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## Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

## NEWSLETTER

## A New Director Brings a Fresh Perspective to the Cemetery



Amanda Thursfield became Director of the Cemetery on February 1, 2008. In April, she shared her impressions with Chris Huemer, former newsletter editor.

**What aspects of the Cemetery first attracted you to this position?**

I'd known about the Cemetery since I studied the Romantic poets as a child. When I moved to Rome eight years ago, it was one of the first sights I wanted to see. As soon as I walked in, I was overcome by the beauty and atmosphere of the place. I visited regularly over the next few years, and dreamed of working there, so when the position of Director came up, I felt compelled to apply.

**After a few months, have your perceptions changed?**

Yes and no. I am still impressed by the beauty of this oasis in the midst of a noisy, built-up area. Of course there are still areas of calm and contemplation for visitors, but for me, the day-to-day activity is really quite frenetic! There is always something going on: staff and volunteers all hard at work, groups of visitors, contractors coming in to do their work, and so forth.

**What is a typical day like for you?**

It varies, but there are always lots of questions—and even demands, which are a bit trickier. By now I can answer most of them. Everything from “can you mend the printer?” to “why have fees gone up?” to “where is my great-grandfather buried?” to “can I be buried here too?”

**Some of the answers must be on the web site.**

Yes, but people want personal contact. I think it's our duty to make sure our activities don't disturb the peace of people visiting their loved ones. On the whole, I think we manage to maintain the

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**Tree Experts Get to Work: Research on the Health of the Trees in the Non-Catholic Cemetery**

by Gian Pietro Cantini

From 2004 onwards, a series of experiments have been carried out to establish the biological condition, state of health and stability of the trees in the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Testaccio in order to see whether any of the trees were ill, suffering from parasites or in danger of falling down. The research began with the cypress trees (*Cupressus sempervirens* L.) and continued with the umbrella pines (*Pinus pinea* L.), and was carried out on examples which - after a preliminary inspection - were found to have defects, structural abnormalities or plant illnesses. At present we are carrying out a complete survey of all the 400 trees in the Cemetery.

The most common trees in the Cemetery are the cypresses, followed by examples of umbrella pines of varying ages and dimensions, some of which are tall and over one hundred years old. Luckily, research showed only small amounts of fungal parasites - the most serious of which is the dreaded Cypress Cancer (*Seridium cardi-*

*nale* [Wag]. Sutton & Gibson) - no traces of which were found. The trees proved to be in a reasonably good biological state, most of them growing vigorously with a good structure both at trunk level and on their upper foliage. We used phytostatic analysis to ascertain the risk of entire trees or parts of trees falling down. The method used for this was Visual Tree Assessment (VTA), a method devised by Prof. Claus Mattheck from the University of Karlsruhe, and officially adopted in numerous European countries. The method consists of externally identifying symptoms and defects that suggest a tree might be at risk, combined with research into abnormalities and alterations inside the tree. After a detailed visual analysis to identify defects and critical points (rot, cavities, large cuts, swelling, necrosis, etc.) a number of trees were examined with special instruments to ascertain and define the extent of any damage, establish the eventual risk of falling, and specify the work needed to make the tree safe.

The instrumentation used was an Iml-Resi resistograph made up of a 400 mm. needle perforator connected to an electronic data collection unit that then used specific software to produce graphic records. The instrument measures the resistance of the wood tissues by perforating the trunk with a thin steel needle which encounters a dif-

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## WHO THEY WERE...

### Gladys Marion Popescu (1919-2000)



We continue our series on people buried in the Non-Catholic Cemetery. Anka Serbu tells us about the fascinating life of her actress aunt.

Gladys Marion Popescu was born on December 4, 1919 in Romania. Her mother was from London and went to Bucharest with the British army as a Red Cross volunteer during the First World War, where she married and lived until her death in the 1970s.

Gladys Marion Popescu, studied classical ballet and when

she was 17 started working with the most important theatre company of the time Tanase Carabus. She became a cabaret star, but her dream was theatre, so she passed the examination at the Arts Academy and started studying to become a theatre actress. Then the Second World War broke out, overturning her life and career.

The Germans occupied Bucharest and she was expelled from the Arts Academy because of her British origins and sent to Russia with an actors company to entertain the Romanian troops at Stalingrad. She was one of the very few survivors of the Stalingrad assault and after a series of terrible experiences, went back to Romania. The country, liberated from the Germans, was now occupied by the Russian army. The new communist government considered her a suspect because of her British mother and she was arrested and imprisoned for being a "dangerous person".

She managed to escape, and embarked illegally on a ship for Naples. Her aim had been to get to Vienna to reach her fiancé, a young American businessman, but they were never to meet again: his plane crashed on its way to Vienna and she got a telegram with the dreadful news when she arrived in Naples. Desperate and confused she started looking for a job, participated in a audition for the film *Napoli eterna canzone* (1949) and was selected for one of the main parts. Being a political refugee, scared she might have been pursued by the Romanian security police, she worked under the name of "Margabella". She left Naples, and went first to Milan and then to Rome, following a brilliant career, working with the most important Italian companies of the time. She worked with Macario in *Votate per Venere*, with Nino Taranto in *B come Babelle*, with Carlo Dapporto in

*Il Cocuzzolo del tuo cuore* and *La Piazza*. She also worked as a theatre actress in *La Figlia di Iorio* by Gabriele D'Annunzio, and even had a small part in *Ben Hur*.

She was an actress, a dancer and singer and she also designed her own costumes. Due to her talent, beauty and skills she became a famous show girl. It was the golden age of Italian cinema. She had the opportunity to meet Charlton Heston, Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, Howard Hughes and



Errol Flynn, whom she was asked to present to the Italian public at various variety shows.

The Italian and foreign press often spoke of her successes: "the brilliant enchanting Romanian artist with her natural talent, Gladys Popescu, a graceful presence enlightens the stage with harmony and beauty".

A newspaper review of Macario's show *Votate per Venere* says "she brings the charm of the beautiful women of her land, elegance and naturalness, with her warm smile and the harmony of her dance".

She worked with some of the most important artists of her time Gérard Philippe, Silvana Pampanini, Loretta Masiero, Elena Giusti, Gino Bramieri and Walter Chiari.

She was a star, a shooting star: in 1960, after a short and brilliant career, she decided to withdraw from show business for family reasons. She stopped doing theatre and cinema, and started working as a sales agent for a pharmaceutical company.

But her fans never forgot her. By a strange coincidence, one of them was the head of the hospital where she was treated during the last days of her life. He recognised her name on the patient list and looked for her. He took her in her wheelchair to the bar and had coffee with her saying: "I saw all her shows, I followed her everywhere but I didn't have the courage to ask her to have coffee with me. Now I have. It took me 50 years but I've made it!"

**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. Write to: [mail@protestantcemetery.it](mailto:mail@protestantcemetery.it)

### FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you haven't already done so, now is the time to renew your membership for 2008. Thanks to your contributions this year we have been able to continue our work on the trees in the cemetery (see Mr Cantiani's article in this issue) and put the finances of the cemetery on a more even keel. To become a Friend please go to our website for the membership form and instructions: [www.protestantcemetery.it](http://www.protestantcemetery.it)

The Visitors' Centre at the Non-Catholic Cemetery is looking for **Volunteers**.

If you like to work with people, garden, translate or to just spend a couple of hours in Rome's most beautiful landscape then

## WE WELCOME YOU!



Come by today and talk with the Volunteer on duty in the Visitors' Centre.

MON - SAT 10:00am - 5:00pm

333.309.2201 or 06.574.1900

EMAIL: [visitorcenter@protestantcemetery.it](mailto:visitorcenter@protestantcemetery.it)

## Cimitero Acattolico di Roma by Vicki Lowen

I know a place where peace prevails,  
A verdant oasis within ancient walls.  
Aurelian enclosures, intertwined with vibrant vines;  
Wrought iron gates open at a reverent pace;  
A dignified entrance to such a Holy place.  
The people's meadow,  
Tall cypresses linger and enhance;  
Among the shining shrines of loved ones.

Rich green ilexes reach blue Lazio skies  
Oh Roma! Roma! *Bella campagna*,  
Such peace, *pacifico*.  
The young English Poet,  
The remarkable young man,  
The passionate Trelawny;  
With the ashes of the famous Shelley;  
Serene, shrouded, in the Italian sun.

In the shadows of the Cestius Pyramid,  
A collection of exiles unsurpassed,  
Revealed by every tombstone.  
Sculptured angels loiter,  
Frozen in timeless stances.  
Gilded with roses of perpetual growth.

Well-tended corners resonate,  
Throughout this peaceful enchanting place.  
Trodden paths among these tombs,  
That lead far beyond to:  
Old friends, acquaintances,  
Industrious writers,  
Settlers, in this city of Rome.

All tell a tale of loyal loved ones:  
Travellers, pilgrims, pious people,  
Compelled by the magic of the City.  
Texts of tombstones, adorned eulogies,  
Silent messages in the warm *sole*,  
And the twilight of the days.

Potent wishes to linger endure,  
Undaunted dedication, a quietude;  
Feel the presence of the illustrious dead.  
Allow the tranquillity to comfort,  
Share the scripts of the inscribed headstones.  
Experiences of such a wondrous corner.

*Bellissima.*

The Angel of Grief is present;  
She surrounds the graves,  
Accompanied by silent *putti* of stone,  
Becalmed, intransigent,  
Elegant, graceful, in earnest devotion,  
Forever holy.

The peace is prevalent  
A message of ardour survives.  
*Ritorno*, one must return.  
Farewell, sweet quiescence friends  
Of immortal beings;  
Dwell in your resting place,  
A cloistered retreat, and beckon still.

*Published by kind permission of the poet.*

### POETS IN THE CEMETERY

As the Non-Catholic Cemetery is known for its poets, we include a poem in each Newsletter. Suggestions are welcome.

## Family Day at the Cemetery



On Saturday 24 May, the Swiss Ambassador Bruno Spinner, who is currently President of the Assembly of Ambassadors of the Non-Catholic Cemetery, kindly hosted a Family Day at the Cemetery where staff from the Embassies in the Assembly and their families followed guided tours in English or Italian and learnt more about the history of the site and the people buried there. Younger visitors took part in an activity programme which included bulb planting, "Cat Stories" and looking for tombs in the cemetery that need restoration. Over 40 people of all ages and backgrounds, and a number of volunteers, attended the event. Luckily, the weather was kind and a good time was had by all, as can be seen from the group picture above.

## Weed & Read



On April 4 Volunteers from the Association of American College and University Programmes in Rome cleaned tombstones for the Weed & Read Event. Fifty students took part in the event, donating their time and energy to help with gardening and washing gravestones.

## A Special Thank You

*We have been hard at work as usual cleaning, preserving and restoring the monuments and gravestones in the cemetery. Special thanks go to the Russian Embassy and the Russian Orthodox Church for their generous financial help for restoration work. We warmly thank all friends and volunteers for their kind support!*

### Tree experts (continued from p.1)

ferent resistance between compact, healthy tissue and abnormal tissue, the latter being more easily penetrated. These differences in resistance due to variations in wood tissue density are one of the main values that allow us to draw conclusions on the overall stability of a tree. The survey will continue in 2008 so that we will have a complete picture of our tree population and a record of the biological and safety situation of every tree on site and can programme and carry out any necessary work and maintenance in future years.

Many of the trees in the Non-Catholic Cemetery, particularly those that have shown problems and defects, have over recent years undergone specific maintenance and safety work: examples that were at risk of falling have been felled and pruning has been carried out on other trees to improve balance and reduce heavy foliage.

The first work was carried out using large machines which were set up outside the cemetery to allow the partial or total removal of pre-selected trees. The maintenance work, particularly on the umbrella pines continued during 2007 using the technique of "tree climbing". This technique uses a series of ropes and pulleys to lift tree specialists (climbers) into the trees to carry out safely pre-planned pruning operations, the removal of dry wood and controlled felling without damaging structures in the cemetery and keeping disruption to a minimum for visitors.



### A new director... (continued from p.1)

impression of tranquillity.

**The Cemetery is an active burial ground as well as a beloved historical site. Are these roles in conflict?**

It's up to us to make sure they are not. By "us" I mean the Director, the group of Ambassadors and its advisory committee, and the staff and volunteers. Our efforts serve various constituencies. For example, recent work on tree maintenance makes the Cemetery safer for everyone. We reintroduced opening on Sundays and public holidays at the request of the concession-holders (relatives and friends of the deceased). So now the Cemetery is

open every day of the week—and this benefits everyone.

**Can the cemetery's economic situation be improved?**

I believe it can be. Ideally, the burden should not fall too much on the concession-holders. Donations from visitors bring in additional revenue, but if we have more visitors, they should be better served and better organized. School tours, for example: we've written to the schools to invite them, and we ask for a contribution. We urge people bringing in groups to inform us in advance so we can schedule them appropriately. We have granted more requests for filming in the Cemetery, and we could make better use of the chapel. We should work on public relations to be sure people in Rome, in Italy, and all over the world know who and where we are. We need to build up an identity and improve signage. We want to improve the merchandise in the shop—tasteful merchandise that reflects the dignity of the Cemetery.

**I understand that the Cemetery receives no public funds, other than for the occasional event or a specific restoration. Is there any chance of changing that?**

That depends on cultural funding in general, which depends on politics. We certainly need to continue good relations with public offices in the city, following the example of my predecessor.

**What about the ambassadors who oversee the Cemetery?**

Some people think they give us loads of money, others believe that we don't get anything. We do get money for specific projects: for example, the Russian Embassy has recently given us funding to restore Russian tombs. But there is no statutory financial obligation for the embassies to support the Cemetery. They do exercise a moral control, and, of course, contribute their valuable time and advice.

**What can the Friends do to help?**

Financial contributions are very important, but Friends can also become volunteers, help spread the word and publicize the Cemetery and encourage their friends and families to visit.

**What goes on in the Visitors' Centre?**

The volunteers control the flow of visitors, keep an eye on security, sell guidebooks and other merchandise, answer questions, and help visitors to find specific tombs. Our volunteers are a talented bunch, often multilingual. Without their help, we would not be able to open the Cemetery on weekends and public holidays.

**What part of your new job do you like best?**

I love the variety. I also like the fact that I

### NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

Via Caio Cestio, 6  
00153 Rome, Italy

MON - SAT

9.00am - 5.00pm

(last entrance 4.30pm)

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9.00am - 1.00pm

(last entrance 12.30pm)

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move around and spend time outside, not just at a desk. I like meeting all kinds of people.

**Is there anything about the Cemetery you would like to change?**

Lots of things. We need to work on the facilities: taps are dripping, the chapel needs cleaning, the gate needs maintenance. I also want to work with the Comune to improve the area outside the cemetery. We need more money for the restoration of the tombs. We need to improve our databases.

**These goals sound excellent, but I take it you have no plans to change the basic functions of the Cemetery.**

No. The idea of coordinating visits to the Pyramid and to the Cemetery has been raised. I'd also like to enhance the natural function of the cemetery—names on trees, nature walks, etc. The cemetery is an oasis in the centre of a capital city and has lots of flora and fauna you would not normally expect to find in a city centre—for example we heard a woodpecker there only last week.

**A couple of years ago, the Cemetery was named on the World Monuments Fund's list of "endangered sites." Is the Cemetery still endangered?**

Yes and no—but what cemetery isn't at risk? We are doing our best to improve financial stability, exploring every possibility open to us. All of our plans are consistent with our long-term goal of keeping the Cemetery viable for the future.

### NEWSLETTER

Friends of the Non-Catholic  
Cemetery in Rome

Amanda Thursfield, REDAZIONE

Susan Sanders, GRAFICA

Tipografia Impero, STAMPA