which looks the same everywhere; whereas in looking down and seeing the difference in the sea, or whatever object may be below, you obtain an adequate idea of the distance you are above them. We were not nearly as much impressed as we should be at the height of Cabo Girao until we spied some men on the narrow beach below, and the excessive smallness of their figures immediately exalted in our ideas the rock beneath which they stood. The same effect was still more strikingly produced by a ladder, left part-way up the rock after an unfortunate explosion of gunpowder, by which twenty men were killed.

There is a narrow strip of cultivated beach lying beneath Cabo Girao on which are grown the finest vines, figs, and peaches in Maderia. These, contrasted with the huge rock, look strangely tiny; the vine trellises are like nets, the peach trees in blossom like small almond bushes, and the fig-trees like plants which you can walk over. Here there is one little hut, the most perfect image of utter and dreary solitude that I ever beheld; shut in on the land-side by the tremendous precipice under which it is built, and with the mighty waste of waters before it, the inhabitants are excluded from all sight of intercourse with their fellow-creatures except by the accidental and uncertain means of boats. I should think it a most melancholy abode on a howling night of storms and darkness.

The hue of Cabo Girao is chiefly a dark red; but there is a great variety of dark and purple tints, and streaks of many forms; there are also many tufts of plants and flowers springing out of its inaccessible sides, and the distant summits are crowned with pines and low vegetation.

We are now determined to land on the beach. This was a difficult matter, for there is a very steep bank of shingles, on which the waves, even this calm day, broke with sufficient force to drag away the rope from the hands of the two men who had waded ashore, and were trying to drag us up. So we proceeded to another part; the men managed to regain the rope, and pulled the boat up upon the black shingles. We now proceeded to eat the cold dinner which we had brought with us. As Mrs Hoskyns and I were the two invalids of the party, the rest busied themselves in the most good-natured way to make us comfortable; they spread cushions and cloaks on the shingles for us to sit upon, and propped us up with cushions, supported against piles of great stones. The sun luckily went in just then, so that we were not scorched with heat. We took off our bonnets; the gentlemen opened the provision baskets; and here, under Cabo Girao, we did enjoy our picnic-dinner. My first picnic was in the Bradley Woods, in Devonshire, the last was in the New Forest; and now – how little then I should have expected it! – I am at one in Maderia.

Some one – Mr. F., I think – set the example of dipping the hand into the pleasant cool water, upon which we all took to dipping. He next told us that it was very refreshing to wet one's temples with the same; immediately we all began applying our wet fingers to our temples, till a sense of the ridiculous struck Miss F., and she burst out laughing!"

A few months later Emily died of her consumption leaving behind a lasting reminder of the power of words to provide an insight into the response of human beings to the world around them and leave future generations a link with our heritage. So if you take a holiday in Maderia and visit the tourist site on top of the great sea cliff do make the effort to walk onto the glass platform jutting out over the sheer drop of nearly 2000m. Look down to the neat little fields at the base of the cliff and listen for the sound of laughter from Emily and her party echoing through the mists of time.



www.pottonhistorysociety.com has an Emily Shore page in its family section.

Peter Ibbett

EMILY SHORE & GAMLINGAY HEATH

Margaret Emily Shore, born Christmas Day 1819 at Bury St Edmunds, daughter of Rev Thomas Shore. Lived briefly at Brook House, Potton and Woodbury. Died of consumption and 'was laid to rest amongst the cypresses and orange trees of the Stranger's Burial ground in Funchal, Maderia on July 7 1839.' Her edited Journal was published in 1891 by two of her sisters.



'Mr Tebbutt, the hairdresser and bird-fancier of Potton was here today. He says that there are snow buntings to be seen on Gamlingay Heath .. and rare and curious birds such as the reed-sparrow & kingfisher'. Dec 3rd 1834



'Gamlingay Heath is famous throughout England for the rare flowers to be found there. Among the prettiest flowers I have found there, at least at this time of the year, are the *Euphrasia officinalis* or eyebright, and the *Polygala vulgaris* or milkwort.' September 16th 1831.



..it reminded me most strongly of past days, when, in full health and strength, I used to ramble for hours amongst the woods and fields of dear Woodbury, in unwearied search of some unknown warbler. .. Exeter April 7th 1837.

'In the evening I walked to the heath to see some poor people of the name of Betts who I sometimes teach a little. They are miserably poor and live in a mud cottage built by the man himself and containing only two rooms for themselves and six children. The man can read ...but the woman is deplorably ignorant.' Aug 9th 1835.

