

of the

## Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

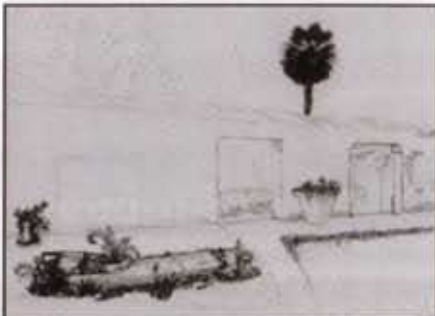
## NEWSLETTER

## Horticulture at the Cemetery

by Duncan Thomas

I was lucky to work at the Cemetery in 2005-2006. I had always been fascinated by the history and the sheer beauty of the site. I had marvelled at the wonderful sculpture each time I visited the six "military" burials from the First World War in my role as a Horticulturist for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. So I was pleased when I was asked to give advice and put into practice measures to simplify the upkeep.

Where did one start? There were no neat evenly spaced rows of military graves, no fine lawns or level ground. Instead there was a wonderful mixture of fine monuments, some set off in a meadow and others jumbled together in splendour on a fairly steep slope. From a horticultural point of view it is always easier to design and then manage areas if you allocate planting themes: arbitrary groupings based on geographical zones, plant families or characteristics. The aim is to group genera that have similar growing re-



Sketch by Duncan Thomas

quirements and that look good together. What themes were evident? After some discussion we decided that these were, loosely, "picturesque" for the natural beauty of the meadow area of the Parte Antica (and the historical



photo: S. Sanders

context of some of the burials), "Victorian" for the Zona Vecchia and its funerary art dating from the age of empire, and "monumental" for the remainder (Zones 1-3) because of the large and beautiful tombs.

Armed with these themes we got to work, starting with the Parte Antica. The chainsaw was employed to tidy up some of the laurel and Judas trees that blocked views and had encroached on some of the graves, making mowing difficult. Soon we had a mountain of branches to get rid of. During the work an old Judas tree fell and we were able to leave it *in situ* and to plant it up with ferns, violets and ivy adding to the "country" atmosphere (in the middle of a city!). We also set to work on the area around the Keats/Severn graves. We decided to plant the violets that they had so admired and that grew well throughout the site. We also tried to reinforce the turf trodden by the many visitors by planting the small ever-

green and drought resistant plant *Liriodendron muscari*. We created a compost area and a place to store the branches in a corner to the rear. In a fairly short period of time the Parte Antica looked fittingly "picturesque" with open areas of meadow giving way to patches of violets and iris, all with the backdrop of the pyramid. A terracotta pot was placed at the foot of the dividing wall and this, coupled with the glimpse of the palm tree behind, heralded the change in theme associated with the next area, the "Victorian."

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## TEMPORARY CLOSURE

On May 25, 2007, several branches from one of the Cemetery's pine trees fell in the Zona Vecchia. Nobody was injured, but several tombs were damaged in the accident. For reasons of public safety, the Cemetery was closed temporarily until the branches could be removed and other potentially dangerous trees could be pruned. The Cemetery was reopened to the public on June 20.

## WHO THEY WERE...

### Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840-1894)



Among the literary greats buried in the Cemetery is Constance Fenimore Woolson, a nineteenth-century American writer and expatriate, a friend to Henry James and the great-niece of James Fenimore Cooper, author of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Born in Claremont, New Hampshire on March 5, 1840, Woolson came into the world amid family tragedy, for in the year of her birth,

three of her sisters died of scarlet fever. Looking for a way to start over after this heartbreaking loss, her parents moved the family to Cleveland, Ohio, where Woolson grew up on the edge of the American frontier. In 1873, after the end of the American Civil War and the death of her father, Woolson and her mother moved to Saint Augustine, Florida, where Woolson spent six years immersed in the culture of the American South.

In 1870, Woolson found her first literary success when magazines like *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's* published her short stories and essays. Her fame grew over the next decade as she published volumes of short stories about life in the Great Lakes region and in the American South.

Following the death of her mother in 1879, Woolson moved to Europe and turned her carefully observant eye on Americans abroad. Continued publication of essays, short stories, and novels assured her success as a writer; however, Woolson was not satisfied with her achievements. Her professional discontent was expressed in a story called "Miss Grief," published in 1880, just after her arrival in Europe. The best known of her works, "Miss Grief" is a study of women's genius in the late nineteenth century and of the failure of powerful male literary figures to recognize the contributions of their female colleagues.

In the same month in which Woolson published "Miss Grief," she met the distinguished and (then) less popular writer, Henry James. The two formed a close relationship that was the object of much speculation amongst contemporaries. The degree to which Woolson's and James's lives were intertwined became clear when she died in January 1894. Suffering from influenza and depression, she either fell or jumped from her apartment window in Venice. When he received the sad news, Henry James offered to

help the Woolson family by sorting through the papers and possessions in Constance's apartment. While doing so, he destroyed the bulk of their correspondence, leaving a void in our understanding of the interactions between these two writers. Was she his muse or his rival? Did Woolson suffer when James refused to fully acknowledge her literary achievements? Did James reject Woolson's need for a more intimate relationship? Scholars and devoted readers have posed many such questions, but the destruction of Woolson's papers by Henry James effectively obscured the answers.

At her own request, Woolson was buried in Rome's Non-Catholic Cemetery. Some thirteen years before her death she had visited the cemetery and had mused upon its beauty:

*Yesterday I went to the Protestant cemetery and stood for some moments beside the grave of Keats, which was blue with violets, and beside that of Shelley, with its inscription, "Cor cordium." The little burial ground is nestled in an angle of the old city wall, and the great gray pyramid of Caius Cestius looks down upon it, bringing the past very near us.*

A small group of mourners attended Woolson's funeral but Henry James did not. Later, however, he would speak of Woolson's intense desire to be laid to rest in the cemetery



photo: O. Plaszczewska

which he described as 'the blest Roman cemetery that she positively desired – I mean in her extreme love of it – and of her intensely consenting and more than reconciled rest under the Roman sky. Requiescat.'

--Laura Flusche

**POSTSCRIPT:** With Clara Fenimore Woolson are buried her sister Clara Woolson Benedict (1844-1923) and her niece Clara (Clare) Benedict (1870-1961). Clare Benedict left a generous bequest to the Cemetery.

**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. Please send your suggestions to: [mail@protestantcemetery.it](mailto:mail@protestantcemetery.it)

## La Vita *by Edoardo Cacciatore*

Finirà una buona volta  
 Prenditi intera la vita  
 Apri la persiana tira su l'avvolgibile  
 Più guardi fuori più tutto sembra incredibile  
 Ma quando infine ti è tolta  
 Canta un'aria di sortita

*La meraviglia mai molta  
 Anche il legittimo è esposito  
 Ognuno all'altro è un dono  
 Tutto è sempre a proposito  
 È l'amnistia è il condono  
 Che vista s'apre alla svolta*

*From "Refutatio," reprinted by permission of Giulio Einaudi editore.  
 Edoardo Cacciatore (1912-1996) is buried in the Zona Vecchia of the  
 Cemetery.*

### POETS IN THE CEMETERY

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



*Psyche Divesting Herself of Mortality*  
 by Richard Greenough  
 photo: S. Sanders



On Saturday 28 April, students from the University of Dallas in Rome spent the morning helping with the gardening and the general upkeep of the cemetery. The volunteer program, called "Weed-n-Read," was organized by Dr. Laura Flusche, Professor of Art, and Kara Maggiore, Rome Coordinator. Students began the morning with a guided tour in which they read from literary works written by some of the cemetery's most renowned authors. Afterwards, the 19-student crew donned gloves and hats and spent the three hours weeding, cleaning, and sweeping. The UD students who were thrilled to spend time getting to know one of Rome's most beautiful sites. "I'm happy to give something back to Rome," said one student. "I've learned so much from this city while studying here over the course of the past semester. I'm glad to be able to make my own contribution to the preservation of the city's long history."

### THE NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

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We also thank the Embassies of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the Russian Federation for their generous contributions to the Cemetery in 2007.

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

This area was not so simply dealt with. We tried to tackle the big jobs first, like cutting back the beautifully-scented box hedging to the land contours. We removed the self-sown seedlings of laurel and other plants like the scholar trees (*Sophora*) that had been placed on the graves by families but had become mature and too large. We tidied up the entrance and planted ground cover under the cypresses. Here we found wonderful terracotta pots (dating from the 1850s) partially buried. These were dug up, planted and positioned to act as focal points for the vistas that had been opened up. The gravel areas were kept swept, the *sampietrino* setts exposed at the entrance and the harsh corners softened by planting iris.

A camellia garden was created in the vicinity of the visitors' centre. A number of overgrown acanthus and star of Jerusalem plants were also removed to make way for others typical of the Victorian period, such as aspidistra, scented geraniums, old roses and ivy. The planting on older graves was simplified by removing sparse box plants and establishing just one herbaceous plant, be it an agapanthus, acanthus, arum or other suitable non-invasive species. The graves were then "sealed" with a covering of vegetation (mulch) produced using the chipper (that the cemetery had purchased) on the branches of trees and shrubs that had been cut back (thereby avoiding paying for their removal). This process helped to cut down on weed growth and to keep moisture in.

In the "monumental" area we concentrated on bringing the weeds under control, removing some of the overgrown oleanders and trying to bring some cohesion to the design by repeating simple planting schemes. All this work was done by the gardeners in addition to their daily duties of watering and weeding.

It was also in this area, under one of the lines of cypress trees, that we were able to create a nursery to grow

drought-resistant dwarf plants and to bulk up numbers of South African and Mediterranean bulbous plant species. These will be used in the future, to provide further horticultural embellishment to the themed plantings.

I had also been asked to look at some form of automatic watering system. Initial trials with micro-nozzles, drippers and a drip line (hosepipe with holes in it) appeared successful. The cemetery's water supply, however, like that of many areas in Rome, was high in calcium, and this led to nozzles being blocked. A modified system using perforated pipe and mulch has been proposed as a possible partial solution to get water down to the roots in an easy and rapid way.

Alas, my time at the cemetery was brought to an end by a posting to Africa. I really enjoyed working with the staff and we made good progress with regard to systematic maintenance. The hardest part of the job was explaining to the many visitors that the best plants to use were not necessarily box plants and those that you find at florists like "baby's breath," large-flowered cyclamen, gardenias and poinsettias, as they need a lot of maintenance (although they are fine if the family are looking after the grave and visiting regularly). For those graves that are seen just every once in a while it is better to plant longer-lived herbaceous species or even a range of bulbs that if chosen carefully will complement the grave. I am hopeful that the themes and generally simplified planting will help the Cemetery maintain a horticulture that is "here to stay".

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

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### NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

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### RENEW FOR 2007!

May 25 marked the first anniversary of the Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome. If you haven't already done so, it's time to renew your membership for 2007!

Thanks to Friends' contributions last year, the Cemetery was able to address urgent problems of soil subsidence, horticultural maintenance, and preventive conservation of the stone monuments. We need your help again this year, as we seek to put the Cemetery on a firm financial basis.

Please use one of the enclosed forms to send your contribution TODAY.

The Cemetery also seeks additional volunteers to keep the Visitors' Centre open and help with other tasks. If you would like to join, please talk to the volunteer on duty or phone 333.3092201 or 06.574 1900, or e-mail, visitorcenter@protestantcemetery.it

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!