



No. 13

# FRIENDS of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

Winter 2010

## NEWSLETTER

**“The only joyous cemetery I know of”**



*These were the words written by Clara Woolson Benedict after a visit to the Cemetery a hundred years ago (see page 2). Are they still true today? We spoke with the Director, Amanda Thursfield (AT), as she completes her third year managing the Cemetery.*

*What atmosphere do you wish to create in the Cemetery? Is “joyous” appropriate?*

AT. I'd like to ensure an atmosphere of respect for it as an active Cemetery, one that is evidently in good hands and being cared for; and that the staff and volunteers

on duty are welcoming and helpful. So yes, “joyous” would be a good word.

*There are many more visitors coming nowadays. Do you see any risks in this?*

AT. Our aim is not to maximise visitor numbers but to make it better known as a peaceful place to visit. Respecting it as a place of memory for many families is fundamental.

*But I suppose more visitors means more income to go towards running costs?*

AT. Not necessarily. We think charging an entrance fee would not be right. We ask visitors to make a donation of €2.00. Some give generously but many others enjoy the free access to this beautiful place. I like to remind visitors that, on average, it costs €1000 a day to maintain the Cemetery in good condition. It is up to them whether they would like to help.

*Do you see any change in the types of visitors coming?*

AT. Because of being in Rome, we get visitors from all over the world and we are also becoming better known to Romans. Young people are struck by the atmosphere of the site – the statue of the Angel of Grief appears on the cover of a rock music CD and many youngsters come specifically to see this. Within families, the adults are interested in history and the notable people buried here while the children love the birds and butterflies and of course the cats. All visitors appreciate the spirit of the place, using words like peace, calm and contemplation, and seeing it as an oasis away from the noise and confusion of the city.

*So the Cemetery is becoming better known generally?*

AT. Certainly, and our re-designed web site has helped in this respect. Our online databases often come up now in Google searches for someone who was buried here. The Cemetery featured recently in a *New York Times* article and video on “36 hours in Rome” as one of the places not to miss. It has also been added to a EU-funded project for a European Cemeteries Route, which links historically interesting cemeteries throughout Europe. This is important for recognition, and may lead to partnership and funding possibilities.

*Many of the visitors are therefore probably first-time visitors?*

AT. I have that impression, yes. But others have known the Cemetery for years and return whenever they come to Rome. Within a few weeks last autumn, we had visits from descendants of John Keats' family in the United States, from Joseph Severn's descendants and from a great, greatgrandson of Edward Trelawny, the friend of Shelley who is buried alongside him. Visits such as these give us huge pleasure.



*You announced a scheme for people to dedicate newly planted trees to the memory of loved ones. How has the response been?*

AT. Very good. We have a wide variety of dedications to people who loved this place but could not be buried here. For example, one is to a lady who lived nearby, another to a lady who spent much of her life in Rome but is now buried in Finland. Not all the dedications are in memory of the dead – one American lady dedicated a tree to the people of Rome for their help during a spell in hospital in the city.

*How have the Friends been of help?*

AT. They make possible this Newsletter which has proved very effective for raising interest. It shows that the Cemetery is not only historically fascinating but also supported by many people who are devoted to it. So it has been a valuable tool for raising funds. The Friends also paid for a new sound-system for announcing to visitors that the Cemetery is about to close. The old system – a recording of music and announcements in English, French, Italian and German – had become almost inaudible. It led to one or two of our visitors being locked inside after closing-time. We can't afford to let this happen, so the new system – together with patrolling carefully the Cemetery – should prevent this. The Friends also help with the high costs of tree-felling.

*The Cemetery sometimes appears as a location in Italian films and TV series. What is your policy about allowing film crews to work here?*

AT. Making films is an important part of the Roman economy. We host several film crews a year which brings in valuable income and makes us better known. We vet carefully all applications to film and request scripts in advance to ensure that nothing will offend families who have relatives buried here. We also monitor companies during shooting to prevent any damage to the Cemetery.

*So, after your first three years in charge, is the Cemetery “joyous”?*

AT. I won't deny that it is a very demanding job, a role that combines handling funerals,



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burials and emotionally difficult situations with managing a place that is part of historic Rome, with valuable monuments to conserve and a rich vegetation that doesn't stop growing. But, thanks to the support of many others – the President, the Advisory Committee, the small staff we have and the many volunteers – I think there is a good, positive atmosphere. At least, many of our customers and visitors say this is what they find here. In September the President, Ambassador Bull of Norway, organised a Family Day for all those associated with the Cemetery. On occasions such as this you realize that all these people are there enjoying themselves because they believe in the Cemetery as a special place in Rome. So, yes, I think Clara Benedict's words still hold true today.



## How others see the Cemetery

Clara Woolson Benedict (1844-1923)

*I wish I could describe to you the beauty of my sister's grave – the whole top one purple mass of sweet violets, and the runic cross lying flat on this lovely bed of violets! The cemetery is the only joyous cemetery I know of – there, the flowers always bloom; the birds always sing. Baedeker has added my sister's name to the list of distinguished dead, and hardly a day passes that some friend or admirer does not stand there. We often find flowers. When I think of our cold snowy cemeteries at home, I wish that all I loved rested just there – where Connie sleeps....*

The quote comes from a letter written by Clara Benedict in January 1908 and published in *The Benedicts Abroad* (privately printed in London, [1930]). In another version of the letter, she added "I never let the little man in charge know when I am coming and it comforts me much to always find everything in such beautiful order". The "little man" was presumably Achille Trucchi whose family for three generations provided the custodian for the Cemetery.



The grave of Clara Woolson Benedict, her sister Constance Fenimore Woolson and her daughter Clare Rathbone Benedict

Her sister Connie was Constance Fenimore Woolson, the American writer of fiction, poetry and travel narratives who died in Venice in 1894 (see *Newsletter* 2, 2007). "Baedeker" refers to that publisher's guide to *Central Italy and Rome* in its 13<sup>th</sup> revised edition (Leipzig, 1900). Its entry on the Protestant Cemetery describes it as "a retired spot, rising gently towards the city-wall, affording pleasing views, and shaded by lofty cypresses". Woolson found herself in distinguished company in the guidebook: in the Parte Antica it mentions the graves of Keats and Severn, the surgeon John Bell and the painter J.A. Carstens. In the 'New Cemetery' it refers only to the graves of Shelley and Trelawny, the writers John Addington Symonds, R.M. Ballantyne (author of *Coral Island*), William and Mary Howitt and Woolson herself, the sculptor John Gibson and August Goethe.

May all future visitors "find everything in such beautiful order", as Clara Benedict did, without giving advance warning of their visit.

Nicholas Stanley-Price

## WHO THEY WERE...

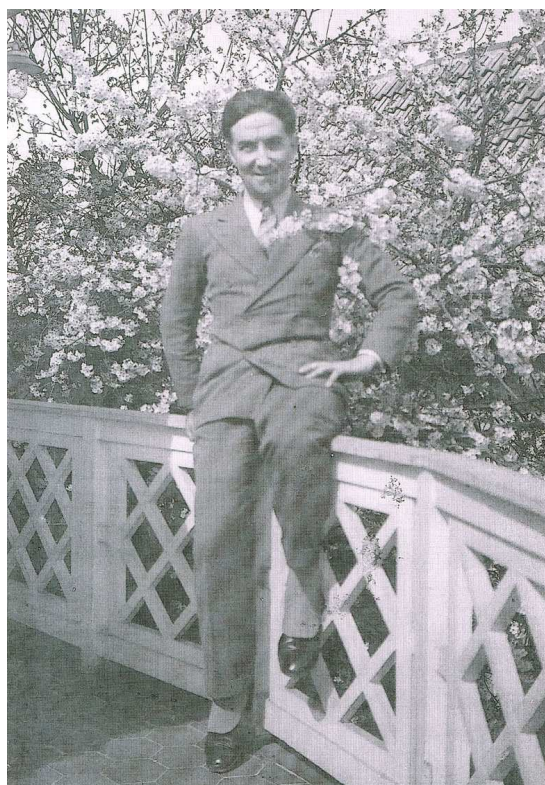
**Max Gutmann (1885-1948)**

**Lilì Gutmann (1873-1967)**

**Toinon Gutmann (1876-1964)**

In the Cemetery there lie several members of one of the most important German dynasties, that of the banker Eugen Gutmann who founded the Bank of Dresden in 1872. The Gutmann family had important and close ties with Italy. In fact three children of the founder of the great German Dresdner Bank lived for a long time in Italy and declared their wish to be buried in the Protestant Cemetery when they died.

The first member of the family to be buried there was **Max Ludwig Gutmann**, the artist of the family who divided his time between Rome and Berlin. Max was a talented painter and pianist and knew well the families of the composer Wagner and of Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, sister of the philosopher. One evening in Berlin, his brilliant gifts as a pianist were even appreciated by the Papal Delegate in Berlin, Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pope Pius XII) who asked him to play for him "The death of Isolde", from Wagner's celebrated opera which Cardinal Pacelli greatly admired. In Rome Gutmann frequented regularly the salon of the Jewish family Della Seta and that of the Contessa Eleonora Orsini Guerrini, where in the early 1930s he introduced American "swing". But the tragic events of the Second World War brought upheaval to the life of Max Gutmann, as it did to most of his family. He spent the war in conditions of great deprivation, being forced to flee the



Max Gutmann  
(private collection, Florence)

persecution of the Jews. Left without any money, he survived by selling his valuable stamp collection. With the end of the war, lacking any passport he set off abroad to regularise his status. But the Sabena aircraft on which he was travelling to Holland crashed on takeoff from Milan-Linate on 6 December 1948.

Next to her brother Max in the Cemetery lies **Lilì Gutmann**, the first-born of Eugen Gutmann and Sofia Magnus. Born in Dresden on 18 September 1873, she was famous in Berlin for her beauty, as was her sister Antoinette, also buried in the Cemetery. Their mother, Sophia Magnus, was of Scottish origin and had studied singing at Dresden with

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the soprano Marcella Sembrich. After her first marriage to Baron Adolph Holzing Berstett, she came to know in Berlin in the early 1900s the Italian diplomat Luca Orsini Baroni, from a noble family in Pisa. Their marriage, celebrated in August 1911, sealed the bond of the Gutmann family with Italy and became an important point of reference for all the family. Lili Gutmann followed her husband in his long and brilliant diplomatic career as Italian Ambassador in Budapest, Vienna, Istanbul and finally Berlin.

The couple had numerous friends of distinction including the composers Giacomo Puccini, Felice Lattuada and Richard Strauss, Carlo Feltrinelli and the sculptor Pietro Canonica, but also Atatürk, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria, the Minister Dino Grandi and other renowned personalities of the period.

In 1933, with the end of Orsini Baroni's diplomatic career in Berlin, the couple settled down in Tuscany, buying the splendid Villa Borbone at Massa Pisana (Lucca). In 1948 Ambassador Orsini Baroni passed away but Lili Gutmann stayed in the villa until 1961. In that year her household goods were put up for sale in what the daily newspaper *Espresso* described as the most spectacular sale in Italy since the War. She decided to give up the property in Tuscany so as to join her sister Antoinette who was living in Rome. Lili Orsini Baroni died on March 1, 1967 while staying at Badgastein, an elegant town in Austria where she used



Lili Gutmann  
(private collection, Florence)

to reside for long periods as a child and to which she had always remained attached. At her own wish, she is buried next to her brother Max Gutmann.

**Antoinette Gutmann**, known in her family as Toinon, was born in Berlin on 10 April 1876, the second child of Eugen Gutmann and Sophie Magnus. Her first marriage was to the Swiss banker Hans Schuster Burckhardt who also worked in the Dresdner Bank. Three daughters were born: Jacobea, Marie Helene and Anneliese. Left a widow by Schuster, she then married Baron Hans Henrick Von Essen (1873-1923), Swedish Minister at Berlin and member of a noble Swedish family. The Baroness D'Essen lived in a villa in the Parioli quarter of Rome that is known today as the Villa Mercadante. Hers was a well-known face in the diplomatic salons in the early 20th century. Her daughter Jacobea also married an Italian diplomat, Baron Giuseppe Sapuppo. Among those who frequently visited the D'Essen villa was the noted sculptor Pietro Canonica. He portrayed her in the marble bust that is exhibited today in the Museo Canonica in Villa Borghese together with a bas-relief of the three daughters of the Baroness. On her death in 1964 she

was buried next to her husband Hans Henrick Von Essen, while her daughter Jacobea, on her own death in 1998, was buried next to her mother.



Toinon Gutmann  
(private collection, Frankfurt)

Contributed by Dr. Elena Ceccarini, author of *Gli Orsini Baroni: storia, politica, diplomazia. Cronaca Mitteleuropea dalla Belle Epoque all'Industrializzazione*, Edizioni ETS (2010).



### In memoriam: Christina Huemer (1947-2010)

On November 12 we lost not just a Friend but the very founder of the Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome, Chris Huemer. She died, after a long struggle with cancer, at Amagansett, NY, having moved back to the States after twenty years living in Rome. The culmination of her career as a librarian was her fifteen years' tenure (1993-2008) at the American Academy in Rome, where she completely renovated the library, boldly requiring it to be closed for more than a year for building work to be done. Remembering her skills as a librarian, manager and enthusiastic historian should not allow us to forget that she was also a choral singer, percussion player in a gamelan ensemble, competitive scrabble player, and the holder of a skipper's licence for sailing.

For us, it was her wide-ranging knowledge of, and devotion to, the Cemetery that puts us for ever in her debt. She took the initiative in 2006 to found the Friends of the Cemetery and to edit the first three issues of this Newsletter. She also helped organise, and edited the catalogue of, the exhibition "Spellbound by Rome" (2005) to which she contributed a valuable essay on American artists and writers who worked in Rome, many of them eventually dying and being buried here. They will also feature in the database of all Americans buried in the Cemetery on which Chris was actively working. But it was not just her knowledge that made her tours of the Cemetery so popular and her company so sought after. Rather, it was her own curiosity about everything and her ability to enthuse others, to share her knowledge and to do so with humour, kindness and modesty. She will be sorely missed.



An obituary and tributes to Chris can be found at:  
<http://www.aarome.org/#rt=blog&rid=294>



## Russian and German help for tomb restoration

The Russian Embassy has maintained its support for the Cemetery by funding conservation of the tomb of the painter Karl Briullov (1799-1852), perhaps the best-known Russian buried there. In his late forties, Briullov had left Russia for health reasons, returning to Rome where he had earlier spent many years as a portrait and genre painter. It was, however, his vast history painting *The Last Day of Pompeii* (1830-33: State Russian Museum, St Petersburg) that brought him renown in Italy and in his native Russia. His imposing tomb in neoclassical style, some 2.60m high, is of white marble on a basalt base. As on many monuments, the acidic environment leads to the formation of black



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

Worksite of the Briullov tomb restoration



Photos: R. Galluccio

Tomb of Briullov before and after restoration

crusts on those surfaces less exposed to direct rainfall, resulting in colour changes that are compounded by the effects of biological growth. Conservation treatment consists of careful cleaning, biocide treatment and infilling of any losses of material in the tomb. Standing as it does prominently near the main entrance, the restored Briullov tomb makes a fine sight for the arriving visitor.

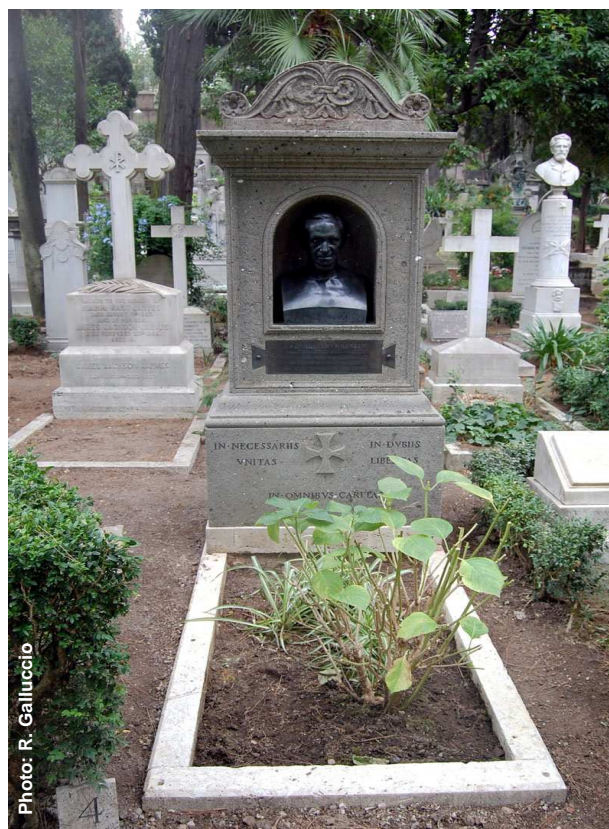


Photo: R. Galluccio

Tomb of J.H.W. Henzen tomb after restoration

In September the German Embassy continued its own support by approaching the German Archaeological Institute in Rome about restoration of the tomb of Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Henzen (Bremen 1816-1887 Rome). He was the director for many years (from 1856) of the same Institute. Henzen was an outstanding epigraphist who contributed to early volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, the systematic collection of all Latin inscriptions from the Roman empire that is a fundamental reference for classicists. His co-editors were the great German scholar Theodor Mommsen and G.B. de Rossi, the pioneer of Christian archaeology in Rome and explorer of the catacombs.

His tomb lies in the Zona Seconda only a few metres from that of the German sculptor Josef von Kopf which was restored last year (see *Newsletter* 8, Autumn 2009). The two headstones are very similar in form: a bronze portrait bust of the deceased inside a niche cut into a *peperino* slab. The Institute kindly provided the help of three stone craftsmen from the Fachschule Steintechnik in Munich. Working together with Rita Galluccio, they helped to remove the extensive biological growth on all surfaces of the monument, and the staining caused by copper salts leached from the bronze bust and dedicatory plaque. The final cleaning will take place in the spring by when a slow-release biocide will have had time to break down the remaining biological patina. But the restored tombs of von Kopf and Henzen already make an impressive pair.

### HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

This Newsletter is made possible by the contributions of the Friends of the Cemetery.

The Friends also help fund the care of the trees in the cemetery and the restoration of tombs. Please can you help us by becoming a Friend? You can find a membership form at:

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

### THE NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

via Caio Cestio, 6  
00153, Roma

Director: Amanda Thursfield

### OPENING HOURS

Monday to Saturday 9:00am - 5:00pm  
(last entrance 4.30pm)  
Sunday & Public Holidays: 9.00am - 1.00pm  
(last entrance 12.30pm)

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### NEWSLETTER of the Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

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