

of the

## Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

## NEWSLETTER

## Friends in Need Are Friends Indeed for the Cemetery!

Welcome to the Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome! Our new newsletter is intended to keep you up to date on developments at the Cemetery, whether you are a frequent visitor or live far away.

The Non-Catholic Cemetery, also known as the "Protestant Cemetery," is the final resting place of poets, artists, musicians, diplomats, and scholars of many nations and creeds: the English poets John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, the grandson of Wordsworth and the son of Goethe, the German architect Gottfried Semper, the Russian painter Karl Brjullov, the the American writer Constance Fenimore Woolson, the Italian activist Antonio Gramsci, and many others, famous and forgotten, drawn to Italy in life and united there by death. Created in the early 18th century and still in active use, the Cemetery is well-loved by Romans and expatriates as a place of historical interest, artistic and natural beauty, and quiet solace.

The Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome was launched on May 25, 2006. The inaugural event took place in the "Parte Antica" of the Cemetery, on a beautiful Spring evening marked by a pleasant breeze and dramatic contrasts of light and shadow. Speakers included two representatives of the Comune di Roma, Gianni Borgna (*Assessore alla Cultura*) and Franca Coen (*Responsabile della Consulta multi-etnica per le Religioni*), as well as Minny Augeri, Director of the Cemetery, and three members of the Advisory Committee, led by Flemming Stender, acting Chargé d'Affaires of the Danish Embassy. Local poets read from the poetry of Keats, Shelley, and their own work. About 100 people attended, and about a third of these became Friends on the spot. Since



Devereux Plantagenet Cockburn (1829-1850)

then, others have joined them, so that we now have over 75 members, including Friends from northern Europe, the United States, and Australia.

Our new organization is part of a master plan, a coordinated response to the urgent problems facing the Cemetery. Despite its idyllic appearance at first glance, the Cemetery's monuments suffer from the effects of

air pollution, soil subsidence, vegetation growth, and poor drainage, at a rate that exceeds our limited financial resources. So serious is the situation that The Non-Catholic Cemetery of Rome was named by the World Monuments Fund (WMF) to its 2006 World Monuments Watch List of the 100 Most Endangered Sites in the world.

- continued on p. 4



## WHO THEY WERE...

### Alfred Strohl-Fern (1847-1927)



Caricature of Alfred Strohl-Fern by Nino Bertolotti

Alfred Guillaume Strohl was born into a wealthy and noble family in Saint-Marie-aux-Mines, in the Alsace region, but left his homeland after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when Alsace became German. He went first to Paris, where he studied painting under Charles Gleyre. Strohl traveled throughout Europe and North Africa, adding the suffix "-Fern" ("far-away") to his name as a poignant reminder of his exile status. In 1879, while still a young man, Strohl settled in Rome. He acquired various pieces of land in what was once part of the Villa Giulia, between the Via Flaminia, the Villa Poniatowski and the Villa Borghese. These were unified and redesigned to create the Villa Strohl-Fern, where the artist built a Gothic Revival house and laid out eight hectares of Romantic gardens, with exotic trees and classical statuary.

Strohl-Fern was a painter, sculptor, poet and music-lover. On his tombstone he is described as "artiste, protecteur des artistes." In the early 1880s he began building studios at his villa, inviting artists, writers, and composers of many nationalities to live and work there. One of the first visitors was the German painter Arnold Böcklin. The American sculptor Albert Harnisch created an allegorical statue of "Justice" for a monument in Charleston, South Carolina, in his studio at the Villa Strohl-Fern. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke stayed at the Villa in 1904, and Russian painter Ilya Repin was an illustrious visitor in

1911. By this time, there were over one hundred studios on the estate. An English visitor described the painting studio of John William Godward in the winter of 1912-13: "[Godward] had one of the finest studios in the Villa Strohl-Fern grounds. It had a wonderful outlook, and among its decorations was a horse's skull locally supposed to be that of Strohl-Fern himself 'when young.' The likeness was remarkable."

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Strohl-Fern's colony had become a center for artists who looked beyond the academic tradition and embraced new artistic currents from across the Alps. Artists from the villa were active in the Secession exhibitions in Rome (1913-16), with the journal *Valori Plastici*, and with the *Novecento Italiano* in the 1920s. Among the artists who worked there were Cipriano Efisio Oppo, Francesco Trombadori, Carlo Socrate, Nino Bertolotti, and Carlo Levi. Women artists were welcome at the Villa. (One of them, the German painter and author Charlotte Popert, is also buried at the Non-Catholic Cemetery.)

When Strohl-Fern died, he left his Villa to the French government. Some of the studios continued to be occupied through the thirties and after World War II, though most fell into disrepair. Since 1957, the Villa Strohl-Fern has been the home of the Lycée Chateaubriand. Strohl-Fern's vision also lives on in the form of subsidies to artists administered by the *Fondation Gleyre* (Switzerland).

-- C. Huemer



"WHO THEY WERE" tells the story of a person who is buried in the Non-Catholic Cemetery. Suggestions and contributions for future issues are welcome.

## International Ball Benefits the Cemetery

The Non-Catholic Cemetery was one of four charities benefiting from the proceeds of the International Ball, held on November 11, 2006, in Rome. Organized by Sara Brain, a Friend of the Cemetery, the black-tie event also benefited Spencer Dayman Meningitis UK, Zambia Orphans Appeal, and Samaritans

Onlus. 135 guests in evening dress enjoyed an elegant dinner and competed for prizes that had been donated by local shops and international travel venues. Flemming Stender of Denmark, representing the Assembly of Ambassadors, gave a brief address describing the Cemetery and urging participants to join the Friends. He

noted that the beautiful Palazzo Brancaccio, where the Ball was held, was originally built for Hickson Field, a wealthy American who is buried in the Cemetery, and his wife. (The Palazzo Field became the Palazzo Brancaccio after their daughter Elizabeth married Prince Salvatore Brancaccio in 1870.)





John Keats (1795-1821)

## Martedì con i Poeti

*Incontri e letture di poesia a cura di  
Domenico Adriano*

Libreria Book City  
Viale G. Marconi, 92, Roma

6 February 2007, 5:30 pm  
*Omaggio a Keats e Shelley*

20 February 2007, 5:30 pm  
*Omaggio a Rosselli, Bellezza, Cacciatore.  
Hauch, Wilcock e Corso*

Italian poets will read from the works of  
poets buried at the Non-Catholic Cemetery.

### FOUNDERS

Susanna Agnelli  
Nicola Bulgari  
Heinrich R. Oetiker  
Parthenon Trust

### PATRONS

Fernando D. Barroso  
Eglise Protestant du Luxembourg  
Paolo Palma

### HONORARY MEMBER

Maria Pia Del Brocco

We also thank the Embassies of  
Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and  
the Russian Federation for their gen-  
erous contributions to the Cemetery  
in 2005-2006.

## For John Keats *by Jorie Graham*

Today, with a friend, in an archaic yellow light, I visited  
the graveyard

here, an easy lawn behind the school. This town knows where  
to find its dead, it seems, the graves just flat stone markers  
in the grass, a gap  
where growth

is barely held back for a name. And it was difficult  
to know

where not to walk. To measure out and skip a length, a human  
length, and just an extra bit, in case  
or in respect  
seemed right

and yet the plots, then, overlapped. Tell me where  
it's right

to walk? Here and there cut flowers had taken root  
by accident. I recognized some Asphodels, Grandmother's  
Pocketbooks... How would you cross  
a lawn that is

a sky? I skipped from name to name,  
leaving a gap for limbs, for sleep, using my shadow as  
a gauge. But it was warm and windy, Spring, my skirts playing  
my legs, and swallows  
hugged the ground

in flight. What is respect? If we are gods up here,  
sunny and quick in this Maylight, mindlight,  
we are indecorous, we break every  
enframement, being  
entirely

transitive,  
striding from rib to rib, or is it--since we're up here--  
thought

to thought? I played them all, therefore--limbs, names,  
flowers, years, even the fresh plots  
waiting to graft. We live up here  
by blurring boundaries, calling it *love, the present moment, or  
the beautiful*. We live a harsh fecundity, it seems  
to me, the symbol tripping much  
too freely

over everything  
it signifies.

*Reprinted by permission of Jorie Graham.*

### POETS IN THE CEMETERY

As the Non-Catholic Cemetery is known for its poets, we hope to  
include a poem in each Newsletter. Suggestions are welcome (in any  
language).



## Friends *cont'd. from p. 1*

Last year, a plan was drawn up by ICCROM, the intergovernmental conservation organization in Rome, to help the Cemetery manage its resources and address its most urgent problems. The Assembly of Ambassadors that governs the Cemetery adopted its recommendations for immediate implementation. As the Cemetery is a private organization which receives no regular public support, it is imperative to cut operating costs while broadening the base of financial support.

All contributions from Friends are used directly for the costs of stone conservation, landscape gardening, visitor aids, and essential maintenance. One urgent problem is being addressed this Fall: the effects of soil subsidence in the western part of the Cemetery, not far from the tomb of Antonio Gramsci. The sinking of the ground is noticeable and has already

caused some monuments to collapse. An engineering firm is surveying the extent of the problem and will suggest solutions.

Other funds are used for ongoing preventive conservation and horticultural maintenance, as well as visitor information. The Cemetery's website ([www.protestantcemetery.it](http://www.protestantcemetery.it)) is now bilingual, in Italian and English, and includes much new information. Check it out!

If you are already a Friend, thank you! If you are not yet a Friend, please join us! The membership form is on the website and on brochures available at the Visitors' Center, or we can send you one in the mail (see contact information below).

You can also volunteer your time to help the Cemetery. Volunteers keep the Visitors' Center open, help with gardening, enter computer data, translate, give tours and run special events. If you have a special skill, or

just want to help, please contact Heather Munro, Co-ordinator of Volunteers, [heatherm@tin.it](mailto:heatherm@tin.it) or 333.309.2201.

Just as you don't have to live in Rome to be a Friend, you can also volunteer from far away. Anyone with an e-mail address can help with writing, translations, genealogical research, and/or identifying funding sources in Italy and abroad. Let us hear from you!

### FRIENDS of the NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY in ROME NEWSLETTER

Christina Huemer, Editor  
Lorna M. Smith, Translator  
Susan Sanders, Graphic Design  
Litotipografia Zesi s.r.l. Printer

#### NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

Via Caio Cestio, 6  
00153 Rome, Italy

MON - SAT

9.00am-5.00pm

(last entrance 4.30pm)

Sundays & Public Holidays Closed

#### VISITORS' CENTRE

Information point & bookshop

Mon - Sat 10.00am-4.00pm

#### OFFICE OPEN

Tues & Thur

10.00am-1.00pm

THUR 2.30-4.00pm

By Appointment Only

Rome Tel/Fax 06.574.1900

[mail@protestantcemetery.it](mailto:mail@protestantcemetery.it)

[www.protestantcemetery.it](http://www.protestantcemetery.it)